

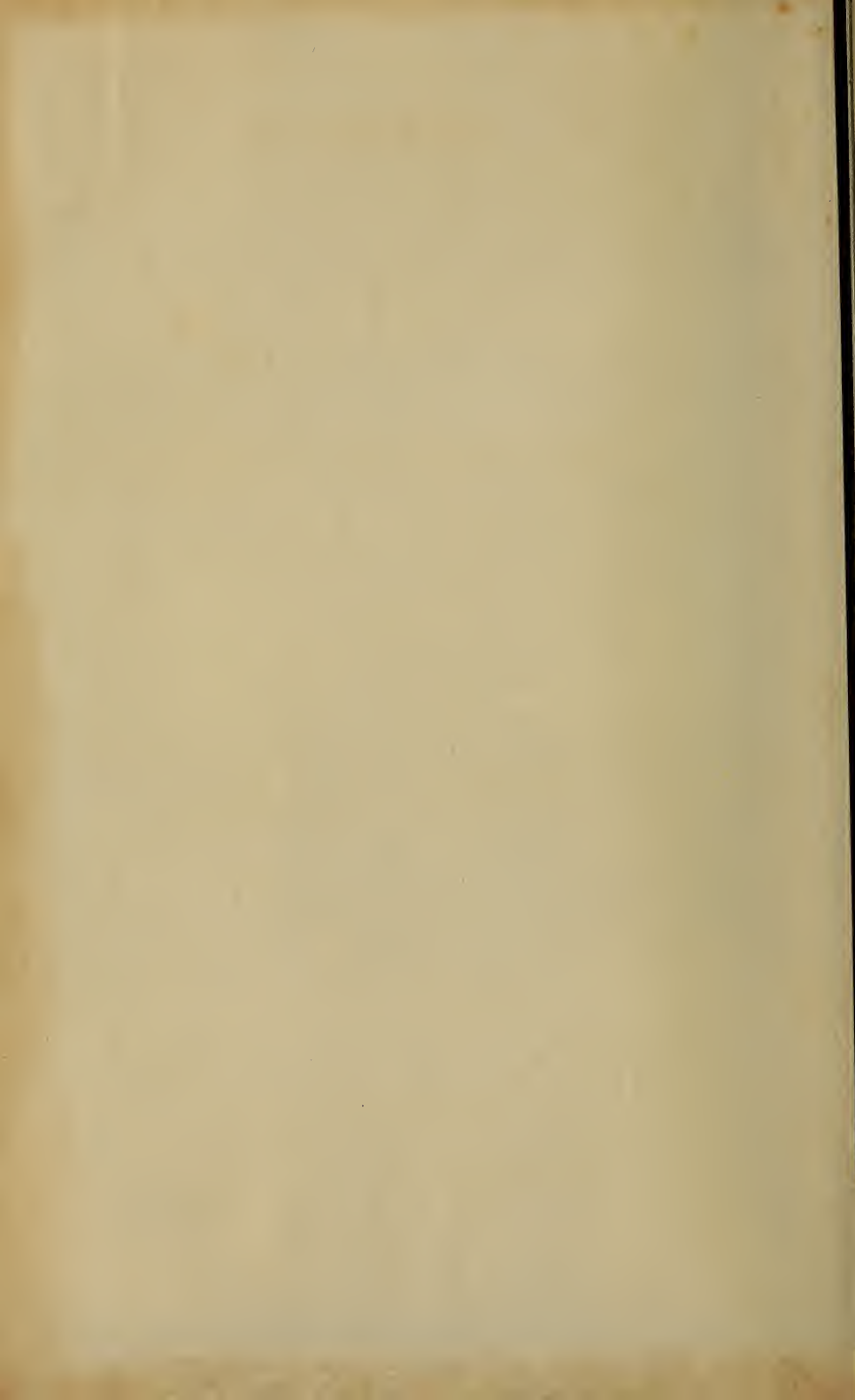


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SERMONS

BY THE LATE

REV. WILLIAM ASHMEAD.

WITH

A Memoir of his Life.



PHILADELPHIA:

PUBLISHED BY TOWAR, J. & D. M. HOGAN,

No. 255 Market Street.

1830.

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Eastern District of Pennsylvania, to wit :

||||| BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the twentieth day of September, in
|L. S. | the fifty-fifth year of the Independence of the United States of Ame-
||||| rica, A. D. 1830, Clara F. Ashmead, of the said District, has deposited in
this office the title of a Book, the right whereof she claims as proprietor, in the
words following, to wit:

SERMONS OF THE LATE REV. WILLIAM ASHMEAD.
With a Memoir of his Life.

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

D. CALDWELL,
Clerk of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

TO THE
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
OF LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA,

AND TO THE
SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
OF CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA,

This Volume
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.

THE STATE

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The second part of the book is a detailed account of the history of the British Empire. It begins with the reign of King Henry II and continues through the reigns of King Richard I, King John, King Henry III, King Edward I, King Edward II, King Richard II, King Henry IV, King Henry V, King Henry VI, King Edward IV, King Richard III, King Henry VII, King Henry VIII, King Edward VI, King Mary II, King James II, King George I, King George II, King George III, and King George IV. The author describes the various wars, treaties, and events that have shaped the British Empire.

The third part of the book is a history of the American Revolution. It begins with the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and continues through the end of the war in 1783. The author discusses the various battles, treaties, and events that led to the birth of the United States.

The fourth part of the book is a history of the French Revolution. It begins with the storming of the Bastille in 1789 and continues through the end of the revolution in 1799. The author discusses the various events, battles, and treaties that led to the fall of the French monarchy and the rise of the French Republic.

The fifth part of the book is a history of the Napoleonic Wars. It begins with the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1799 and continues through the end of the wars in 1815. The author discusses the various battles, treaties, and events that led to the rise and fall of Napoleon.

The sixth part of the book is a history of the 19th century. It begins with the year 1800 and continues through the year 1850. The author discusses the various events, battles, and treaties that shaped the world in the 19th century.

The seventh part of the book is a history of the 20th century. It begins with the year 1850 and continues through the year 1900. The author discusses the various events, battles, and treaties that shaped the world in the 20th century.

The eighth part of the book is a history of the 21st century. It begins with the year 1900 and continues through the year 2000. The author discusses the various events, battles, and treaties that shaped the world in the 21st century.

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The tenth part of the book is a history of the world. It begins with the year 2100 and continues through the year 2200. The author discusses the various events, battles, and treaties that are expected to shape the world in the 22nd century.

P R E F A C E.



THE discourses which compose the present volume were the weekly productions of the author for the instruction of his own people. Many of them were written under the languor and depression incident to declining health, and all of them, amidst the various duties and interruptions attendant on the ministerial office.

The candid reader will, it is hoped, be disposed rather to acknowledge their merits, than to dwell upon their defects; rather to profit by the instruction which they convey, and the truths which they exhibit, than to scan them with the eye of criticism. With a view chiefly to gratify the friends of the author, these sermons have been selected for the press; not without the hope that they may be attended with the divine blessing, and that the fervent and affectionate remonstrances, the forcible arguments, the tender solicitude of the preacher, may yet find their way to the hearts of some, upon whom his personal ministry made only a transient impression. To the people who long sat beneath the sound of his voice, as well as to those on whose altars the light of his genius and his piety shed but a momentary

lustre, to all who have heard these discourses, it will, no doubt, enhance their value, to know that they appear almost precisely as they were delivered. Of far the greater number this is literally true. In a few instances a passage which has been thought less suitable for the press than for the pulpit, has been omitted—and twice, or thrice, where the writer has not expressed himself with his usual clearness, a sentence has been extracted from his other sermons, and introduced, to illustrate his meaning. This is the amount of the alterations which they have undergone. The subscribers will perceive, that, to the four hundred pages promised in the proposals, nearly twenty have been added to the sermons, and a memoir of the author has been prefixed, which it is believed will render the volume more interesting, and for which they are indebted, to the able pen of the distinguished advocate of the Bible in the South.* This gentleman, with that liberality of sentiment which he commends in another—overstepping the narrow limits of sectarian feeling, has paid this brief but honourable and disinterested tribute to departed worth.

* Mr. Grimke.

MEMOIR

OF THE

REV. WILLIAM ASHMEAD.



THE death of a faithful servant, though intrusted only with matters of small moment, and of temporal concern, is an afflicting circumstance. However humble his capacity for usefulness, however narrow the sphere of his influence, his fellow servants who knew his fidelity, and all who were blessed in his labours, cannot fail to lament his departure. His living example of zeal and diligence is gone for ever; though he leaves behind him the memory of his virtues, to guide and encourage others. If we ascend from the private to the public station, from ordinary minds to distinguished talents, from limited information to extensive knowledge, we look upon the decease of such a servant, with deeper emotions of sorrow. And if human experience had not repeatedly testified how little the most distinguished public servant is missed, and how speedily and effectually his place is supplied, we should often be overwhelmed with despair, rather than with grief, at our loss. But even in the affairs of this world, we are not permitted to feel aught of despair; though, for a season, we know not who shall be found worthy to fill the vacant seats of departed greatness and goodness. In the course of a few years, however, the spacious circle in the forest, where the monarch-tree had stood, is filled up by degrees, and another reigns in its place.

Such are the reflections which spring up in the mind, when we contemplate the death of him who has been a faithful servant, even to his fellow men. But, when we turn from such a one, and consider the decease of a faithful servant of God himself, how much more gratifying and consolatory are our reflections! His labours, indeed, are at an end; but they were those of trial and pain, of disappointment and sorrow. The enjoyments of his earthly station,

have passed away; but they were frail and imperfect, and exposed to anxiety, sickness, and grief. His walk of usefulness is to be trodden no more for ever; but then it was a pathway beset by temptations and discouragements. The powers of his mind are no more to be employed, nor the affections of his heart to be poured forth in the service of his brethren; but the blindness, and errors, and solitudes, of the studious and benevolent have vanished for ever. How glorious the change, from the valley of the shadow of death, to a world of unfading light and of everlasting life; from tears, and grief, and pain, to the happiness of heaven; from this body, the seat of disease and corruption, to the condition of glorified spirits; from the society of men, degraded by crimes and vices, and darkened by selfishness, ignorance, and pride, to the company of the spirits of the just made perfect, and to the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem! There is this remarkable difference also, between the death of the servants of God, and that of the servants of man: the former depart at the bidding of the Master, whom they had preached on earth, to honour and worship him in heaven. The same Master transfers them from one department of usefulness, enjoyment, and duty, to another of a character incomparably superior, in its rewards and happiness. He, who had allotted to them a portion of his vineyard here, calls them away, as best suits his gracious purposes, at the first or the third, at the ninth or the twelfth hour. And let him call when he will, whether from sickness or health, from mourning or joy, from temptation or triumph, from the love of friends or the persecution of enemies, they depart full of resignation, humility, and confidence; for they know that all is for the best, as to themselves and their families, as to the social circle and the sphere of their pastoral labours.

In such a spirit, departed the Rev. WILLIAM ASHMEAD, late Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church, in the city of Charleston. A sketch of the life and death of such a minister of the gospel, is due to that congregation who had called him to be their shepherd; to the community who were to have shared in the blessings of his talents, learning, and piety, of his influence and example; and to the social and domestic circles, which have lost in him the husband, father, friend.

The Rev. William Ashmead was the son of William and Margaret Ashmead, residents of Philadelphia. Captain Ashmead, his grandfather, seems to have possessed a taste for literature—

though his active life afforded little leisure for its indulgence. He kept a journal for the gratification of his friends, which has been said to be highly interesting; and he wrote his own epitaph in verse, in which he beautifully alludes to the extraordinary circumstance of having completed one hundred voyages, and to the peaceful haven, in which he hoped to rest his shattered bark. The mother of Mr. Ashmead was one of the most amiable of women. Mr. Ashmead was from a very early age devoted to books and retirement, and averse to the amusements of boyhood. Dr. Rush, who had frequent opportunities of observing him, while visiting at his grandfather's, remarked of him, when still quite young, that he was a boy of fine promise. At the age of thirteen or fourteen, he was placed in a bookstore, where, for the want of sufficient employment, he read, as might be expected, in the most irregular manner, a great variety of books. The habit of desultory reading, thus acquired, he always regarded as a serious disadvantage. But those acquainted with the character of his mind, in the maturity of life, would never have suspected him of such undisciplined habits, in his early years, nor have admitted their influence over him, even if the fact had been known to them.

He passed the first nineteen years of his life in Philadelphia, and there contracted those sedentary habits which laid the foundation of future disease. During this time, he studied the languages, and having entered the University of Pennsylvania, passed through the usual studies with much credit, and graduated in 1818. Immediately after, he engaged in teaching, as a means of support; and having decided in favour of the Gospel Ministry, studied under the Rev. James P. Wilson, of Philadelphia; a gentleman distinguished for the power and logical character of his mind, for extensive erudition, and especially for his intimate knowledge of the Christian Fathers. Mr. Ashmead was compelled to teach by day, and to pursue his professional studies by night. A pallid countenance, frequent head-aches, and disordered nerves, soon admonished him, that he spent too much time in the cultivation of his mind, and too little in the preservation of his health. Having finished the preparatory course of studies, he was licensed as a preacher in the Spring of 1820. Few men have begun the career of ministerial labour so destitute of extrinsic aid or factitious advantages. Without patronage or favour, without the influence of the rich and the powerful, his personal

merits, set off by a sweet countenance, pleasant, cordial manners, and an extremely youthful appearance, soon secured to him a far more than usual share of kindness and esteem, of respect, and even of admiration.

Soon after Mr. Ashmead had been licensed, he travelled on horseback for the benefit of his health, in the mountainous region of Northumberland and Sunbury. On his return, he was invited to preach at New Brunswick in Jersey, and gave great satisfaction to a crowded audience. He was requested to return in July, as a candidate for the pastoral office; but as there was a division of opinion in the congregation, probably on account of his youth (being little more than 21 years of age), he declined altogether. Fortunately, however, for one who desired, (after having sufficiently prepared himself) to enter at once on the service of his Lord, he had, in the mean time, been invited to take charge of the congregation in Sunbury, a small town of Northumberland county, on the Susquehanna. He had not, however, been installed as their pastor, when he received an unexpected call from the Presbyterian church in Lancaster. Believing that a wider and more important sphere of usefulness awaited him there, and having laboured diligently to fit himself for such a station, he felt it a privilege, as well as a duty, to go. He accordingly removed to Lancaster, and served the Presbyterian church of that city for upwards of eight years. During that period, he not only discharged the duties of an affectionate, faithful, and able pastor, but employed his talents and influence in the moral and intellectual improvement of the community. With this view, he exerted himself in procuring the building of a public academy, and, after some difficulty, obtained a donation from the Legislature, in aid of the object. After he had resided in Lancaster about two years, he received a unanimous call to the Presbyterian church in New Brunswick, with a proposal to bear all the expense of removal. This was the more honourable, because they had neither seen nor heard him since his visit in July, 1822; and of course they judged of him still by the favourable impressions then made. He declined the offer, however, as his people remonstrated earnestly against his leaving them.

His assiduity in the discharge of pastoral duties, and his sedentary habits, acting on a constitution which had been impaired in early life, gradually undermined it, and prepared the way for an alarming state of feebleness and exhaustion. The decline of his

health, and the danger which had now become painfully manifest, brought him to the South in the Fall of 1828, under the hope that relaxation from his labours and a genial climate would restore him. Nor was this expectation disappointed, so far as appearances enabled his friends to judge.—During his stay in Charleston, he preached occasionally, and made a very favourable impression, as an able, interesting, and evangelical minister. Whilst at Washington, during the winter of 1829, being then on his return to Lancaster, he received a unanimous call from the Second Presbyterian church of Charleston, South-Carolina, whose pulpit had been vacated by the death of the Rev. T. C. Henry. Mr. Ashmead was sensible of the danger he should incur by continuing at Lancaster; and, therefore, resolved to accept the call, from a sense of duty to the church, to his family, and to himself. He accordingly terminated his connexion with the Presbyterian congregation of Lancaster. He arrived in Charleston on the 25th of April. Here he remained two months, during which he received many marks of regard from his new people, and became warmly attached to many individuals among them, especially to his hospitable friend Mr. A**** and his family, of whose affectionate attentions he often spoke with the warmest gratitude, and towards whom he felt as a son and a brother. On the 17th of May, 1829, he was installed, and on the 25th of June, he set out on his return to the North, to make arrangements for the removal of his family, in the ensuing Fall. Before he left the South, however, he had a serious attack of bilious fever, and immediately after his arrival in Lancaster, he was again seized with a dangerous fever. He slowly recovered; yet his apparent restoration to health was flattering to his friends.—Whilst, however, he was waiting in Philadelphia, for the departure of the vessel in which he had engaged a passage for himself and family, he was again taken sick. This relapse occurred the very week during which he had expected to sail for Charleston; and arose from the latent consequences of the attack at Lancaster.—This fever, apparently not so violent and alarming as the former, was declared by his physicians to be subdued at the end of two weeks. He had been deeply affected by the disappointment of not being able to commence the voyage, at the set time; for his heart was fixed on it, as a duty peculiarly interesting and important.—But, when his medical advisers declared that he must not attempt it, he did not hesitate to

yield his anxious wishes to their judgment, and only directed that his people should be made acquainted with the cause of his detention, and with his actual situation, from time to time.—Although the fever returned in a week, yet it seemed of so mild a character, and he appeared at intervals so much better, that his friends could not but indulge the hope, that he would yet be restored to health and usefulness. Even as late as three days before he died, he appeared to be much better; his countenance, always interesting, was unusually sweet and natural, and his voice was clear and distinct. He himself, however, relied not on the favourable changes which occurred at times, still adhering to the settled opinion, that he would never recover. He spoke of an inward feeling, which convinced him that he should not survive. At first, he appeared solicitous to live, and said: “O my God! spare me to praise thee and serve thee, with more ardour than I ever have!—Spare me to my dear wife and children. I trust it is not inconsistent for me to desire to live. Dr. —, who is a holy man, and lives near to God, once reproved me on that subject after I had preached a sermon, in which I had painted in glowing colours the desire of the righteous man to die, and the triumphs of a death bed. I believe there have been a few good men who have desired to die, such as Brainerd, Edwards, and Baxter, but in general there is no instinct so strong as that with which we cling to life.” But he added: “If I am to die at this time, dying grace will be given me. God can make me willing to leave all.” In the early part of his illness he often expressed a cheerful hope of future happiness, but said he had not that assurance of which some persons appeared possessed. “But,” said he, “perhaps it is best for me not to feel too confident. Dr. W—— says that there have been many good Christians who never attained this assurance.” He desired his wife to preserve his sermons for his son. “Should God direct his views to the ministry,” said he, “they may be of use to him.” “At least,” he added, “they will serve to show him something of his father.” This mention of his dear boy was almost too much for him; yet he shrunk from nothing that duty required.

He conversed with his two eldest children: told them that he had but few days to live, and exhorted them so to live, that he might hope to meet them in heaven. On this day also he spoke to several of his relatives, with great tenderness and affection, giving them appropriate advice, which will, it is hoped, be long

remembered. Parting with his wife and little ones, appeared to be the greatest conflict which nature experienced; yet, we feel a strong assurance, that God enabled him to resign even these into his hands. In his last illness he loved to expatiate upon the virtues of his mother, to recall her nameless endearments, and her tender solicitude for his welfare. "My mother," said he, "O how I did love my mother! and well do I remember what a shuddering came over me, when I first thought that she would die, and be removed from me. But she is now among the gentlest of the spirits in heaven." He looked forward with pleasure to the period, when he should meet this fondly-cherished parent in those regions, where happiness is pure and unalloyed. He often remarked, "My sickness has been sanctified to me; it is good for me that I have been afflicted." The activity and energy of his mind to the last, exemplified a remark, which he had made a few days before his death when very weak and low.—"Mind," said he, "immortal mind never decays. When the body is sinking to the grave, it often breaks forth with unwonted splendour." During the last memorable week of his life he expressed his sentiments upon many subjects, with a clearness and vigour which were truly surprizing considering his extreme debility. He spoke at this time of the difficulty of distinguishing between a desire of happiness and a dread of misery—a desire to obtain heaven for its own sake, and a desire to escape from hell. "This," said he, "is one of the most difficult points in the Christian experience." On another occasion, he spoke with great pleasure of the resurrection of the body. He also referred to the subject of moral evil—its entrance into the world:—"God," said he, "created all things good." His views on this subject were very clear and satisfactory. When suffering under a most painful inability to sleep, he said, "This is the way we learn to die, by suffering." "Yes," was replied, "it is the way our Heavenly Father takes to lead us to himself." "And a very good one," said he. On the Friday before his decease, he said to a kind brother, who was with him, "I feel a strong confidence in God. I can say with David, 'great is his goodness,' and with Paul, 'thy grace is sufficient for me:'" "I am in the hands of the Lord Jesus," said he at another time, after remarking the improbability of his recovering; and again, "Lord Jesus, into thy hands I commit my spirit." He gave direc-

tions with the greatest composure for his funeral, and requested that the Rev. Dr. G——, whose visits had been a source of much comfort to him, should speak at his grave. On one occasion he remarked to a friend, "It seems to me more difficult for ministers of the gospel to be saved, than for other men." He then spoke of himself as a sinner, as indeed he daily did, frequently uttering the fervent ejaculation, "God be merciful to me a sinner." On Sabbath morning, two days before his death, he said, "this is the Sabbath; I wish to be in the spirit on the Lord's day." He then repeated:—

"Sweet is the day of sacred rest,
No mortal care shall seize my breast:
O may my heart in tune be found,
Like David's harp of solemn sound."

On the evening of that day, he said "I am a sinner, it is true," (and every man that dies must say that,) "but hoping for heaven through the merits of the Lord Jesus; and now I am resigned to go; and feel that I should delight to join the glorified and happy spirits that surround the throne: and Oh that I might hope to meet the whole human family there. I would not be a Universalist—but how dreadful the thought that even one human being should be lost; and God would have all men to be saved. If fire and the want of water be faint emblems of the miseries of the lost, what, Oh my God! must be the reality." On one occasion, he exclaimed, with strong emotion—"I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." "Let me die," said he, "the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." During the last week of his life, he spoke with great feeling of a pocket English Bible which he always carried with him, and to which he was very much attached. "That little Bible," said he, "has been my companion over many a mile of land and ocean." He then marked several appropriate passages with his own hand. On the last day, he remarked, "I am dying: but I fear not death; my trust is in the Saviour of sinners." There was a deep and affecting solemnity in all that he said, the last night of his life. He was evidently fast ripening for Heaven; his path was shining more and more unto the perfect day. To him may justly be ap-

plied the words of the Psalmist, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace." Instead of murmuring or repining on his bed of languishing, his heart seemed to overflow with love and gratitude. A day or two before his death, when presented with a draught of cold water, he said, "O how delightful! fresh from nature's fountain. How good our heavenly Father is in providing us so many comforts, notwithstanding our sinfulness. The goodness of God far exceeds his severity." On another occasion, when his shutters were opened, and he beheld the sun, he exclaimed, "the Lord God is a sun and a shield, the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly." Several times he said, "I am dying," yet no symptoms of immediate danger were visible; his sleep was easy, his voice clear and strong. A few minutes before he departed, he said to his wife: "You can come to me, though I cannot return to you." After some moments of intense pain, he desired that his head might be raised. It was done, when immediately his eyes became fixed, and his spirit was released without a groan or struggle. He died after an illness of six weeks, on the morning of the 2d of December, 1829, in his 32d year, leaving a widow, and six children all under ten years of age.

Mr. Ashmead read with ease, the French, Spanish and Italian languages, though entirely self-taught. In the winter of 1825, he commenced the translation of Saurin's Historical, Critical and Theological Discourses, of which he was under the impression there was no English version. He had proceeded so far, as to complete eight of them, with very copious notes, when admonished by ill health of the necessity of relinquishing every study, except what was indispensable to prepare him for the pulpit. These Sermons are among his manuscripts, and are written with the greatest accuracy and neatness. In the German language he also made considerable proficiency, though his declining health obliged him to give up the study. He was very fond of good poetry, and had all the sensibility and fancy of a poet, though he never attempted that kind of composition.

He was a good Mathematician also. But the study of the human mind was to him the most interesting of all. Accordingly he read with profound attention all the different systems of moral science and metaphysics. But, after all his learning and research, he declared, when recovering from the fever which attacked him

on his return from Charleston, that he would in future study the Bible more, and other books less. Let it not hence be inferred that he had hitherto neglected the holy volume. Far from it. He was in the daily practice for many years not only of reading the English version, but of reading every morning, a chapter in the Hebrew Bible, and every afternoon, another in his little Greek Testament, which he always carried with him.

In 1826, he published an essay on Pauperism, addressed to the State Legislature, then in session, in which are displayed great ingenuity and originality in applying the Christian principle, "If a man will not work, neither shall he eat," to the subject of a legal provision for the poor. The argument is not a popular one in the native State of the author, but the time is coming, when, we doubt not, its force will be admitted by all. The literary merits of the essay will be acknowledged by every reader of taste and judgment.

Among the manuscripts of Mr. Ashmead, there are from 170 to 200 Sermons, written out, and possessing nearly equal merit: several works which have not been given to the public; one is entitled, "the Laws of the Greek Accents;" one is on "The Advantages of the Sabbath, considered as a Civil Institution;" another on "The Influence which Christianity has exerted on the Political Condition of the World;" another is entitled, "The Scripture Doctrine of an Intermediate State between Death and the Resurrection, defended." There are also "An Abridgment of the Manual of Epictetus;" "An Epitome of Brown's system of Theology;" and a Criticism on "Sermons by a Layman." These are all written with the most perfect neatness, not a sentence being abridged or a word omitted.

It is worthy of remark, that the only unfinished Sermon among his manuscripts, is on these words: "And the dust shall return to the earth, as it was." It is supposed to have been commenced between his illness in July, and the last fatal attack. It breaks off abruptly with these words, which seem to have been prophetic: "Then, when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory."

The Rev. Wm. Ashmead was richly endowed by nature. The God whom he served with the zeal, simplicity and faithfulness of the apostolic age, had bestowed upon him talents, far superior to those, which are given to the vast majority of mankind. Conscious

of his powers, and acknowledging the full force of the obligation which they imposed, he cultivated his mind with the fidelity of a Christian, and the enthusiasm of a scholar. It is not therefore, surprising, that he should have attained in comparatively few years, an extent, variety and depth of knowledge, which few of the Clergy ever attain, even in the course of a long life. His Theological acquirements especially, were extraordinary for his age; and serve to show us what intellectual ability can accomplish, when stimulated by a sense of Christian duty; and by an ardent love of study. It has often happened that the profound and learned Theologian, too deeply imbued with the spirit of controversy, and becoming a devotee, if not a bigot to his own sect, has but little affection for the Church Universal, and for the common cause of Christian benevolence, too little sympathy with other denominations, and too little respect for their pious labours. But Mr. Ashmead, though an accomplished scholar in divinity, valued religion more than sectarian Theology, and the broad diffusive charity of the New Testament, more than the narrow-minded jealousies, which often separate the members of different communions, even where they harmonize in essentials. He loved and venerated the principle of mutual fellowship and mutual labour, and was ever ready to unite on common ground, with any of the Evangelical denominations. His liberality, therefore, seemed the more remarkable and captivating, because he had not only travelled the broad road, but had explored the narrow winding paths of biblical learning; and had surveyed minutely, as well as comprehensively, the various religious opinions, which divide the Christian world. From these he selected such as he was satisfied the Scriptures sanctioned; and hence his scheme of religion was evangelical, and his ecclesiastical tenets Presbyterian. Inflexible in these sentiments, as derived from the pure fountain of Scripture, he yet acknowledged in others, most cheerfully and sincerely, in thought, in word, and in deed, the privilege of judging and acting for themselves. He insisted with fervour and energy, uniformly and steadily, on the peculiar requirements of the gospel: and declared, as a herald of the cross, the whole counsel of God. To his people, he addressed himself, with the authority of a pastor; with the gravity and earnestness, which became their spiritual guide; with the tenderness and solicitude of a brother and a friend; with the humility of a fellow-servant; and with the penitence, the gratitude, the faith

of a sinner, sanctified by the same holy spirit, redeemed by the same precious sacrifice, and accepted by the same almighty Father. He preached as one who had bound himself, for the rewards of eternity, to strengthen the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees, to lead the blind, and to encourage the fearful, to bring back the wanderer, to bind up the broken heart, and to warn the strong, that he take heed, lest he fall. He preached as one who had experienced in himself the regenerating power, and the purifying influences, the holy enjoyments, rich consolations, and eternal sanctions of the gospel.

But there are other points of view, in which we may advantageously contemplate the character of Mr. Ashmead. We have said that he was gifted with fine talents, and he accordingly trained himself, by the assiduous cultivation of his mind, to a thorough knowledge of its capabilities, and a complete mastery of its powers.—Hence, while the Christian heard with gratitude and humble joy, the message of salvation, delivered in the very spirit of the gospel, kind, considerate and simple: the scholar was charmed by the display of a logic, clear, vigorous, convincing; of a judgment, sound and discriminating: and of a taste, at once pure and beautiful. His reasonings in favour of religion were delivered with all the energy of truth, all the fervour of piety, and all the chastened elegance of an accomplished preacher.

It is believed that very few of the numerous clergymen who have visited our city, during a long course of years, so speedily established such an enviable reputation, as a Christian minister, as a scholar and a gentleman.—Whilst he was loved as a pious and amiable man, he was admired as an able and eloquent preacher, and respected as a faithful servant of his crucified Master. The character, which he had developed and finished, during eight years of service at Lancaster, had attained such a state of perfection, that a display of its moral beauty and intellectual excellence seemed rather to be spontaneous manifestations of its power, than deliberate purposes of the mind. The large and enlightened audience which attended his preaching, attested the general satisfaction which he gave. The unanimous call to fill the vacant pulpit of the 2d Presbyterian Church, was at once the reward of his labours, and a testimony to his sterling merit. The deep regret of the Lancaster church, at parting with him, and the affliction of the 2d Presbyterian church at his decease, bespeak the gratitude

of the former, and the broken hopes of the latter. As a husband, father, friend, the qualities of Mr. Ashmead were but emanations from the higher and nobler character, which distinguished him as a Christian and a minister. Such a Christian and such a minister could not fail to exhibit, in the social and domestic circles, those qualities, which not only endear but adorn, the husband, the father and the friend. His virtues commanded respect, and won esteem; while the affability and gentleness of his manners, the sweetness and serenity of his temper, his cheerful and cordial conversation, his pure and humble spirit, recommended him as a companion and a model. The strength of his affections and the extreme delicacy of his feelings were known to but few. "I have been a sensitive being," said he, "and my feelings have been but little understood." His modest and retiring manners, veiled from the casual observer much of the loveliness of his character. Yet withal, he was fearless in the discharge of duty, and uniformly opposed injustice, with a determined purpose.

To his widow he has left the bright example of a Christian life, and the more glorious and precious consolations of a Christian death-bed. To her, as a pious mother, he has entrusted that example and those consolations, as the rich and affecting bequest of a dying father to the little children, whom he loved. By her, the wife of his confidence and affections, we feel assured, that these treasures of a husband's character, will be preserved as a sacred patrimony for his children, and as a pledge of their re-union in that world of glorified spirits, where sorrow and tears are unknown, but the purity and bliss of angels and seraphs become the eternal inheritance of the redeemed.

The death of such a man is a heavy loss to the community, who expected so much from his life. The death of such a minister, is a season for fasting and prayer, to the people whom he served. The death of such a scholar is consecrated by the tears, and embalmed in the memory of Literature. The death of such a husband, father, friend, clothes in mourning the forms that he loved, and banishes smiles from the faces which were ever wont to rejoice when he rejoiced.

But the death of such a man, such a minister, such a scholar, of such a husband, father, friend, is full of consolation to those who survive; as it is full of glory and happiness to him. Theirs is a loss, that can last but a few years, for they also must die: but his

we are assured, is an eternal gain. They continue in a state of temptation, of trial, of sorrow; while he has passed through the valley of the shadow of death, to the bosom of his Father and their Father, of his God and their God. They, indeed, now sorrow, because they shall behold his face no more; but when their corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and their mortal shall have put on immortality, if it be given them to enter, as we trust he has, into the rest prepared for the people of God, then shall they behold him again, clothed in the glorified form, and beaming love from the seraph countenance of the just man made perfect,

SERMON I.



JOB XI. 7, 8, 9.

“Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.”

THE text teaches us, that the Deity is a being altogether incomprehensible. The words imply, that we can no more discover the mode of the divine subsistence, and develope the nature of the divine perfections, than we can measure the vault of heaven, or explore the lowest abysses of the earth.

It is told of Simonides, a distinguished ancient poet and philosopher, that, when asked by Hiero, king of Syracuse, the question, “What is God?” he desired to have a day for reflection, before he undertook to reply. On the following day, the query was repeated, and two days more were requested; at the expiration of which, Simonides again doubled the time which he demanded for consideration. At length, Hiero, growing impatient, inquired why he acted in this manner. “Because,” answered the candid pagan, “because the longer I examine the subject, the more obscure it becomes.”

Many have supposed, that the necessity of an intelligent First Cause is so obvious, that, had Jehovah made no direct revelation of himself to man, we should yet have been able, by the exercise of the mental facul-

ties with which he has endued us, to arrive at a knowledge of his existence. In fact the possibility of learning something in respect to the being and attributes of God, independently of the disclosures contained in his word, has been assumed by not a few able writers, as an incontestable truth. Thus the eminently profound and discriminating Calvin commences the third chapter of the first book of his Institutes with this confident assertion, "We lay it down as a position not to be controverted, that the mind of man even by natural instinct has some sense of a Deity." We may add, that the apostle Paul himself has been thought to favour the opinion of which we speak, when he says, "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead." This passage has been understood as implying, that on the works of creation the great Architect has impressed the fact of his existence in lines so broad and conspicuous, that they cannot fail to attract the notice of every being who has eyes to see, and an intellect to consider and comprehend.

There are those, however, who, after a close and patient investigation of the subject, have been led to doubt, if not to deny, that man, without the assistance of revelation, would have known any thing respecting his Maker. They look upon the language of Paul just quoted, as too ambiguous to be relied on for the support of the opinion which they reject, while there are various considerations which incline them to a contrary supposition. We shall here offer one or two remarks on this point, but without taking upon us to decide it.

That the numberless indications of design and contrivance which pervade the works of God, are an evidence of his existence, is certain. The argument with which we combat the Atheist, when we point him to the universe which he inhabits, and of which he is a part, and demand of him how a structure so stupendous and magnificent, and so admirably fitted to the accomplishment of wise and benevolent ends, should have originated without an intelligent agent,—is unquestionably a sound one. On this point, let it be carefully observed, there is no difference of opinion. It is conceded on both sides, that, “the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy-work.” The question is not whether those who are already acquainted with a Deity, may discover in the fabric of nature numerous and striking tokens of his being, but whether these tokens would be sufficient to arrest the attention, and force conviction on the minds of those who were entirely ignorant of the fact. Phenomena which appear singularly conclusive to persons whose belief in the divine existence has been previously established, might make no impression whatever, or, at best, only a feeble and transitory impression on individuals, who had never before heard or thought of a God. To discern the evidence which sustains a known truth, is a very different thing from the discovery of a truth that was wholly unknown. It is, at the present day, no very hard matter to demonstrate those physical laws which govern the revolutions of the solar and planetary orbs. And yet how many ages of the most profound ignorance had been slumbered away, before Newton, by the efforts of his splendid genius, ascertained and elucidated the simple but sublime prin-

ciples, by which the harmony of the spheres is preserved!

The general, if not universal, belief of mankind in respect to the divine existence, has been confidently appealed to by many as evincing, that this great truth, which lies at the foundation of all religion, is discoverable by human reason. The assertion has been broadly made, that no nation or tribe of people entirely ignorant of a Deity, can be found at present on the globe, or has ever existed. How far this assertion might be successfully combatted, we shall not now inquire, though we cannot forbear observing, that Locke, in the first book of his *Essay on the Understanding*, has quoted some facts, which he considered as sufficiently proving the contrary, and that a later writer of our own country has recorded a very remarkable circumstance, which we shall here state in his own words: "I was well acquainted," says he, "with a negro, who was a man of superior natural powers, and made a profession of religion; who told me, that he was born in the island of Madagascar, and lived there till he was above thirty years old; and in all that time he never had a thought of the being of a God, a creator, or governor of the world, or of a future state after death." But let us concede, for the sake of argument, that some indistinct notions relative to a supreme Divinity, are, and have always been co-extensive with the diffusion of human nature.—We ask, is it by any means certain, that such notions are the pure result of investigation and reflection on the part of those who possess them? May they not be referred to that original revelation of himself with which we know that the Deity was pleased to favour our first parent? The idea of a God once

communicated to our race, would be handed down through successive generations, extending its influence to the remotest periods and regions.

We come now to exhibit what has been considered as something like a positive argument in support of the opinion which denies the possibility of arriving at a knowledge of the divine existence, independently of revelation. The benevolent attention which of late years has been devoted to the instruction of the deaf and dumb, has led to some discoveries highly interesting to the philosophical observer of the human mind. Among other things, it has, we believe, been pretty clearly ascertained, that this unfortunate class of beings are entirely ignorant of a Deity, until they receive from their teacher particular and explicit information on this subject. And here we must not omit the mention of a circumstance which is well authenticated. It is the case of a man born deaf and dumb in France, who is reported to have been quick and sagacious in the ordinary affairs of life. He was a regular attendant of public worship, and applied for admission to the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. The bishop to whom the application was made, examined him as far as practicable, through the medium of his relatives and familiar companions, who could best converse with him. He was received as a communicant, and continued for many years, as was supposed, a devout Christian. At length, a surgical operation was performed on his ears, which enabled him to hear, and, of course, he soon became able to speak and to read. He then declared, that, in his previous state, he had not the most indistinct apprehension of a God, and that all the interest which he formerly appeared to take in religious exer-

cises, resulted solely from a desire to imitate what he saw in others. Now, there is undoubtedly a degree of force in the argument founded on the case of the deaf and dumb. Yet this argument must not be looked upon as conclusive, because the class of beings in question are in circumstances different from those in which the rest of the race are found. They have not, so to speak, the full complement of faculties pertaining to human nature. They, consequently, labour under disadvantages which render their situation so peculiar, that the inference drawn from their ignorance of a Deity, cannot be fairly relied on as decisive of the point at issue.

And after all, brethren, we confess that we are not competent to determine, whether man, independently of revelation, could have ascertained the being of God. That he has an instinctive perception of right and wrong—that his conscience often alarms and influences him by vague feelings of accountability,—we are willing to admit. But how far these moral emotions would necessarily involve a belief of the divine existence, we are at a loss to say. His Maker did not think proper to leave man without a revelation, and, therefore, we know not what it were possible for him, either immediately on his creation, or in a succession of ages, to discover of the being of a Deity.

If, however, we should admit, that the bare fact of the divine existence is discoverable by human reason, still we may venture to assert, that no correct ideas relative to the character and perfections of God, can be derived from any other source than his own word. In support of this position, it is sufficient to appeal to the state of religion among the most enlightened and refined nations of antiquity. Behold the learned

and polished Greeks and Romans offering their homage to thirty thousand divinities—divinities, too, whom they conceived to possess all the passions which belong to our nature in its state of degeneracy. See the inhabitants of Athens—a city accounted the metropolis of the literary world,—erecting altars to *unknown gods!*

And here it deserves to be particularly remarked, that the opinions entertained by the ancients in reference to the divine nature, appear to have become less rational, or, rather, less consistent with the discoveries of revelation, in proportion to their advancement in literature and philosophy. The question might hence arise—if the knowledge of God which they possessed, had been acquired by the exercise of their own mental faculties, why did it not improve and enlarge in the same ratio in which those faculties were cultivated and expanded? How are we to account for the fact, that the religious sentiments of the Greeks and Romans, never exhibited the least symptom of progression towards the truth? The only change which they underwent, was to grow more absurd and more monstrous. This circumstance, however we may attempt to explain it, is a curious one.

We know it has been alleged, that while the popular religion of the ancients was a system of unmeaning and debasing superstitions, their philosophers and intelligent men of the higher classes, entertained more enlightened views respecting the divine Being, and merely professed, from motives of policy, to coincide in the vulgar notions of their countrymen. There may be some ground for this assertion, though every one must discern, that it is unsafe to pronounce positively concerning opinions which those who are conjectured

to have held them, are admitted to have been most anxious to conceal. The truth of the matter we suppose to be about this—that reflecting men among the Greeks and Romans perceived the futility of the religious system adopted by the multitude, but having no certain information on the subject, and knowing not whither to go for such information, their minds settled into a state of general doubt and total indifference. According to the testimony of Gibbon, (their warmest admirer and eulogist,) they were, in reality, *Atheists*, though they thought proper, for obvious reasons, to conform externally to the religion of their country. It is Cicero, we believe, who somewhere remarks, that he never could tell, how one augur was able to look at another without laughing. And yet we are much mistaken, if his own speculations respecting the Deity, will not be contemplated with little complacency by a modern advocate for the sufficiency of human reason.

Enough, we presume, has now been said to show, that, apart from the revelation with which our Creator has kindly condescended to favour us, God is an incomprehensible being. Had it not been for the sacred scriptures, we should have remained ignorant of the divine character and perfections, even if we had been able to discover the simple fact of the divine existence.

But, brethren, we are prepared to advance farther than this, and to maintain, that, even with the light which the inspired record reflects on this sublime and glorious subject, we can learn little comparatively concerning Him who made us. Yes, we may go to the man who has the Bible in his hands, and as he diligently explores its pages, we may say to him in the language of the text, “Canst thou by searching find

out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know; The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.”

Does any one here ask, why it is that the Deity, notwithstanding the disclosures of his word, is, in a great measure, incomprehensible to the human mind? We answer, because of the feebleness and imperfection of our capacities. A finite intellect can no more comprehend that which is infinite, than the hollow of our hand could contain the waters of the ocean. The poet has well said,

“ Could we conceive him, God he could not be ;
Or he not God, or we could not be men.
A God alone can comprehend a God.”

Let us now endeavour to analyze the truth inculcated in our text, and to ascertain more definitely what it is that we mean, when we speak of the incomprehensibility of God.

And first we remark, that God is incomprehensible in respect to the mode of his subsistence. He is an uncreated substance. He lives by an immutable necessity inherent in his own nature. He has proceeded from none, and is sustained by none. He is wholly independent of any of the relations of space and time. We may add, that the manner of his being becomes still more mysterious, when we take into view what the scriptures reveal with regard to a plurality of some kind in the unity of the divine essence. It is utterly impossible for us to conceive how the same God can be both one and three. And yet this fact relative to the Most High is taught so distinctly in his word, that we

cannot, without a culpable disregard for the authority of revelation, withhold from it our credence. The utmost that we can discover concerning the matter, is, that the Deity is one and three in different senses. Thus far we can go, and no farther.

Again, God is incomprehensible in respect to many of his perfections, and particularly those which theologians have distinguished by the epithet *incommunicable*. For example, what definite and satisfactory ideas can we form of his *eternity*—that attribute in virtue of which he has existed and shall exist always? Or of his *omnipresence*—that attribute in virtue of which he is in every part of this vast universe at the same moment of time? Or of his *omnipotence*—that attribute in virtue of which he has only to will, and the object of his volition is instantly accomplished? Or of his *immutability*—that attribute in virtue of which he remains himself unchanged amid surrounding systems of changes? Brethren, we may strain and torture our minds to the utmost in trying to conceive of these perfections of the Godhead, and after all we shall be forced to own with Simonides, that deliberation on the subject serves only to perplex and bewilder us the more.

Further, God is incomprehensible in respect to his works. Their extent and variety, their greatness on the one hand, and their minuteness on the other, surpass our conception. When we look above to those enormous masses of matter, suns, planets and stars, which are continually moving with a velocity almost immeasurable through the regions of unbounded space; and when we cast our eyes downwards to survey the minutæ of creation, and remark how every leaf of every tree, and, indeed, almost every material particle

teems with organic life, invisible, it is true, to the unaided eye, but plainly discoverable through the medium of the microscopic lens; we are constrained to admit, that the Deity "doeth great things past finding out, yea, and wonders without number." This truth comes home with peculiar vividness and energy to our minds, when we contemplate ourselves, when we examine the mechanism of our bodies so ingeniously contrived, and admirably executed, and especially when we mark the exquisite structure of the thinking and feeling principle, whatever it may be, which constitutes the chief dignity and excellence of our nature. O! who can reflect for a moment on himself, without realizing the pertinency and force of that address of the Psalmist to his Creator, "I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." In short, the works of the Most High abound with facts to illustrate and confirm the great truth of his incomprehensibility. To a certain extent, we can explore the nature of these works, ascertain their use, and determine the laws by which they are governed. But much, very much that is either partially or entirely unintelligible, remains. Nature is an immense store-house of mysteries. Wherever we direct our view along the range of created things, we may say, "Lo, these are parts of his ways; but how little a portion is seen of him!"

Moreover, God is incomprehensible in respect to the dispensations of his providence. We know, that all things and all events are under his absolute control, inasmuch that a sparrow cannot alight upon the ground without his knowledge and permission. It is equally certain, that he governs the universe agreeably to the dictates of infinite wisdom, and that the end which he

aims to accomplish in all that he does, or suffers to be done, is the promotion of the general happiness of his creatures, and the advancement of his own declarative glory. And yet, how numerous are the occurrences which to our short-sighted view, appear as if they could not have been ordered, or even allowed, by a perfectly wise and purely benevolent Divinity! Why is it, that of all the human beings born into the world, more than one third are cut off in the very dawn of their existence, removed from earth before a single revolution of the seasons has passed over their heads? Why is it, that pestilence and famine and war are so often seen to desolate whole districts of the globe? Why is it, that the virtuous are sometimes visited with every form and degree of affliction, while the wicked sometimes enjoy a superabundant measure of temporal blessings? Why is it, that the husband and father is snatched from a family which depended entirely on his exertions for support, and the widow and her lisping offspring are thereby thrown upon the sympathy of relatives and friends, and the charity of the wide world? Why is it, that of two sons, the one who promised to gladden his parents' hearts, and to be an ornament to society, sinks into an untimely grave, while another, the very reverse in character, lives to disgrace his connexions, and to injure, by the contagion of his vicious example, the community in which he moves? Why is it, that the minister of the gospel is called from the field of his labour, at the very moment in which his prospects of permanent and extended usefulness shone brightest? But there would be no end to such questions. The judgments of Heaven are verily a mighty deep. Of Jehovah it has been truly said, that his "way

is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known." In marking the course of his providence, we have abundant reason to exclaim, "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out."

Finally, God is incomprehensible in respect to the economy of his grace. The plan of redemption exhibited in the Gospel, is replete with mysteries sufficient to baffle the conception, not of men only, but even of the highest orders of created beings in the universe. We remember how an inspired apostle, in meditating on this plan, burst forth into the rapturous exclamation, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Who can estimate the measure of that benevolence, which moved the Father to consent to the sacrifice of his only begotten and well-beloved Son, which urged the Son himself voluntarily to embark in the enterprise of recovering, at the expense of his own life, our fallen and alienated world; and which prompted the Holy Spirit to become a party to this wonderful undertaking, and to lend his potent agency for its certain and effectual consummation? Who can understand how, when Jesus Christ came down to earth, he appeared as a person composed of two natures, the divine and human, distinct as to their respective properties, and yet really and inseparably combined? Who can explain how the obedience which he rendered to the law, and the sufferings which he endured, were capable of expiating the offences of others whose representative he was? Who can point out the manner in which the Spirit of grace operates upon the human heart, so as to fashion it anew, and qualify it for the discharge of moral and

religious duties to which it was previously averse? Who is competent to inform us, how devout men are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation? These, brethren, these are the things into which the angels themselves desire to look. Of course, we can know comparatively little about them in our present state. "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness."

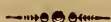
Upon the whole, the Deity, in whatever light we contemplate him, whether we look at his being, his perfections, his works, the dispensations of his providence, or the economy of his grace, is incomprehensible. The truth of our text is established beyond dispute. We cannot by searching find out God; we cannot find out the Almighty unto perfection.

Brethren, from the subject on which we have now been meditating, we may learn, in the first place, the importance of revelation. We have seen that this is the source to which we owe all the sure and satisfactory knowledge that we possess concerning the divine Being. It is doubtful, whether, without the sacred scriptures, we should have discovered even the fact of his existence, while it is certain, that, but for them, we should have remained entirely ignorant of his character and perfections. We should have known nothing of his willingness and his intention to pardon sin and save sinners. That there is forgiveness for malefactors doomed to die—that man, though guilty of numberless and aggravated offences against his Maker, may yet obtain reconciliation through the friendly offices of a Mediator,—is a truth of which not a glimmering of evidence can be discerned on the works of nature. The phenomena of the universe throw no light upon the

subject: "It is neither written by the sunbeam, nor wafted on the breeze." In a word, it can be gathered only from the Bible.

Our subject, dear hearers, further teaches us *humility*. If we are unable, even with the advantages of an express and a particular revelation, to comprehend God, it surely becomes us to contemplate with the most profound self-abasement, his perfections, his works, and his word. Let us be fully sensible of the weakness of our capacities. Let us beware of imagining that we are competent to explore the purposes of Jehovah, to fathom his proceedings, or to determine what it is proper for him to do in the government of his own universe. Instead of aspiring to be wise above what is written, let us take the holy volume as our certain and unerring rule of belief and conduct, in relation to the Great Supreme. Let us bow with implicit reverence to the authority of scripture, employing our own reason as an interpreter of its principles and its precepts, and not as an arbiter to decide on the truth of its contents. Let us acquiesce meekly and devoutly in all the various allotments of divine providence, however dark and inscrutable they may seem. Let us rest on the persuasion that our destiny is in the hands of one who is infinitely wise, and powerful, and good; and that if we only serve him aright in this world, the period is coming when much that is now incomprehensible in his character and doings, shall be cleared up—a period when we shall know him better, and love him more, than we can possibly do at present. Let us wait for this period, and, until its arrival, live by faith.

SERMON II.



ECCLESIASTES XII. 7. (Last Clause.)

—“And the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”

THAT man is a being compounded of matter and spirit, is an opinion of such high antiquity, that the annals of philosophy afford few data for enabling us to determine the time and place of its origin. It formed a part of the system of Pythagoras, who flourished as much as two centuries before Socrates, and was certainly one of the most extraordinary of the Grecian sages. His notions on this subject were probably acquired during his residence in Egypt, to which, as the great mart of learning and science, he repaired in his youth, for study and improvement. Where the Egyptians obtained their knowledge, cannot be positively affirmed, though it may be fairly presumed, that they derived from the posterity of Abraham, while the latter inhabited their country, valuable traditionary information respecting the Deity, the creation of the world, and the nature and destination of man. It is admitted, that the priests of Egypt were far in advance of the Jews with regard to arithmetic, geometry, and general literature. But they must have been greatly inferior to the people whom they had enslaved, in the knowledge of authenticated history and true religion.

The opinion, that two distinct substances—if we may so speak—matter and spirit—enter into the com-

position of human nature, was obviously in the mind of Solomon, when he penned the verse of which our text is a part. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." He here distinguishes, with as much accuracy as language would seem to allow, between the two constituent principles of man. He does not, to be sure, seat himself in the metaphysician's chair, and undertake to point out, in what respect the one of these principles essentially differs from the other. He simply asserts the important fact, that their destiny at death is dissimilar, and even opposite.

The passage before us reminds us of the creation of man as narrated in the inspired record of Moses. We there read, that the almighty Architect fashioned the human being out of the dust of the ground, and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. The amount of this statement would seem to be, that the material frame of Adam was endued with an immaterial soul. Some, indeed, have supposed, that by "*the breath of life,*" may be meant nothing more than the principle of animation, whatever it is, which belongs to man in common with other living creatures. But the peculiar style in which the formation of our first parent is related, must, we think, be understood as marking some decided superiority, in respect both to nature and destination, over the other inhabitants of this world. Besides, the Hebrew term rendered by our translators *life*, is in the plural number—*the breath of lives*. Now, this circumstance, though it may not be thought sufficiently important, to be made the basis of a very serious argument, deserves at least a degree of consideration. It would appear to warrant the idea, that there was communicated from the Deity to man,

a principle of existence in addition to, and distinct from, the general principle of animal being.

We conceive, then, that the term *spirit* is applied by Solomon, in the text, to the human soul, for the purpose of denoting its entire dissimilarity from the body. We have no doubt, that such phraseology was employed by him, in accommodation to the prevailing sentiments of the country and age in which he lived. But we are not less certain, that it is phraseology, the accuracy of which has been perceived and admitted by correct thinkers in all nations and periods of the world.

It is not our intention this morning to enter into a very elaborate discussion relative to the nature of the human mind. The subject, you are aware, is one respecting which there has not been a uniformity of opinion among philosophers. While the majority of inquirers have concurred in viewing the mind as an immaterial substance, there have been those who have maintained, either that it is nothing more than a highly sublimated species of matter, or else that it is simply the result of material organization. Of the writers who have espoused the latter doctrine, there is only one whom we could have wished to see on the other side of the question. And yet it is, perhaps, doing injustice to the great and good Locke, to rank him as a decided disbeliever in the spirituality of the soul, when he has merely gone so far as to say, that we are not entitled to pronounce matter essentially incapable of thought. Whatever may have been the opinion which he really held, or to which he inclined, his whole speculation on this point is replete with his characteristic modesty and caution, and forms a striking contrast to the positiveness, if not dogmatism, betrayed by the Hartleys, the Darwins, and the Priestleys—men of whose writings

it has been justly said, that they are “equally unphilosophical in the design, and uninteresting in the execution, destitute at once of the sober charms of truth, and of those imposing attractions which fancy, when united to taste, can lend to fiction.” The works of these metaphysicians have, for some years, been sinking into merited oblivion. But a new order of materialists have recently presented themselves on the arena of science, who, while they do not pretend to affirm, in so many words, that mind is matter, yet profess to have made discoveries which would seem to imply, that it is capable of being physically analysed, in a manner somewhat analogous to the process of dissection. According to this scheme, all the phenomena of thought and feeling depend on certain protuberances of the brain, which the advocates of the system denominate *organs*, while others have conferred on them the less elegant appellation of *bumps*. We can readily imagine the smile of ineffable contempt which would have crossed the philosophic brow of Locke, even while committing to paper his own remarks on the possible materiality of the mind, had the bust of a modern phrenologist been placed on his table.

In our speculations concerning the human soul, it will serve to prevent much indistinctness of perception, and uncertainty of aim, if we keep constantly and prominently in view a fact which is of fundamental importance in every philosophical inquiry. Let it, then, be remembered, that all our knowledge, both actual and possible, respecting the substances in nature, relates to their *properties*, and not to their inherent *essence*. Thus, matter is known to us simply as something possessed of *solidity*, *extension* and *divisibility*. And so mind is known to us merely as something endued with the qualities of *thought*, *volition*

and *feeling*. Here, on the one hand, and on the other, is the ultimate boundary of our information—a boundary more impenetrable than the mountains of ice that surround the poles of the earth, and bid defiance to the mariner's approach. With regard to the peculiarity which distinguishes the intimate structure of these two substances—matter and mind—we are, and must always be, so long as we continue in the present state, entirely ignorant. It will be perceived, therefore, that the knowledge which we have acquired in respect to the existence and properties of matter, is not more certain and complete, than that which we have acquired in respect to the existence and properties of mind. We know full as much of the latter, as we do of the former—and, perhaps, more. And yet—strange to say—the theories of the materialists have always proceeded on the erroneous supposition, that we are better acquainted with matter, than with mind. Who, then, can wonder, that such speculators, having entered on their researches with views so radically unphilosophical, should have arrived at a false result?

Now, the qualities of matter, and those of mind, are utterly and entirely different. We might even say, that they are opposite. What resemblance have *solidity* and *extension* to *thought* and *feeling*? Where is the analogy between *divisibility* and *volition*? There is surely no resemblance—there is no analogy. We are, therefore, under the necessity of conceding, that matter is one thing, and mind another thing. It is an abuse of language, as well as a violation of the principles of true science, to apply the same name to two substances, whose properties—by which only we know either of them—are so strikingly dissimilar. We wish, that the materialist would inquire how broad is a remembrance; and

into how many parts he supposes, that the emotion of joy, operated on by proper instruments, might be divided. It would likewise be worthy of his investigation, to determine which is the larger, and in what precise ratio, a hope or a fear. There are, besides, many curious questions which he might resolve, concerning the bulk, weight, and other physical properties of an imagination. Let no one conceive, that these remarks are irrelevant. They bear most directly on the real merits of the point at issue; for, as has been well observed, "in saying of mind, that it is matter, we *must* mean, if we mean any thing, that the principle which thinks, is extended, hard and divisible." Such, in a single word, is the true purport of the materialist's doctrine.

But we shall not pursue an argument which we feel is not very well adapted to the pulpit. Enough has been said, it is presumed, to convince you, that Solomon expressed himself with the accuracy of a just philosopher, when he called the soul of man a *spirit*. He regarded it as something entirely distinct from the *dust* of which the body is composed, and on this ground rested, in part, his belief of its continued existence after the dissolution of the latter. And here, brethren, let us tell you, that the immateriality of the human mind affords one of the strongest evidences of its immortality. We are entitled to believe, that the same causes which produce decay in substances endued with extension and divisibility, can have no such effect on those endued with thought and volition. The dissolution of matter is occasioned by the separation of its component parts. But spirit, which is not made up of parts, would seem to be naturally indestructible. We know it has been said, that material and immaterial substances are alike depen-

dent, for the continuance of their being, on the will of the Creator, and that he can render the one immortal, quite as readily as the other. While we admit, that there is truth in this suggestion, we cannot retract what we have asserted, that the spirituality of the soul is the best evidence which reason furnishes, that it is destined to survive the ravages of death. To the nature of the mind, as something essentially distinct from the body, we appeal, for the clearest and most satisfactory proof, independently of revelation, that it shall never perish. Nor do we at all believe, that the doctrine of the soul's immortality has been, in the least, injured, as materialists have often alleged, by those who have argued for it chiefly from the immateriality of the thinking principle.

We have said, that the spirituality of the human mind was regarded by Solomon as an evidence of its immortality. And yet the inference has been hastily drawn from some detached passages of his works, that he was not himself a believer in the future existence of the soul. Thus, in one place, he exclaims, "I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see, that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men, befalleth the beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath: so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast; for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." Now, we shall not deny, that this passage, taken by itself, might induce a reader to suspect, that the writer did not believe in the future existence of man. But we contend, that, when fairly construed agreeably to the general tenour of the production in which it is found, its import must be seen,

even on a casual glance, to be very different. Solomon's object, in these words, is merely to illustrate the vanity of human life, by showing how similar, in many respects, is its termination to the death of the irrational animals. He refers, throughout the comparison, only to the body, and not to the soul, as appears sufficiently from the sentence immediately succeeding the verses just quoted, where he says, "Who knoweth the spirit of a man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward?" There is no ambiguity here. A distinction is drawn in the clearest and most decided terms, between the ulterior destination of man, and that of other living creatures. But further remark would be superfluous. The verse of which our present text is a part, must certainly satisfy every candid reader, that the immortality of the soul was an article of Solomon's creed. Does he not say, in this verse, that while the dust shall return to the earth as it was, the spirit is destined to ascend to Him who gave it? What language, we should like to know, can be more explicit than this? Indeed, it would almost seem as if the wise man, in anticipation of the unjust inference which some might endeavour to draw from previous passages of his writings, had resolved to deliver himself, in such a manner, in the conclusion of his last work, as might obviate all misconception in respect to his real sentiments.

The immateriality of the mind has been alleged as one main argument in support of the position, that the spirit returns, on the dissolution of the body, to God who gave it; or, in other words, that the thinking principle continues in being after death. A second argument nearly allied to this, in behalf of the same momentous truth, might be drawn from the transcendent faculties with

which the Creator has replenished the human understanding. When we contemplate these faculties—Reason, Judgment, Memory, Imagination; or, rather, when we survey the various operations of which the one indivisible principle of mind is capable,—we come almost irresistibly to the conclusion, that a substance so richly endowed must be immortal. When we open the records of science, and examine the actual achievements of intellect, we recoil from the thought, that it is fated to perish by the same ignoble stroke that prostrates the body. Besides, we behold in the soul an illimitable capacity for the ingress of ideas; a desire for the reception of knowledge, which is never saturated; a susceptibility of improvement which time, instead of exhausting, serves only to increase. Life is much too short to enable the mind of man to attain to that high proficiency, to which it ardently aspires, and for which it would seem to be ultimately destined. Must we, then, suppose that the human being is cut down in the very infancy of his career? That his mental faculties, so replete with promise, are all suddenly arrested and annihilated in the very inception of their development? Is there not something in our present circumstances and condition, which proclaims intelligibly and emphatically, that a future and a nobler theatre for exertion and improvement, is in reserve for us beyond the grave? In short, it has been forcibly remarked, that to presume, that man has been gifted with such powers as we have mentioned, and rendered capable of indefinite progression in knowledge, and all in reference to no higher sphere of action than “this dim spot called earth”—is as preposterous as it were to imagine, that an individual should be clothed in scarlet, and decorated with diamonds, for the business of the plough, or instructed in

the arts and sciences, in order to qualify him for attending a herd of swine.

In connexion with the consideration just stated, we may observe, that the difference which obviously obtains between man and the irrational animals, in respect to actual enjoyment on earth, furnishes strong presumptive evidence in behalf of the important truth for which we contend. This world seems suited to the ample and final gratification of the latter. From the various physical objects with which they are surrounded, they derive supreme and unalloyed pleasure. The cattle that browse in the fields, the birds that carol in the air, and the fishes that sport in the water, enjoy sensual happiness, superior both in kind and degree, to any of which the human being partakes. The delights of sense are far too meagre to gratify *his* towering appetites. Instead of affording him substantial and enduring enjoyment, they always contribute, when too eagerly pursued and immoderately grasped, to impair his health, mar his peace, and entail upon him a train of numberless calamities. He fails not to discover, sooner or later, that they are little better than "vanity and vexation of spirit." Now, this important difference between the *rational* and the merely *sentient* being, points, we think, to a corresponding difference in their respective destinations. If the existence of man were to be finally cut short at death, it would seem as if the benevolent purposes of Heaven in his creation, were, in a measure frustrated. He falls like other animals, while, unlike them, he has not been fully blessed. His mind—the very principle of his dignity—that which appears to constitute him their superior, and to crown him as the lord of this lower world,—renders him less capable of enjoyment amid the scenes of his pre-eminence.

Man, on the supposition that there is no futurity, is of all earthly beings, the most miserable. His existence, limited to the present world, is an enigma that serves only to confound those ideas of the divine wisdom and benignity, which every thing else in nature is so admirably fitted to excite. If he is not to live in another state where perfect happiness is attainable, it is difficult to conjecture for what end he was formed.

A further argument in support of the immortality of the mind, has been derived from the inequality which marks the dispensations of Providence in the present world. There is not here that exact accordance between character and condition, which we should calculate on finding in the government of a holy and just Divinity. It often happens, that a greater share of prosperity is enjoyed by the bad, than by the good. Solomon, the most acute observer of human life, thus asserts the fact: "There is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness." Some writers, indeed, have laboured, by a species of subtle reasoning, to show, that the inequality of which we now speak, is more in appearance than in reality.* They contend, that although much difference is visible in the

* The following passage occurs in a letter from Lord Bolingbroke to Swift. He speaks of Pope's Essay on Man, which his poetical friend was then engaged in writing:—

"It is a noble subject; he [Pope] pleads the cause of God, (I use Seneca's expression,) against that famous charge which Atheists in all ages have brought—the supposed unequal dispensations of Providence; a charge which I cannot heartily forgive your divines for admitting. You admit it, indeed, for an extreme good purpose, and you build on this admission the necessity of a future state of rewards and punishments. But what if you should find that this future state will not account, in opposition to the Atheist, for God's justice in the present state, which you give up? Would it not have been better to defend God's justice in this world, against these daring men, by irrefragable reasons,

outward circumstances of men, yet the balance of advantages and disadvantages, in all the various conditions of life, may be so evenly adjusted by an impartial Deity, that the amount of actual enjoyment is nearly, and, perhaps, quite the same. Happiness, say these authors, depends primarily upon the state of the mind—its views, its feelings, and its wishes. External prosperity is no unfailing index of internal tranquillity. In the midst of wealth, and honour, and power, the human being may be really miserable. On the other hand, seeming adversity does not infallibly denote mental infelicity. Tattered garments, scanty fare, and a diseased body, may belong to one, within whose breast there mantles the sunshine of an unclouded calm. There is some plausibility, we grant, in this representation of things. We do not, however, think it necessary to enter into an elaborate argument for the purpose of exposing its fallacy. We would only ask you to go abroad through the numerous walks of actual life, and see how far these ingenious speculations of the closet, correspond with what you there behold. We shall be egregiously deceived if you do not find little within the range of your observation, however extended it may be, to corroborate the philosopher's assumption, that the happiness of the mind is independent of external circumstances—that when the body is afflicted with want or racked with pain, perfect serenity may pervade the soul. You will soon discover, that such a position is most strikingly confuted by the facts that come before your eye; yes, and you may be still more fully convinced of its unsoundness, if it should ever be your lot to know, from personal experience, the effect of some of

and to have rested the proof of the other point on revelation? I do not like concessions made against demonstration, repair or supply them how you will."

those evils which the speculating sage, as he muses in his easy chair, surrounded with every comfort, accounts so very tolerable, evils which, though they may be readily mitigated and counteracted in theory, are generally found more obstinate and unmanageable in practice. In short, this is a question on which it is safest to follow the common sense of mankind, and we are very sure, that no one but a philosopher ever thought of denying or doubting the unequal distribution of good and evil, which characterizes the doings of Providence here below. If, then, there is a Deity who sits upon the throne of nature—a throne of which righteousness and judgment are the foundation,—he cannot fail to make a due distinction, sooner or later, “between them that serve him, and them that serve him not.” As surely as he is just, and holy, and good, all present inequalities shall be rectified at a future period, and in a future state. The happiness or misery of every accountable agent in the universe, must be ultimately in the exact ratio of his moral deserts. As this is not the case with man on earth—as vice here is often more prosperous than virtue,—we may fairly presume that his being is to be prolonged in another and retributive world. The supposition, that the soul is immortal, seems necessary, then, to vindicate the divine character and proceedings. Without it, we shall be completely foiled in all our attempts to

“——— Assert eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.”

An additional argument for the future existence of the soul, has been built on the general belief of mankind in relation to this subject. It is certain, that the expectation of life beyond the grave, however it may have been obtained—whether it be a deduction of reason, or a remnant

of information originally communicated from the Deity to the first man, and by him handed down to his posterity,—has formed an article of the popular creed in all periods, and in almost all countries. It is found to prevail, at this day, among some of the rudest tribes on our earth. The untutored savage, who dwells afar from the radiance of revelation, and on whom the dimmer light of philosophy has not shone, comforts himself amid the privations and calamities incident to his present state, by looking forward to

“Some safer world in depths of woods embrac’d,
Some happier island in the wat’ry waste.”

Now, the question has been asked, can we reasonably imagine, that an expectation thus deeply seated in the human bosom, and widely diffused throughout the human race, is wholly unfounded? Is it consonant with the benignity of the Creator, to suffer a whole order of intelligent beings to indulge a hope of immortality which is never to be realized?...But this argument will strike different minds with a different degree of force, and as its strength may be thus variously estimated, the judicious thinker will not be tempted to lay upon it an undue stress.

A similar remark is applicable to an argument which curious observers have sometimes derived from the analogies of nature. For example, the natural history of insects presents a remarkable fact, which shows, that it is possible even for material animals to undergo a very considerable and striking change in their modes of being—a change as little credible to one who was not aware that it had been indubitably ascertained, as the continued existence of the human spirit in a new form, after the dissolution of the clay fabric, with which its existence, and

all its operations on earth appear to be inseparably allied. Who would not wonder on hearing, for the first time, that the grub, on which we look with so much disgust as it crawls along the ground, becomes, after a short period of torpidity, a beautiful butterfly, that banquets on the nectar of the flower, and glitters in the beams of the summer sun? And yet such is the fact. The wing of this gay insect, which captivates our unaided vision, and whose variegated hues, when surveyed through the microscope, command the astonished gaze of the naturalist, emerged from the tomb into which an unsightly caterpillar sunk. Now, may we not hence infer, that there is nothing like improbability in the opinion, that death, instead of implying the annihilation of the human being, is merely a process through which he enters into a different and superior condition of existence?....But we shall not pursue a mode of reasoning, on which it has been already intimated, that too much reliance ought not to be placed.

Brethren, we have now presented you with a brief view of the several arguments which have been commonly resorted to, in support of the immortality of the soul. After all, however, it must not be concealed, that these arguments afford only a high degree of probability in relation to this point. They are insufficient of themselves to create a clear and an unfaltering conviction, that man is born for eternity. For such conviction, which lies at the basis of all rational and practical religion, we are indebted to the sacred volume. It is by the gospel that life and immortality are brought to light. Here we learn, of a certainty, that the dissolution of the body is not followed by the extinction of the mind—that, when the dust returns to the earth as it was, the spirit returns to God who gave it.

And for what purpose does the spirit return to God who gave it? Our limits will not allow us to answer this question in detail. We would merely remark, in a single word, that the spirit returns to God who gave it, in order to be tried at his bar for the deeds done in the body, and then assigned to a condition of interminable happiness, or interminable misery, according to the nature and desert of those deeds. Reason leads us to presume, that, if the human being is to exist in a future state at all, the circumstances of such existence must correspond to the moral character which he had sustained on earth. And revelation expressly assures us, that, "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." It is most certain, then, that the unalterable destiny of every one is determined in the crisis of his dissolution. There is, at that moment, passed upon him, a sentence of righteous retribution, which takes immediate effect, and which, in the approaching day of the general judgment, shall be republished and confirmed before an assembled universe.

Here, then, brethren, we are brought to the conclusion and improvement of our subject. If death, which destroys the body, has no other effect upon the spirit, than to remove it from a state of probation to one of retribution, how important is it, that our conduct in this life, should be regulated by a due sense of our ulterior destination! Let us always act under a deep persuasion of our immortality. Let us not forget, even for a moment, that these material structures are endued with a principle distinct, in all its properties, from matter—a principle which shall survive the dissolution of the planets, and outlive the splendour of the stars—a principle which, when millions and millions of ages have rolled away, shall continue fresh, and young, and vigorous as ever; either ris-

ing to higher and higher degrees of enjoyment in the paradise of God—climbing the sun-bright steeps of glory, without a barrier to obstruct its brilliant way,—or else sinking deeper and deeper in the abyss of misery, its torments receiving new accessions of keenness, as its distance from the regions of light and purity increases! Who that thinks for an instant of the future career of the human being, does not feel the force of our Lord's reflection, "What is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Poor, indeed, would be that individual, who should barter the undying principle within him, for all that this earth, in the shape of riches, honours, and pleasures, has to bestow. When he reaches the margin of eternity, these delusive pageants must wing their flight, and leave behind them nothing save the torturing recollection of advantages misimproved, and time misemployed.

And now, dear hearers, in the view of such solemn truths, we would entreat you, one and all, to prepare, with becoming earnestness and anxiety, for that crisis in which the dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit ascend to God who gave it. Remember that life is a mere "vapour, that appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away." Very near is the period, when we who have met to-day in this house of worship—speaker and hearer,—shall be numbered with the many generations who have already passed over this brief stage of action, and entered within the veil of eternity. Yes, and let us tell you—even you, our young auditors,—that soon your bodies, which it is now your chief concern to decorate and to gratify, shall be mingled with their elementary dust. And will you devote supremely an

existence so short and uncertain as the present, to any other purpose than that of securing an unalienable inheritance beyond the grave? O! tell us, will you waste in comparatively frivolous pursuits, those inestimable moments, on whose improvement the tremendous destinies of your future being are suspended? Ignorant of the day and hour in which your souls shall be required of you, will you not endeavour to be always ready for a summons to the bar of your Maker and Judge? "The Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye, therefore; for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, watch."

Brethren, we cannot leave you, without repeating the same truth which you have heard from this pulpit a thousand times before. If you would contemplate death, each individual for himself, as the prelude to a blissful and glorious immortality, you must found your hopes implicitly and entirely on the Lord Jesus Christ. In him alone is there salvation for sinners like yourselves. Confide in his atonement, and then you may anticipate, with meek and tranquil submission to the divine will, that approaching day, when the body shall return to its kindred dust, and the liberated spirit soar to the Being from whom it sprung. And now, what more shall we say? "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

SERMON III.



PSALM XV.

“Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.”

THE sacred Scriptures, it has been often remarked, divide mankind into two great classes. According to this classification, every human being is either the friend or the enemy of God. Our Lord, when on earth, expressly taught his disciples, that those who were *not with him*, were *against him*. Neutrality in the matter of religion, is wholly out of the question. There can be no medium between the performance and the neglect of duty—no half-way ground between obedience to the divine will, and disobedience; no stationary spot between holiness and unholiness; no definable point equally removed from the service of God and the service of Mammon—from the love and the hatred of that Being, “in whose hand is our breath, and whose are all our ways.”

Now, it is surely of the last importance, that each individual should know, to which of these classes he belongs. And how is this question to be determined? We answer, that the characteristic traits, the distinguishing marks, of the truly pious man, are described most clearly and minutely in the word of God; so that we may all,

by the comparison of our moral feelings and conduct with this infallible standard, arrive at some knowledge of our character and condition in the view of heaven. Thus it is the object of David, in the psalm before us, to exhibit some of the most prominent of these attributes which designate the friend and servant of the Most High. He accordingly begins by proposing the query, "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?"

It cannot be necessary to attempt a critical exposition of this metaphorical phraseology. To the ancient Jews, the tabernacle was an expressive figure of the good man's earthly pilgrimage, as the hill of Zion was a significant emblem of that condition which awaits him after death. The import of the first verse, then, must be sufficiently obvious. It is as if the Psalmist had written—Who shall enjoy the present comforts, and the future blessings which religion bestows? Who shall possess the favour of God in this world, and dwell with him for ever in the world to come?—This question, we observe, is addressed to the LORD, or, as it is in the original, JEHOVAH. And why is it addressed to him? Because it relates to a matter which is known, with the highest and most unerring certainty to the divine omniscience; and also because it is the province of our Father in heaven, to render us acquainted with our standing and prospects as religious beings. His all-piercing eye can penetrate the deepest recesses of the human heart, and detect its most secret thoughts and desires. And he, too, has promised to devout men, his holy spirit, to bear witness with their spirits, that they are his children; to sooth and animate them with the hope that their sins are forgiven, and that the felicities of paradise shall be their eternal reward.

The first trait which the Psalmist assigns as indicative

of the good man, is more general and less definite than those which follow. "He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness." This is one among numberless passages of the inspired record, which insist upon moral rectitude as an indispensable passport to the divine favour. It has been a common objection to the Christian system, with the ignorant and the uncandid, that it tends to lessen the obligation and importance of those virtues which are in the highest esteem among men, and are most essential to social order and happiness; that it confers an undue value upon a certain set of devotional feelings, such as *faith*, and *hope*, and *love*, with regard to the existence and the degree of which, there must always be great danger of deception on the part of the individual himself, and still greater danger on the part of others. We freely admit, and deeply lament, that some systematic expositors of Christianity have presented views of its doctrines, calculated in some measure, to countenance the objection of which we speak. We refer not now to the writers called Antinomian. We know that there may be found paragraphs even in our orthodox divines, especially those of a less recent date, so incautiously expressed as to give point, if not justness, to that sarcasm of the wittiest of poets, when he describes morality as that

"—— Which both the saints,
And wicked too, cry out against."

But we are bold to affirm, that the Bible, while it teaches the entire insufficiency of mere moral virtues, to save the individual who is a stranger to penitence and faith, declares, in terms the most perspicuous and peremptory, that, where these virtues are wanting, there can be neither penitence nor faith. In fact, the ethical precepts contained in the sacred volume, display a purity and a rigour altogether singular and distinctive. There is no other

code of morals, belonging either to ancient or to modern times, which tasks so sternly and severely all the principles and powers of man.

Let it, then, be distinctly understood, that no one is entitled to the name and rewards of piety, who does not walk uprightly and work righteousness. The strictest and most scrupulous probity must mark all his intercourse with his fellow-men. Every transaction in which he engages, whether great or small, whether public or private, must be in accordance with the highest demands of justice. In him must be realized the sublime conception of the poet, when he speaks of the man whose "eye even turned on empty space, beams keen with honour." In a word, he must endeavour rigidly to conform his conduct to that golden rule which our Lord laid down, when he instructed his disciples to do to others, in all circumstances, precisely as they would have others to do to them.

And here we may remark, that the root of the Hebrew term rendered *uprightly*, in the passage before us, literally signifies *to be perfect*. It is the same word, for example, that occurs in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis, and first verse, where God says to Abraham, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." Another instance of its occurrence we have in the description of Job, which represents him as "a perfect and upright man."

Yet we must not hence infer, that absolute perfection is attainable in the present life. In the Psalm immediately preceding the one on which we are now commenting, the inspired writer expressly declares, that "there is none righteous, no not one." Although Job is said to have been a *perfect* man, yet in speaking of himself he exclaims, "If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me; if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me

perverse.” The original word for *perfect*, is the same in both cases.

It is, then, a Scriptural truth, that so long as we continue in this world, a measure of imperfection mingles itself with our holiest exercises and performances. In the language of theologians, we are released from all the *guilt*, but not from all the *power*, of sin. The apostle Paul, even after he had made high attainments in piety, frankly acknowledged, that in him, that is, in his flesh, dwelt no good thing; for to will was present with him, but how to perform that which was good, he found not; the good that he would, he did not, and the evil that he would not, that he did. With his experience we are sure that the experience of all true Christians, whatever may be their doctrinal views on this article, must coincide. Their progress in pure and undefiled religion, instead of encouraging them to cherish the hope of sinless perfection, can have no other effect than to render them more deeply sensible of their remaining faults and infirmities; they will still discern in themselves an unsubdued propensity to offend, in some particulars, against the perfect law of their God. Just in proportion to the advances which they are enabled by the grace of heaven to make in the conquest of their own hearts, will be their discovery, that “there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.” Every step that they travel along the path to glory, so far from appearing to bring them nearer the termination of their journey, will disclose new and loftier obstacles to be surmounted—more steep, and craggy, and perilous eminences to be scaled:

“Hills peep o’er hills, and Alps on Alps arise.”

But there is virtue in aiming at an end which we cannot attain—in aspiring to an elevation which we cannot reach. Our actual performances, too, will always be

proportioned to the extent of our endeavours. If Alexander had not commenced his career of conquest with the resolution to subjugate the whole world, he would not have carried his victorious arms from Macedonia to the country of the Ganges. If Paul had not made a strenuous and persevering effort to possess the same mind that was in Christ, he would not have advanced so far as he did, in real conformity to the moral likeness of his Lord and Master. Besides, the law of God, which is an expression of his own immaculate purity, cannot require less than perfect obedience. Jehovah may, indeed, condescend to accept, for the sake of his Son, imperfect obedience. But such obedience it would not comport with his character and dignity, as the governor of the universe, to demand. The language of the Saviour to his disciples was, "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect."

The Psalmist, having described in general terms the character of a good man, goes on to state a few particulars for the better elucidation of his subject. He tells us, that the individual who shall abide in the tabernacle, and dwell in the holy hill of the Lord, must *speak the truth in, or from, the heart.*

Some writers on the science of moral philosophy, have treated the obligation of truth, as a kind of tacit contract, which, for the common interests of society, subsists among men. But surely an obligation so solemn must rest upon a basis more real and stable than this. It is one of the elementary principles of our moral nature, and conscience, that faithful representative of the supreme Judge in the human soul, lifts her disapproving voice as often as it is violated. The individual who utters a falsehood, feels, not that he has broken an implied promise to speak only the truth to those with whom he converses, but that he

has offended against his Maker. This is the true ground of his self-reproach and self-condemnation.

A falsehood has been defined “any departure in words (and we might add, or in actions) from the reality of things, made with an intention to deceive.” Where such intention does not obtain, as in narratives professedly fictitious, or in the complimentary modes of subscribing a letter which custom dictates, there is no violation of veracity. In a word, the essence of a falsehood consists in *the design to deceive*. Agreeably to this principle, we must pronounce every equivocation an untruth. And so we must say, that the guilt of lying is imputable to the person who indulges a propensity not very uncommon in company, of attempting to embellish a relation, and lend it higher interest, by the addition of unreal circumstances. More criminal is the conduct of the tradesman who seeks to hide the faults, or exaggerate the merits of his merchandize; or who with an eye to a larger profit, declares that he paid for what he offers for sale more than it actually cost him; or who, to avoid the unpleasant task of offending those whom he does not like to trust, assures them, that he has just sold the last of the article which they want. We think, too, notwithstanding what Dr. Paley has intimated to the contrary, that the lady who directs her servant to say to the visitant at the door, that she is “not at home,” when she is sitting up in her chamber or nursery, is a liar in as strict a sense as any of which the term is susceptible. With regard to the case of a prisoner when arraigned for trial, pleading “not guilty,” we have only to say, that while much allowance is no doubt due to the infirmity of human nature in such a situation, a criminal under the influence of proper views and feelings, cannot do otherwise than at once acknowledge the offence which he has committed. The writer

to whom we have just referred, and who, in our humble opinion, is a most unsound and dangerous casuist, mentions as another instance of falsehoods which he accounts innocent, "an advocate's asserting the justice, or his belief of the justice, of his client's cause." We trust, for the honour of the profession of law, that but few of its members would subscribe to such a doctrine in theory, even if they have been tempted sometimes to adopt it in practice. Nor can we hesitate to condemn the deception so often practised by physicians, relatives, and friends, with a view to cheer the languid spirits of the sick, and promote their recovery. We well know, that they who act in this manner, may do so from the most benevolent motives. And we would not be understood as intimating that persons afflicted with sickness should be unnecessarily alarmed, or that it is improper, in any case, to employ means calculated to enliven their minds, and counteract the injurious effects of despondency. Indeed, we have witnessed instances, in which we could not help thinking, that such means were not sufficiently resorted to, since we were persuaded, that they could hardly exert the least unfavourable influence on individuals, respecting whose piety and actual fitness for death, no doubt could be reasonably entertained. But at the same time that we say this, we contend that it is culpable in a high degree, to flatter with the delusive hope of life, an impenitent sinner, whom the lapse of a few hours or days will convey to the retributions of eternity.

The question may now arise, is it ever consistent with duty to depart from the truth? Some ethical writers of high repute, have not scrupled to answer this query in the affirmative. They have given it as their formal and deliberate judgment, that cases may occur, in which a falsehood, if not positively virtuous and commendable, is

at least excusable. Their views on this point have been thus briefly stated: "As the virtue or the vice of actions depends, in a great measure, on the utility or the injury of their consequences, whenever the benefit of the immediate consequences of a departure from the truth, as the rescuing of an innocent life from the fury or iniquity of an assassin or robber, evidently and greatly exceeds the remote consequences of the example, in such cases, but in no others, can it be justified." This argument, however, appears to us inconclusive, because it assumes premises which we cannot yield. It is built on the general doctrine, that utility is the foundation of virtue: a doctrine, which, though it has been most ably and plausibly defended, does not comport with a just and rigid analysis of our moral feelings. Let us have a care how we detract, in any degree, from the obligation of veracity—an obligation so solemn, that we tremble even to think of its infringement. It may be safely affirmed, that the theoretical standard of morality cannot be raised too high; that our speculative ideas relative to all the great questions of right and wrong, cannot be too rigid. We should not, indeed, actually expect too much from fallen human nature, in the most trying situations in which it can be placed. But that philosopher does little benefit to society, whose speculations tend, in any particular, to impair the principles and relax the laws of immutable rectitude. We are at a loss to conjecture the good that is to follow from admitting, that there are emergencies in which to depart from the truth may be innocent.

The Psalmist, continuing his description of the character of a pious man, says, "He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour."

This verse is directed principally against the calum-

niator—the man who falsely, or without a sufficient motive, assaults the character of another, and endeavours to rob him of that which constitutes the chief value of existence.

There is no one, we presume, who will not admit, and who does not feel, that to speak evil of another, is a sin involving a high degree of moral turpitude. And yet how widely prevalent is this sin, among all classes of society! Who of us, dear hearers, can plead entire exemption from its polluting influence? Is it not a lamentable fact, that we are all more or less prone to detract from the merits, and to magnify the faults of one another? Yes, whatever may be the motive which prompts us—malice, envy, or a mere fondness for idle chat,—we take too much pleasure in animadverting upon the history and conduct of our neighbours and friends. It affords us more gratification to disclose, than to bury in oblivion, what we may have heard or seen to their disadvantage. Nor does it mend the matter, that we put on an air of deep concern, or that we enjoin the strictest secrecy on those with whom we converse. There is not in all the intercourse of life a stronger evidence of human weakness and human corruption, than that which the whole process of confidential communication supplies.

We have alluded to the guilt of slander. We may add, that like all other sins, it is fraught with folly. It is calculated, in the nature of things, to do an essential injury to him who commits it. He will discover, sooner or later, that what he has said to the disadvantage of others, has contributed, in some way, to impair his own peace and happiness. The case of the slanderer presents no exception to that general law of providence and revelation, which connects our interest with our duty. On this point, we cannot forbear quoting the sound and

pungent remark of a French author. It is to this effect : “ He of whom you speak evil, may become acquainted with what you have said, and he will be your enemy; he may remain in ignorance of it, and even though what you have said were true, you would still have to reproach yourself with the meanness of attacking one who had no opportunity of defending himself. If slander is to be secret, it is the crime of a coward ; if it is to become known, it is the crime of a madman.”

The sin of which we now speak, has been distinguished into two kinds; viz. *malicious* slander, and *inconsiderate* slander. Of these the latter is by far the more common. We think so favourably of human nature as to believe, that there are few comparatively who could be base enough to invent, or even give currency to a report detrimental to the reputation of an individual, with the deliberate intention of injuring him. But we fear, or rather we know, that there are many who allow themselves, in unguarded moments, to speak with too much freedom respecting absent persons. How often are censorious remarks and insinuations thrown out, to relieve the tedium of a dinner party, or evening assemblage, and to infuse interest into casual conversation ! It has been said by some who profess to be experienced observers, that the introduction of cards into company has always a perceptible and salutary effect in *saving reputations*. How this is, we shall not take upon us to decide. But we venture to affirm, that the same desirable end might be attained far more honourably and effectually by subjecting the tongue and the heart to the influence of correct moral and religious principles.

And here let us observe, that slander is very often grafted on that kind of curiosity, which it is too common for persons to feel respecting the history, character and

pursuits of their neighbours and acquaintances. Against such curiosity Paul frequently and earnestly cautions his Christian brethren. Thus in his second Epistle to the Thessalonians, he says, “ We hear that there are some who walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy-bodies. Now such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread.” The apostle here takes it for granted—and the truth, we suppose, is unquestionable—that those whom he calls *busy-bodies* are generally idlers. Indeed, this, from the very nature of things, must be the case, because they devote to the concerns of others, that time and attention which ought to be employed on their own.

The standing apology of him who is given to detraction, is, that what he says to the injury of another’s character is true. But this plea, however plausible, will not avail for his justification. A man is not at liberty, on scriptural principles, to utter even the truth, with a view of detracting from the merits of his neighbour. The apostolic injunction is, “ speak not evil one of another.” This phraseology, it has been well observed, is very explicit. The sacred writer, instead of saying, “ speak not evil FALSELY one of another,” omits any such qualifying term, and says simply and absolutely, “ speak not evil one of another.” We sometimes hear the doctrine of the English law, that “the truth may be a libel,” ridiculed as absurd. We know not precisely what the laws of our own country on this subject are. But we feel no manner of hesitation in saying, that the doctrine itself is correct, however inaccurate in a grammatical point of view, may be the language in which it is ordinarily expressed. It ought by no means to be admitted, that the utterance even of the truth, with the design of throwing a

shade over the reputation of an individual, is consistent with sound morality and pure religion.

The Psalmist next says, "In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord."

It is a common maxim, that an estimate of a man's character may be fairly formed from the companions with whom he habitually associates. A rational being naturally seeks congeniality of disposition and pursuit. The Christian resorts to the society of those whose deportment attests the controlling influence of evangelical truth, and who feel a lively interest in the cause of virtue and piety. The man devoted to literature and science, delights in the intercourse of the learned and studious. The lover of pleasure betakes himself to the wine-club, or the oyster-cellar, in order to meet his cherished associates.

We see, then, that it is with the strictest propriety that the Psalmist here assigns, as one characteristic of the good man, that he avoids, as far as practicable, the society of the wicked. "In his eyes a vile person is contemned." This language does not, indeed, imply, that the Christian should cherish supercilious or unkindly sentiments towards sinners, or that he should hesitate to mingle with them, if by so doing he may become the instrument of reclaiming them from the error of their ways. Nor should it be understood as conveying the idea, that the Christian cannot receive occasional pleasure from the society of those who, though not pious, are distinguished for the intellectual and moral accomplishments which impart so much grace and attraction to human intercourse. But the meaning of the passage before us is briefly this, that the Christian derives no satisfaction from habitual companionship with the irreligious or the immoral. And how can it be otherwise? Is it possible, that he whose thoughts and affections are fixed supremely on the glories

of the heavenly state—whose purest and dearest joys flow from the love and service of his Maker—should yet delight in the society of those who are entirely occupied with terrestrial objects, and give themselves no manner of concern about the character and the commandments of Jehovah? Well may we ask, in the language of the apostle, “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?”

The same impulse which constrains the Christian to keep aloof from the society of the wicked, leads him to delight in the intercourse of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth. “He honoureth them that fear the Lord.” A man of real unassuming piety will command the esteem even of those who are strangers to practical religion. From such a character none but the deeply depraved can withhold their respect and admiration. Certainly, then, when the genuine disciple of the Saviour beholds an individual who lives near to his God, and whose deportment in all the diversified relations of life, is regulated by the precepts and the spirit of the gospel, he cannot fail to honour and to love him. He feels a close attachment of soul to those who wear the image of a common Redeemer. He has for them an affection similar in nature, though inferior in degree, to that pure and exalted friendship, whose bonds unite in one fraternal band, the angels that encompass the throne of God. “Behold how these Christians love one another!” is a compliment, which, however inappropriate to the state of things in the present day, may be regarded as the most honourable that the religion of Jesus ever procured for its votaries. It is the native tendency of this religion

to strengthen the ties of mutual affection among its professors—to foster that chastened and elevated emotion of charity, which the Scriptures beautifully compare to the dew of Hermon, and the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore. Let us be sedulous, Christian brethren, in the cultivation of this charity. Let us devoutly and fervently pray for its increase in our bosoms. And let us rejoice that we live in an age, in which the disciples of the Saviour are beginning again to honour and to love one another. It is true, that we have little ground for exultation, if we compare the present condition of the church, with what was exhibited by apostolic Christianity, when “the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.” But it is equally true, that we have abundant cause for joy, when we contemplate the religious history of the last thirty years: when we see how the various denominations of Christians have begun to step over some of those boundaries within which they have been so long entrenched by ignorance and prejudice—when we mark how sectarian jealousy, with all the nameless Shibboleths of party, is receding before the benign radiance of truth, and the hallowed influence of evangelical feeling.

The Psalmist, in this same verse, mentions another trait, as characteristical of the citizen of Zion. “He sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not.” On this point, however, we need not enlarge, after what has been already said respecting the general obligation of truth. A pious man will ever have the most inviolable regard for his promise. His word is as sacred with him as his oath. It is not necessary to bind him with signature and seal, in order to secure the faithful performance of a contract. You will, in no instance, see him making his es-

cape through some legal technicality, from an engagement just in itself, because he has found out that compliance with it would be prejudicial to his interest.

The Psalmist farther says, “He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent.”

It is not unworthy of observation, that the Hebrew term here rendered *usury*, radically signifies *to bite*. “This word,” we are told by critics, “is supposed to mean a contract which converts interest into principal, or conduct which produces the same effect; or a very exorbitant interest or premium, disproportioned to the risk.” In these and similar instances, the person who suffers is very properly and emphatically said to be *bitten*.

A great deal occurs in the Old Testament against *usury*. The Jews were permitted to lend money on interest to foreigners, but not to one another. Their law on this subject we find thus laid down in the book of Deuteronomy: “Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to, in the land whither thou goest to possess it.” The term *usury* is not here used to denote exorbitant interest, but interest of any kind. We are not, however, to imagine that it is inconsistent with the principles of morality, or with those of religion, to receive a moderate premium for the loan of money. The Mosaic statute to which we have adverted, was a provision accommodated to the anomalous circumstances of the Jews, who had little trade, and whose legislator, acting under the divine direction, framed his civil code with a view to preserve, as far as could be, an equal distribution of property among all the tribes and families of Judea. His law relating to interest, was certainly not intended to

be obligatory on any but his own particular countrymen. If we entrust our funds to an individual, that he may employ them in commercial enterprise, or any profitable business, what can be more reasonable and just, than that he should pay us, in return, a fair consideration for the use of our property? Money is surely as real and proper an article of merchandise, as any other commodity.

But *usury*, in the common acceptance of the term, is inconsistent with the character of an honest man. How much more, then, with that of a Christian! Indeed, so injurious is this practice to the interests of every well-regulated community, that it is prohibited, under severe penalties, by the civil law. The legal provisions on this subject, we know, are frequently evaded. But those who are guilty of such evasion, betray a want of principle, and of feeling too, utterly at variance with the precepts and the pervading spirit of the gospel. Christianity has acquired little influence over him, who can take advantage of another's necessities, to extort ten or twenty per cent. for a pecuniary accommodation. As surely as the Bible is the word of God, a heavy retribution is in store for those, whom the trading world familiarly and significantly denominate *shavers*.

The passage before us may be considered as condemning not only *usury*, but also that excessive avidity of gain, in which it has origin. The Christian cannot be a covetous or an avaricious man. It is not his supreme desire to add to his stores. Wealth is not the idol before which he falls down and worships. His heart is not devoted to houses and lands, gold and silver, bonds, mortgages, and certificates of stock. The riches on which his thoughts, and affections, and hopes are fixed, are not the fleeting possessions of earth. He lifts his aspiring soul to more splendid and substantial treasures in heaven

—treasures which no possible contingency can wrest from those who once obtain them.

But while we say this, we would not wish to convey to any hearer, the impression, that the Christian must be destitute of a prudent regard to the things of this world. Religion, instead of inculcating the neglect of our temporal avocations, enforces a due degree of attention to them. He who provides not for his own household, according to Paul, has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. It is the indispensable duty of every man, not already possessed of a competency, to pursue some honest calling for the support of himself and his family. The rigid rule of the gospel is, that the individual who refuses to work, is not entitled to eat. The Christian is fully aware, that so long as he is clothed with a material body, he must attend to its necessities. These he has no more right to neglect, than to terminate the cause which produces them by an act of suicide. He accordingly so distributes the several portions of his time, as to realize the position of Solomon, that there is a season for every thing. He has his periods for devotion, and his periods for business. Nor does he allow the one to encroach upon the other. The speaker who now addresses you, would not raise his feeble voice in behalf of the religion of the New Testament, did he not look upon it as a system eminently adapted to encourage the formation and the growth of those industrious habits and frugal virtues, which constitute honourable and useful members of society.

The Psalmist adds, in conclusion, “He that doeth these things shall never be moved.” Such is the inestimable and glorious privilege of Zion’s citizen. The man whose conduct in life is distinguished by those evidences of piety which are here enumerated, shall not be affected by the vicissitudes of present or of future time. His con-

tinuance in the path of rectitude—in the way that conducts to glory and honour and immortality—is as certain as the High and Holy One is true. He belongs to the number of those concerning whom the Redeemer has uttered this gracious saying; “They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” He may rely securely upon the promise of that God who changes not, and who loves the pious with an everlasting love—an affection from the benignant regards of which neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate them. Firm and abiding foundation of the good man’s peace and happiness! His present tranquillity and future bliss rest upon a basis which shall stand unimpaired by every coming desolation.

Brethren, the Psalm to which your attention has now been directed, exhibits, as we have said, several important tests, by which you may individually examine yourselves, and ascertain what is your character, and what your prospects as moral and religious beings. We would impress it upon you, that an unfeigned and ardent love to God, displayed in a life of strict and cheerful compliance with his will, is the touch-stone of piety. Let us, then, tell you, that it is vain to make a profession of faith—to assume the mantle of religion—so long as you are devoid of those evidences of real Christianity, which the Scriptures generally, and the passage under review in particular, assign. Believe us, if you lack even one of these evidences, you shall not abide in the tabernacle, nor dwell in the holy hill of the Lord; or, in other words, you will never reach heaven. The sincere, consistent follower of the Saviour, is one who walketh uprightly, worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart—who back-

biteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour—in whose eyes a vile person is contemned, but he honoureth them that fear the Lord—who sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not—who putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. Such is the man who shall never be moved. Not the trials of time—not the revolutions of eternity—shall do him harm. His is a bright and blissful career, to which there shall be no termination. He shall advance, with steady and rapid progress, in knowledge, virtue and happiness, while God himself exists.....May this, dear hearers, be the glorious destiny of us all, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

SERMON IV.



JOHN XV. 5. (Last Clause.)

“—Without me ye can do nothing.”

To discern the full force and import of these words, we must contemplate them in connexion with the context. Our Lord here represents the relation subsisting between himself and his followers, under the figure of the vine and its branches. Such a metaphor was highly significant to the inhabitants of a country, in which the culture of the vine was one of the most important species of husbandry. It is probable, too, that the figure was suggested to the Saviour, at the moment, by some appropriate circumstance. We know that he and his disciples had just

been partaking of the fruit of the vine, at the feast of the Passover; and if we suppose, with some commentators, that the discourse recorded in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth chapters, was delivered while they were still at the table, we may readily trace the association of thought, by which Jesus, as he looked at the cup before him, and its contents, was led to commence his remarks by the allusion that we have mentioned. And so, if we imagine with other expositors, that this address fell from the lips of Christ, as he and his companions were proceeding from the scene of the paschal supper to the garden of Gethsemane, we shall have no difficulty in perceiving that the impression of the cup, scarcely faded from his mind, would be revived by the view of the first vineyard on his way. In either case, then, it was perfectly natural for him to exclaim to his disciples, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now, ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." Our Lord then goes on, in the fifth verse, to repeat the same general truth: "I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit;" adding, in the words of our text, "for without me," or more literally, *apart from me*, "ye can do nothing."

We observe, then, that the particular passage on which we design to expatiate this morning, is a prosecution of the same train of thought, and, in some measure, a continuation of the same figurative phraseology, which had preceded it. The branch that is severed from the vine,

cannot be expected to yield fruit. In like manner, the individual who is separate from Christ—not united to him in the bonds of a covenant ordered in all things and sure,—is unable to render any services acceptable to God, and permanently profitable to himself.

This truth, however preposterous it may appear to the philosopher, and however reluctant the moralizing Christian may be to admit it, is one which the New Testament clearly and repeatedly inculcates. The inspired penmen describe the work of redemption, in all its stages, as entirely the effect of divine power, accomplishing the ends of divine love and mercy. The Lord Jesus is represented by them as the Author and the Finisher of human salvation. To him exclusively belong the praise and glory of our deliverance from sin and misery. Every pulsation of spiritual joy felt by the saints on earth, and by the redeemed in heaven, is due to Him who ransomed them from the guilt, and cleansed them from the pollution of their transgressions. Yes, it is grace which lays the foundation of holiness in the heart of fallen man, and when the moral edifice is completed, the head-stone is brought forth, with acclamations of Grace! grace unto it!

When it is said, that without Christ we can do nothing, the meaning plainly is, that without him we can do nothing towards the accomplishment of the great work of our salvation. There is, indeed, a sense in which the text would be unrestrictedly true. When we consider the Saviour as a divine being, and thus identify him with that God who is the creator and preserver of us all, there is no impropriety in saying, that without him we can do literally nothing. Every act that we perform, whether physical or mental, is, so to speak, the exercise of his delegated power—the putting forth of an energy which we have derived from him. In short, it is He who

enables us to speak and move, to think and feel. But this is not exactly the truth which our Lord intended to assert in the passage before us. He here refers to himself, in his mediatorial character and office. The precise import of his declaration is, that without him we can do nothing that will avail to procure the pardon of sin, and confer a title to life, happiness, and heaven. It is certain, indeed, that without him—independently of his aid as our Redeemer,—we may do many things which our fellow men will approve and admire; we may be upright, discreet, temperate, and benevolent individuals; good members of society, dutiful children, and affectionate parents. But it is nevertheless true, that without him, apart from his gracious influences, we are utterly incapable of a single action, or a single thought, on which the high and holy One that inhabiteth eternity, can bestow an approving smile, such as shall stand us in stead when we appear at his bar. So long as we are destitute of an interest in Christ, we are like branches cut off from the vine, whose inevitable doom it is to wither and die. If we duly reflect upon our present fallen condition, we shall discover, that two things are mainly requisite to our salvation. In the first place, we must obtain the pardon of our past offences; and in the second place, the native depravity of our hearts must be so far corrected, that, in future, we shall delight in the service of our Maker, and become ultimately fitted for his presence. Now, the truth of our text will be amply illustrated and established, provided it can be shown, that these great and important blessings are to be procured only through the medium of the Lord Jesus Christ; or, in other words, that the gospel of his grace reveals the only method by which sin may be pardoned, and the sinner rendered personally

holy.—Let us advert, for a moment, to these two particulars.

We contend, then, that without Christ we can do nothing, because he is the only Being in the universe, who is at once able and willing to forgive our transgressions. As soon as we admit that we have broken the divine law, (and who will pretend to deny this?) we must be sensible that it is no longer in our own power to remove the guilt which we have thus contracted. There can surely be no merit in our present or future obedience, to atone for antecedent disobedience. The demands of Heaven's justice, cannot be more than fulfilled by the utmost efforts that we are capable of making. The highest and purest seraph before the throne of God, feels that he is unable to rise above his obligations. After he has done all that his talents and circumstances will permit, he confesses that he is an unprofitable servant. It is manifest, therefore, that our own righteousness, however exalted, is a very inadequate ground on which to rely for salvation. Now, if our moral virtues cannot procure for us the remission of our sins, we may be assured, that nothing else which we can present to Jehovah, will satisfy his justice, and render it possible for him, in perfect consistence with the honour and the interests of his throne, to blot out our crimes and misdemeanours from the book of his remembrance.

But, brethren, this consideration need not drive us to despair. There is a way by which we can obtain pardon—most abundant pardon—at the hands of our offended Father who is in heaven. Yes, blessed be the name of our God, he has given his own Son to die that we might live. The Lord Jesus Christ has been exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high, to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and the remission

of sins. He is able to save to the uttermost all who put their confidence in him; and those who approach him, he will, in no wise, repulse. Seated on his throne of grace, he proffers pardon, free and full, to the very chief of sinners. The accents that fall from his lips, are rich with benignity and mercy: "Come now, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Again, without Christ we can do nothing, because the influences of his spirit are absolutely necessary to change our depraved hearts, and to qualify us for the services of earth, and the enjoyments of heaven. He has taught us, that we must be born again, before we can become fit subjects of that kingdom of righteousness, of which he is the Founder and the Sovereign. We know, indeed, that some persons—perhaps we should say *many* persons—are disposed to regard the evangelical doctrine of a new birth as one of the reveries of mystical and enthusiastic devotion. But we are at a loss to comprehend, why any one who properly reflects on the corruption of human nature, should doubt the necessity of that great moral change, whatever it may be, on which the New Testament insists. We conceive, that every sound and ingenuous philosopher, who duly examines the subject, will find himself constrained to unite with the Christian in the speculative opinion, that nothing short of the direct interposition of the same almighty power which created the mind of man at first, can so alter and modify the springs by which its operations are governed, as to impart purity and rectitude to all its thoughts and feelings. It is not within the competency of moral suasion to correct the depravity of a being, concerning whom it has been said, as justly as emphatically, that he "drinketh iniquity like

water." In the view of all the means which ethical writers and teachers have employed for the inculcation of virtue, we only perceive the soundness of the prophet's query, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."

Brethren, we do not scruple to say, that the distinguishing excellence of the Gospel consists in the provision which it makes, for delivering us from the power and dominion, as well as from the penal consequences of sin. It promises to render us ultimately happy; but it proposes to do this, only by rendering us previously holy. In fact, it represents the renewing of our minds, and the sanctification of our hearts, as the very chief of the blessings which the Son of God died to procure for us; or, rather, as including all the rest. There is not, in the whole Bible, a more precious passage, than that in which Jehovah is heard exclaiming, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them."

And here it should be distinctly observed, that the grace of God is requisite, not only to change the heart at first, but also to promote its progress in holiness. Without Christ, we should have remained forever dead in trespasses and sins, and even after we have been quickened by the energy of his life-giving Spirit, we should, were it not for him, sink back again into that condition of moral lethargy and death, from which we were raised. There is not a single moment of the Christian's existence,

in which he is not indebted to his divine Lord, for all the spiritual vigour that he exercises, and for all the spiritual comfort that he enjoys. The more elevated his attainments in piety, the lowlier will he lie before the throne of heaven's Majesty, and with deeper sincerity will he utter the humble acknowledgment, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." He arrogates no merit to himself. All his honours he lays down at the foot of his Immanuel's cross. He is fully aware, that he has nothing which he did not receive from above. He knows, that his heart, instead of being a fountain, from which original streams of moral purity flow, is rather a reservoir, out of which no good current can ever issue, but such as arises from a far higher and a heavenly source.

The truth, dear hearers, on which we are now insisting, is one that lies at the very foundation of practical piety. There can be no genuine religion, which does not rest on a conviction of our own native weakness and helplessness—our utter incompetency, except so far as we are aided by Christ, to perform acts and render services acceptable to God. We enter into no scholastic discussion as to the nature of human inability. We shall not, at present, put on the professor's gown, and proceed to inquire, whether such inability should be called *natural*, or *moral*. But we take upon us to say—and reason, experience and the divine word will amply sustain the position,—that the incipient step, the first movement of the sinner, in the process of his conversion from the error of his ways to the wisdom of the just, is a firm and devout persuasion, that without Christ he can do nothing.

To the doctrine which asserts the sovereignty of divine grace in the entire matter of our salvation, it has been objected, that this doctrine is calculated to destroy the

moral agency of man, to paralyze all human effort, and to encourage licentiousness of heart and life. This is, indeed, a serious arraignment of the truth for which we contend, and it were not proper to let such charges pass without some notice.

We do not propose this morning to enter very deeply into the much litigated question of moral agency, or, as it is sometimes called, the freedom of the will—a question concerning which there has been more nonsense spoken and written, than even the celebrated controversy between the Nominalists and the Realists of the dark ages, was the occasion of producing. Some metaphysicians have strangely imagined, that while matter is entirely subject to the control of Deity, there is something in mind, that is completely independent of his influence; or, at any rate, if this be not their meaning, and if such be not the position which they are anxious to establish, they have certainly speculated to very little purpose respecting human liberty. Now, we are persuaded, that matter and mind are alike subject to the dominion of the great Creator—that all the phenomena of the one and of the other are modified and regulated by the good pleasure of that Being who presides over the destinies of the universe. By this language we do not mean to say, that God controls matter and mind in precisely the same manner. The former he governs by physical laws, and the latter by moral. He sways the conduct and the hearts of men, not by absolute and positive coercion, but through the instrumentality of motives. These are the means by which Jehovah effectuates his own purposes in all our voluntary actions. It is in this way that he exercises his sovereignty, without at all impairing our accountability. We admit, that there is some difficulty connected with this as with every other subject, and every other thing, that we attempt to explain.

Let us be contented with a knowledge of the *fact*, that the influence of the Deity on our minds does not abridge, in the least, our freedom of volition and of action. Of this there can be no doubt. The renewed individual is just as conscious, that he is a free-agent, as the man who loves sin, and lives in the habitual practice of it. The operation of the divine Spirit on the souls of believers, so far from being inimical to their liberty, has the specific effect of rendering them *willing* in the day of God's almighty power. The change which they experience is not the subversion, but only the alteration of their will. Their desires are not exterminated, but merely diverted from an old into a new channel. And this important revolution is effected, as we have said, through the agency of motives.

Nor is there any real force in the objection so often and so strenuously urged by superficial thinkers, that the doctrine which asserts the sovereignty of divine grace has a tendency to discourage and counteract human exertion. In fact, the doctrine has precisely the opposite tendency. It is calculated, when rightly understood, to incite us to diligent and zealous efforts for the advancement of our spiritual and eternal interests. The practical receiver of it will be, of all men, least likely to become slothful in the business of religion. He will regard the promise of heavenly aid implied in the doctrine in question, as the most cogent reason why he should sedulously task all his energy in the service of his Maker. The point to which we are now directing your attention, will be seen in a clearer and more satisfactory light, if you bear in mind what has been already observed with regard to the instrumentality of motives in the moral government of God. We have distinctly stated, that it is through the medium of these that the Deity operates upon the human mind.

Accordingly, the revelation with which he has been pleased to favour us, must be viewed as a system of motives designed to influence our conduct, and form our character, as religious beings. Hence every doctrine of this revelation is to be contemplated as a motive fitted to produce its appropriate moral effect. Let it, then, be understood, that the necessity of the Spirit's influences is revealed, in the sacred Scriptures, for no other purpose, than to stimulate us to an active and unremitting discharge of our religious duties. It is exhibited as a motive, not to repress, but to call forth human exertion. Thus the command to us, to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," is enforced expressly and formally by this consideration, that "it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Had we no ground to expect divine assistance in the matter of our salvation, we might well forbear all effort, and sit down in despair. But when we are assured, that such assistance can always be obtained, the effect certainly must be very different. There is not the smallest danger, then, that the individual who really feels, that without Christ he can do nothing, will abandon or relax his endeavours to perform the will, and enjoy the favour of Jehovah. The conviction of our own weakness can have no other effect, than to induce us to seek the strength which we know, that divine grace is ever ready to communicate. On the other hand, a confident reliance on ourselves, begets a false and fatal feeling of security. He who thinketh he standeth, is in the greatest danger of falling. To this truth David and Peter, were they with us to day, would bear ample testimony.

In the remarks which have now been made, we have, in a good degree, anticipated an answer to the objection, that the doctrine which asserts the sovereignty of divine

grace, in the entire matter of our salvation, tends to promote licentiousness of heart and life. We shall not here enter into any speculation on this point. It is properly a question of fact, and by facts it ought to be decided. We know that the oppugners of our doctrine are not peculiarly fond of the issue which we now tender to them. But why should we take up time with reasoning against an objection, which may be fairly disposed of in a far more summary way. We affirm, then, that this objection is conclusively refuted by facts. And as we cannot pretend to enter into much detail, on a topic of this nature, we would merely remark, in general terms, that the practical receivers of the truth for which we contend, have been, as all experience shows, the most virtuous and pious of men. Look, for instance, at Scotland, where the tenets which, for want of any other equally distinctive and convenient name, we are compelled to call *Calvinistic*, have long and triumphantly prevailed. No one competent to decide, will hesitate to admit, that the inhabitants of that country are, to say the least, by no means inferior, on the score of private and public morals, to the inhabitants of any other country in Christendom. The belief, that without Christ they could do nothing—a truth deeply impressed on their minds by the instructions of pious mothers, zealous schoolmasters, and faithful preachers,—has certainly done them no harm as individual or social beings. We shall mention only one circumstance more. It must be confessed, we presume, on all sides, that the only really valuable and useful writers on practical religion, are those who have dwelt with emphasis on the truth, that without Christ we can do nothing. The Henrys, the Edwards, the Doddridges, the Newtons, and the Scotts, of the Christian church, were all the champions of this truth. Upon the whole, we mean

no invidious comparisons, when we say, that if the system in which the sovereignty of divine grace is a prominent and characteristical tenet, is to be judged from its fruits, the friend to virtue and piety must at once embrace it.

We recur, then, with additional confidence, to the doctrine of our text, that without Christ we can do nothing. He is the alpha and the omega of our salvation. To him we must be entirely indebted for the pardon of our past sins, and also for the disposition, in which consists the ability, to avoid future sins. It is He who remits our offences for his own name's sake; and it is He who, by the power of his Spirit, renews and sanctifies our depraved hearts. The fountain in which alone our moral uncleanness can be washed away, flows with his precious blood. All the holiness that we can ever possess, is derived from the fulness of grace that centres in him. The Spiritual life that believers enjoy, is, in reality, nothing more than Christ living in them. He sits enthroned as a sovereign in the hearts of his people, wielding his sceptre over the entire territory of their souls, communicating to them constant supplies of strength, defending them from the assaults of their enemies, and so governing their thoughts, their feelings, and their conduct, as to render them the willing instruments of advancing at once his glory, and their own immortal interests.

The subject on which we have now been meditating, is calculated to comfort, encourage, and animate Christians. It teaches them, that all their dependence must be upon the grace of Christ, since without him they can do nothing. The first lesson in the school of Jesus, is to learn that he is our salvation and our all. Brethren, you can never be too deeply convinced of the truth, that in yourselves you are weak and insufficient for the perform-

ance of any good thing. Just in proportion to your conviction of this truth, will be your attainments in vital piety. "When I am weak," said one of the holiest of men, "then am I strong." The expression may carry the air of paradox to those who are strangers to the mystery of godliness. But every truly devout person understands its meaning, and feels its force. To him it contains an element of truth, as evident as any in the axioms of mathematics. He can affirm, from lively experience, that it is the persuasion of his own weakness, which braces all the sinews of his strength. As soon as his soul settles in the belief, that without Christ he can do nothing, he has virtually arrived at the conclusion, that with Christ he can do every thing. Diffidence in ourselves is the essential principle of confidence in the help that cometh from on high.

We exhort you, then, Christian brethren, to apply the doctrine of the text to the edification of your souls. Are you in prosperity? Learn that you have nothing which you did not receive, and ascribe all your happiness to the grace of Christ. Are you in adversity? Look up to your divine Lord for consolation and relief. He has promised that his grace shall be sufficient for you, and that he will never leave nor forsake you. Have you reason to trust that you are making daily advances in virtue and piety; becoming more and more ripe for heaven? Remember that you are indebted, for all your attainments, to the favour of Jehovah. Let your reliance on his aid increase, and your progress in the knowledge, the love, and the fear of your Maker, shall be proportionably accelerated. But does your conduct or your heart testify that you have grown remiss in the service of God, and become comparatively indifferent to the things that belong to your everlasting peace? Ah! you have been too confident in your

own strength; you have leaned too much on the arm of flesh. Repent, and do your first works. Humble yourselves at the footstool of your offended Sovereign, and never again forget, as you would hope for salvation, that without Christ you can do nothing. In fine, whatever may be your circumstances, the language of our text speaks to you a word in season.

Again, the passage before us is not without its use, when addressed to those who are still in a state of impenitence and unbelief. That there are such in this assembly, we may take for granted, and yet not be uncharitable. Permit us, then, dear hearers, to tell you plainly, though affectionately, that you never can be saved, until you are brought to know and feel that without Christ you can do nothing. This is the very turning point of your conversion. Repentance and faith (the grand conditions of the gospel) are neither more nor less, than a practical conviction of the truth on which we have been expatiating. The sincere penitent, the devout believer, is simply a man who has imbibed the spirit of our present text.

We pray you, then, sinners, at once to submit to the terms of the gospel, and receive Jesus Christ as your only and all-sufficient saviour. Awful must be the consequences of refusing or neglecting to secure an interest in him. We shall not attempt to describe the anguish and despair that await the finally impenitent. But we may ask, in the language of the Bible, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Once more, dear hearers, we say, Come to the Son of God. Without him you can do nothing. He only can enable you to escape hell, and enter heaven. Accept, without delay, the aid which he proffers. That aid may be obtained *to-day*: *to-morrow* may be too late to seek it.

SERMON V.



GENESIS XXXIX. 9. (Last Clause.)

“How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

A religious system, to be perfect, must not only contain a full and correct code of human duties, but must also enforce those duties by the most appropriate and urgent motives. This perfection is exemplified in Christianity. The Bible, besides teaching us how we ought to act in all the various circumstances of our being, further presents us with sufficient reasons why we should act in the particular manner which it points out. And one of the most powerful of those considerations which it urges to deter us from the commission of crime, is exhibited in the passage now before us: “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God!”

These words, as you, no doubt, recollect, are part of the language of Joseph to the wife of Potiphar, when she sought to entice him to an adulterous act. It may be doubted, whether humanity, in the present state, be capable of more signal virtue, than was displayed by the Hebrew captive on this occasion. Any one who reflects, for a moment, on the circumstances of the temptation to which he was exposed, must be convinced, that he owed the exalted moral triumph which he achieved, to the influence of some motive peculiarly strong and impressive. What this motive was, is learned from our text. He considered, that he could not yield to the illicit desires of the Egyptian female, without doing a great wickedness

and sinning against God. Such was the solemn thought that subdued his passions, and nerved his soul for a victory with which no other that historians have recorded, or poets sung, is worthy to be compared.

One important reflection suggested by this passage, is, that all sin is an evil committed against God.

All sin is an evil committed against God. By this language we mean, that it is a violation of his will—a departure from the course which he requires us to pursue. We would not deny, that some sins are more directly offences against the Supreme Being, than others. There is undoubtedly ground for the common distinction of our duties into those which we owe to our Creator, and those which we owe to our fellow men and ourselves. It was on the principle of such a distinction, that the moral law was anciently divided by Him who enacted it, into two tables. Now, if there are two classes of duties, there must be two classes of sins corresponding to the violations of these duties. Thus, to blaspheme the divine name, or omit the divine worship, is an offence against God; while to covet the possessions, or take away the lives of others, is an offence against our fellow men. Still, however, there is a sense in which every sin may be considered as an offence against the Deity. The crime to which Joseph referred, when he spoke the language of the text, was *adultery*—a crime, the prohibition of which occurs in the second table of the decalogue. And yet he was persuaded, that he could not commit this crime without sinning against God; and justly, since he knew, that the seventh commandment, no less than the first or the third, had its origin in the authority, and was an expression of the will, of his Maker.

Some eminent doctors in ethics teach, that utility is the foundation of virtue, and, of consequence, that when we

do wrong we injure both ourselves and others. Some again say, that virtue is a general term for denoting such actions as we contemplate with a peculiar feeling of vivid approbation, and, consequently, that when we do wrong we become the victims of self-reproach, and forfeit the good opinion of all who witness our error. Now, it is most true, that the sinner's doings are detrimental to himself and to others, and also that he acts counter to the dictates of his own conscience, and incurs the disesteem of every upright mind. But to behold the full enormity of his conduct, we must ascend higher than this. Our estimate of his guilt is an inadequate one, unless we take into the account the relation which he sustains to his Maker. We must consider, that he is a creature entirely dependent for his existence, and for all his comforts and enjoyments, on the sustaining arm of Heaven. We must not forget, that the faculties with which he meditates and executes evil, were conferred upon him, in order that he might employ them in pure and noble pursuits. We must recollect, that each unholy purpose, and each unholy act, betray the basest ingratitude towards his highest Benefactor. We must remember, that his omissions of duty are an infraction of his Creator's will, as indicated by the very structure of his moral constitution. In a word, we must look upon him as a rebel against the divine government, whose conduct in itself, and as an example of insubordination, tends to disturb the quiet, and mar the happiness, of the universe.

The representation which has now been given relative to the evil of sin, we know, does not accord with the ordinary apprehensions, and familiar parlance of men. They commonly estimate the demerit of crime by its tendency to disgrace and injure the individual who commits it, or by its baneful effects on society at large. Hence,

while they denounce, with no measured reprobation, the man who breaks his promise, who defrauds his neighbour, or who circulates a slanderous report, they speak with lenity in reference to him who lives in the habitual neglect of those devotional duties, which have the Deity immediately for their object. They are by no means accustomed to view every deviation from rectitude as an offence against God. They will descant upon human errors precisely as if there were no Being on high who created us, and to whom we are answerable for our entire conduct here below. If, for example, mention is made of some one who fell a victim to dissipation, they will put on a grave countenance, and moralize in this strain: "Poor fellow! he had a good heart; many estimable and endearing qualities were his. He never indulged his passions to the injury of others. All the harm he did was to himself."...What! All the harm he did was to himself? We deny that assertion. It is very true, indeed, that he destroyed his own body and soul. But "the head and front of his offending," was that he trampled on the laws, and bade defiance to the authority, of his Creator. We shall, perhaps, best illustrate this point, by taking the case of a son who has experienced the most affecting tokens of parental regard, and notwithstanding, slights the counsels, and disobeys the positive injunctions of his father, and gives himself up to the unrestrained pursuit of criminal enjoyments. Will it be contended, that such a son does injury to none besides himself? Who will deny, that he likewise does a serious injury to the father who sustained him, and who laboured with the utmost solicitude to render him an honourable and useful member of society? O! with what bitter—what untold—pangs, must his thankless and rebellious conduct pierce the bosom that never felt for him any emotions but those

of pure, ardent, self-denying love! Now, similar in nature, though incalculably worse in degree, is the injury which every sinner does to God—that kind and indulgent Father to whom we are all indebted for our being, and whose sincerest wish and constant effort, if we may so speak, it has ever been to render us good and happy.

When we look into the sacred Scriptures, we observe, that the representations which they uniformly give of sin, convey the idea, that its demerit consists essentially in the circumstance of its being an evil committed against God. The passages to which we might appeal in support of this position, are too numerous to admit of quotation. We may, however, just advert to one or two of them. First, then, the text on which we are now commenting, is directly in point. No language could be more explicit than that of Joseph, when, in relation to adultery—a crime which men in general seem to regard as a transgression of human laws, rather than of the divine law,—he exclaimed, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God!” Again, call to mind the terms in which the apostle reprov'd Ananias for uttering a falsehood—a crime which we all, indeed, agree in reprobating, but few of us, it is to be feared, on the ground of its offensiveness to our Maker. Said Peter, “Why hast thou conceived this thing in thy heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.” Mark, too, the phraseology of David, when mourning over that infamous deed, by which he jeopard'd his own soul, and gave occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. Humbled to the very dust, before the throne of his heavenly Father, he exclaimed, “Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.” This, brethren, was the poignant lamentation of genuine penitence, because it evidently resulted from proper views of the na-

ture and malignity of sin. And so you will find, on a careful review of the inspired record, that no repentance is accounted effectual, unless it has its origin in a deep and an overwhelming conviction, that all moral evil is the transgression of a divine law, and in this respect, an injury done to God. A man may regret his wanderings from rectitude, because he has thereby brought infamy or poverty upon himself. But the sorrow which he feels under such circumstances, is good for nothing. He has not seen his mal-conduct in its true light, until he contrasts it with his obligations to that God in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being. He cannot realize the full amount of his guilt, he cannot see how awfully culpable he has been, without reflecting that the goodness of Heaven has been abused, and its majesty defied. In short, the sentiment of evangelical contrition has respect to the vile nature of sin, quite as much as to its ruinous consequences.

Brethren, we would have you, then, to know that, according to the doctrine which we have now deduced from the text before us, every misdemeanour of which you can possibly be guilty, is an offence against Jehovah. Yes, it is his law that you infringe, and his majesty that you insult, and his just displeasure that you incur, whenever you deviate, in any particular, from a virtuous course. To blaspheme his name, or to neglect his worship, is not a more real, though it may be a more direct, sin against him, than to invade the property, or to assail the reputation, of your neighbour. O! remember, that God can look with indifference upon no part of your deportment—upon no incident of your lives. The code of duties which he has enacted for the government of intelligent beings, extends to every thought, and every feeling, and every purpose, and every act. Hence it is, that remorse arises

when any species of wrong has been done. Hence it is that conscience speaks in remonstrance against all evil meditated, and in indignation against all evil accomplished. Ay, sinner, that internal monitor who presides over your moral conduct, is the Divinity himself promulging and enforcing the precepts of his own law. As often, therefore, as you despise the authority, and turn a deaf ear to the counsels of this celestial monitor, you virtually sin against the Most High. Believe us, there is no escaping from this fearful conclusion. The voice of conscience is the voice of God.

We now proceed to remark, as another highly important reflection suggested by our present text, that it is this view of sin, as an evil committed against God, which must ever operate as the most cogent motive to deter us from that which is wrong, and impel us to that which is right. There are various considerations which may exert an influence in restraining vice and promoting virtue. An individual may be temperate, because he knows that the opposite course would impair his health, and shorten his days. He may be honest, because he is sensible that without a reputation for integrity, he would not enjoy the confidence of his fellow-men, and so would not have it in his power to prosecute his secular business to the best advantage. He may be kind and generous, because his feelings are naturally tender, and he would suffer real pain from beholding misery, without attempting to mitigate it—from hearing that there was want, without making an effort to relieve it. But these, and similar motives to temperance, honesty, and benevolence, though fit and commendable enough in themselves, and by no means inconsistent with religion, are not commensurate with the nature and extent of human duty. A man who understands his true obligations as a dependent and

an accountable being, will be temperate because he knows that intemperance is a sin against God. He will be honest, because he is sensible that fraud, in all its forms, is a sin against God. He will be benevolent, because he is aware, that to neglect the miserable and needy is a sin against God. In fine, he will be virtuous, because he is convinced that vice of every kind is offensive to the divine rectitude and purity.

It will be seen, then, that while we would not question the propriety nor weaken the force of other motives to virtue, we maintain that there is none so proper, and none so effectual, as that presented in our text. Such is the position for which we contend. And one or two remarks will serve to evince its correctness.

We have said, that there is no motive to virtue so proper, so intrinsically fitting, as that presented by the thought, that all sin is an evil committed against God. If our first position be granted, there can hardly be any diversity of sentiment on this point. When the fact is conceded, that every moral error, besides its pernicious consequences to the individual who commits it, and to society in general, is the contravention of a divine law, it must also be admitted, that we ought to be deterred from what is wrong, not so much by the apprehension of its injurious effects upon ourselves and the community, as by the consideration of its opposition to the will of Heaven. In other words, the fear of offending God, and the desire of securing his approbation, rather than the dread of temporal disadvantages, and the prospect of temporal rewards, should, in strict propriety, be our reason for doing what is right.

Again, there is no motive to virtue so really effectual, with one who feels its force, as that presented in the text before us. The individual who habituates himself to

view all sin as an evil committed against God, throws around his moral character the strongest panoply that can be conceived or desired. He knows that if he does wrong, he incurs the heavy indignation of One who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. He feels that if he does right, he secures the approving smile of One whose favour is life, and whose loving kindness is better than life. O! how powerless and inefficient, as well as how unworthy, compared with views and feelings like these, must be a mere dread of the world's frowns, and a mere desire of the world's applause! May we not say, that the motive arising from the one source, exceeds that which flows from the other, in the same ratio that eternity outmeasures time?

And here let us distinctly note one fact, that imparts peculiar importance and efficacy to the motive on which we are now insisting. This motive, it will be observed, operates with as much force as ever, under circumstances calculated to render other motives feeble, if not entirely impotent. There are sins which may be kept concealed from the world; some, the knowledge of which may extend only to one or two persons besides the individual who commits them; and some, of which every being in the universe, except the guilty agent himself and his omniscient Maker, may be ignorant. Now, what motive, we should like to know, will deter from sins of this description, where the fear of God is wanting? Tell us, how is man to avoid the commission of secret errors, if he does not reflect, that, although no mortal eye may be upon him, he is yet amenable to a Deity who follows him to his closet, and with whom the darkness and the light are both alike? Look at the case of Joseph. Is it not perfectly apparent, that, had he been regardless of the divine authority and laws, he must have fallen a victim to

the peculiar temptation by which his virtue was assailed? Are we not entitled to affirm, that no other consideration than that which forced itself with such irresistible awe and energy upon his mind, when he gave utterance to the words of our text, could have availed him in the trying circumstances in which he was placed? He might have yielded to the solicitations of Potiphar's criminal consort, without subjecting himself to any immediate consequences of an injurious nature; and, although it rarely happens, that such a sin, however it may be hid for a time, escapes ultimate exposure and punishment even in this world, yet the apprehension of remote possible or probable disadvantages, must have exerted little influence on an inexperienced youth, in a situation like that in which he found himself.

There is, then, no proper and effectual substitute for that motive to virtue, which grows out of a sense of our obligations to God. We will go farther, and say, that this one motive is so appropriate and powerful, that it does not need to be aided by any other. The most plausible auxiliary that human ingenuity has devised, is, perhaps, to be found in the practice of auricular confession, which forms so prominent a feature in the ecclesiastical regulations of a large Christian community. We have sometimes heard this practice commended by serious persons not belonging to the particular sect who adopt it, as an institution calculated to deter from sin, and in this way to do much good to society. But, while we would not deny, that benefit may, in some instances, have resulted from auricular confession, we are constrained to believe, that it has more frequently proved the means of encouraging, than of restraining evil. For one individual who has said, "I will not commit this offence, because if I do, I shall have to disclose it to the priest," we pre-

sume, that ten have said, "Why should we refrain from this gratification, when we have only to acknowledge our error to the priest, and obtain absolution?" Can it be imagined, for a moment, that if Joseph had been regardless of the divine authority and laws, he would have been deterred from the commission of sin, by the consideration, that he would be under the necessity, either of neglecting a religious rite, or else revealing his crime to one whose official situation bound him to inviolable secrecy? And feeling, as he did, that to commit adultery would be doing a great wickedness and sinning against God, he surely needed no additional reason for resisting the temptation to which he was exposed.

It is not necessary, however, to enlarge on this subject. Every candid and serious thinker must be convinced of the intrinsic propriety, and the superior efficacy of that motive to virtue, which religion furnishes, and which the text exhibits as swaying the conduct of a good man when powerfully tempted to do wrong. And, brethren, how unutterable are our obligations to the Bible for revealing such a motive! The doctrine of infidel morality, as taught by Hume, the most distinguished, and certainly the ablest of its professors, is, that adultery, provided it can be concealed, is nothing, and even if discovered, is only a trivial matter. But not so speaks Christianity. Not so thought Joseph, when, in the true spirit of Christianity, he exclaimed, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Brethren, we may learn from our present subject, the importance of contemplating sin as an evil committed against God. This is the view of sin which the Scriptures present. It is the view of sin which arises from the deductions of reason. It is the view of sin which is sometimes impressed on the mind by the *still small voice* of

conscience. Let us, then, accustom ourselves to look upon transgression in this light. If we would lead a pure and an upright life—if we would avoid those moral errors which cannot fail, sooner or later, to overwhelm us with ignominy and wo—if we would enjoy peace here, and bliss hereafter—we shall best attain our object by pursuing the course now recommended; or, rather, we shall attain our object in no other way. The only motive on which we can safely rely, for the preservation of our virtue in seasons of emergency and peril, results from the thought, that, if we deviate a single inch from the path of rectitude, we do a great wickedness, and sin against God. This motive, dear hearers, is a buckler with which you may encounter fearlessly and securely every temptation incident to your present state. The sharpest arrows that strike it, will fall blunted at your feet. Christian, thank your heavenly Father for such a weapon of defence. And O! remember, that it must be your own fault, and your own eternal disgrace and ruin, if, with this implement of moral warfare at your command, you should not come off, at last, a conqueror—aye, and more than a conqueror.

Our present subject furnishes a test, by which they who are anxious to know what is their character, and what their prospects as moral and immortal beings, may examine themselves. There is no better evidence of piety, than a deep feeling of the evil of sin as an injury done to the great and beneficent Ruler of the universe. Nor is there any better evidence of advancement in religion, than the growth of this feeling. Look, then, brethren, into your hearts, and strive to ascertain how far your conduct is regulated by a single regard to the divine authority and laws; and how far the influence of this motive augments, as you become older. Every Christian should often in-

terrogate his conscience particularly in relation to this latter point. It should be his unceasing effort to discover, whether his progress in years is marked by a growing conviction of the demerit of sin as an evil committed against God.

We may likewise take occasion from this subject, to say a word to impenitent sinners. It has been shown, that all moral error, properly viewed, is a sin against Jehovah. And O! that we could cause this solemn truth to tell upon the heart and conscience of every one in our audience to day, who has hitherto lived unimpressed by any just sense of his accountability to his Maker! Yes, dear hearers, we would have you to realize, that whenever you commit an offence, no matter under what circumstances, you injure not only yourselves, or your fellow men, but the High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity. Were you only persuaded of this, you would not—you could not—act as you have thus far done. O! did you always consider, that the Deity is a close and vigilant observer of your ways—that he is thoroughly conversant with your whole moral history—that you are exposed to his keen inspection amid the gloom of a starless midnight, as well as in the brightest sunshine—that, besides marking all your outward misdeeds, he surveys the deepest operations of your minds, and knows full well those transgressions of his law, from which you are restrained only by a regard to public opinion, or the dread of some personal injury—did you seriously believe, and duly ponder this unquestionable fact, you would inevitably become new beings—a great and glorious change of character would at once ensue. Let us then assure you, that what we have now said, is as true as there is truth on earth or in heaven. You are amenable to the Sovereign of the universe for every thing that

you do, or even wish to do. No moral act of your lives, no purpose that ever dawned in your souls, has been seen with indifference by him. Each act and each purpose have been put down in the volume of his remembrance, as violations of his pure and righteous law. We caution thee, sinner, against merely asking, when pressed by some urgent temptation, "What harm will be occasioned by doing this thing? Shall I thereby injure either myself or my neighbour?" Remember that the proper question to be submitted to thy conscience, in every case, is, "Can I do this thing, and yet not disobey any clear indication of the divine will? May I venture on this course without doing a great wickedness, and sinning against God?"—And O! may thy Maker grant thee grace thus to act, through the merits of Jesus Christ, his Son! Amen.

SERMON VI.

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I SAMUEL XXVIII. 16.

"Then said Samuel, Wherefore, then, dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy."

SAUL ascended the throne of Israel with fair and flattering prospects. The Jews had grown weary of the theocratical form of government, under which they settled in Canaan, and become clamorous for a human sovereign. Their demand was at length complied with, and they hailed with enthusiasm the son of Kish, who was designated by lot to the regal office. His personal qualities

were favourable to his popularity in a comparatively rude and uncultivated nation, for we are told that he was "a choice young man;" that "there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he;" and that "from his shoulders and upwards he was higher than any of the people." His intellectual endowments, too, seem to have been of a highly respectable order. Every thing, in short, appeared to promise an honourable and a happy reign. But circumstances soon presented a different aspect. Saul, elated with prosperity, forgot his obligations and his accountability to the Most High, and hurried into a succession of fatal errors. Of these, the first was his assumption of the sacerdotal office, at Gilgal, when, impatient at the delay of Samuel, he determined, in express contravention of the Mosaic law, to offer sacrifice with his own hands. Another was his disobedience to a particular and positive injunction of heaven, respecting his conduct towards the Amalekites, when he reserved a part of the spoil which he had taken from that discomfited people. A third, was his unmanly and impolitic, not to say iniquitous, treatment of David, which led to a train of disastrous events, and wrought ultimately his own overthrow, and the exaltation of his rival. One calamity prepared the way for another, until the situation of Saul became truly desperate. The Philistines, the ancient and inveterate enemies of Israel, availed themselves of the opportunity afforded by the schism between him and David, to invade Judea. The unhappy monarch was filled with consternation. The host of the invaders was formidable; his own subjects were divided; and he trembled for the issue of the impending contest. In his distress, he began to lift an imploring eye to heaven, for pity and succour. But "the Lord answered him not; neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." And

what was the expedient to which he then resorted? Miserable man! he said to his attendants, "Seek me out a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her." Such a step on the part of Saul, was lamentable evidence that an awful change had taken place in his moral sentiments and feelings. There was a time when he regarded with becoming contempt and abhorrence, the wretched pretenders to necromancy and supernatural powers, who abounded in Palestine as well as in other countries. We are informed, that he "had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards out of the land." Had any friend, gifted with the true spirit of divination, then assured him that a period was coming in which he would himself be induced to consult one of the very impostors whom he was so laudably endeavouring to expel from his dominions, what would he have thought of the prediction? He would doubtless have treated it, as Hazael, the Syrian captain, subsequently treated a well-known prophetic intimation of Elisha—"What! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? But Hazael was ignorant of his own heart, and so was Saul.

It often happens, that men in adversity betake themselves to some friend, whose counsels they once found judicious, but whom, in their prosperous circumstances, they were disposed to neglect. Hence the object for which the Jewish king proposed to visit the sorceress, whom he instructed his servants to seek out for him. He had been accustomed, in the early part of his reign, to rely on the advice of Samuel, in all cases of emergency. But as he saw his power increase, and felt himself more firmly seated on his throne, he began to entertain a higher opinion of his own judgment, and was the less inclined to confer with an old friend, who sometimes made free to

tell him of his faults. Samuel finally withdrew from court, and closed his career in retirement at Ramah. The voice of the prophet was now sealed in death. The grave had received the mortal remains of him whom all Israel, and the monarch himself in his better days, looked up to as an inspired instructor and counsellor. Saul, in the wane of his fortune, as disasters thickened around him, and the gulf of ruin seemed to yawn before him, felt the absence of his once revered and confidential adviser. Fully persuaded that the spirit outlives the decay of the body, he did not despair of being able to obtain an interview with the departed seer. His situation was a dreadful one, and he resolved upon this last and fearful experiment as the best that the crisis allowed.

It is far from being our plan, on this occasion, to enter into a minute consideration of the remarkable circumstances which attended the nocturnal visit of Saul to the witch of Endor. The opportunity, indeed, would be as good a one as could be desired, for the display of frivolous research, and the exercise of a puerile imagination. Some of our auditors, too, would probably be quite content to spend half an hour in listening to a detail of the various hypotheses adopted by biblical expositors in respect to this subject. But, curious man, we have a higher object in view, to-day, than your amusement. We shall therefore beg to be excused from any nice disquisitions relative to the story of the witch of Endor, and would simply observe, that we cannot accord with the opinion of those who conceive that the whole transaction was a mere juggle, effected by the legerdemain of a wicked female, practised in the art of imposing on the weak and superstitious; nor again, with the opinion of those who imagine that the apparition was Satan, who assumed the form of Samuel, in order the better to achieve the ruin

of Saul. We confess that we are simple and old-fashioned enough to think that the apparition was Samuel himself, raised, not by the magical arts of the woman, but by an immediate interposition of divine power wholly unlooked for on her part. We suppose, that the sorceress contemplated nothing more than to impose on the credulity of her visitant, and that she was herself both surprised and alarmed at the actual appearance of him, whose spirit she was affecting to call "from the vasty deep." In behalf of this opinion, it may be remarked, that the incident is related by the sacred historian as a reality, and that to explain the passage in any other way, is to palter with the plain and obvious meaning of language. Another argument, and certainly one of considerable force, arises from the clearness and truth of the prediction uttered by the apparition: "The Lord also will deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me." Thus unambiguously did the voice that spoke, foretell the rout of Saul's army, and the death of himself and his sons—a prediction which was most fully verified. Now, this circumstance, we cannot help thinking, will strike the reflecting mind as evidence almost conclusive, in favour of the idea that the prophet was personally present, and conversed with Saul. It may be added, that this was the opinion generally adopted by the ancient Jews. That it was held by Josephus, will be seen by any one who inspects his account of the transaction. There is, likewise, a passage in the apocryphal book called *Ecclesiasticus*, which may serve to show what were the notions on the subject prevalent at the period in which it was penned. The writer in reference to Samuel, says, "And after his death he prophesied, and showed the king his end, and lifted up his voice from the earth in prophecy to blot out the wickedness of the people."

We consider it as certain, then, that Samuel himself appeared on this occasion, wrapt in the same well-known mantle which he was wont to wear prior to his decease—a mantle, the recollection of which could not be very grateful to Saul, since it was marked by that ominous rent, which portended the removal of the kingdom from his own family....To the anxiously inquiring monarch the apparition replied in language of which our text is the introductory sentence: “Wherefore dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?”

It has been thought by some, that this language is not such as the prophet himself would have held in addressing Saul. They conceive, that, had it been really Samuel who spoke, he would not have sought to drive the king to final despair, by telling him, that the Lord had departed from him, and become his enemy; but would rather have exhorted him to repent of his sins, and prepare for his approaching fate. There may be a degree of plausibility in this argument. And yet we apprehend, that Samuel, under the circumstances of the case, might, without impropriety, have uttered the words attributed to him in the passage before us. Let it be observed, that he appeared on this occasion, not as an ordinary minister of God, but as a special messenger from the world of spirits, to premonish the inquiring monarch of the doom which awaited him. He was not instructed to urge the duty of repentance upon Saul. Indeed, he knew, that such an exhortation must be unavailing, when addressed to one whom Heaven had abandoned to destruction.

The text, then, may be regarded as one among many passages of sacred writ, which teach us, that there may occur a crisis even in the earthly career of impenitent sinners, after which their salvation becomes morally impossible.

We know, that there are those who, while they would not absolutely deny this truth, are extremely reluctant to yield to it their assent, and think that it should be rarely—never indeed—insisted on from the pulpit. But when we observe how distinctly and prominently the doctrine in question is exhibited in the Bible, and when we further reflect, that it is peculiarly fitted to arrest and alarm careless transgressors, we are persuaded, that the preacher who neglects to bring it frequently and emphatically before his hearers, is awfully remiss in his duty to the Master whom he serves, and may have to answer for the blood of some, whom a different line of conduct on his part might have saved from eternal ruin.

Allow us, then, brethren, to assure you, that the individual who has long persisted in the misimprovement and abuse of distinguished advantages, is in an almost hopeless state. Such an one has reason to apprehend, that the Lord may soon depart from him, and become his enemy. The course which he pursues is calculated to blunt the religious sensibilities of the soul, and to bring on a condition of utter callousness, in which nothing short of a miraculous exertion of Almighty power can arrest him in his degenerate career, and reclaim him from everlasting perdition. Such, as we have seen, was the case with Saul. Such, too, was the case with Pharaoh, when the Lord hardened his heart, or, in other words, abandoned him to the domination of his own depraved nature. And such, moreover, was the case with those in respect to whom our Redeemer himself declared, that the things which belonged to their peace were hidden from their eyes. But why do we go back to such instances, when it is more than probable, that the experience of some in this very assembly will lend its testimony in corroboration of the truth on which we are insisting? We only

ask you, dear hearers, to cast a retrospective glance over your past history. Can you not recollect the period, when you had far more sensibility on the subject of religion, than you now have?—when you listened with a livelier interest to the preaching of the gospel, and even began to indulge the hope, that its truths were taking a salutary hold in your hearts? Tell us, merchant, was there not a time, when you occasionally thought of God amid the most pressing concerns of your store and counting room? Is it not so, politician, that you were once accustomed to consider, how it would profit you nothing to gain the whole world, and lose your own soul? Will you deny, aspirant after literary distinction, that there were moments of sober reflection, in which you felt how insufficient would be the breath of human applause to sustain and to cheer you amid the solemnities of death, and the realities of eternity? And will you hesitate to admit, votary of pleasure, that, in former days you scarcely ever returned from a scene of dissipation, without thinking, that enjoyments more solid and enduring than those of which you had just partaken, were necessary to sate the high and expanded appetites of the ethereal and immortal mind? But, alas! thoughts and feelings such as these rarely visit your bosom at present. Now, this fact, we would have you know, is a fearful indication, that the Lord is on the point of departing from you, and becoming your enemy. It shows, that unless a change speedily ensues, you are irretrievably undone—that you are fast approaching that dread crisis in your moral history, which shall determine your character and destiny for ever. Yes, the harvest may soon be past—the summer soon ended—and you not saved. Would to God, that we were capable of sounding in your ears such a note of alarm, as should penetrate the deepest recesses

of your soul, lend the keenest pungency to the goadings of conscience, and constrain you to resort, for safety and peace, to the strong-hold of the gospel!

We have represented the text as implying, that there may occur a crisis in the earthly career of those who have long enjoyed, without improving, the means of grace, after which it becomes morally impossible for them to be saved. By this representation we would not circumscribe, in any irreverent manner, the power of Jehovah. It is only our object to say, that such is the constitution of the human mind—such the nature of that moral government which the Deity exercises over it—that the possession, for a considerable length of time of distinguished religious privileges, by one who is not duly affected and benefited by them, contributes to harden his heart, to stupify his conscience, and, of course, to render his ultimate deliverance from sin and misery an extremely unlikely occurrence. It is one of the laws of our being, that familiarity with any object, physical or moral, tends to lessen the interest with which we contemplate it, and to weaken its influence over us. He whose native habitation is near the cataract of Niagara, looks without emotion on one of the sublimest of nature's spectacles, simply because he has been used to the scene from his boyhood days; and when he lies down to rest at night, the tremendous roar of the mighty torrent cannot prevent nor disturb the slumber of one whose cradle was rocked amid its loudest din. And so the man of middle and of old age, who has contemplated the truths of Christianity and listened to the sound of the gospel, from his earliest youth, may become, at last, almost utterly indifferent to all that the Bible reveals, and all that the preacher proclaims. We accordingly find, that the faithful minister of Jesus who takes up his residence in some of the remote

settlements of our country, where the visits of previous ministers had been, like those of angels, "few and far between," makes a much deeper and more general impression on his hearers, and converts a larger proportion of them from the error of their ways to the wisdom of the just, than he would have done had it been his lot to be called to the pastoral charge of a congregation in one of our cities or populous towns. Another evidence of the truth to which we are adverting, is found in the circumstance so often remarked, that the truths of the gospel are, for the most part, brought to bear with greater efficacy on the young, than on those who have passed the meridian of life; and on the latter than on those who have reached the evening of their days.

But some may now ask, How happens it, that familiarity with the means of grace, in the case of those who *do* improve them, produces a result so very different from what has just been stated? Is there not here a singular exception to the otherwise universal law, that similar effects flow from similar causes? We answer, that this difficulty admits of a satisfactory solution. The means of grace, when allowed to exert their due influence on the heart and conscience, sustain to the human being a relation, which no other objects in the physical or moral world are capable of sustaining. They then become intimately allied, in his view, with all the realities of an eternal scene, and are, therefore, invested with an interest which time, instead of diminishing, serves only to increase. Hence it is, that the truly pious man can always discover something new in the Word of God—that he repairs every Sabbath with fresh delight to the sanctuary of the Most High—and that he finds the exercises of private devotion, just in proportion as they are repeated, more and more essential to his happiness. The principles of religion are

thus deeply and inseparably incorporated with the system of his habits, and consequently "grow with his growth and strengthen with his strength." On the contrary, the means of grace, when misimproved, are viewed apart from the eternal realities to which they point the eye of faith. Like other physical and moral objects, they then affect the mind less forcibly in proportion to its familiarity with them. A habit of indifference and neglect is thus formed, which must, in the nature of things, grow more inveterate, the longer it is indulged. And this is the very way, as we have already intimated, in which, when a man has long enjoyed superior religious advantages, without improving them, the Lord departs from him, and becomes his enemy. The impossibility of his salvation arises from the circumstance, that he has rendered himself insensible to the only means which it has pleased the wisdom and goodness of Heaven to ordain for the promotion of his spiritual improvement. To suppose that he could be saved independently of these means, were as preposterous, as to imagine that animal life could be sustained without the instrumentality of food.

A common objection to the opinion, that a man's "day of grace," as some theological writers have rather unhappily called it, may terminate prior to the article of death, is, that this opinion represents God as withdrawing from certain individuals, the influences of his Spirit which he had formerly vouchsafed to them, and thus consigning them to remediless destruction. It will be seen, however, that the doctrine which we have deduced from the text before us, is not liable to the objection now mentioned, because we have not supposed that they from whom the Lord departs and becomes their enemy, really enjoyed the gracious operations of his Spirit, and so have not presumed that their hopeless state is a consequence

of the withdrawal of such operations, or, indeed, that any thing like a positive exercise of divine power is concerned in the accomplishment of their ruin. As this is a point of some importance, it may be proper to explain our views more fully. Let it, then, be distinctly understood, that we wholly reject the idea of there being any operations of the Spirit on the human heart, which do not issue in salvation. The influences of this almighty Agent must always be exerted on the moral constitution of man, or, in other words, must correspond with the office which he sustains and executes as the *Sanctifier* of them that believe. Now, we have yet to learn from the sacred Scriptures, that the process of sanctification is, in any instance, commenced, and afterwards abandoned. We have hitherto understood them as teaching, that God never begins a good work in the soul of an individual, without carrying it on to perfection. It is granted, that men frequently have convictions of guilt, which, though pungent and overwhelming for a season, produce no lasting amendment of life. But these are readily accounted for, when we refer them to the dictates of conscience; and particularly of a conscience enlightened and stimulated by the natural operation of revealed truth, in a land blessed with the various institutions of Christianity. There is not the least necessity for supposing the intervention of that mystical and inconceivable agency which theologians have styled *common grace*. The idea of such an agency is unphilosophical, since all the moral phenomena which it is brought to explain, may be sufficiently solved without it. Our hearers, we doubt not, are now ready to inquire, what is meant by such Scriptural expressions as these: "My Spirit shall not always strive with man"—"And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption"—

“Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost”—“Quench not the Spirit,”—and others of like purport, which occur in the inspired record? We reply, without difficulty, that language of this description must be interpreted as referring simply to men’s misimprovement of the external means of grace. The context, in every instance, will be found, on a close and candid inspection, to call for this interpretation. Take, for example, the passage just quoted—“My Spirit shall not always strive with man.” These, as you recollect, were the words of Jehovah, when, contemplating the depravity of the antediluvian world, it repented him that he had made man on the earth. Now, passing by the various explications which have been given by critics of the term *Spirit*, we contend that the utmost that can be gathered from the context, is, that when the Lord declared that his Spirit should not always strive with man, he alluded to the universal deluge with which it was his secret purpose to visit and punish the first descendants of Adam. His language may be thus paraphrased: “The means of grace which I have instituted, and through which my Spirit operates in the conversion of sinners—the exhortations, the remonstrances, the warnings, and the threatenings of Noah, whom I have commissioned as a *preacher of righteousness*,—shall not always be enjoyed by this perverse generation. It is my intention soon to close their period of respite—to terminate their opportunity of repentance, by the desolating convulsions of a total inundation.”—In short, when we speak of the Lord’s departing from a man, and becoming his enemy, we allude simply and entirely to the effect produced on the moral and religious character by a long neglect of the means of grace. The gospel of Christ, where it is not “a savour of life unto life,” proves “a savour of death unto death.” The heart that is not

softened and subdued by the repeated calls of divine mercy, is rendered harder and more obstinate. And this, we conceive, is all that is meant by the passage of Scripture, so variously understood by commentators, which speaks of a sin against the Holy Ghost that is unpardonable. The persevering misimprovement of superior advantages so deadens every spiritual susceptibility of the soul, and lulls the conscience into so profound and fatal a lethargy, that all the means of grace become ineffectual, and the wretched individual, lost to virtue, happiness and God, goes on heaping up for himself wrath against the day of wrath. Ah! it had been good for such a man, as it had been good for Judas, if he had not been born!

Enough, it is presumed, has now been said to show, that the doctrine which we have deduced from our present text, has no tendency to dishonour the divine character, by ascribing the destruction of any sinner, either in whole or in part, to the efficient agency of the Almighty. It is a gross misconception of this doctrine to suppose, that, when the Lord departs from a man and becomes his enemy, he puts forth an omnipotent arm to hinder the repentance, and preclude the salvation, of one who is thus handed over to perdition. Such a supposition were a blasphemous imputation on the holiness and benignity of the Most High—an imputation which every enlightened believer in the sacred Scriptures will reject with inexpressible abhorrence. The Deity whom the Bible reveals and the Christian adores, has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He always looks with deep commiseration on the downward course of impenitent offenders, and even when he yields to the imperious dictate of inflexible justice, and swears in his wrath, that they shall not enter into his rest, he exerts no positive influence in determining their continuance in sin. Nor, in truth, is it at all

necessary, that any such influence should be exerted. Only let the sinner persist in turning a deaf ear to the invitations of the Gospel—let him “throw on headlong appetite the slackened rein”—let him, like an independent man, recklessly resolve to live as he lists—let him, in a word, give himself up to the impulse of his own natural affections—and he will sink to the world of wo, by a law as uniform and imperative as that which brings down unsupported bodies to the earth—as that which hurries the mountain stream over every obstacle, until, at last, it finds its way to the ocean in which it is to be merged and lost for ever.

Brethren, let us learn from our subject to day the importance of a close and unremitting attention to our spiritual interests. It is only by timely and strenuous and untiring exertions, that these interests can be secured—that the inestimable blessings of salvation can be obtained. Indolence, which, in all pursuits, is inimical to success, is particularly so in the high concerns of religion. There is not a being through all the ranks of the redeemed in heaven—not an individual of our race in the whole throng of rejoicing spirits around the throne of God—who is more than *scarcely saved*. Of how much consequence, then, is it, that we, probationers for eternity, should give all diligence to make our calling and election sure! O! let us not exhaust our energies—let us not squander our days—in occupations and amusements, which have no fitness to advance our immortal welfare. Let us strive to enter in at the strait gate—let us work while it is called to day—let us live as becomes those who have a business to accomplish, of no less magnitude and difficulty than the salvation of our souls. To loiter and trifle with such a task before us, is a kind and a degree of infatuation, for which no terms sufficiently expressive can be found in the

entire range of human language. He who should deliberately cast himself upon his couch for repose, as he saw the flames enkindling about his edifice, were a wise man compared with the fool who exclaims, *A little sleep and a little slumber*, when he has not yet made his peace with God—when the stupendous work of religion remains unexecuted.

And, brethren, let us distinctly learn from our subject the danger—the awful danger—of continuance in habits of inattention to the established means of grace. The victim of such habits is dead while he lives. He is lost amid the noon-tide effulgence of the day of salvation. God only knows, how many in our present audience are in this deplorable state. You have been sitting for years under the Gospel's sound. Who can tell the opportunities which you have failed to improve? Who can number the sermons to which you have listened in vain? And have you no fear, that the sentence which Ephraim brought upon himself, may go forth against you—"He is joined to idols, let him alone?" Ah! dear hearers, we would not have you presume too much on the forbearance of your Maker. There is—believe us—there is a limit to his patience. And will you—can you—persist in the neglect of the great salvation which we now once more tender to your acceptance? If you will—if you can—we have nothing more to say, except that the period is coming, when you may wish, and, perhaps, vainly wish, that you had acted otherwise. Yes, on the bed of death, you may be racked with feelings similar to those of Saul, when, in the frenzy of his despair, he sought to bring back the spirit of a departed saint to his relief. You may then inquire of Jehovah through the medium of his Word—through the medium of your own prayers, and those of your pious relatives and friends—and he will not answer

you. You may send for the ministers of the gospel, and they shall afford you no comfort. They will not, indeed, venture to address you in the language of Samuel to the Jewish potentate, for God has given them no authority to pronounce on the future destiny of any human being. But conscience, in a voice terrific as if it emanated from the unseen world, where disembodied spirits dwell, may say to the dying sinner, "The Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy."

We cannot conclude, without saying a word particularly to the youth in our assembly. It has been already intimated, that the morning of human life is the most auspicious season for producing religious impressions, and fixing religious habits. We well know that the young are too prone to commune with themselves in some such strain as this: "Our Maker, whose benignity towers above all his other attributes, has evidently destined us for enjoyment. To indulge the passions which he himself has implanted in our nature, cannot be criminal. We may, therefore, spend the early part of our existence in the moderate pursuit of pleasure, and devote the residue to the calls of piety." But does language of this description accord with the solemn lessons inculcated in the Bible? Point us to that portion of the inspired record, which sanctions the tenour of conduct you propose to adopt. The exhortation of the wise man is "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." Hesitate not, we entreat you, to follow the preacher's judicious advice. If you neglect religion when young, the probability is so strong as to amount almost to a certainty, that you will do no better when old. And here allow us distinctly and emphatically to assure you, that the course which we

now recommend to you, instead of interfering, as you might erroneously imagine, with any rational scheme of felicity, is calculated to subserve alike your present and your future well-being. Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Wisdom's ways are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. The New Testament condemns no pursuits, it prohibits no enjoyments, that consist with the true dignity and ultimate security of man. O! if happiness be the object of which you are in quest—happiness in the largest sense of the term, temporal, spiritual, and eternal—happiness suited to the capacities of intelligent, moral, and immortal beings,—come to the gospel; believe on Christ; obey his precepts—imitate his example. Then shall you obtain the pardon of sin, peace of conscience, and hearts fitted for the love and service of your God. Then shall you enjoy, in moderation and contentment, the substantial blessings of this life, and look forward to a bright and unfading inheritance beyond the grave. In short, then you need not fear that the Lord will ever depart from you, and become your enemy. He will be always near you. He will be your unchanging friend.

SERMON VII.



JOB XV. 16.

“How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?”

THE most casual reader of the sacred Scriptures, must be struck with the peculiar style which they adopt, when adverting to the moral state of the world. They describe the degeneracy and wickedness of men, in language far more glowing and pungent, in a tone of reprehension infinitely more authoritative and severe, than is met with in any other writings. The ethical productions of Cicero and Seneca—the courtly sarcasms of Horace, and the sterner invectives of Juvenal—leave upon the mind a very different impression as to the nature, the extent, and the consequences of human depravity, from that produced by a perusal of the Bible. No uninspired moralist or poet, belonging either to ancient or to modern times, has ever intimated, or ever thought, that the corruption of our race is any thing like what the pages of divine revelation affirm.

These remarks are amply illustrated by the passage now before us. We have here the strongest terms, and the most expressive figure, employed to impress us with a just idea of the depraved condition of mankind.—The words were uttered by Eliphaz the Temanite, in a conversation with the pious, but afflicted, citizen of Uz. “What is man that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold,

he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?"

We need not tell you that we propose to-day to treat of the depravity of man. The subject, indeed, is a humiliating one: but little do we know, dear hearers, of our own hearts, if we have yet to learn, that humiliation is the very thing of which we are all most in need.

In prosecuting our present discourse, there are two distinct, though collateral, points, to which we shall ask your attention, viz. first, the *universal* and *total* depravity of man; and, second, the *native* depravity of man.

The first topic, then, on which we shall insist, is that of the *universal* and *total* depravity of man.—And here, a few preliminary remarks, by way of explanation, may be proper.

When we speak of the *universal* depravity of man, we refer to the species in general, and our meaning is simply this: that all the individuals of our race have sinned, in a greater or less degree. They have transgressed the rule of duty, not only as laid down in the inspired record, but as ascertained by the dictates of their own consciences—as indicated by the very structure of their moral constitution. This truth is certainly taught in our text. The epithets *abominable* and *filthy* are here applied, not to some men, but to man in general; and so we are here told, not that some men “drink iniquity like water,” but that man in general does this. There are likewise many other scriptural passages which teach the same thing. Let us take one of the fullest and most striking. It occurs in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and consists of quotations from the Old Testament. “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They

are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." And in a subsequent verse of the same chapter, the apostle declares, in the most unqualified terms, that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Now, with regard to this portion of sacred writ, it has been justly remarked, that the inspired penman is here speaking, not so much of particular individuals, as of the entire race. His representations, it is very true, were most literally applicable to the men of his own age and country. But they are not less really applicable to the men of every age and country. In fact, if this were not the case, they would be irrelevant to the object of his argument in the chapter, which is, to prove that all mankind have become guilty before God, and need the expiatory virtues of a Saviour's blood.

Again, when we speak of the *total* depravity of man, we refer to the individuals of our race in particular; and one or two observations may be necessary to explain fully and distinctly our meaning.

First, then, by the *total* depravity of man, we do not mean that all the individuals of our race are equally corrupt. There is a very great difference among men, in respect to their degrees of moral turpitude. To deny this would be to adopt the maxim of the ancient Stoics, who held that all sins were equal.

Nor, by the *total* depravity of man, do we mean that the individuals of our race exhibit no estimable traits of moral character. On the contrary, we admit that man, though fallen and corrupt, often displays a high degree of remaining virtue. There is much in the transactions of business—much in the toils and self-denials of patriotism—much in the charities of neighbourhood—and much in the endearments of domestic life,—on which it is not

extravagant to say, that the pure eyes of the Divinity may look with a kind of complacency.

What, then, it will now be inquired, do we mean by the *total* depravity of man? Our meaning, we answer, is briefly this; that the extent and degree of man's corruption are such, that all his views, and feelings, and purposes, and acts, so far as they are of a moral nature, fall immeasurably below the just and reasonable requirements of his Maker—that the prevailing state of his heart is characterized by a settled aversion to the divine authority and laws. He delights not to contemplate the holiness and justice of Deity. This truth is taught in our text. The epithets *abominable* and *filthy*, and the assertion that we “drink iniquity like water,” can surely imply nothing less. There is another passage of sacred writ, which declares, in the most peremptory terms, that “every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart, is only evil continually.” This language, to be sure, was spoken with a particular reference to the antediluvian world. But human nature is essentially the same in every period. The deluge was not followed by a new creation. The earth was peopled afterwards by the descendants of those who lived before.—A third passage in point, is that place of Jeremiah, where we read, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?”

Having thus explained what it is that we mean by the *universal* and *total* depravity of man, we may advance to the proof of this doctrine. Allusion has already been made to some of the scriptural passages which have a bearing on this subject. Many more of a similar purport might easily be adduced. But it will probably be more interesting to inquire, how far the truth in question is established by facts lying within the range of ordinary observation and experience.

As one evidence of this truth, we observe, that there has never been an individual of our race, except *the man Christ Jesus*, who has enjoyed the reputation of being perfectly free from the taint of moral evil. This is a remarkable fact, on which much stress has been laid, but not more than it is fairly entitled to. We demand only a single instance of a human being, in respect to whom those who had the opportunity of knowing the circumstances of his life, have pronounced, that, in their honest belief, he never committed a moral error. Help us, if you can, to such an instance. History furnishes none. Present observation furnishes none. The Son of God is the only partaker of our common nature, concerning whom it may be believed, on the concurrent testimony of friends and foes, that he "did no sin, neither was any guile found in his mouth. Every other member of the human family lies at least under a strong presumption of guilt. We feel persuaded, brethren, that however extended may be the circle of your acquaintance, and however long you may have lived in the world, you have never yet had the happiness to meet with a solitary person, whose conduct has appeared, in all respects, precisely such as it ought to have been. It has been said, that no man is a hero in the eyes of his servants. We are sure, that no man is a saint in the estimation of his intimate friends.

As a second evidence of the truth for which we contend, we observe, that the religions of all nations, ancient and modern, have recognized, as a leading principle, the universality of human corruption. It is certain, that the sacrificial rite, whenever or however it may have originated, had obtained from time immemorial over the whole known world, at the era of the commencement of the Christian economy; since which period it has been found

to prevail among all the Pagan nations of the earth. Now this rite has always been understood as implying guilt on the part of man, and placability on the part of God. We perceive these notions relative to the nature and design of animal oblations distinctly stated even in so old an author as Homer:

“If broken vows this heavy curse have laid,
Let altars smoke, and hecatombs be paid.”

To the rite of sacrifice, we might add the various *lustrations*, *ablutions*, and similar ceremonies of paganism, all which tend most strongly to show, how the idea of human depravity has incorporated itself with every system of religion under heaven.

We proceed to remark, that not only the ecclesiastical, but the political institutions of all nations may be regarded as a striking evidence of the truth taught in our text. It is clear, that were it not for the depravity of man, there would be no necessity for any form of government in the world. The object, real and professed, of laws and rulers is to restrain the violence of human passions, and to protect each individual in the enjoyment of rights, which, but for this important regulation, a thousand arms would be instantly uplifted to take away from him. We would not here be understood as subscribing to the doctrine of certain philosophers who have maintained, that man is naturally the enemy of man. Indeed, if this doctrine were correct, it is obvious, that no system of government would be effectual in keeping society together; or, rather, it is difficult to conceive, how any system of government should have originated. Perhaps we may go still farther, and say, in the language of a profound thinker, that, if the natural condition of man were a state of mutual hostility, “the whole race must have ceased to exist, before the period at which they could be supposed capable of

existing even in a state of war.” But although man is not naturally the foe of his fellow beings, all experience has shown, that the general corruption of the species is such as to render governments of some form indispensable to the existence, as well as to the peace and happiness, of communities. The circumstance, that the wisest legislators have been accounted the best benefactors of their country, goes far to demonstrate, that there is no exaggeration in the scriptural representations of human depravity.

As a further evidence of the truth inculcated in the text, we appeal to the existence of natural evil in the world. We think it may be laid down, as an incontrovertible principle, that a race of moral agents perfectly innocent, must be strangers to misery. All suffering, whether physical or mental, is an effect of sin. We are very far, indeed, from affirming, that, in this life, every individual is afflicted exactly in proportion to his demerits. If such were the case, the present world would be a state, not of discipline, but of retribution. Our position is simply this, that, as every human being is more or less subject to pain and sorrow, so every human being must be an offender in the sight of God.

We might now go on to speak of many amusements of mankind, as an argument for the truth of our text. And on this article, we should not find it necessary to recur to the gladiatorial exhibitions of the ancients. We could, if we are not greatly mistaken, select from the various diversions of our own age—yes, and even from those of our own country—quite enough to answer our purpose. A single instance will suffice. You may be surprised to hear the public execution of criminals, mentioned in connexion with this topic. Such execution, to be sure, is not ostensibly—but it is virtually—a great popular amuse-

ment; and we know, that the officer of justice, who should presume on his own responsibility, and without the authority of positive law, to deprive the people of such a spectacle, when they had been expecting it, would incur no small degree of odium. Now, let any one look at the avidity with which vast multitudes of both sexes assemble, to witness a fellow creature expiring in ignominy and torture, and then tell us, whether he can solve the phenomenon, on any other principle, so well as on the one for which we are this morning contending.—We would not here be understood as intimating any opinion as to the lawfulness, or the expediency, of capital punishments. But we have no hesitancy in saying, that, if culprits are to be executed, the tragical ceremony should be performed in private. We rejoice too to find, that the opinion of the community at large, is becoming somewhat enlightened in respect to the demoralizing effects of public executions.

There is another fact to which we apprehend that we might safely refer in support of the truth taught in our text. The observation has been often made, that men will sometimes do that, in a corporate capacity, which they would not venture to do as individuals. Every one must have heard that saying from the highest legal authority, that “corporations have no souls;” for it has been quoted, we suppose, at least as often as a suit has been brought against any one of these fictitious bodies. Now, without dwelling on the circumstance alluded to, we would simply put the question, whether it does not help to evince the depravity of human nature. Surely there must be something wrong in the moral state of our race, when men will avail themselves of a combined responsibility, to pursue a line of conduct, from which, as separate agents, they would feel impelled to keep aloof.

But instead of following this course of argument, we choose to carry our appeal directly to your consciences. We request you, dear hearers, to look into your own bosoms, and then decide, whether the language of this text is wholly inapplicable to you. Let each individual sit in judgment on himself—let him try his conduct, we do not say by the requisitions of the Bible, but by his own natural sense of right and wrong—let him only do this honestly and thoroughly, and we are quite sure, that his verdict will be in unison with the representations of the inspired record.

And here, brethren, we have one question, in particular, to propose. Tell us, would you have no objection to publish to the world, a faithful and minute history of all the transactions in which you have been engaged? Say, would you unbosom, even to the dearest and most confidential friend that you have ever known, all that has passed within the deep recesses of your souls?—We can answer for you in the negative. There is not a man on earth, no matter how eminently moral, or how sincerely pious, who would be willing to expose his heart, with all its secret thoughts and desires, to the inspection of another human being. Every one is conscious of some crime, or of some frailty, which he deems too bad or too weak for disclosure. The confessions of Rousseau form a very singular exhibition of his own depravity—an exhibition such as no individual, not lost to all sense of virtue and decorum, would have submitted to the public eye. But who imagines, that even he has told the whole truth?

Now, on this general fact, which none, it is presumed, will attempt to deny, we take our stand. Concealment is incompatible with a consciousness of perfect rectitude. Indeed it is the first and most natural impulse of guilt. There was nothing like secrecy, or reserve in Eden, so

long as our first parents retained their integrity. It was not till after their fall, that they “hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.” A man who felt himself to be absolutely guiltless, could have no motive for desiring to cast a veil over any one incident of his moral history. He would not, indeed, be disposed to boast of his integrity. But he would certainly perceive no advantage likely to result to himself, or to others, from burying in oblivion a single emotion that ever arose in his heart, or a single thought that ever found its way to his mind. Virtue “dwells like Uriel in the sun.” We, therefore, feel warranted in saying, that, as every man’s bosom is the depository of some secrets or secret never to be divulged—or, at least, not to be divulged till the day of final account—the inevitable conclusion is, that every man is a sinner. And on this ground we are not reluctant to rest the argument.

The second point on which we propose to insist, is included in the proposition, that man is a being *naturally* depraved.—This proposition has often been denied. Those who are conversant with our most popular authors in the department of ethics, and in that of elegant literature, cannot have failed to observe, how uniformly such authors ascribe the moral degeneracy of men to the influence of example and to various adventitious circumstances, instead of accounting for it on the scriptural principle, that we are all shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin. The arguments with which our moralists, from the professed philosopher in his academic chair, down to the periodical essayist and the poet, endeavour to reform the human kind, seem to proceed on the supposition, that our race is by nature more inclined to virtue than to vice, or, at any rate, is *as much* inclined to the one, as to the other. This fault, of course, does not obtain, to an equal degree,

in all our writers. But there are very few, even of those whose morality approaches the nearest to the evangelical standard, that are entirely exempt from it.

The truth for which we contend, has likewise met with opponents among writers professedly theological. It has in particular been combated by the Unitarians of England and our own country. The great champion of the sect on the other side of the Atlantic, has gone so far as to assert, that even in the most depraved of our race, there is a decided preponderance of virtue over vice.* He also says, in so many words, that "the only difference between the most virtuous and the most vicious person, is, that the former was placed in circumstances, and exposed to impressions, which generated virtuous habits and affections, and the latter in circumstances by which vicious principles and dispositions were produced." This, it will be observed, is the same general doctrine, a little differently expressed, which a still later writer (whether he accounts himself a theologian, or only a philosopher, we are not informed) has taken such Quixotic pains to propagate, under the title of, "A New View of Society."

It will be of importance, before we proceed any farther, to endeavour to state, as concisely and perspicuously as possible, what it is that we mean, when we say, that man is by nature a depraved being. And this we can do, without touching the question so much mooted among divines, whether (to use their own language) man is born "guilty of Adam's first sin." Leaving this litigated question to those who feel an interest in discussing it, we would remark, distinctly and emphatically, that when we affirm the native depravity of our race, we do not mean that men come into the world with any positive and ac-

* The same opinion was avowed and emphatically reiterated by Dr. Ware, in his controversy with Professor Woods.

tually existing propensities to evil. Our meaning is simply this, that every human being enters into life under such circumstances, that, as soon as he becomes capable of distinguishing what is right from what is wrong, he will evince a preference for the wrong; or, in other words, that no individual of the species can pass the period at which his moral agency begins, without being guilty of actual transgression.

And here it must be understood, that we do not profess an ability to explain, or comprehend, how a child derives a corrupt nature from its parents. This is a matter that lies far beyond the sphere of legitimate inquiry. The fact, that man is by nature depraved, is all that the Scriptures reveal, and all that any judicious thinker would take upon him to maintain. This fact we are not at liberty to reject, merely because we may be incompetent to ascertain why and how it happens. If the phenomenon be a real one, we are bound by the dictates of common sense, as well as by the rules of sound philosophy, to receive it, however numerous and inexplicable may be the difficulties with which, to our short-sighted view, it appears to be attended.

We shall not extend to an undue length, the second division of our subject, by entering into an examination of the several scriptural passages which either assert or imply the natural corruption of our race. It is sufficient to remark, that this truth, in our estimation, is taught in our present text. It may be fairly deduced from the figure, which compares the fondness of the soul for iniquity, with one of the most importunate appetites of the body. What must be the moral condition of that being, who rushes on evil with as much avidity, as, in a paroxysm of thirst, we betake ourselves to the cooling fountain?—But apart from the testimony of holy writ, there

are some arguments sufficient, unless we greatly overrate their force, to establish the truth which we are attempting to defend.

The universal depravity of man has already been demonstrated. Now, we conceive, that the universality of human corruption, is itself a conclusive evidence that such corruption is natural. How else can it be satisfactorily explained? When we see that all men are more or less tainted with moral defilement, and when we find that every authentic historical document to which we can gain access, goes to show the existence of a similar state of things in all preceding ages of the world, how can we withhold our assent from the position, that our race is naturally depraved? Whence has it happened, that among all the millions of men that have lived and died within the range of nearly six thousand years, there has never been a solitary individual, except the more than human author of Christianity, respecting whom it might be affirmed, that he passed, we do not say the whole of his existence on earth, but even any given fractional part of such existence, without either doing something which he ought not to have done, or leaving undone something which he ought to have done—whence, we ask, has this happened, but from the natural depravity of human kind?

There is, indeed, a different mode, in which certain writers have sought to account for the fact to which we are now adverting—the universality of human corruption. They have referred, as already observed, such corruption to the influence of example. The principle of imitation they deem sufficient to explain the phenomenon. Now, we admit that man is an imitative being. We are by no means reluctant to grant, that evil examples have contributed very largely to the increase and extension of wickedness throughout the world. But then we contend, that

this circumstance is far from furnishing a cause adequate to the production of all the effects traced to it. Unless men were naturally depraved, they would be at least as ready to imitate good examples as bad ones. Yet we all know that such is not the case. Melancholy experience proves, that there is in the human mind a morbid proneness to imbibe the sentiments, contract the habits, and copy the general conduct of the vicious, rather than of the virtuous. Every attentive and candid observer must concede, that there are moral phenomena connected with our earliest mental operations, which the imitative principle will not explain. Children undoubtedly betray propensities of an unamiable kind, which this principle could have had no agency in creating.—And, after all, who does not perceive, that to impute the universal depravity of man to the influence of bad examples, is, as President Edwards, with his usual acuteness, remarks, “accounting for the thing by the thing itself?” It is, to explain “the corruption of the world by the corruption of the world.”

Another fact which has been urged to prove the native depravity of man, is, the sufferings and death of infants. We are not ignorant that some persons put on a supercilious air, and look exceedingly wise when this argument is brought into view. But to each of these sneerers we would say, as Eliphaz says to Job in the chapter whence our text is taken—“Art thou the first man that was born? or wast thou made before the hills? What knowest thou that we know not? or what understandest thou which is not in us?” Although we have no special regard for ancient opinions and arguments, merely because of their antiquity, any more than we have for the bones and other relics of reputed saints; yet we are not ashamed, even in these enlightened days, to take the old

ground, that the fact which we have mentioned, is best explained on the Scriptural principle, that every human being is "conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity." Death is the greatest physical evil to which humanity is exposed. The Bible represents it as the consequence and penalty of moral defection. In this light, too, philosophy must contemplate it, since reason forbids the idea, that the Deity inflicts on any of his intelligent creatures, misery, which they have, in no sense whatever, deserved. Now, a very large proportion—about one third—of mankind die in infancy. In other words, a vast multitude of human beings, incapable of personal transgression, are subjected to the punishment of sin. Can there be a stronger evidence, that these sufferers, though innocent as individuals, must belong to a race naturally depraved?

To this argument it is replied, that the death of infants is only a partial evil incidental to the operation of a general law. This is a point on the discussion of which our limits will not allow us to enter. We must, therefore, be content with remarking, that the death of infants, instead of being a mere exception to a general law, is itself a general law. And in support of this position, it is enough to refer to the extremely large proportion of those who die in infancy. When a human being commences his career, the chance is only as two to one, that he will live to become a moral agent.

But there is a further and more plausible objection to our present argument. We are told, that the death of infants may be viewed as a merciful dispensation, inasmuch as it early removes them from a scene of trial and sorrow, to a state of perfect purity and bliss. This objection, however, is readily answered. Death, in spite of all our efforts to foster a contrary persuasion, is a real evil—an

evil from which every living creature instinctively recoils. The amplest resources of philosophy fail to reconcile us to the idea of our own dissolution, or to that of our relatives and friends. The consolations of religion, it is true, are sufficient for this purpose. Yet even they, emanating, as they do, from the fulness of divine grace, are barely sufficient. Besides, although the parents, when hanging over the cradle of their infant, to witness its expiring agonies, and mark its last breath, may find some comfort in the thought, that it is on the eve of a happy transition—although they, by a strong act of faith, may hush every rising murmur, and devoutly say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord”—yet what has the little sufferer to mitigate its pangs, and diffuse serenity over its spirit? O! gladly would the mother whisper in its ear, that the conflict will soon be ended, and the sun-light of a glorious immortality break upon its view! With transport would she point the eye of its mind to the expanded arms of a Saviour—the same Saviour, whose precious saying we have, “Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” But impotent wish! Vain endeavour—Now, it matters not, that the pains of dissolution are short in duration, while the felicity that follows is eternal. The question still arises, Why is any suffering imposed on an innocent being? Why must the ordeal of death be passed by all of human kind, before possession can be had of the inheritance that fadeth not away?

We must not dismiss this part of our subject, without adding a word respecting the salvation of infants. It is the more necessary to be guarded and explicit on this point, because the notion has long been a prevalent one, that ministers of the particular church to which we belong,

hold, that some who die in infancy are lost. You may often hear it given, as one prominent article of their belief, that “there are children in hell not a span long.” Many is the good old orthodox preacher, to whom this charitable saying has been imputed by an offended hearer. And yet we have some doubts, whether it was ever really uttered by any one individual to express his own convictions on the subject. The fact is, not that any Calvinistic divine, so far as we know, positively believes in the damnation of infants, but that some—we trust not many—regard the question as a doubtful one, in respect to which a confident opinion ought not to be formed. We leave such cautious inquirers to the free possession and full enjoyment of their doubts; happy to adopt for ourselves a view of this matter less calculated to dishonour God, and to do violence to our own sensibilities. We do not scruple to say, as our mature impression, that to suppose any being not guilty of actual sin can be finally miserable, is utterly—nay, dreadfully inconsistent with rational and scriptural conceptions relative to the divine character and government. This is our most deliberate conviction. We are just as certain, that every dying infant shall be saved, as we are, that there is a God. And yet we firmly believe in the native depravity of man. We are persuaded, that the infant, with all its apparent and its real innocence, inherits a corrupt nature, though one which almighty grace may renew and sanctify. The young lion is as harmless as the new-born babe. And so is the young viper. But they both have, in their physical constitution, principles, which, when developed by time, must render them as terrible, and as noxious, as any of their species. In like manner, the infant, guiltless and lovely as it appears to every eye, possesses a moral constitution, which unless prevented by the occurrence of

death, must infallibly and speedily evolve the baneful elements of transgression.

There is a third circumstance to illustrate the native depravity of our race, which we shall merely mention in this place, as we have not time to dwell upon it. Do we not habitually associate with all our conceptions of virtue in man, the idea of effort, of restraint, of self-denial? Is it not unquestionable, that, in all our views on this subject—in all our plans for promoting our own moral improvement, and that of others—we proceed, unconsciously as it were, on the supposition, that the human being is not by nature inclined to be virtuous? When he becomes so, it is in consequence of some check voluntarily imposed on his passions and his conduct. But no effort, no restraint, no self-denial are wanted to render a person vicious. The argument flowing from this fact is a cogent one.

Not less cogent is the argument which we would derive, in the next place, from the little effect that moral suasion has had in meliorating the general character and condition of our unhappy race. Look, for example, at the renowned teachers of pagan antiquity. We know with what elegance and eloquence they illustrated the science, and enforced the duties of ethics. And yet they had almost no success whatever in promoting, on an extended scale, the cause of virtue. The world manifestly grew worse in their hands. Again, contemplate the impotency of moral writing, and even of evangelical preaching, in our own day. The ablest productions that issue from the press—the most energetic addresses that are delivered from the pulpit—utterly fail to produce impressions such as might be expected from them. The author is read—the orator is heard. But the reader—the hearer—is unamended. There is one fact connected with this point, to which we must not omit distinctly to refer, be-

cause we regard it as the strongest that can be adduced or conceived. We allude to the comparatively little effect that resulted immediately from the personal ministry of our divine Lord himself. He delivered the lessons of wisdom and of virtue, with a perspicuity and a majesty such as had never been witnessed in the synagogues of Judea, in the forum of Rome, or in the porticos of Greece. And yet how powerless an engine was moral suasion, even in the hands of him who spake as never man spake, when arrayed against the corruption of the human heart! His professed converts, after three years' labour, were few in number and humble in circumstances; and the same populace that had hung with rapture on his eloquence, thronged the judgment-hall of Pilate, exclaiming, *Crucify him, crucify him!*

An additional argument, and the last to which we shall appeal, in behalf of the native depravity of man, arises from the circumstance, that the temporal judgments of God contribute so feebly to the moral improvement of those by whom they are experienced. We might, did time permit, refer, in support of this position, to various scriptural facts; and particularly to the universal deluge—that greatest of all temporal judgments. But, brethren, instead of going back to ages long past, let us look at our own personal experience. Have we never been visited with temporal judgments from God? Has he never laid upon us his chastising rod? Has he not caused us to feel, in our own persons, a portion of his displeasure against sin? Has he not occasionally sent upon us sickness and pain, and terrified us with the prospect of a speedy summons to his dread tribunal? Or, if he has not done this, has he not removed from us some object on which our hopes and our affections were fixed? Has he not torn from our embrace some relative or friend, to whom we

were ardently attached? And what effect of a salutary kind, have these dispensations of his providence produced? Have they benefited our hearts? Have they altered the general complexion and prevailing tendency of our moral exercises? Have they diverted the current of our inclinations from their old channel? In one word, have they rendered us any better than we were before?—Alas! in too many instances they have not. And even where we cannot say that they have been wholly ineffectual, we must ascribe their beneficial results solely to the grace of God. We are, therefore, fully borne out in our position, that no temporal judgments, however overwhelming their nature, however long their duration, or however frequent their occurrence, do, of themselves, (independently of a sanctifying influence from on high,) meliorate, in any considerable degree, the moral condition of man. Now we apprehend that this circumstance, duly weighed, proves that the scriptural representations of human depravity are not overcharged.

We have not time, on this occasion, to examine the common objection to the doctrine of man's native depravity, that this doctrine is inconsistent with the divine purity and benevolence. It must suffice to remark, that it is precisely as difficult to reconcile the moral character of Deity, with the actual existence of sin in the world, as with the truth for which we are contending. And the same may be said of the objection to our doctrine, drawn from its supposed inconsistency with the moral agency of man. Besides, we recur to the position already laid down, that, if the native depravity of our race be a fact asserted by Scripture, and abundantly confirmed by reason and experience, (and we have shown that it is,) then we cannot, without rejecting the Bible, and trampling on the soundest maxims of science, refuse our credence, not-

withstanding that there may be difficulties connected with this truth, which baffle our efforts fully to explain them.

We have thus attempted to demonstrate the *universal*, *total*, and *native* corruption of our race. In doing this, we have realized the correctness of a remark made at the commencement of our discourse, that the subject is a humiliating one. It is mortifying to think, that we who possess faculties which raise us far above the irrational animals that surround us—we who are capable of ranging with a thirst for knowledge that is never saturated, the universe of matter, and the nobler universe of mind—we who were originally fashioned in our Maker's image, and endued with every qualification for his acceptable service, O! it is mortifying to think, that we should all have become so "abominable and filthy," as to "drink iniquity like water." Yet such is the melancholy truth. We have all, without a solitary exception, rebelled against the authority, and violated the laws, of the Lord our God. This, beyond controversy, is the character and condition of man—

"————— man ;

Sinful and weak, in ev'ry sense a wretch;
An instrument, whose chords upon the stretch,
And strain'd to the last screw that he can bear,
Yields only discord to his Maker's ear."

Many are the practical reflections which must arise on a review of this subject. But as so large a demand has already been made on your patience, we must confine our closing remarks to a single point. Is it so, that every human being is by nature totally depraved? Then there is surely nothing very extravagant or unreasonable in that evangelical doctrine, which asserts the necessity of a fundamental alteration in our moral frame, before we can be qualified to perform the will, and enjoy the smiles of our Maker. This doctrine perfectly accords with the

soundest deductions of philosophy. There are those, we well know, who regard the idea of a *new birth*, or *second creation*, on which the New Testament so strenuously insists, as only fit to be embraced by weak and canting enthusiasts. But we take our stand on the broad ground of common sense, and affirm, that, without a radical change of views, and feelings, and pursuits, a being naturally corrupt can never become virtuous and happy. And how is this great revolution to be effected? We answer, only by divine power. We admit that moral suasion may, in some instances, produce a partial and temporary reformation. We farther admit that it may even produce a partial reformation that shall be permanent. But it can do no more. It cannot regenerate the soul. It has no creative energy. Vainly does it issue its fiat—"Let there be light," across the dark chaos of man's heart. The mandate is an empty sound. No light rises into being. The gloom remains as thick and palpable as it was before. We repeat it—regeneration can be accomplished only by the agency of the almighty Spirit. The same power which gave existence to the human being at first, is requisite to new-model his depraved affections, and re-constitute his entire moral system.

But, brethren, we may admit the fact of man's natural corruption, and we may farther admit the doctrinal inference as to the necessity of regeneration, which has just been drawn from it—we may admit both these truths, as a matter of mere speculation, and yet be really in no better condition, as to our immortal interests, than those who will concede neither the one nor the other. The grand question is, Have we been born again? Have our souls been renovated by the power of the High and Holy One?—Let us entreat you, dear hearers, to urge this momentous query on your consciences. O! remember

that, without a change of heart, you must perish—perish for ever. Rest assured, that the threshold of heaven shall never be crossed by one individual of the human family, who has not been the subject of a second creation—in whom old things have not passed away, and all things become new. Without holiness—that holiness which has its origin in regeneration—no man shall see the Lord.

SERMON VIII.

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JEREMIAH II. 12, 13.

“Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”

Jeremiah commenced his ministry in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah. He was very young when called to the prophetic office, and on this ground would gladly have excused himself. “Ah, Lord God,” said he, “behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child.” This modest plea, however, could not be admitted by Jehovah. His language to Jeremiah was: “Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee, thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces; for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord.” We are told, that God then put forth his hand and touched the prophet’s lips, adding, “Behold, I put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out,

and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build and to plant.”

It was the lot of Jeremiah to sustain the prophetic office at a period in which the Jews had grown exceedingly corrupt. He was commissioned by God to reprove them for their abandonment of the divine ordinances, and to warn them, that, if they continued in their idolatrous practices, the severest national judgments would be the certain and the speedy consequence.

The prophet, speaking in the name of his God, here accuses his countrymen the Jews of two enormous sins; first, their abandonment of Jehovah; and second, their adherence to idols. The former is represented under the figure of their forsaking the fountain of living waters, and the latter under that of their hewing out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that could hold no water. Now, such conduct was surely unwise and criminal in no ordinary degree. It indicated the deepest ingratitude towards their best Benefactor. It likewise betrayed the most glaring disregard for their own truest interests. Well, therefore, might the inhabitants of heaven be solemnly called upon to contemplate it with astonishment and horror.

But the passage before us, though penned originally in reference to the ancient Jews, may be readily accommodated to the case of many in our own day. There are not a few at the present period, with regard to whom it may be affirmed, that they have done the identical thing here alleged against the idolatrous descendants of Abraham—that they have committed two evils; one in forsaking the fountain of living waters, that is, rejecting the gospel of Christ; and another in hewing out for themselves cisterns, that can hold no water, that is, relying for pardon and acceptance with the Deity, on views of

their own suggestion, and schemes of their own invention.

We have said, that the number of those who thus act, is considerable. By this assertion it is not intended to intimate that a formal and an avowed substitution of some other system of religion in the room of Christianity, prevails to any extent in our own country. Such an intimation would be incorrect. Infidelity, in the strictest sense of the term, has been going out of fashion for the last fifteen or twenty years. Our politicians, whose business it is to study the thermometer of public sentiment and feeling, are not now ambitious of the reputation of sceptics. They have generally no desire to display their familiarity with the writings of unbelievers. An honest Christian is no longer backward in saying, that he thinks the "Age of Reason," the production of an ignorant, a vulgar, and an impious mind. All this he may venture to assert without hearing in reply, that he should not speak harshly of one to whose services as a political writer our country is so much indebted, as if any thing could make amends for open, deliberate, and high-handed blasphemy, and as if the services in question had not been more than repaid by the very kind of consideration for which they were rendered.—The number of professed infidels, then, is now small. But the number of virtual infidels—of those who, whatever may be their theoretical views of the gospel, reject it in practice—is not small. We may presume, without a breach of charity, that there are such in the audience before us, and consequently, that the passage to which we would direct your attention this morning, is by no means inapplicable and inappropriate. May the Spirit of the Most High—the all-powerful Agent of salvation—accompany our remarks with his blessing!

The first sin condemned in our text, is that of “for-
saking the fountain of living waters,” or, as we propose
to understand the passage, “rejecting the gospel of
Christ.” The position which we lay down is this, that
the bare rejection of the Christian system, no matter what
may be the particular merits of the scheme substituted in
its stead, is a flagrant offence in the estimation of God—
an offence sufficient to ruin eternally the individual who
commits it—an offence of such a nature, that all the pure
beings in the universe look upon it with mingled emotions
of wonder and dismay.

We shall here take it for granted, that the gospel, or,
in other words, the system of religion exhibited in the
New Testament, is divine in its origin. Our limits will
not allow us to present even an outline of the various evi-
dences which might be urged in support of this truth.
We may confidently affirm, that they are quite sufficient
to produce the fullest conviction in every attentive and
impartial mind. Certain it is, that they obtained the
assent of Newton and Locke, two of the most illustrious
master-spirits of our race. We know, indeed, that some
have referred the faith of those great men to the influence
of prejudice, and that an infidel of the last century, dis-
tinguished for his wit, has adverted to Newton’s belief in
Christianity, as a signal instance of the occasional weak-
ness, into which intellects of the highest order may fall.
But we have no right to presume, that philosophers, in whom
cautiousness of inquiry and slowness of decision were
eminently characteristic traits, would yield a hasty cre-
dence to the gospel of Christ. All that we know of their
mental qualities and habits forbids us to suspect, that they
embraced the Christian system without a careful and
thorough investigation of the grounds on which it chal-
lenges the homage of mankind. They, no doubt, closely

examined, and maturely weighed, the proofs on which its claims to credibility rest. The evidences of its divine original they found perfectly satisfactory; and, therefore, the assent which they yielded to its truths, so far from being the offspring of prejudice, or from indicating an occasional failure of intellectual vigour, shows that they could scrutinize the merits of our religion, with the same spirit of sound and rigid philosophy, which had enabled them to explore so sublimely and luminously, the one the laws of matter, and the other the phenomena of mind. And we may add, that, while every one should think and conclude for himself on this momentous subject, the fact, that Newton and Locke were enlightened and firm believers in Christianity, may be regarded as a species of secondary evidence in behalf of the gospel's divine origin.

Now if the gospel be, as we assume that it is, an explicit and authoritative disclosure of the will of God, in relation to our present duties and our future destiny, who can doubt that the rejection of it is highly criminal? Will any one pretend to deny that we are solemnly bound to receive with gratitude and meek submission, any intimation of his pleasure which the Deity may think proper to afford us? Has he not an indubitable right to prescribe the mode in which we his fallen creatures shall approach his throne, and present to him our tribute of adoration and obedience? And if it be once ascertained that he has exercised this sovereign prerogative, in revealing a system of truths for the direction of our faith, and a code of laws for the government of our conduct, what more can be requisite to evince that they who discard or neglect such revelation, incur a fearful amount of guilt?

But there are those who say, "The gospel is, in many respects, above our comprehension, and even in those

particulars in which we do understand it, we cannot always discern the fitness and the excellence of what it inculcates. Now, are we to be accounted culpable for not adopting a system, which is either incomprehensible, or else repugnant to the dictates of our reason? Can we believe at pleasure? Is not faith an act of the mind, depending on circumstances entirely beyond our control, and, therefore, having as little connexion with moral character, as the height of our stature, the hue of our skin, or the colour of our hair?" Such is the miserable sophistry—the wretched special pleading—with which some men attempt to apologize for their rejection of the gospel. They forget that the question is not, whether the Christian system be perfectly comprehensible, and conformable in all its parts to our views of propriety—but simply, whether it has come from heaven, and is a revelation of the divine will? It does not occur to them, that their preconceived hostility to the theoretical truths, and the practical requirements of this system, may prevent them from duly appreciating the force of its claims to credibility. And when they affirm that unbelief is, in no case, criminal, they betray a signal want of discrimination; for surely the unbelief in respect to a matter of infinite moment, which results from prejudice, cannot be innocent. What would we think of a judge, who, as soon as a cause comes on for trial, should at once take up the opinion, that one of the parties, whose integrity he had previously doubted, was certainly in the wrong, and on this ground should either refuse to hear any evidence to the contrary that might be offered, or else attend to it negligently, and with a predetermination to find it irrelevant or inconclusive? We would have no difficulty in pronouncing such a man not only unfit for the official station which he occupied, but worthy of severe punish-

ment. And where, we should like to learn, is the difference between his conduct, and that of those who allow their prejudices to disqualify them for a proper investigation of the proofs in support of Christianity? There is none. We are therefore entitled to affirm, that the rejection of the gospel on the part of those who have access to the evidences in behalf of its divine origin, is criminal—yes, and criminal to the extent of sealing their everlasting destruction. Indeed, we can conceive of only one plea which they may urge in extenuation of their unbelief. They may allege that their understandings are too feeble to examine these evidences. But we would have them to know, that even this plea will not avail them, unless they can make it appear that they belong to that unfortunate portion of our race, from whom a mysterious providence withholds entirely the rational faculty. We have no doubt that the lowest degree of intellect, where the heart is in a proper state, will enable its possessor to believe the gospel. We are sensible, however, that the rejecters of this gospel, will smile at our simplicity in presuming that they would be likely to excuse their unbelief on the ground of mental imbecility. We have not to learn, that very different is the estimate which they form of their own powers, and that they are exceedingly prone to consider their lack of faith as a consequence, and, indeed, one of the best evidences of their great superiority.

Brethren, we need not detain you any longer on this point. We have said enough to convince you (if you are at all open to conviction) that the rejection of the gospel is highly criminal.—We proceed to remark, that its criminality is aggravated by the circumstance, that the schemes substituted in the room of the Christian system, are not such as the attributes of God, and the condition of man demand. In the language of our text, they are “cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”

It would be impossible, on this occasion, to examine in detail the various religious schemes adopted, either speculatively or practically, by those who reject the gospel of the Son of God. We shall confine our strictures to one leading principle, which appears to pervade all these schemes, and in which their error essentially consists. The grand objection to Christianity, on the part of those who withhold from it the homage of their cordial belief, is, that it represents the Deity as a being, whose purity and justice are such, that he cannot look upon any degree of sin with the least allowance—whose moral government is so constituted, as to render final misery the inevitable result of all unexpiated transgression. The generality of men do not like this scriptural view of the divine character. They prefer to contemplate God as a being whose sole attribute is mercy. They take it for granted, that there is ample resource for the vilest and most obdurate offenders, in the predominant and unlimited benevolence of his nature. They conceive, that their own ultimate happiness is secure, no matter what may be the course of conduct which they pursue on earth. Or, if they do not go quite the length of this monstrous supposition, they imagine that their Maker will condescend to overlook their occasional aberrations from rectitude, provided their general deportment be as correct as the imperfections of their present state will readily permit. They may not be disposed to contend in theory, that their virtues are sufficient to atone for their casual *failings*, as they would mildly denominate their vices; but they act as if they entertained some such opinion as this: and we hold, that a man's conduct is a better interpreter of his creed, than any profession which he may make.

It may be assumed, then, that the practical rejecters of the gospel, rely for acceptance with God, either wholly

or chiefly, on vague notions which they have embraced respecting the benevolence of his nature. The Deity of the Bible is too stern and vindictive for their taste. They would rather contemplate the Creator of the universe as a being who is all goodness, and who has determined to render his creatures, whether virtuous or vicious, ultimately happy. They sometimes affect quite an edifying strain of discourse, and tell us, that they do not approve the Christian system, because it makes too direct and strong an appeal to the selfish fears of the human heart—because it aims to influence the conduct, and form the character of man, as much by threatenings of punishment as by promises of reward. Their views, in one respect at least, coincide with those expressed by a female fanatic, whom a certain bishop is said to have met with fire in one of her hands, and water in the other. He asked her what was the import of those symbols. Her reply was, “My purpose is, with fire to burn paradise, and with water to quench the flames of hell, that men may serve God without the incentives of hope and fear, and purely for the love of God.” “But this good woman (observes the writer from whom we have taken the story) began at the wrong end. The love of God is not produced in us after we have contracted evil habits, till God with *his fan in his hand, hath thoroughly purged the floor*—till he hath cast out the devils, and swept the house with the instrument of hope and fear, and with the achievements and efficacy of mercies and judgments.”

Far be it from us to detract from the benevolence of Deity. God forbid that we should be induced, in our zeal to expose the insufficiency and the futility of the religious systems substituted in the room of the gospel, to advance a sentiment or utter a single syllable derogatory to the divine goodness! The gospel itself teaches us that

“God is love,” and the plan of redemption which it unfolds, is a most sublime and glorious display of benignity and mercy, on the part of the Father who gave his Son, and of the Son who voluntarily shed his blood, for the expiation of human guilt. In fact, our admiration for the Christian system arises chiefly from the circumstance, that it diffuses a brighter and more attractive lustre over the amiable perfections of the Godhead, than any other scheme which has yet been presented to mankind. It exhibits Jehovah as looking with the tenderest emotions on his fallen creatures—as employing all the resources of his matchless wisdom in the contrivance of a method for their rescue—as consenting to sacrifice his only-begotten and well-beloved Son for the accomplishment of the benign object which he had in view—as sending forth his Spirit to co-operate in the furtherance of such object—as devising a system of means through which he might make known to men the expedient invented for their relief, and urge them to the acceptance of the benefits provided for them—as manifesting the utmost forbearance towards those who neglect or despise these means, and at last consigning them to misery, only when they have become so hardened, that there is no longer any possibility of their amelioration. Yes, when we contemplate these prominent features of the gospel, we are prepared to say, that it spreads a moral beauty around the character of Deity, far transcending any with which the speculations of philosophers have been able to invest the divine nature.

But while we entertain the most exalted ideas of the benevolence of God, we cannot admit, that he is a being whose general and uncovenanted mercy affords a safe ground of confidence to the violators of his law. We cannot believe, that his goodness is of such a kind as to render him indifferent to the distinctions of moral charac-

ter among men. We should presume, that in him justice is an attribute as essential as clemency. The unsophisticated deductions of reason would lead to this conclusion. And when we look abroad upon the works of nature, we think that we behold a numerous and various class of facts, from which we may infer, that the Governor of the universe can inflict misery, as well as confer happiness. What means the volcano which emits its liquid fire, and dosolates a city in an instant? What means the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and what the destruction that wasteth at noon-day? What mean the whirlwind and the storm, that level with the dust the loftiest and firmest habitations of man, leaving man himself, the inhabitant, a part of the ruins? Tell us, soft and sentimental religionist, are these the doings of a God, whose only attribute is mercy, and who cannot, under any circumstances, be provoked to punish the guilty? It may be replied, that they are events which, though calamitous for a season, may contribute, in the end, to subserve the purposes of infinite benevolence. We admit the correctness of the suggestion. But we cannot see, that it furnishes any argument against the justice of Deity for which we are now contending. We can cheerfully subscribe to the doctrine of the poet, who, contemplating the universe as a stupendous whole, pronounces,

“All discord harmony not understood,
All partial evil universal good.”

But we must protest against the inference which some would deduce from this doctrine. Let us not suppose, that because God renders evil the means of producing eventual good, such evil is not, in any instance, to be regarded as an expression of the Divine displeasure against sin; or, in other words, as the penal consequence of transgression. The misery which overtakes the guilty, may

be instrumental in swelling the aggregate amount of general happiness in the universe. And yet this circumstance, while it tends illustriously to display the wisdom and the benignity of the Most High, is surely no evidence, that the amiable perfections which belong to his nature, may not co-exist in harmony with others of a sterner character. The moral government which he exercises over this world, so far as we can trace its operations and ascertain its principles, indicates a disposition to punish vice. Of the future state reason has no knowledge beyond the imperfect conjectures which the argument from analogy affords. These conjectures fully coincide with present observation, and thus leave upon the mind the impression, that justice, no less than goodness, has its influence in the divine administration.

Again, if the character of God, as delineated on the works of nature, does not correspond with what the rejecters of the gospel imagine, it is still more emphatically certain, that the character of God, as exhibited in his own Word, is totally at variance with the views which they entertain. The Deity of the Bible is a being whose benevolence does not absorb all his other perfections, but in whom mercy and justice, goodness and severity, are awfully and gloriously combined. He is full of compassion for the miserable, and of forbearance towards the disobedient. And yet he "will by no means clear the guilty." The history of his dealings with man, recorded in the sacred volume, furnishes the amplest evidence, that while he desires the happiness of our race, and "has no pleasure in the death of the wicked," he utterly abhors sin, and cannot do other than punish the sinner. Behold the expulsion of our first parents from the garden which they had profaned by their disobedience. Behold the antediluvian world rendered desolate for the

guilt of its inhabitants. Behold the cities of the plain consumed by fire from heaven, because ten righteous persons could not be found within their walls. Behold the signal disasters inflicted, at different periods, upon the Jews for their idolatry. Do not these, and numberless facts of a similar kind, with which we are all familiar, abundantly demonstrate, that they who rely for acceptance with Jehovah, on the general benevolence of his nature, are “hewing out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water?”

Upon the whole, the gospel presents you, dear hearers, with the only secure basis on which to rear your hopes for eternity. It teaches you, that the Deity who is just, as well as good, has devised a plan by which he can exercise his goodness towards our fallen race, without doing violence to his justice. To use its own language, than which none could be more expressive, it shows us how “God can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” This wonderful contrivance of Heaven for the benefit of earth, has removed every obstacle to the display of the divine benignity. It has opened a fountain broad and deep and full, from which the living waters of salvation may be dispensed, without money and without price, to perishing men.—Blessed, thrice blessed, is he who repairs to this fountain! Wretched beyond expression is he who forsakes it!

The passage of Scripture to which we have now endeavoured to direct your attention, ought to awaken the deepest anxiety in the bosom of every individual who is conscious that he has not humbly submitted to the terms of the gospel. It has been shown that his conduct is criminal in a very high degree. The inhabitants of heaven are here called upon to behold it with amazement and consternation. And what offence, we would ask, can be

greater than that of rejecting blessings which God has purchased for mankind, by the mysterious sacrifice of his own Son? Let us suppose that a culprit has been condemned to death, and that at the very moment when all things are in readiness for his execution, he is informed of a plan devised for his rescue—a plan, the accomplishment of which was attended with vast expense to the dispenser of pardon, but of which the dying man may at once avail himself, on certain conditions reasonable and easy to be complied with. Would we not think it the extreme of fatuity in such a culprit to refuse the boon of life thus tendered to his acceptance? Would we not look upon his refusal as an indignity to the chief magistrate who had so kindly interposed for his relief? And yet this imaginary case affords only a faint emblem of the folly and the guilt of him who neglects the great salvation provided in the gospel, and resolves to risk his eternal destiny upon views of the divine character and of human duty, for which he has no higher sanction than the dictates of his own erring reason.

Permit us, dear hearers, to urge upon you, one and all, the prompt and cordial acceptance of the blessings proffered in this gospel, which it is our business to preach. Believe us, Christianity is the only system of faith that can administer effectual solace under the severe trials of life. And it is the only system which can sustain and comfort you in the terrific hour of death. Ah! you will then find, that those vague impressions of the divine benevolence, on which you now so confidently rest, will not do to die by—will not meet the exigences of the departing spirit. We are sure, impenitent sinner, that when you are trembling on the brink of the eternal world, you will wish that you had received and obeyed the gospel of the Son of God—you will see the emptiness of those cis-

terns which you had hewed out for yourself, and bitterly regret that ever you forsook the fountain of living waters.

We entreat you, then, rejecters of our gospel, to pause and reflect upon the fearful consequences of your present career. Certain and overwhelming destruction lies at a short distance before you. The only opportunity of escape is rapidly passing away. Yes, the day of salvation flies apace. The *night*, in which *no man can work*, must soon set in. A few more months or years like the past, will land you in the world of wo.—But what are we saying? The sun may not go down before the angels of heaven, who would gladly have celebrated your conversion, shall take up their harps to sound the dirge of your perdition—and will you, *can* you, dear hearers, still resolve to forsake “the fountain of living waters?” We trust not. Come, then, to this fountain, and partake of its contents. O! come without delay, and drink, and live for ever.

SERMON IX.



JOHN III. 36. (Last Clause.)

“ — He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

MAN, as a moral agent, always acts in the view, and under the influence of motives. It is through the instrumentality of these, that his character and conduct are operated on by the God who made him.

The system of truths exhibited in the Bible, is simply a scheme of motives, devised by infinite wisdom and good-

ness, with a view to influence the conduct of men as religious beings. We entirely mistake the nature and design of God's revelation, if we contemplate it in any other light than this. All the facts related—all the doctrines taught—all the promises of good, and threatenings of evil, contained in the inspired record,—are neither more nor less than so many motives, which our Creator has been pleased to present to our consideration, as the means of reclaiming us from sin and consequent misery.

Of these motives, one of the most solemn and impressive, is furnished in the text which we have just read to you. It is here declared, in reference to any and every one who does not believe on Christ, that he "shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

We shall not take up your time to-day with any critical and explanatory remarks on the phraseology of the text. We presume that you are all sufficiently conversant with the general scope of doctrine and style of diction that prevail in the New Testament, to comprehend the proposition involved in this passage. You are aware that faith in the Son of God is the grand condition on which the blessings of the gospel are tendered to human acceptance, and can therefore be at no loss in perceiving, that what our divine Lord here teaches us is briefly this,—that the man who has not faith, must be miserable for ever.

The text before us, then, might be considered as presenting two prominent topics of reflection; first, the importance of faith, and second, the perpetuity of future suffering. We shall confine our remarks this morning to the latter of these topics; and we ask your candid and serious attention, while we undertake, for a few minutes, to show that the punishment which God has denounced in his word, against all who persist in unbelief, shall be

absolutely interminable in its duration. It affords us no sort of pleasure, dear hearers, to bring forward and dwell upon a subject of this description. But we should be awfully delinquent in faithfulness to the Master by whose authority we stand before you, did we forbear to urge the most solemn and cogent of those motives to a virtuous and pious life, which he has placed at the disposal of his ministering servants. Yes, however grating to our sensibilities may be the thought, that any of our fellow beings, and particularly, that any of our personal friends—any of the men and women whom we esteem and love on earth—are destined to dwell with devouring flames, and lie down in everlasting burnings, it is still our duty to assert, with distinctness and emphasis, a truth which God, for the most important, and there would be no incongruity in adding, the most benevolent purpose, has thought proper to disclose.

It is not to be wondered at, that this truth has been so often and so strenuously denied. The sinner is naturally reluctant to admit, that the course which he delights to pursue, shall terminate in endless wo. He attempts to silence and to soothe his conscience in some such way as this: "All the harm," says he, "that I ever do, is done to myself. The Being who formed me can sustain no real injury by my aberrations from the line of strict rectitude. He is merciful and indulgent in his disposition. He surely cannot be so cruel as to render me miserable for ever, simply for yielding to the impulse of passions which he himself has implanted in my nature. He must desire the happiness of all his creatures, and what he desires he certainly will be able, in the end, to accomplish."

Thus it is that the wicked endeavour to persuade themselves that the notion of perpetual sufferings is a mere fable, invented to terrify weak and superstitious minds.

It is, moreover, a lamentable fact, that even good men, distinguished less for strength of intellect than for suavity of disposition, have been led, in some instances, to embrace the doctrine which supposes, that all the partakers of our common nature shall be raised ultimately to a state of perfect and unending bliss.

There are two modifications of this doctrine, each of which has its advocates. Some imagine, that there is no punishment at all in the future world; while others admit, that the wicked are to be punished, for a limited period, after death, and restored, through the medium of such penal discipline, to the favour and enjoyment of their Maker.

The former of these schemes—that which supposes that there is no punishment whatever in the future world—has been defended with particular diligence, and propagated with untiring zeal, in many sections of our own country, during the last fifteen or twenty years. The modern assertor of universal salvation generally adopts this view of the subject. The judgment, he contends, is past already, and the penal effects of sin consist wholly in the afflictions incident to our present state. We deem it unnecessary to employ much time in pointing out the absurdity of such a doctrine as that which we have now stated. Indeed, we are at a loss to conceive how any sensible and candid observer of human life can seriously maintain, that this world is a state of retribution. What! is it a fact, that men are happy or miserable here, precisely in proportion to their deserts? We leave it to the common sense, and the common honesty of every individual in this assembly to answer the question.—Besides, we should really like to know how death, which, so far as we can understand it, is merely a dissolution of the union that had subsisted between the body and soul, can produce an essential change in the moral character of men; and with-

out such a change we may confidently pronounce, that not a few of those who die must be more or less unhappy. There is nothing in the ordinary circumstances under which we pass from the present to a future condition of being, to rectify the sentiments and feelings which we have here cherished, and to alter the habits which we have here formed. It is not, therefore, to be presumed, that death ushers all men, no matter what may have been their character and conduct in this world, into a state of perfect purity and consummate felicity. We may venture to affirm, that, so long as the principles of the divine government remain what they are—so long as God himself continues what he is—a bad man cannot be happy, in the proper sense of the term. And we repeat it, that the change which death induces in the mode of our existence, is not a moral process by which a bad man is rendered good.—And, after all, is there not something incongruous—something revolting to our instinctive conceptions of rectitude and fitness—in the idea, that the virtuous and the vicious—the benefactors of their race, and those who have lived only to disgrace and injure society—shall become alike the participants of joy, immediately on their departure hence? One individual, for example, may die in the very act of praising his Maker, or rendering an important service to a fellow being, while another may close his career, uttering curses on the God who made him, or inflicting the deepest injury on some member of the community to which he belonged. And will any one, in moments of sober and honest reflection, imagine, that both these persons enter into the same state of felicity?—We might further insist on the pernicious practical tendency of the doctrine which we oppose. It requires no profound acquaintance with human nature to discern, that this doctrine is calculated to destroy every incentive to virtue,

and, consequently, to exert an influence incalculably deleterious to social order and happiness. In fact, we should be loth to repose the least confidence in a man who holds, that every human being passes, at death, into a condition of high and interminable enjoyment. A judicious moralist is reported to have once said to a lady who was speaking of the infidel principles entertained by a certain person with whom she was on intimate terms—"Madam, if your friend has no belief in a future state, I can only advise you, when he leaves you, to *count your spoons.*" How much more appropriate would be this advice, in relation to one who professes to believe, not that thieves, as well as adulterers and murderers, are to be annihilated when they die—but that thieves, as well as adulterers and murderers, are to be unspeakably and eternally blessed beyond the grave!

Brethren, we feel as if we had not yet spoken in terms sufficiently strong, of the fatal consequences likely to result from this doctrine. We have never heard, nor can we conceive, of any sentiment half so dangerous. Its general prevalence, as an article of the popular creed, would at once tear up society by the roots. The infidel scheme of annihilation, which wrought such horrors during the French revolution, is not near so bad. You had better tell men that the soul perishes with the body, than that future felicity shall be the certain and immediate portion of all who die. Yes, it were far safer to label upon the tomb, "Death is an eternal sleep," than to write over it, "Death is the broad gate to heaven." There is something in the thought of utter extinction repugnant to the feelings even of the most depraved, and they embrace it only as a less disagreeable alternative than the idea of future misery. The soul "shrinks back upon itself, and startles at destruction." But the promise of

instant and interminable happiness, addresses itself to all the instinctive sympathies of the human being, and is therefore calculated to become the most fatal instrument that diabolical ingenuity ever devised for the ruin of our erring race.—We rejoice that there is a native and an unconquerable energy in conscience, which, in most cases, will impair the influence of this pestilent doctrine—that every man carries that within his bosom, which will sometimes compel him, in the midst of business and of pleasure, to fear the retributive judgments of his Maker. And we thank God, that he has taught us with so much perspicuity in his word, that he will not fail to distinguish, after death, between them that serve him, and them that serve him not—that it will be far from him, as the Judge of all the earth, to confound the righteous and the wicked.

The second modification of the doctrine of universal salvation, is by far the more plausible, and we are utterly astonished that any should have abandoned it for the one which we have just mentioned. According to this scheme, the wicked are to endure some punishment in the future world, but punishment limited in duration, and designed to prepare them for ultimate felicity.—Let us next inquire how far such a view of the subject is sustained by the dictates of reason, and the representations of Scripture.

The asserters of universal salvation, have invariably founded their system on mistaken notions relative to the divine benevolence. They have entirely lost sight of the justice of Deity—an attribute certainly not less essential to the perfection of his nature than goodness. Now, there is one remarkable passage in the Bible, which, had it been duly attended to, would have been enough to prevent any fallacious conceptions with regard to a subject of such vast importance. When Jehovah passed before

Moses on Sinai, he proclaimed himself—"the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin"—but, lest this detail of the lovely attributes of God should induce us to imagine that he is a Being whose administration is carried on irrespective of justice, it is added in the very same sentence—"and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation." Hence we learn that mercy can never be extended, on the part of God, to the violators of his law, in a manner derogatory to the sacred and imperious claims of justice. Those claims must, in every instance, be fully and rigidly satisfied. The great Ruler of the universe cannot do other than right. The individual who founds his expectations of future felicity, on vague notions of the divine benevolence, trusts to an unstable and a treacherous basis, which may one day sink from beneath him, like the sudden and tremendous fall of an Alpine avalanche.

In contending for the perpetuity of future suffering, we shall not take the ground which many have taken, that sin is an infinite evil, and therefore deserves infinite punishment. Indeed, it appears to us rather unfortunate, that such a ground should ever have been assumed by those who have combated the doctrine of universal salvation. We shall not, however, detain you with a discussion of this intricate subject. We are afraid that we could not enter on a discussion of this kind, without neglecting the counsel of the apostle, who would have us to "avoid foolish questions."

The advocates of universal salvation, who admit that any punishment awaits the wicked in a future state, contend that such punishment will be wholly of a corrective

kind—that is, designed gradually to ameliorate the condemned sinner, and lead him to repentance and to happiness. But the Scriptures, in our apprehension, exhibit a different view of this subject. They seem to us to represent the sufferings of the finally impenitent as the effect of the divine displeasure against transgression—a display of justice on the part of the august Sovereign of the universe. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” In another passage, Jehovah exclaims, “If I whet my glittering sword, and my hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and reward them that hate me.” Now, we would inquire, whether these, and similar passages in which we read of God’s pouring out his fury on his adversaries, do not clearly imply, that the infliction of vindictive punishment is by no means inconsistent with the benignity of the divine perfections?

But more than this.—We cannot conceive, that there is any thing in the nature of punishment which has a tendency to lead its subject to sincere and effectual penitence. We can easily imagine, that torments may cause the sinner to dread and to hate the Being from whose hand they proceed. But we see not how they can beget in his soul genuine and pungent contrition for his offences. This kind of repentance is described in the inspired record as resulting from the *goodness*, not the vengeance, of the Lord. What human father ever reclaimed an erring son by penal discipline alone? Kindness and severity judiciously combined, may have a salutary effect. But mere and unmitigated chastisement will only tend to break down the spirit of a child, to extinguish the sense of shame in his bosom, and thus to promote his ruin, instead of his reform. And so, in the future world, the malignity and exasperation of the sufferer must increase in a direct ratio with the amount and intensity of the woes which are heaped upon him.

The universalist contends, that a portion of our race are to be recovered from sin and misery, through the instrumentality of penal discipline in the future world. Now, it is at least remarkable, that the language of the New Testament in reference to human salvation, seems to be wholly unaccommodated to the peculiar circumstances of such individuals. Thus, we read, "By grace are ye saved through faith;" but, if our memory serves us, there is no passage which says, "By severity are ye saved through suffering." Again, the apostle writes, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us;" but he no where writes, unless we are much mistaken, "Christ hath imposed on us the curse of the law, intending to cast us down to hell for a season when we die." The same apostle thus expresses himself, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ;" but he does not exclaim, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will curse us with all spiritual cursings in infernal places in Christ, that we may at last be happy." Those who shall be elevated to honour and felicity, without passing through the ordeal of hell, may properly sing, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever." But the ransomed prisoners of Tophet will have to raise a very different song throughout eternity. Their strains, we should suppose—for the Scriptures really leave us to conjecture on the subject—will be somewhat in this style: "Unto him that damned us, and purified us from our sins, in the devouring fire of the infernal pit, be glory and dominion for ever and ever."—Brethren, we leave you to pursue this argument for yourselves, and we venture to predict, that the farther you advance, the more

decided and irresistible will be your conviction, that there is but one method of salvation, and that is, by the grace of God, through the atoning death of his Son, and the sanctifying agency of his Spirit.

There has been not a little discussion in respect to the Hebrew and Greek terms, which, in the common translation of the Bible, are rendered *everlasting*, *eternal*, and *for ever*. It has been strenuously maintained, that these words do not express duration absolutely perpetual. That they are sometimes applied to objects whose being is limited and transitory, is the basis of the Universalist's argument. Thus we read of "everlasting hills;" and so we are told that "the earth abideth for ever," and that the slave, who, as a token of his willingness to continue in servitude, submitted his ears to the awl of his Jewish master, became thereby bound to serve him "for ever."

Now, we shall at once concede, that the original terms for "everlasting," "eternal," and "for ever," do not always express duration strictly interminable. Neither do the English words. The poet, for instance, speaks of the mountain whose summit "is white with *eternal* snows." And what does he mean, when he thus speaks? Why simply this, that the snow, instead of disappearing before the suns of summer, continues throughout the entire year. In like manner, by the "everlasting hills," of which mention is made in the Bible, we are to understand hills whose existence is co-extensive with that of the globe on which they are erected. They, as well as the snow, are styled "everlasting," because they are to last as long as it is possible, in the nature of things, that they should last.

But although the Hebrew and Greek terms for "everlasting," "eternal," and "for ever," are sometimes used in reference to objects of limited existence, they are also employed, in numerous cases, to express duration that

can never come to a close. For example, these epithets are applied to the being of the Deity himself. Thus, we read, that "Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the EVERLASTING GOD." Again, "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the EVERLASTING GOD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?" Moreover, Jehovah is styled, "the king ETERNAL, immortal, and invisible." The same terms are likewise used to denote the perpetuity of future blessedness. Thus it is said, "And these (the wicked) shall go away into EVERLASTING punishment, but the righteous into life ETERNAL." Now on this passage it is particularly worthy of remark, that the Greek terms rendered by the two English words, "everlasting" and "eternal," are one and the same. Hence we must infer, that the happiness of heaven, and the misery of hell—the joys of the redeemed, and the agonies of the lost—are to continue throughout equal periods of time. It appears to us that there is no avoiding this conclusion.

Let us, however, consent to waive, for the sake of argument, all those passages of Scripture in which the terms in question occur, and then see if we cannot find other passages, to which no ambiguity can possibly be imputed. And first, we might insist on our present text—"He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God ABIDETH on him." This solemn declaration of Christ, the faithful and true Witness, certainly implies that the punishment of unbelief is to be perpetual. The New Testament, too, exhibits negative language on the subject of future sufferings, wholly incompatible with the idea that such sufferings shall ever end. Thus the Saviour informs us, that the wicked shall be consigned to hell, "where their worm dieth NOT, and their fire is NOT

quenched." He tells us also, that when the Proprietor of the universe shall, at the last day, send forth his reapers, for the purpose of collecting his harvest, "He will gather his wheat into the garner, and will burn the chaff with UNQUENCHABLE fire." The Universalist, it will be observed, understands by "unquenchable fire," in this place, *fire that is to be quenched*. Again, "NOT every one (exclaimed the Redeemer) that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." On another occasion, we find him thus addressing the Jews—"Ye shall die in your sins, and whither I go ye CANNOT come." The Son of God likewise speaks of some, "whose END is to be BURNED." Such an expression, it has been well observed, clearly denotes, that the *final* condition of the unhappy individuals alluded to, is to be a *state of burning*. Moreover, we read, that after the general judgment it will be said, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust STILL; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy STILL." This language, naturally interpreted, conveys the idea, that a period is approaching, when delivery from the guilt, and recovery from the pollution, of sin, shall be no longer possible. Of course it inculcates the perpetuity of future misery.

We come now to consider one of the most plausible of the arguments by which the doctrine of universal salvation has been defended. It has been said, that the forgiveness of men by God, after the judgment, may be compared to the pardon of criminals who have been tried, and found guilty of violating some human law. The power of conferring such pardon, we know, is generally vested in the executive departments of earthly governments. And why, it has been asked, may we not suppose that a similar prerogative belongs to the supreme Ruler of the universe?

In entering on the consideration of this argument, we may take the opportunity to say, that not a few enlightened and benevolent men have doubted the expediency of giving to any magistrate the power of staying the execution of law against a convicted malefactor. It would certainly be better for society, if such a power were never exercised, unless in cases of a very extraordinary kind. When it is known that the demands of justice are inexorable—that there is no possibility of escape from the penalty of transgression—a restraint is imposed on the vicious portion of mankind, which, under different circumstances, cannot exist.

With this preliminary observation, we shall go on to show that there is far less force in the argument which we have mentioned, than most persons would at first imagine.

Why is it that the power of pardon is lodged with the executive of human governments? We answer, in order to remedy the imperfections of laws, which cannot be adapted to the circumstances of every particular case that may occur; or, with a view to provide for sudden and extraordinary emergencies. The exercise of this power is, indeed, discretionary with the chief magistrate. But it is always presumed that he will not, except for what he deems good and sufficient reasons, extend his lenity to the criminal who has been regularly tried, and justly convicted. If he should, without such reasons, and from a mere impulse of sympathy, arrest the execution of a violated law, he betrays a degree of weakness unbefitting his elevated and responsible station, and abuses the authority with which he is clothed.

Let us, then, examine for a single moment, the various cases in which the pardon of an offender in human society may appear adviseable, and then inquire whether similar cases can occur in the divine government.

First, laws framed by short-sighted and fallible men, must always be more or less imperfect. If, when they were enacted, they seemed expedient, and it was hoped that their operation would be salutary, yet experience may not realize the anticipation. In an emergency of this kind, the chief magistrate might think it his duty to exercise the prerogative of clemency with which he is invested. But no such case, it is very certain, can present itself in the government of God. His laws are the offspring of infinite wisdom. They were enacted by One to whom the future is as clearly and fully known as the past.

Again, the executive of human government may be induced to exercise the prerogative of pardon, for reasons like the following, viz. The trial of the person condemned may have been marked by some illegality or informality; the witnesses may not have been competent or credible; the judges may have been hasty and incorrect in their decisions; popular prejudice may have exerted an undue influence on the jury; or, circumstances may have been brought to light, after the close of the trial, to palliate the guilt of the accused, or even to furnish strong presumption of his innocence. But every one must at once discern, that no such reasons for the pardon of condemned sinners, can be relevant in the perfect government of that God, who is intimately acquainted with the entire moral history of every human being.

A third case may be imagined, in which the executive might think proper to interpose his prerogative of forgiveness. The execution of the laws may be attended with danger to the community. The criminal may be connected with families of wealth and influence, and his friends, rising up in his behalf, may demand his pardon. His fate may be so linked with the interests and the hopes of a formidable faction, as to render his release from justice

a measure of political expediency. But is there, we ask, a possibility of the like emergency occurring to hinder the execution of the divine laws? Tell us, has God any thing to dread from the resentment of friends, or the violence of party feelings, when he signs the death-warrant of a convicted offender? Surely not. His power is infinite. Yes, and were millions upon millions of sinners throughout the universe to combine, and present themselves, in haughty and menacing array, before his throne, demanding the forgiveness of some brother culprit, he would only laugh at their puny insolence, and reiterate with tenfold sternness and vehemence, his mandate, "Let justice have its course."

But we need pursue this subject no farther at present. Enough, it may be presumed, has been said to convince you all, that in respect to the extension of pardon to condemned criminals, no analogy can be conceived to subsist between human governments and the divine government.

A further, and, we think, a decided objection to the doctrine of universal salvation, arises from its injurious tendency as a practical principle. What possible good, we should like to know, can result to men as individual or social beings, from this doctrine? Is it calculated to render them better, or worse? Will it, in any way, promote the cause of virtue, or contribute to the advancement of piety? Who can expect, that those who hope ultimately to enjoy the favour of the supreme Being, no matter what may be their character and conduct on earth, will be likely to abandon the pursuits of sin, and lead an upright, a temperate and a devout life? Is it not much more probable—much more consonant with the usual order of things—that men, relieved from the apprehension of endless wo, as the consequence of their transgressions, will give themselves up to the dominion of their passions,

determined not to forego present indulgence on account of some years of future misery? And is it not an undeniable fact, that the believers—yes, and with few exceptions, the preachers—of universal salvation, generally exhibit a tenour of deportment little conformable to the precepts and the spirit of the New Testament? They act out their principles, and dreading no punishment hereafter, or, at any rate, punishment, which compared to a succeeding eternity of bliss, does not deserve the name, they are prepared to assume, as the polar star of their earthly career, the Epicurean maxim, “Let us live while we live.” No sensible man, not absolutely lost to virtue, would wish his wife, his daughter, or his son to be an universalist.

We close our argument with one more brief remark. Of the two doctrines—that which asserts, and that which denies, the eternity of future punishment—one must necessarily be erroneous. The schemes are directly opposed, and, of course, both cannot be true. Allow us, then, to put the question, Which of these opinions is the safer one? To believe in the perpetuity of future suffering, even should the tenet be unfounded, can be attended, so far as we see, with no disastrous consequences. But to believe in universal salvation, and, on this ground, neglect the means of securing an interest in Christ, may undo the human soul for ever!

Brethren, we must not leave you to-day, without distinctly reminding you, that it is far from being enough to have a theoretical conviction of the truth on which we have now insisted. We know not, that any of you are *speculative* universalists. But we may be sure, that some of you are *practical* universalists. You may not profess to think, that all men eventually shall be saved. But you live as if you thought so. Permit us, then, to urge upon

your consciences, the solemn declaration of our Lord in this text. He here affirms, in language the clearest and most express, that every individual who believes not on the Son of God, shall be wretched throughout eternity. On such an individual the wrath of Jehovah must abide. Each moral agent in this congregation who dies in impenitence and unbelief, must bid, not only a long, but a final adieu to peace and happiness. How powerful the motive which hence arises to a virtuous and pious life! Some, we are aware, pretend, that a religion which seeks to impel men to duty, by menaces of endless woe, makes too broad and direct an appeal to the selfishness of human nature. But a similar objection lies, in all its force, against a religious system which should seek to allure men to duty simply by promises of imperishable felicity. The fact is, that the dread of evil, and the desire of good, are virtually the same principle. Nor is there any impropriety in appealing to this principle, when we attempt to enforce the requisitions of the gospel. The apostle Paul, "knowing the terrors of the Lord," endeavoured to "persuade men." And what he did, let no succeeding preacher of the cross hesitate to do. We pray you, therefore, dear hearers, to flee from the wrath to come, by believing, and that without delay, on the Son of God. O! neglect not this golden opportunity of escape from eternal misery. You are now invited to secure an interest in Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of sinners. Accept the invitation, and you shall be happy for ever. Reject the invitation, and you shall not see life, but the wrath of God must abide upon you. Such is the fearful alternative. We here leave you to your choice. The responsibility is your own. Whatever may be the result, the justice of Jehovah is clear, and every virtuous intelligence in the universe shall approve his sentence.

SERMON X.



LUKE X. 42.

“But one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.”

THE occasion which led to the utterance of these words on the part of our divine Lord—for they are his—may be briefly stated.—As he was going about doing good, he arrived at a place not very distant from Jerusalem. This was the village of Bethany, about two miles east of the sacred city, in which Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus, resided. From what is to be gathered out of the New Testament respecting this interesting family, it has been conjectured, that Martha was a widow, with whom her brother and sister, both unmarried, lived. An intimacy and a mutual attachment seems to have subsisted between the Saviour and them, and he was more than once their visitant and guest. In the instance now before us, a circumstance occurred, developing the respective characters of the two sisters. Jesus appears to have commenced, soon after entering the house, an address to those who were present—for numbers always followed his footsteps—on the momentous things pertaining to the kingdom of God. It was his uniform practice, we know, to speak a word in season, as often as the opportunity was afforded, to all who were disposed to become his auditors. Mary, it would seem, took a seat near to him, and listened with profound attention, to the instructive lessons that emanated from his lips. In the mean time Mar-

tha was deeply immersed in household duties, striving to evince her respect and affection for the Messiah, by exhibiting a sumptuous meal for his entertainment. Thus busily employed, her mind was distracted with a variety of cares, and she could not help betraying the peculiar weakness incident, in such an emergency, even to the gentlest female nature. Although in the presence of her Redeemer, she was unable to preserve that equanimity which is so frequently lost amid the multiplicity of domestic concerns. Chagrined that Mary sat at ease, and did not contribute to lighten her burden, she had so little self-command, as to disregard every dictate of propriety, and prefer a pitiful complaint about the matter to their distinguished Friend. "Lord," said she, "dost thou not care, that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her, therefore, that she help me." This peevish and highly unbecoming remark drew from Jesus a reproof which Martha herself, in a cooler interval, must have been conscious was deserved. We are told by the sacred historian, that he answering "said unto her, Martha, Martha"—this repetition of the name rendered the rebuke which it prefaced still more pointed—"thou art careful and troubled about many things." Then follows the text: "But one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her."

The reader of this passage, who follows only his own common sense in ascertaining its import—and a better guide is seldom to be had—imagines, that he fully understands its scope and design. He conceives, that Jesus here represents religion—the care of the soul—as the one thing needful, and further teaches, that this thing, or, in other words, the blessings which it confers, shall not be taken away from those who make it their deliberate and constant choice. But—wonderful to relate—there are

those who confidently affirm, that an entirely different explanation is to be given of the text. They gravely inform us, that the object of the Saviour, in what he said, was merely to excuse Mary from aiding her sister, by assuring Martha that he had no desire for so great a variety of dishes as she was ambitious of preparing, and would be perfectly contented with a plain and frugal meal, such as could be most easily provided. According to the views of these deep-searching expositors, the language of our Lord may be paraphrased in this manner: "One dish will be quite enough. I ask for no more. Mary has done well in preferring a seat near to me, where she may enjoy the benefit of my instructions, to uniting with you in the vexatious cares of culinary occupations. The part which she has chosen, is a wise and good one, and shall not be taken away from her. Let her therefore sit still, and hear what I am saying." Of this exposition, notwithstanding the plausibility with which some ingenious writers have endeavoured to invest it, we must unhesitatingly assert, that it is truly what the judicious and pious Matthew Henry styles it, "a low" and "forced construction put upon" the passage.

The Saviour, then, here teaches us that there is *one thing* which is emphatically *needful*. What this *one thing* is, may be inferred with sufficient clearness from the second clause of the text, where he speaks of Mary's having chosen the good part which should not be taken away from her. A comparison of the two members of the sentence leads to the conclusion, that the "one thing needful" is the same with the *good part* which *Mary* had *chosen*. Now we have already seen what her choice was. She preferred spiritual to temporal concerns. She deemed it better to sit at the feet of her Lord, and imbibe the heavenly lessons which he delivered, than to lose the

golden opportunity which his presence afforded, of becoming more "wise unto salvation," by withdrawing from his company, and busying herself about matters comparatively trivial. She acted judiciously. Her conduct was commendable. It deserves universal imitation. The same thing which was pre-eminently needful for her, is equally so for every human being. In short, to adopt the first lines of a well-known hymn—

"Religion is the chief concern
Of mortals here below."

We must not, however, infer from the language of our Lord on this occasion, that the concerns of our souls cannot be adequately attended to without the neglect of our secular occupations. There is no warrant in the text before us, nor in any other portion of the inspired record, for such an exclusive and absorbing attention to the business of religion, (momentous and all-important though it is,) as incapacitates us for the discharge of inferior duties. In fact, religion itself is not only neglected, but outraged, by those who would make it a cloak for indolence, seeking to excuse themselves from temporal pursuits, under the pretence that their minds are too deeply engrossed with transactions of a spiritual nature. In this sense, there is certainly such a thing as being "righteous overmuch." In seasons of high religious excitement, individuals, and perhaps females more particularly, are liable to be carried beyond the bounds of moderation, and to dissipate their thoughts and their time in a round of almost uninterrupted attendance on the exercises of public and social devotion. This circumstance is one of those which unhappily have furnished some ground for the reproach which scoffers have attempted to bring upon what are called "revivals." These are undoubtedly great blessings to the sections of the church to which they are

vouchsafed. But, like all the other bounties of heaven lavished on a corrupt world, they are alloyed in some degree with the noxious effects of human infirmity. Brethren, it is certain, as Solomon has told us, that "there is a season for every thing;" and you may readily discern that Martha was censured by her Redeemer, not because she was careful about the affairs of her family, but because she suffered them to exercise an improper ascendancy over her mind on an extraordinary occasion, when the great "Teacher come from God" was in her house, and an opportunity of religious improvement was presented, such as she might rarely again enjoy. On the same ground, Mary was commended for not allowing an ill-timed anxiety in relation to household concerns, to force her from the company of Him, "who spake as never man spake."

But the point now adverted to, is one on which it is not necessary to be very prolix. The opposite error is by far more common, as well as more generally dangerous. It happens comparatively seldom, that men neglect the concerns of time for those of eternity. Frequently, however, do we see them neglecting the concerns of eternity for those of time. The case of Martha is less rare than that of Mary. We would not, indeed, be understood as intimating by this remark, that Martha was not a truly pious woman, for we believe that on the whole she was. Our object is simply to say, that her conduct in being "careful and troubled about many things," is more in accordance with the way of the multitude, than that of Mary, who pursued just the opposite course. It is not to be denied, that the cares of the world steal away even from the best of Christians, a portion of that time which should have been devoted to the performance of the duties having the Deity immediately for their object. The petty con-

cerns of life—the thousand little items continually recurring in the transaction of domestic affairs,—too often interfere with our religious exercises, and thwart our pious resolves. This observation is emphatically true in respect to females; or, at least in respect to those females, who, like Martha, occupy the arduous post of housekeeper. They are so frequently “cumbered,” or as the original term literally implies, “*distracted with much serving*”—they are subject to such various and nameless vexations arising from the perverseness of servants, and similar causes, that they cannot but realize the difficulty (insuperable, were it not for the all-sufficient grace of God) of combining, with a due attention to inferior duties, a paramount regard for the “one thing needful.” It is an easy matter to smile at these peculiar trials of the female sex; and, perhaps, a moderate share of judicious satire will be taken in good part, and can do them no harm. But we should always remember, that the difficulties with which they have to contend are real, and the profoundest philosopher of the age has averred, that “it is no small panegyric of woman to be mistress of herself, though China fall.”

We have said, that religion is represented by our Lord, in the text, as the “one thing needful.” And surely it deserves to be thus represented. Even if we were to look no higher than to its influence on the character and condition of man here below, we should perceive much that serves to demonstrate its supreme importance—its transcendent value. That it is the source of many temporal blessings, may be confidently affirmed. Indeed, this truth seems to be indirectly asserted by the Saviour himself, when he says, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you;” where the expression, “all these things,”

refers, as may easily be seen from the context, to such comforts as are contemplated in the questions, "What shall we eat? what shall we drink? and, wherewithal shall we be clothed?" The apostle Paul expressly assures us, that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that *now is*, and of that which is to come." The Proverbs of Solomon, too, abound with passages of the same tenour. For example, speaking of *wisdom*, his language is, "Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour." It is true, that some consider passages of this kind as figurative allusions to spiritual blessings. But we are persuaded that they may likewise be understood literally. And we moreover believe, that both reason and experience will bear us out in the assertion, that the general tendency of pure and undefiled religion is to promote the real happiness of man even in this world. It preserves him from those evils which attend the unrestrained indulgence of the appetites and passions—it procures for him the esteem and confidence of the community in which he moves—it lends dignity and value to all the innocent joys of life.

But religion, viewed in relation to man as a candidate for eternity, is emphatically the "one thing needful." Much might be said in support of this position. We think, however, that its soundness will be sufficiently illustrated and evinced, if we consider, for a single moment, that the duties which religion prescribes, and the blessings which it confers and promises, are precisely accommodated to the condition and the wants of our race.

Let us first look at the duties of religion. These, though multifarious, may be conveniently reduced to three: viz. *Repentance*, *Faith*, and *general obedience to the revealed will of heaven*.

Repentance. And who can doubt, that is a duty which it is eminently fitting for man to perform? Is he not a sinner? Has he not broken the law of his Maker, written on his heart, and faithfully interpreted by conscience? Has he not also violated that fuller and brighter announcement of Jehovah's will, which the sacred volume exhibits? And how, under such circumstances, can he enjoy any thing like peace and happiness, until he has learned to contemplate his past conduct in its true light, as deeply offensive to the divine majesty, and has formed the fervent resolution to spend the residue of his career on earth in a very different manner? Is it not becoming, that his heart should bleed with sorrow for the transgressions which he has committed? Is it not right, that tears of penitence should flow in torrents from his eyes? What can be more *needful* than the contrition which the Scriptures enjoin? Who does not feel, that the offender against heaven never acts with so much propriety and grace, as when, overwhelmed with a sense of guilt, he falls prostrate before the throne of the Most High, and exclaims in the language of Job, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes?"

Another duty of religion is Faith. And surely this duty is one peculiarly fitted to the situation of man as a culprit, all whose hopes of mercy must rest on the friendly offices of a Redeemer. He is wholly unable to save himself. No oblation which he can carry to the altar of heaven will expiate his guilt. He can be accepted at the bar of Jehovah only in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ. Of course he must rely implicitly and entirely on those merits as a ground of salvation. So that the leading injunction of the New Testament, BELIEVE, is exactly suited to the present condition of man.

Obedience to the whole revealed will of heaven is a third duty of religion. The fitness of this duty results

from the relation subsisting between every created being and the great Creator. It is unquestionably proper, that the thing formed should submit to the control and fulfil the pleasure of Him who formed it. And still more right and reasonable must this subserviency appear, when we reflect, that God requires of us nothing but what is calculated to promote our own advantage. In keeping his commandments there is an exceeding great reward. In yielding to his exactions, we pursue the course most truly and permanently profitable to ourselves. For example, if we advert to that class of his precepts which may be arranged under the general head of *self-denial*, and to which the mind undisciplined by virtue and piety, is always most ready to demur, we shall discover, on due examination, that they have a direct tendency to diminish the evils of the present, and to mature the human being for the enjoyments of a future state. They are exactly what he needs to preserve him from degradation and misery in a world, where temptations so many and so powerful beset every moment of his life—every step of his career. While they appear to bring him under a degree of restraint, their real effect is to liberate him from thralldom far more ignominious and wretched—to sever the trammels of corrupt habits, and to confer upon one who was once the veriest slave, the immunities of the noblest freedom. O! tell us, ye who object to the self-denying maxims of Christianity, can you conceive of liberty more exalted and more enviable, than that which comes to the soul of the man who emerges from the depths of intemperance, and puts for ever away from him the inebriating goblet! And is it not a glorious emancipation too which religion achieves, when it causes that significant injunction, “Love not the world, neither the things of the world,” to tell on the conscience of the avaricious

individual, and compels him to unlock his hoarded treasures, and melts the stream of sympathetic feeling which had been so long frozen in his bosom, and relumes the light of benevolence which had faded from his eye, and renders him a ministering angel to the destitute and the suffering that surround him! What a sublime—what a blessed transformation is this! And yet it is the simple effect which the precepts of self-denial contained in the New Testament, when carried into practice, necessarily produce on the moral character.

We see, then, that the duties which religion enjoins, are precisely adapted to the condition of man. And so the blessings which it confers in this world, and which it promises in the world to come, are exactly such as he is most in need of. We shall not attempt to speak of these blessings in detail. A passing allusion to one or two of them will answer our present purpose. First, the pardon of sin is among the most prominent of the benefits which the gospel bestows on our guilty race. Now, every one must admit, that no boon is better suited to our wants than this. The criminal sentenced to die for the violation of his country's laws, will tell you, that the most intense and absorbing desire of his soul, is that he may become an object of executive clemency. Nor can any language speak the joy with which he is transported, when he hears, that the claims of justice are to be relaxed in his favour, and that he is not to perish by the ignominious stroke which he so much dreaded. In like manner the individual who has a proper view of his guilt as a transgressor of the divine law—who sees that he has incurred his Maker's direst displeasure, and that nothing but the interposition of most unmerited mercy on the part of his heavenly Sovereign, can rescue him from the deep dishonour and the excruciating anguish of eternal death

—he who thus feels would exchange the treasures of the universe, were they his, for the well-authenticated intimation, that the sentence of condemnation passed upon him was revoked, and that the offences which he had committed were all expunged from the recording-book of his supreme Judge. To him *forgiveness* were, indeed “a joyful sound”—a sound which comes upon his ear with melody more exhilarating than “the music of the spheres.” Another blessing which religion confers, is peace of conscience—that internal tranquillity—that settled calm of the soul—to which the wicked are strangers, and for which, in their hours of remorse, when haunted by the terrific spectre of a mispent life, they would gladly sacrifice all that they had ever deemed desirable in wealth, in pleasure, or in the coveted distinctions of earth. As a further blessing that springs from the benign influence of religion, we may mention the peculiar support and solace which it administers in the season of sorrow, in the hour of sickness, and in the crisis of death. The parent who follows to the grave a beloved and promising child—the man whose property is wrested from him by some sudden casualty, or, which is yet worse, whose reputation has been blasted by unfounded calumny—and the individual who lies on yonder couch, from which he is to rise no more, given over by his physicians, and admonished by sensations within him not to be mistaken, that the last struggle is at hand,—these, brethren, are the witnesses to whom we appeal in behalf of the doctrine of our text, that religion is the *one thing needful*. And yet the benefits which it thus confers, are merely preparatory to those which it promises. We have mentioned only the beginning—the inadequate foretaste, of its blessings. Un-speakably higher, indescribably brighter, incalculably dearer—are the joys of which it is the source, in the state

that follows death. It lifts the human being to a future and celestial world, where, delivered from all that is gross in his nature, and elevated above those limits that here obstruct his vision and impede his march, he shall expatiate over the regions of purity and bliss—unfettered by space—unbounded by time—the compeer of angels—the associate of kindred spirits from earth—the co-heir of Christ—the child and friend of God.

There is a further consideration suggested by the second clause of the passage before us, which especially shows that religion is the “one thing needful.” “And Mary (says the Saviour) hath chosen that good part which *shall not be taken away from her.*” All other blessings are fleeting and precarious. Religion only is able to impress the signet of immutability upon the benefits which it confers. They who make these benefits their choice, select a portion of which nothing can deprive them. Their career on earth may be shaded by occasional gloom—untoward circumstances may now and then occur to mar their quiet—a mysterious providence may even visit them with many temporal calamities. But of what account are such light afflictions, compared with the eternal weight of glory which is in reserve for them beyond the grave? They may look upon these transient ills, as the parental inflictions of a God who chastens his children for their good; and who addresses them individually in such consolatory terms as these: “For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.” How happy and secure are those to whom Jehovah thus speaks! In the darkest and dreariest hour, they have a hope of which they are not ashamed—an

anchor fastened within the veil, which buoys up their despondent hearts. Yes, even then they can enter into the feelings which prompted the prophet of old to exclaim, with the unconquerable energy of faith—"Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." This, brethren, is the language of a soul into which the Spirit of the Most High has shed his selectest influence. And it is language which may well be adopted in view of the substantial, ever-during blessings which religion imparts—blessings which, when earth with all its scenes and pursuits has vanished, shall remain the unalienable inheritance of the redeemed—blessings subject to no change, except so far as they are destined to gather new brightness and fulness from the revolutions of eternity. O! what an animating thought is this! Who can conceive the thrill of ecstasy which it must diffuse among the inhabitants of heaven! Yes, the conviction that the good part which they have chosen, shall not be taken away from them, is a primary element—the grand vivifying principle of the happiness which they enjoy. Deprive them of this conviction—tell them that they shall not "be ever with the Lord"—publish to them the intelligence, that at some coming period, no matter how remote, their lot must alter, and what would be the consequence? Every harp would be unstrung, every countenance would droop, and the awful stillness of despair would reign throughout their ranks:—

"Could they, so rich in rapture, fear a change,
'That ghastly thought would drink up all their joys,
And quite unparadise the realms of light."

But an apprehension of this kind can never force its perturbing way into the rest that remaineth for the people of God. The participants of that rest know that their peace and bliss are secured beyond the possibility of molestation. They feel that their condition is unchangeable—that their fate is mysteriously linked, if we may be allowed so to speak, with that of the High and Holy One himself.

And now, dear hearers, what is the conclusion of the whole matter?—It is this: Have you obtained the *one thing needful*? We would press the query on the conscience of every individual before us. We have attempted to show—and we presume you will hardly deny—that the blessings of religion are infinitely valuable. They are blessings, in comparison with which the choicest advantages that earth can yield, are but “as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away.” Wealth may be dissipated by a thousand casualties. Honour may be rudely torn from the brow that wears it. Pleasure, in its fairest and most enchanting forms, is evanescent as the shadow of the dial. But the happiness which religion confers, instead of coming to an end, is destined to last and expand for ever. Believe us, then, it matters not what may be your acquisitions, and what your enjoyments, so long as you are destitute of the *one thing needful*. Without the assurances of religion, how intolerable must be the sense of sin! Without the consolations of religion, how cheerless must be the day of affliction! Without the prospects of religion, how gloomy must be the hour of sickness! And without at once the assurances, the consolations, and the prospects—the whole combined power of religion, how awful must be the article of death! Ah! there are periods in the earthly career of every impenitent sinner, no matter how apparently

prosperous and externally happy may be his condition—periods in which he realizes the utter worthlessness of all terrestrial objects, and sighs for a tranquillity and a satisfaction which he cannot find. A more miserable being is not to be met with in the wide range of existence, than the man who knows—who feels, that religion is the *one thing needful*, and yet remains a stranger to its comforts and its joys. He may be said, almost without a figure, to endure, not merely the torment of unquenchable thirst, but like the fabled Tantalus, the additional aggravation of a stream regularly promising to approach his lips, and as regularly receding in mockery away.

It is folly, then—nay, it is madness, to postpone the business of religion. Seek then at once, dear hearers, the *one thing needful*. Choose, this very morning, “that good part, which shall not be taken away from you.”

SERMON XI.



LUKE VII. 36—50.

“And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to meat. And behold, a woman in the city which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster-box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now, when the Pharisee which had bidden him, saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who, and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering, said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house; thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And they that sat at meat with him, began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.”

It was distinctly foretold, in the prophecies of the Old Testament, that when the Messiah should appear in our world, he would meet with a reception by no means suited to the excellence of his character, and the important object of his divine mission. This prediction was literally verified. He came to his own, and his own received him not. He grew up as a tender plant, and as

a root out of a dry ground; and when he entered on the duties of his public ministry, he seemed without form or comeliness; the generality of those who saw him, discerned no beauty that they should desire him. All classes of the community contemplated him with distrust, while the wealthy and the influential—particularly those in the high places of the temple and the synagogue—displayed a keen and an active hostility to his pretensions and his person.

There were a few, however, even among the opulent and distinguished citizens of Judea, who rose superior to prejudice, and perceived, that Jesus of Nazareth was no ordinary man. Of this description also was Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy individual, who obtained from Pilate the crucified body of Christ, and caused it to be properly interred in his own sepulchre. And of this description too was the Pharisee, concerning whom we read in the passage which we have chosen for comment this morning. It does not, indeed, appear, that he entertained any correct views as to the character and office of our Lord. But he must have formed a favourable opinion, however vague, of one whom, though poor and friendless, he invited to become his guest.

Who this Pharisee was, is a question which critics have not been able exactly to settle. That his name was *Simon*, is evident from the fortieth verse, and hence some have been led to identify him with Simon the leper, who resided in Bethany, and at whose house Jesus was partaking of a meal, when a female entered and manifested her affectionate regard for him, in a manner similar to what is here recorded. We shall not enter into the controversy, whether the four evangelists allude to the same occurrence, or whether the circumstance related by Luke

is different from the one which Matthew, Mark and John describe as having taken place at Bethany. The arguments in support of both opinions are plausible. But those in favour of the latter supposition appear to us to preponderate. We, therefore, incline to think, that the incident presented to our consideration in the passage before us, has been omitted by the other historians of the New Testament, the coincidence of names to which we have alluded, being merely accidental.

This Pharisee, whoever he was, and wherever he lived, invited our Lord to eat with him. Such a mark of respect, though it did not proceed from a conviction, that Jesus was the Christ, shows at least, that his merits, as a man of piety and intelligence, were appreciated. It is consolatory to reflect, that his poverty and obscure origin did not prevent all from perceiving his excellence, and treating him with a degree of attention and kindness.—The Saviour accepted the invitation, because he was aware that it had been dictated by no improper motive. It was not his custom to keep aloof from society. As he lived only to do good, he mingled, on every suitable occasion, with men.

During the progress of the entertainment in the Pharisee's house, a woman whose character had not been the best, came in to see Jesus, and to manifest her peculiar veneration for him. The opinion has long been a very prevalent one, that this woman was no other than she who is known to the readers of the New Testament by the name of *Mary Magdalen*. Why such a notion should have obtained so much currency, it is not an easy matter to say. There is not a particle of Scriptural evidence to sustain it. The common, but somewhat unaccountable, impression of Christians has done a gross

injustice to the reputation of Mary Magdalen.* That she was an unchaste woman is a mere presumption, not supported by any thing which the sacred historians have recorded in respect to her. Indeed, from their relations, we should be led to conclude, that she was a female of wealth and most reputable standing in society. It is true, that she is described as one out of whom the Saviour cast seven devils. But we must not imagine, that the subjects of the demoniacal possessions, were persons of a worse moral character than others. Whatever opinion may be adopted concerning the nature of those possessions, all, we presume, must look upon them as afflictive visitations of providence, to which the good and the bad were equally exposed. Calamity in this world, is not a criterion, by which to measure the amount of human guilt. The Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, were not sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things. Nor were the eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem. And so neither were those possessed of demons sinners above other individuals, who escaped this dire misfortune.

It is certain, then, that the woman in the passage before us was not Mary Magdalen. All that we know respecting her, is that she was a female who had formerly lived an irregular life, but was now brought to a proper sense of her extreme depravity. She looked back, with the keenest regret, upon her abandoned course, and anxiously desired the pardon of her sins. We may presume, that her convictions of guilt had on some previous occasion, been awakened by the preaching of our Lord, and that, when she heard of his being in the

* See, on this subject, a note in Cappe's Sermons, (Sermon xiv. pt. 1.) and also a Tract by the celebrated Dr. Lardner, therein referred to.

Pharisee's house, she determined to approach his presence, for the purpose of manifesting the reverential love, with which his character and instructions had inspired her, and obtaining, if possible, the remission of offences, the oppressive burden of which was weighing down her spirit to the very dust. We are told that she advanced behind him as he sat at meat, or rather, as he reclined on his left elbow, according to the ancient custom, with the lower part of his body outside of the person below him on the same couch. It is obvious that in this posture, his feet would be accessible to any one who approached him as this female is represented to have done. The sacred historian informs us, that she brought with her an alabaster box of ointment, in order to anoint the Saviour's feet. We need scarcely tell you that anointing was a custom prevalent in Palestine, at the time in which this incident occurred, and which still forms one of the characteristics of Oriental manners. It was usual for every person to wash and anoint himself before he went to an entertainment. As sandals were then worn, the feet would be somewhat soiled in walking, and therefore the guest, on arriving at the house to which he was invited, was conducted into a room, where a servant in attendance immediately took off the sandals, and washed and anointed his feet. It appears that this mark of respect was omitted in the case of our Lord, and, probably, for a reason which the Pharisee might readily persuade himself was quite sufficient—because Jesus was an individual of indigent and lowly circumstances, and it was not fashionable then, any more than it is now, to be very ceremonious with such a guest.—The penitent female, as she stood behind the Saviour, wept profusely, her tears dropping upon his feet. Perceiving what had happened, she proceeded to wipe the feet with her hair, and then applied the ointment with which she had provided herself.

A transaction so extraordinary, naturally attracted the notice of all who were present, and every one, no doubt, commented upon it in his own mind. The sacred historian has told us what the Pharisee himself thought about the matter. His mental language was as follows: "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who, and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner."—A precious specimen of Pharisaical sanctimoniousness! Jesus *was* a prophet, and he *did* know every thing relating to the character and history of the woman. Yes, and he knew, too, what were the thoughts of his host, for he immediately accosted him in this style: "Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee;" and, on the Pharisee's desiring him to proceed, he continued thus—"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?" The Pharisee, perhaps not yet discerning the drift of our Lord's discourse, promptly replied, "I suppose, that he to whom he forgave most." The answer spoke the natural dictate of every sound understanding, and prepared the way for the apposite conclusion at which the Saviour wished to arrive. "Thou hast rightly judged," said he to the Pharisee; and then, looking at the despised female, pursued his remarks:—"Seest thou this woman? I entered into thy house, thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she

loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." Our Lord, having thus explained the grounds on which he suffered the penitent female to manifest her affectionate regards for him, addressed to her the consolatory words—"Thy sins are forgiven." This language, as usual, excited the surprise of those who heard it, and we are told, that they began to say among themselves, "Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" Jesus, without intimating his knowledge of their secret murmurs, dismissed the woman with the additional assurance, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

The scriptural passage which we have thus briefly reviewed, is replete with interesting and important instruction. We shall now advert, for a few minutes, to one or two of the topics which it presents to our consideration.

And our first remark is, that we may hence learn, how free and ample is the pardon which the gospel proffers to penitent sinners. We have seen that the female who heard from the lips of Christ, the gracious assurance that her sins were forgiven, had been an offender of no ordinary turpitude. It is said expressly, that her transgressions were *many*, and when we consider what is intimated concerning her course of life, we cannot doubt the correctness of the declaration. Yet we find that the deep depravity of character in which she appeared before the Saviour, did not induce him to spurn her from his sacred presence. She came as a contrite transgressor, and met with a kind reception. He did not say to her, as the self-righteous Pharisee would, no doubt, have said—"Thy errors are too numerous and flagrant to be erased from the recording book of heaven. Forgiveness is out of the question. Thou must perish eternally."—No; and there never was an instance in which the Son of God

held such language as this towards any sincere penitent. It is the glory of our religion, that it professes to be able to save all classes of human culprits. Other systems may deal in nice distinctions, balance the various degrees of guilt, and promise the divine favour only to those whose history has not been marked by wide aberrations from rectitude, and gross violations of purity. But Christianity takes a different and a broader ground. It concludes all under sin, and provides a method of recovery suited to the condition, and commensurate with the exigencies, of all. It does not, indeed, espouse a doctrine similar to that so strenuously defended by the ancient Stoics, who maintained that there is absolutely no difference in respect to the moral demerit of crimes. It admits that there are many degrees of human guilt, which will be rigidly discriminated by the sovereign Judge, in pronouncing the sentence of final condemnation. But then it teaches us, that the least degree, if not repented of, will doom the violator of the divine law to endless misery, while the greatest will not be sufficient to exclude the truly penitent offender from everlasting happiness. It informs us, that the sacrifice of Christ, being of infinite value, has satisfied every demand of justice against the race of man, and that there is now no obstacle to the pardon of any transgressor, who manifests by repentance and faith, a sincere desire to obtain such pardon. This, brethren, is the amount of the message from on high, published in the gospel. And surely it would have been unworthy of the wisdom and benevolence of Heaven, to devise and reveal a scheme of salvation less comprehensive in its nature and provisions. There is no feature belonging to Christianity, so clearly and conclusively indicative of its celestial origin, as the fact, that it points us to a personage whose blood cleanseth from all sin, and who is able to

save to the very uttermost, those who come unto God by him. This, as we have said, is the glory of our religion. Let us always avoid every set of theological dogmas, which has the smallest tendency to obscure it.

Again, we may learn from the passage before us, some of the attributes of that repentance, which is required by the gospel, as a preliminary to the pardon of sin. We see that it implies a poignant regret for the offences which we have committed against the divine majesty. Nothing could exceed the sorrow of this female, whose tears fell in torrents on the feet of her Saviour. And what was the cause of her grief? Did it arise purely from the reflection that she had lost, in consequence of her vicious course of life, the favour of her friends, and the esteem of society? Surely not; else her first transgression, which must have awakened the same reflection, would have been equally efficacious in producing the same result. The bitterness of soul which she now experienced, proceeded from an entirely new train of thought. Her eyes were at last opened to see that her conduct, besides its injurious effect upon her character and happiness in this world, was a violation of the divine law, and placed her in the awful attitude of a rebel against that God, in whose hand was her breath, and whose were all her ways. She perceived that she had been criminal in a manner, and to a degree, of which she had not before the most vague conception. The overwhelming conviction came upon her, that she had abused the mercies, and insulted the authority of her highest—her heavenly Benefactor. Yes, this was the feeling which predominated in her bosom, and rendered her penitence so acute.—A second distinguishing feature of her repentance, was, that it was accompanied with some hope of forgiveness. Her remorse, however great, was not marked by absolute despair. She believed that

Christ was able to speak peace to her troubled soul, and, under the influence of this belief, determined to apply to him for mercy. The very fact of her application, would seem to prove, that she cherished an idea, that there was, at least, a possibility of its being attended with success. But the concluding words in which our Lord addressed her, establish the point beyond dispute. "Thy FAITH," said he, "hath saved thee; go in peace." It is evident, then, that the repentance of this woman was what some religious writers have termed, a "believing repentance."—A third attribute by which it was characterized, was the ardent love to Jesus which accompanied it. We cannot conceive of affection more humble, disinterested and fervent, than was displayed by this female. Her conduct evinced, that there was no kindly office, however menial, which she would not gladly have performed for Christ.

Another leading idea involved in the passage which we are considering, is that the individual who becomes sincerely penitent, will, in general, love and serve his Redeemer, with a zeal proportionate to the enormity of his previous career. This truth is beautifully illustrated by our Lord, in the case of the creditor and two debtors, which he proposed to the Pharisee, and from which he deduced the conclusion, that they to whom much is forgiven, will love much. It is natural, that the man who is arrested by divine grace, in the full tide of iniquity—in the midst of a course which was carrying him, with more than ordinary rapidity, down to the world of wo—should be penetrated with the deepest sense of the value and importance of the benefit thus conferred upon him, and should, consequently, cherish the most ardent affection for the Author of his deliverance from impending misery. How strikingly does the example of the apostle Paul

elucidate and confirm the principle to which we are now directing your attention. We know, that, previous to his conversion, he was one of the bitterest and most dangerous enemies to the cause of Christ. He had conceived a deadly hostility to the gospel, and he was not a man whose opinions exerted little influence over his conduct. Bold, energetic and restless in his disposition, he could not remain an inert opposer of a religious system which he disliked. He at once threw himself into the van of the persecution which was gathering against the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. So fierce and cruel was the zeal which raged in his bosom, that he spared neither age nor sex; and when he had finished, as he supposed, the diabolical work at Jerusalem, he set out on a crusade against the Christian fugitives, who had sought an asylum from death or imprisonment in the surrounding cities. Such was Paul before he became a penitent believer in the gospel. And what was Paul afterwards? The most devoted friend of Jesus, and the most resolute and untiring and successful champion of the cross. He laboured more abundantly than all the other apostles, because, as much had been forgiven him, so he loved much. He displayed his affection for the Saviour, by a series of unexampled self-denials, sufferings and toils in his service. So ardent and irresistible was the zeal manifested by him in behalf of the religion which once he destroyed, that a living writer of our own country, inheriting something of a kindred spirit, has hesitated not to affirm, that fifty such men as Paul the apostle would be sufficient, at this day, to evangelize the world.—To the case of Paul, we might, did time permit, add many more of a later date. Thus, the author of the *Pilgrim's Progress* was as distinguished, among those who knew him, for wickedness, before his conversion, as he was afterwards remarkable for his piety.

He felt, that much had been forgiven him, and he, therefore, loved much. He was sensible, that he was most deeply indebted to divine mercy, and he accordingly manifested his gratitude, by producing a book which we do not forbear to place at the head of uninspired compositions—a book which has gone through more editions, been more generally read, and effected more extensive and permanent good to mankind, than any other, with the single exception of the Bible.—And what was the early life of John Newton? He has himself told the story of his awful depravity. He says, that so utterly abandoned had he become, that he “made it his study to tempt and seduce others upon every occasion,” and even “eagerly sought occasion, sometimes to his own hazard and hurt.” In a word, such were his character and condition, while on the coast of Africa, engaged in the business of the slave-trade, that, according to his own statement, there were “few even of the negroes who did not think themselves too good to speak to him.” And yet this man, so apparently lost to virtue, respectability and happiness, became one of the most ardently pious Christians, and eminently useful ministers of the gospel, that England has produced, brightly exemplifying the principle, that they to whom much is forgiven, will love much.—We doubt not, that the personal observation of our hearers may furnish them with instances illustrating, in a greater or less degree, the same truth.

Brethren, we may learn from this subject, that there is nothing so well calculated to increase our love to the Saviour and our diligence in his service, as the review of our moral history during the period in which we were indifferent to the concerns of religion. Where is the Christian who does not feel, that much has been forgiven him? Is it not an unquestionable fact, that we have all

greatly offended against the divine Majesty? We may not, indeed, have been guilty of any of those crimes for which the laws of human society inflict punishment—any of those gross and flagrant offences which are followed by a forfeiture of the esteem and confidence of the world at large. But our consciences may readily point us to numberless cases, in which we have violated the precepts, and incurred the severe displeasure of the Most High. The very best of us have sinned enough, and more than enough, to render hell our due. The utmost suffering that Omnipotence could impose upon us, would not exceed our deserts. Let us, then, look back upon our past career. Let us think of our transgressions. Let us contrast the mercies we have enjoyed with the life we have led. It is in this way that our affection for Him to whom we owe our pardon, will gather additional intensity, and we shall become more and more devoted to his honour and glory. Yes, Christian brethren, we shall thus realize, that much, very much has been forgiven us, and shall, therefore, be constrained to love much.

The passage on which we have now been meditating is fraught with encouragement to penitent sinners. It teaches us, as we have already remarked, that the gospel proffers a free and an ample forgiveness to all who really feel their need of a Saviour, and promptly apply to him for mercy. There is no human culprit, whatever may be his character and condition—widely as he may have strayed from rectitude and purity—deeply as he may have sunk in corruption—who has it not in his power, by repentance and faith, to obtain the full remission of his offences, and, what is still more important, such a renovation of his moral nature, as shall render him a fit companion for the virtuous in this world, and an heir of honour, glory and immortality in the next world. Yes, contrite transgressor,

you have no occasion to despond. Jehovah's arm is not shortened, that he cannot save—his ear is not heavy that he cannot hear. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

We have said, that the gospel proffers free and ample forgiveness to all penitent sinners. We must not, however, omit to add, distinctly and emphatically, that it proffers such forgiveness ONLY to *penitent* sinners. For those who regret not their violations of the divine law, and who, consequently, determine to live in time to come, just as they have lived in time that is past, it reveals no pardon—it holds out no prospect, but that of perpetual banishment from the presence of God, and the joys of heaven. Believe us, dear hearers, you must either repent of your sins, or else go to hell, and be miserable there for ever. This language may sound harsh; but if we know our own heart, we speak it affectionately. We are persuaded, that it involves a truth, of which it is essential to your highest and dearest interest, that you should be fully and deeply convinced. Wo to the man who deludes and ruins himself with the hope, that the Bible is a lie, and that there is no future suffering for the impenitent! It were an easy task to show, how repugnant is such a notion to the dictates of reason, and the decisions of Scripture. But arguments would be lost upon him who is fool enough to suppose that Jehovah will make no distinction between them that serve him, and them that serve him not—that thieves and drunkards and revilers and extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of heaven—whoremongers and adulterers God will not judge.—We repeat it, dear hearers, that you must either repent, or be wretched throughout eternity.

The gospel presents no other alternative. And O! remember that it is in your own power to do, or to be, which you please. You are just as free to repent, as you are to continue impenitent. There is no obstacle to your repentance, unless, indeed, a preference for sin be accounted such. And what is a preference for sin but impenitence itself? Yes, you can repent, if you will; and, therefore, the language of God to you this day is, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

SERMON XII.



ZECHARIAH XIII. 1.

“In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.”

OUR text is a prophetic reference, peculiarly distinct and emphatic, to the mediatorial work of Christ. We are here pointed, in a manner too plain to be mistaken, to that blood which was shed on Calvary, for the expiation of human guilt. The passage thus contemplated, suggests reflections of an interesting and important kind.

It implies, that it was necessary for God to make some provision for the salvation of men—to devise a method by which they might be recovered from “sin and uncleanness.” The natural condition of every human being is marked by moral defilement. The soul, which originally proceeded from the Creator’s hand in a state of purity—bright with the lustre of virtue—glowing with the fair imprint of the divine image,—is now soiled, and stained, and polluted. We do not, indeed, say that it retains no traces of what it once was. We believe the contrary. We can see in man many an indication of primitive rectitude. There is undoubtedly much in the endearments of domestic life—much in the kind offices of friendship—much in the disinterested exertions of benevolence—and much in the varied intercourse of business,—to convince the sober and candid observer, that the fall has not utterly destroyed that exquisite workmanship which he who formed it pronounced *good*. But man, though conscience

points his view with unerring certainty, to the broad distinctions of right and wrong, and compels him on many occasions to be just and benevolent—is still a fallen and depraved being. He does not love, he does not fear, he does not serve, his Maker as he ought. While transient emotions of a devotional sort, may now and then arise in his bosom, it is indubitable, that the prevailing state of his heart is characterized by a settled aversion to the divine authority and laws. He delights not to contemplate the holiness of Deity. He recoils from the thought, that Jehovah is immaculate in all his perfections, and equitable in all his proceedings—a Being in whose sight the very heavens are comparatively impure—one who weigheth actions, and will by no means clear the guilty.

It was necessary, then, that some provision should be made by God for the restoration of our race to original purity. The stains of sin must be washed out from the soul, before the human being can enjoy the favour of his Maker, and become happy under the moral government of the High and Holy One. We do not now say, that it was necessary for Jehovah to resort to the very plan of salvation which the gospel unfolds. We shall not take upon us to assert, that it was incompetent to a Deity whose wisdom and power are both unbounded, to contrive an expedient different from the one which he has actually adopted for the recovery of our fallen world. The assertion has, indeed, been made by well-meaning writers; and it is no unusual thing to hear addresses from the pulpit, in which the same ground is assumed. But the judicious thinker will not venture to limit the omnipotence of God, in any case which does not clearly involve a contradiction. He will not presume to affirm that the infinite mind was driven to such a state of diffi-

culty and perplexity—that the resources of Divinity were so nearly exhausted, that only a single alternative remained, and the Creator must either abandon the intelligent inhabitants of earth to final, irretrievable destruction, or else rescue them by the precise method which Christianity exhibits. And after all, the point is one respecting which it is useless to speculate. It is surely enough for us to know that some method was necessary; and that a method every way adequate to the end contemplated, has been revealed.

We are thus led to a second general reflection suggested by the passage under consideration, which is, that sufficient provision has been made on the part of God, for the recovery of men from “sin and uncleanness.” This is implied in the figurative language of our text. A “fountain” conveys the idea of abundance. The water from a reservoir may be exhausted: but the stream that emanates from an original source, runs with a fulness and steadiness, in which we may recognise at once the bounty and the uniformity of nature. And in the same manner flows the grace of God which bringeth salvation: a tide of benevolence—a current of compassion,—exuberant and perennial.

There are two aspects under which the salvation of the gospel may be contemplated. It may be regarded as a plan both for expiating the guilt of men, and gradually emancipating them from the dominion of evil habits; the former being accomplished through the atoning merits of the death of Christ, and the latter effected by the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit. Let us glance for a few minutes at each of these particulars.

The provision which God has made for the salvation of men, consists primarily in a full satisfaction rendered to his justice for their transgressions, by the sacrifice of

his Son. We are aware, that we are now approaching ground which has been much contested. The doctrine which asserts the necessity and the fact of an atonement for sin, has been assailed by every form and variety of argument. But before we undertake to repel any of the objections which have been made to this doctrine, we would direct your attention, for a moment, to a single point. We presume, then, that every one who has read the Bible, has observed, that the death of Christ is dwelt upon by the inspired penmen with an emphasis altogether peculiar. No one will attempt to deny, that far more importance is attached to this event, than to any other which the sacred Scriptures record. So unquestionable is this fact, that the most candid of the rejectors of the doctrine of the atonement, have felt themselves constrained to admit, that the death of the Messiah, besides its use as an example of fortitude and resignation in the endurance of suffering, may be the means of accomplishing some higher but unknown object in the divine administration. This they grant may be the case, though they contend, that it is a matter too obscurely revealed, to form an intelligible article of religious belief, or to exert a perceptible influence on religious practice. Now, while we admire the ingenuousness of those who make even this slender concession, we deeply regret that the inveteracy of preconceived opinions is such, as to prevent them from discovering that what they view as a mere possibility, the New Testament announces as an absolute and a glorious certainty. The sacred writers occasionally refer to the sufferings of Jesus as an example of fortitude and resignation. But they much more frequently and emphatically refer to those sufferings as a great transaction, in virtue of which sin may be pardoned, and sinners saved. They incidentally exhibit the Son of God as a

perfect model for human imitation, while they generally and chiefly describe him as the only Deliverer from the curse of a violated law. There is, therefore, great propriety and pertinency in the exhortation of an old author, who tells us, to "take heed, that we do not so consider Christ for our pattern, as to disown him for our Saviour and Redeemer."

That the death of the Son of God has some peculiar relation to the forgiveness and acceptance of fallen man, is a truth the denial of which seems to lead to the conclusion, that a very numerous order of scriptural passages convey no intelligible meaning, and can be applied to no useful purpose. Did the prophet Isaiah, for instance, utter nothing more than a puerile rhapsody, when he declared, that the coming Messiah should be "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities?" Was Daniel beside himself, when he affirmed, that this same Messiah "should be cut off, but not for himself?" Or if it be alleged, that the prophets were accustomed to express themselves poetically and obscurely, what shall we make of many of the assertions of such a plain and prosaic personage as the apostle Paul? He tells us, that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures"—that he "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself"—that he "gave himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour"—that he was "made sin for us, though he himself "knew no sin." The same apostle on more than one occasion represents the Lord Jesus as "the propitiation for our sins." These and similar passages that might be quoted, must, we presume, have some meaning. Now, they surely cannot imply, that Jesus of Nazareth died simply as a martyr and a pattern of heroic fortitude; or, at any rate, if this be their meaning, the inevitable conclusion is, that the authors of the

Bible were so strangely ignorant of the ordinary use of language—so singularly destitute of common sense—that the book which they have written is perfectly valueless, and can answer no other end than to produce dissensions and controversies respecting its contents. And are we prepared for this conclusion? If not, we must admit, that the inspired penmen meant what the phraseology which they have employed to express their ideas, naturally implies—that the death of Christ is a great transaction designed to obviate any difficulty which the principles of God's moral government, and the general interests of the universe, might otherwise have interposed to the pardon of human offenders—the prominent provision and leading feature of a plan by which Jehovah might be just, and yet justify the guilty.

It has been already intimated that various objections have been urged against the doctrine of the atonement. And nothing, brethren, is more easy than to object. It is by no means difficult to say, that the doctrine in question represents the Deity as a stern and vindictive being, who will bestow not a look of compassion upon his miserable creatures without some valuable consideration—a being whose laws are “written like Draco's, in blood,” and who has “erected a gallows in the centre of the universe” for the “most conspicuous and terrible manifestation of his justice and wrath.” Nor is it difficult to complain that this doctrine is dark and mysterious—that it supposes a relation to subsist between the sufferings of an innocent Personage, and the acquittal of the guilty, which is wholly incomprehensible. These, and a hundred such objections, we say, are easily made. But the only legitimate query, as we conceive, is, Do the sacred Scriptures describe the death of Christ as an atonement for sin—an event eminently instrumental in procuring the forgiveness

of human offenders—a something, in short, without which our entire race must have been lost? If they do thus describe it, then there ought to be an end to all unbelief or doubt—the saying is a faithful one and worthy of all acceptation. And yet it has been too common for disputants on this subject, to forget the point really at issue, and to lose themselves in abstruse and unintelligible disquisitions relative to the nature of the atonement. Brethren, we regard all disquisitions of this sort, whether they proceed from the heterodox, or from those who are reputed orthodox, as speculations that can lead to no valuable or satisfactory result. We have nothing whatever to do with the nature of the atonement. Our business is solely with the question, whether or not one has been made for sin. And if we find that the inspired record virtually answers this question in the affirmative, we are then bound to yield our credence to a fact so highly and fully authenticated, even though we are not able to clear up all the difficulties connected with it, which it is easy for ingenious minds of a sceptical turn to suggest. We know, that some of the most real and obvious phenomena in nature—even the very existence of material things—have been denied by some philosophers—yes, and denied with such an array of plausible argumentation, that their works remain to this day unanswered—for all the reasoning of Dr. Reid on this subject, however well-meant, serves only to remind us of that famous definition, “Why, a poet is as much as one should say—a poet.” And why have not these works been answered? Because our knowledge here below is limited. We know, indeed, that material things do actually exist. Their existence was known to the very metaphysicians who attempted to deny it. But we are unable from the imperfection of our mental faculties, to explain clearly and satisfactorily the

various difficulties that may be conjured around such an apparently simple, and, indeed, such a really simple question as that of the existence of a material universe. In like manner we know, since the God of infinite truth has communicated to us the information that there has been "opened (in virtue of the death of Christ) a fountain for sin and uncleanness." But we are incompetent to answer all the objections which acute and sophistical reasoners may readily array against this fact.

Let us then, dear hearers, banish every doubt, and receive with gratitude and joy the doctrine of the atonement. Let us embrace this truth as the leading principle of divine revelation—the very corner-stone of our immortal hopes. Let us contemplate the death of Christ, as a great transaction which has in some way expiated the offences of men. Let us behold, in the blood shed on Calvary, the medium of our restoration to the favour of Jehovah—the "fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness." True, we know not how that blood is capable of washing away our transgressions. Nor need we know. It is enough for us to learn, on the authority of Him who cannot lie, that such a relation subsists between the sufferings of Jesus, and the justice of Heaven, as to render the pardon of human culprits a safe and an honourable measure on the part of their offended Sovereign. There is a real, though an unknown something, in the circumstances attending the crucifixion of the Messiah, which has made it possible for the high and mighty Ruler of the universe, to show pity towards our rebellious race, without tarnishing his own moral purity, or affording encouragement to beings yet unfallen, to become the imitators of our disobedience. In other and scriptural language—God hath set forth his Son to be a propitiation for the remission of sins, in order that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

The death of Christ, then, was a satisfaction for our sins. Yes, and it was a full satisfaction. The offering which he made of himself, was infinite in value. This is evident from the fact of his divinity. It is also evident from the circumstance, that the invitations of the gospel are addressed, and its blessings promised, to the whole human family. And it is further evident from express declarations of the New Testament, with which you are all familiar, and which, therefore, we shall not now quote.

But the provision which God has made for the salvation of men, further consists in a process of moral renovation, begun and continued in their souls through the agency of the Holy Ghost. And here the figurative language of our text becomes eminently significant. The gospel may well be considered as opening a great "fountain for sin and for uncleanness," since it reveals a method by which fallen and corrupt human nature may be restored to its original rectitude and purity. Other systems of religion promise forgiveness to the offender, and lead him to entertain a vague anticipation of happiness beyond the grave. But they present no consistent and effectual plan for reclaiming him from the influence of his native depravity, and rendering him fit to dwell in the presence of the Holy One. Numerous rites and ceremonies, however imposing in their nature, have not the smallest tendency to emancipate from the chains of unhallowed habits. Nor can mere ethical precepts, even when recommended by the most attractive speculations of philosophy, subdue the sinister propensities, and control the irregular movements of a heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. The sinner "must be born again." He must become "a new creature." A great and radical change must pass upon him, ere he can be truly and permanently happy. The universe affords

not a solitary spot to which a being alienated in his affections from God, may resort for tranquillity and enjoyment. Should the justice of heaven pursue him with no positive inflictions of misery, still he would be the victim of constant self-reproach—inextinguishable fire would rage in his bosom—he would feel the worm that never dies gnawing at his soul. Yes, it is certain, that without regeneration man can never find peace and bliss, either in the present or the future world. He must be renewed in the spirit of his mind—his moral nature must be touched and moulded again by the plastic hand of the Creator—the image of his Maker must be restored to his soul,—or he will remain for ever wretched. A change so complete and transcendent as he needs, can be effected only by the interposition of divine power. And, blessed be God! he has made the most ample provision for such interposition. He is willing to exert his power in the regeneration of the human heart. He has opened “a fountain for sin and uncleanness,” in which the most polluted of mankind—the vilest transgressor that lives on this earth—may obtain purification. He is always ready to impart the renewing and sanctifying influences of his Spirit, to those who sincerely desire and earnestly implore them. No individual ever put up to the throne of his heavenly Father the ingenuous petition, “Create in me a clean heart, O God! and renew a right spirit within me,”—and met with a refusal, or an unkind reception. The uniform language of Jehovah is, “Ask, and ye shall receive.”

The doctrine which asserts the necessity of a divine operation on the human heart, like the doctrine of the atonement, has been much objected to. It has been contended, that those passages of Scripture which seem to speak of such an operation, are nothing more, in reality, than figurative allusions to the effect of moral suasion.

But we submit it to the common sense of every unprejudiced person, whether the language of the sacred writers on this subject, is not entirely too strong to be explained away in any such manner. “A fountain for sin and uncleanness”—“born again”—“a new creature”—“the workmanship of God”—“temples of the Holy Ghost”—“washed and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” Are these tropes and metaphors? If they be—why then, farewell to all our religious knowledge derived from the Bible. On the same principle, it may easily be shown that the resurrection of the body—the immortality of the soul—the ministry of Christ—and, in fact, the very being of Deity—are mere figures—the embellishments of rhetoric.

Brethren, it becomes us all to be grateful to God, for the provision which he has made for our recovery from guilt and moral defilement. O! let us not cease to thank the beneficent Author of our being, that he has not left us unpitied, to perish in our transgressions. Let us rejoice that “a fountain” has been “opened for sin and for uncleanness.” Let us call upon our souls and all that is within us, to bless and praise Jehovah for those animating promises of pardon and sanctification, which the precious volume of his grace contains.

Nor let us be contented with general emotions of gratitude, elicited by the view of what God has done for the benefit of mankind. It will be of no advantage to us, dear hearers, that “a fountain” has been “opened for sin and for uncleanness,” unless we actually betake ourselves to this fountain, and obtain the application of its purifying streams to our polluted souls. And O! have we done this? Have we secured an interest in the blood of Christ? Have our numberless offences against our Maker been pardoned? Have we been regenerated?

Have old things in us passed away, and all things become new? Do we now love God supremely? Can we say that we give to him undivided hearts? Can we look up to him and exclaim, "Whom have we in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that we desire besides thee?" Happy they who can answer such queries to the satisfaction of their own consciences!

Brethren, these and similar queries are particularly important to those among you who have made a public and solemn profession of faith, and contemplate a renewal of this profession on the next Sabbath. Then the table of the Lord will be again spread. Then the great fountain for sin and for uncleanness will be exhibited, in significant and affecting emblem, to your view. Prepare, communicants, prepare for the scene that is before you. Examine yourselves, and so eat of that bread, and drink of that cup, which represent the body of Christ broken, and his blood shed for the remission of sins. Compare your lives—not merely your external conduct, but the temper of your minds, and state of your hearts—with the requirements of the holy volume. And remember, too, that in this, as in all other matters, you can do nothing without the aid of your heavenly Father. To him let your supplication arise—"Search us, O God, and know our hearts; try us, and know our thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting."

And what shall we say to those who have not yet come to the fountain for sin and uncleanness—who forsake this fountain of living waters, and hew out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water? We entreat you, dear hearers, to pause, and reflect upon the inevitable consequences of your present career. Believe us, there is no pardon for the guilty—there is no sanctification for the polluted—there is no happiness for the

miserable—except what the gospel of Christ reveals. His name is the only one by which you can be saved. And in him there is complete and final salvation. It matters not what may be the nature or the number of your transgressions. The blood of God's Son can cleanse from all sin. There is no human being on this side of eternity, who need apprehend that his offences are too numerous and aggravated to be forgiven—that the stains of moral defilement are too deeply wrought into his soul, to be washed out. O no! The fountain spoken of in our text, has efficacy enough to purify every sinner that repairs to its streams. Its current springs from those heights of benevolence and glory, on which the Deity himself sits enthroned, and comes down to earth with an impetus, a fulness, and a power, sufficient to overflow the loftiest mountains of human guilt and depravity. Here, then, ye prisoners of hope, is your encouragement. Banish every thing like despair from your bosoms. The voice of love and mercy this morning sounds to cheer and to invite you. Listen to its heaven-born accents:—"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, and though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

SERMON XIII.



LUKE XVI. 1—9.

“And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him, that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship; I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord’s debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely; for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”

THE generality of infidel writers have admitted, that the morality of the gospel is pure and unexceptionable. And yet there have not been wanting those, who have assumed a different and bolder ground. The Bible has been openly characterized by one who was himself the pollution and disgrace of every community in which he moved, as “the most immoral book in the world.” This extravagant and blasphemous language was used by its author principally in reference to the Old Testament. But even the New Testament has not entirely escaped detraction. The very instructions that fell from the lips of the Son of God have been objected to, as not uniformly in accordance with the principles of rectitude.

Thus the parable which we have just read to you, has been condemned on the ground that it is calculated to encourage fraud, by the terms of approbation in which it relates the conduct of a dishonest steward. We can readily conceive, that to the casual reader, there may be a semblance of plausibility in this objection. We have, therefore, thought, that it might not be uninteresting nor unprofitable to attempt a correct exposition of a passage of Scripture, which is liable to misapprehension, but which, when rightly understood, will be found highly instructive in its scope and tendency.

“There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and the same was accused unto him, that he had wasted his goods.”

This verse accurately and strikingly delineates the relation which we all sustain to God. We may be considered as his stewards, because every thing that we possess belongs in reality to him. We are his property in the most unrestricted sense of the term. Our existence was derived from him in the first instance. His eyes beheld our substance yet being imperfect; and in his book all our members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. He clothed us with skin and flesh, and fenced us with bones and sinews. He endued us with the thinking and feeling principle, whatever it is, which animates and ennobles our material frame. By his kind and untiring providence too, we have ever since been preserved in being. To his bounty we owe every corporeal comfort, and every intellectual enjoyment. The food that we eat, and the raiment that we wear—the lands and the houses that we are accustomed to call our own—the gold and silver that we have laid up in our coffers—the knowledge that we have acquired—the reputation and honours that we have won

—the children around whom our tenderest affections and fondest hopes revolve—these are all the gifts of Jehovah. Human arithmetic would fail to enumerate the various obligations under which his benignity has brought us. We have not a single possession, for which we are not indebted to the Creator and sovereign Proprietor of the universe.

Again, the steward in the parable was accused of squandering the goods of his employer. And, brethren, may not a similar accusation be preferred against each one of us? As the stewards of God, we are bound to take care of the various talents with which he has entrusted us. Any misuse of these talents must render us obnoxious to his displeasure. He has been pleased to confide them to our safe keeping, and, of course, the waste or neglect of them must be viewed and punished by him as a breach of trust. In short, our Maker has a most equitable and cogent claim to the highest services that we can render; he is fairly entitled to put in requisition for his own pleasure, and the promotion of his own glory, all the faculties of body and of mind, which he has bestowed upon us. Now is it not a fact, that we are exceedingly prone to deny—if not with our lips, at least by our conduct—that he is our rightful Master? How frequently do we act without the least reference to his will! How proudly does the feeling of independence arise in our bosoms! And how arrogantly does the general tenour of our deportment say, “What is the Almighty that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?” Yes, we all waste, in a greater or less degree, the blessings which a bountiful providence has conferred upon us. What noble endowments of the mind and heart, not to speak of inferior advantages, have been ruined and destroyed by intemperance! Can you conceive

of a more profligate and disgraceful expenditure of Heaven's favours, than may be laid to the charge of those, who, in the expressive language of Solomon, "tarry long at the wine?" O! how should the thought, that they are the stewards of God, dash from their lips the intoxicating goblet, and drive them humble, broken-hearted penitents from the scene of dissipation! There are also those who prostitute the best gifts of Jehovah to the purposes of an inordinate ambition, sacrificing the favour of the Creator to the applause and admiration of his creatures. There are others who frustrate the benevolent designs of the Almighty by hoarding up for the gratification of avarice, that wealth which he placed at their disposal, in order that they might have the opportunity of augmenting their own happiness by contributing to the happiness of others. We might likewise refer to the conduct of those whose career is a round of frivolous occupations and amusements, styled in most appropriate phraseology, so many modes of "killing time." But it would be no easy task to enumerate all the different ways in which men waste the mercies of heaven. In general it may be observed that the promotion of the Divine glory is the great end of our being, and that thus, so far as we act without a due reference to this end, are we chargeable with the guilt of dissipating the property of Him, whose we are, and whom we are bound to serve.

We are not, however, to imagine, that nothing more is required of us, as the stewards of God, than merely that we should not waste or neglect the talents which he has put into our possession. This is a part of our duty. But it is not all our duty. More, much more is demanded by our Master in heaven. He calls for the judicious and assiduous improvement of his talents. And here we may refer, in illustration and support of this position, to

another of the parables of our Lord, in which the kingdom of heaven is compared to a certain person, who previous to his departure for some distant region, left his property in charge with three servants. To one he gave five talents; to another two; and to a third one. They who received the five and the two talents, presented, on the return of their lord, double the amount confided to them: thus evincing, that they had been prudently and diligently employed during his absence. They were accordingly commended as good and faithful servants, and promised an abundant reward. But he who received the one talent, approached his master with this pitiful speech: "Lord, I knew thee, that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine." Mark his lord's indignant reply: "Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed; thou oughtest, therefore, to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming, I should have received mine own with usury." With what point and energy are we here taught, that it is not enough merely to retain the talents with which God has entrusted us, so as to be able to return them to him, in the day of final settlement, in the same state in which they came into our hands! The precept of our divine Master is, "Occupy till I come." He demands the improvement of the favours which he confers. We must not only avoid the deterioration of his gifts, but we must evince our gratitude for their possession, and our high estimation of their value, by employing them as instruments for the promotion of his glory.

Let us now return to the parable before us: "And he called him, and said unto him, How is it, that I hear this

of thee? give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.”

The great practical truth inculcated in this verse, is that of human accountability. The very idea of our being the stewards of God, implies that we are responsible to him for the use that we make of the talents with which he has entrusted us. The truth is one which conscience forces us to admit. Every individual feels that he is a moral agent—the subject of reward and punishment. There is something within him which declares, in language too plain to be mistaken, too loud and imperious to be wholly unheeded, that he is amenable to a Being of infinite rectitude and purity, not only for his external deportment, but for the emotions which he cherishes in his heart, and the thoughts which he entertains in his mind. He has an innate conviction on this subject, which he vainly endeavours to eradicate from his moral system—a conviction which survives the ravages of sin, triumphs over the speculations of philosophy, and points the transgressor to the retributions of eternity.

The sacred Scriptures not only assert, with peculiar emphasis, the general truth of man's accountability, but they also inform us, that a period is approaching, in which the whole human family shall be arraigned for trial at the bar of God. They assure us, that a day has been appointed for judging the world in righteousness—a day in which the supreme Ruler of the universe shall be seated on his throne, and before him shall be assembled all the individuals of our race. Then the books shall be opened, and each one of us shall be tried according to the things written in those books. Every work shall be brought into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or bad. Nothing shall elude the scrutiny of our Maker. The untold history of the heart shall be

submitted to the inspection, and published in the audience, of congregated millions. Sins committed in the deep gloom of midnight, and of which the authors would have blushed to think that even the stars of heaven were witnessing them, shall be exposed to the view of the universe, amid the blaze of ten thousand suns. Transgressors of every description and of every order—from the murderer of myriads, to the murderer of a solitary individual—from the despot of a whole community, to the despot of a single family—from the plunderer of nations, to the convict whose first attempt at robbery consigned him to the gallows—the calumniator, the adulterer, the blasphemer, the profaner of the Sabbath, the miser, the spendthrift, and the idler—however various their degrees of criminality—must all appear to receive their sentence and their doom at the judgment seat of Christ.

How solemn and impressive, dear hearers, is the truth to which we are endeavouring to direct your attention! We are now stewards. But we shall not always be so; or at least not in the same sense in which we are at present. A crisis awaits us, (and God only knows how near it may be,) in which we must surrender up our trust, and give in an account of our stewardship. Have we received from the Creator peculiar endowments of mind? or has Providence furnished us with ample opportunities for mental improvement? Then must we account for these advantages. Do we possess extensive wealth, or considerable influence in society? We must likewise account for these advantages. Are we parents? If so, we shall have a heavy account to render for the effect which our precepts, and especially our example, have had on the moral character and the eternal destiny of our children. Are we hearers of the gospel, and have we neglected the great salvation which it proffers to our acceptance?

Ah! who can conceive the reckoning which we shall have with our divine Lord, for the abuse of this inestimable privilege! Gladly, under such circumstances, would we exchange conditions with the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon—of Sodom and Gomorrah.

We proceed now to contemplate the conduct of the steward, on receiving the summons to deliver up his trust. We are told that he said within himself, “What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.” After further reflection on his situation, he added—“I am resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.” The expedient which he devised, is thus related by the Saviour: “So he called every one of his lord’s debtors unto him, and he said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he unto another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.”—The plain English of all this is, that the steward determined to provide for his support, after his dismissal, by defrauding his employer. For this purpose, he called together his lord’s *debtors*, or, as the original term might be rendered, *tenants*, and inquired of them the amount of their debts. We may account for the circumstance of this matter being left to them for decision, by supposing that the debts in question, were their rents, which were to be paid in the produce of the soil they cultivated. To these tenants, the steward remitted a considerable part of what was due, entering into a settlement with them before he had been actually discharged from his stewardship, and while his acts would consequently

be binding on his master. Some have imagined, that by such conduct he merely made amends for his former injustice towards them. However this may have been, his object manifestly was to ingratiate himself with those whose debts he thus curtailed, so that after his dismissal, he might have some title to their friendly offices.

We next read, "The lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely." Now, the first remark we have to offer on this passage, is, that it was not the Saviour who commended the unjust steward, but his employer. The objectors to the morality of the parable, have too frequently overlooked this important distinction. Again, we would observe, that the commendation bestowed upon the unjust steward, was a commendation, not of the fraud which he had committed, but simply of the prudence and sagacity which he had displayed, in planning for his own interests. It is expressly said, that his lord commended him "because he had done wisely."

The remainder of the verse may be considered as the observation of Christ: "For the children of this world are in their generation"—(or, as a judicious translator renders the original, "in conducting their affairs")—"wiser than the children of light."

We perceive, then, that it was by no means the design of the Saviour, in the delivery of this parable, to countenance any species of injustice. He always enjoined upon his followers, the strictest integrity in their intercourse with one another, and in their dealings with the world at large. He laid down an admirable maxim for the regulation of their conduct, in all the various transactions of life, when he directed them to do to others, precisely as they would have others to do to them. We moreover know, that in his own example, he displayed the most rigid and scrupulous honesty; for an instance is

mentioned by his biographers, in which, when the payment of a certain tax was demanded of him, he unhesitatingly yielded to the exaction, although he was aware, that so far as respected himself, it was illegal. So proper did he deem it to avoid any thing which might even look like a departure from rectitude.

Brethren, we would not omit this opportunity of stating, in the most explicit manner, that every kind of fraud and injustice is repugnant to the precepts and the spirit of the sacred Scriptures. The servant who pilfers the groceries or the sweetmeats of her mistress—the apprentice who keeps himself in pocket-money from his master’s drawer—the tradesman who asks an unreasonable profit on his goods—the bankrupt who lays by for his own use any portion of his property—may rest assured, that their conduct is minutely observed, and will be severely punished by the God whose law is promulged in this holy volume. Even the Old Testament, which, for reasons that might be given, exhibits a less elevated standard of morality than the New, is not without passages which represent dishonesty in all its forms, as a sin peculiarly offensive to the divine Being. Hear, for example, what is written in the book of Deuteronomy: “Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thy house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight; a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God.”

It is now time to meet the very natural inquiry, What was the object of the Saviour in the delivery of the parable under consideration? We answer, that his object

was to exhibit the foresight of the steward in providing for his temporal interests, as a pattern worthy of our imitation in providing for our spiritual interests. The force of our Lord's argument is briefly this: If prudence in a matter of comparatively little moment, and even when united with injustice, be commendable, how much more deserving of commendation is prudence in the great business of religion?

Such is the true moral of the parable; and in enforcing this moral on his disciples, Jesus added, "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail," (or, "when ye are discharged from your stewardship") "they may receive you into everlasting habitations." The expression, "mammon of unrighteousness," is in the Hebrew idiom, and may be translated, "the unrighteous mammon," that is *false or deceitful riches*. Now, we are not to imagine, that the Saviour here sanctions the notion, that wealth may purchase eternal happiness. He does not intend to convey the impression, that riches, whether acquired by dishonest or by honest means, may be so employed by their possessors as to *entitle* them, in the strict sense of the term, to the favour of God, and the joys of heaven. His language, in this place, must be understood in accordance with the leading idea of the parable, and must, therefore, be interpreted as a general direction to render all the temporal blessings of providence subservient to the advancement of our spiritual interests. Do we possess wealth? We are required to use it in a manner calculated to promote the glory of God, and the welfare of man. By so doing we shall confer the highest and most lasting benefit on our own souls. We shall make to ourselves many friends in this world, and, what is of infinitely greater consequence, we shall secure a Friend in heaven,

who, when the term of our stewardship on earth shall have expired, will receive us into the everlasting habitations above. Although there is nothing intrinsically meritorious to the view of Deity in the purest and most self-denying exercises of human benevolence, yet such exercises, being at once the fruit and the evidence of piety, may be considered, in an humble sense, as the instruments by which the divine approbation is procured. The final salvation of an individual is the reward, not, indeed, of *debt*, but of *grace*. Still, however, it is truly a reward.

We have said, that the prominent truth inculcated in this parable, is the importance of a wise and diligent attention to our spiritual and eternal interests. The sagacity of the unjust steward deserves our imitation in the transaction of a business which admits of no injustice. When the blessings of religion form the grand object of our pursuit, we may copy his prudence without the least danger of being induced to copy his fraudulent conduct. The concerns of the soul are of such a description, that he who would manage them to any useful purpose, not only may, but must combine all the wisdom of the serpent with all the harmlessness of the dove.

And here let us think, just for a moment, of the sagacity and industry, which men exhibit in their various secular avocations. First, behold the merchant. With what zeal and assiduity does he devote himself to the accumulation of wealth! And with what penetration does he frequently anticipate the never-ceasing fluctuations of trade—the constant rise and fall in the prices of merchandize! Next look at the politician. With what intense and irresistible energy does he grasp at the gilded shadows of ambition! Mark the intuitive glance with which

he develops the stratagems of faction—the prophetic spirit with which he reads the distant future, and accommodates his plans to events which he knows that the revolutions of time must bring to pass. Contemplate also the votary of science, and candidate for literary distinction. See him consecrating the hours which others consume in sleep, or employ in inferior occupations, to the acquisition of knowledge. Observe the anxious and untiring ardour with which he prosecutes the one absorbing object of his thoughts, his desires, and his hopes. The setting sun leaves him at his task, and the morning star witnesses the renewal of his toil.

Thus it is, that men “labour for the meat that perisheth.” They rise early, sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrows,” in order to secure the precarious wealth, the fading honours, and the unsatisfying pleasures of earth. Would to God that they manifested the same sagacity and zeal and perseverance, in attending to the momentous concerns of religion! But alas! “the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.”

We shall not undertake, on this occasion, to enforce the practical lesson of the text, by showing, that the business of our salvation is infinitely the most important in which we can embark. But we must not conclude, without observing—and we shall do so in a single word—that there is a certainty of success connected with wise and strenuous efforts in this business, which attends the prosecution of no other pursuit. The merchant, the politician and the scholar are subject to disappointments from various sources. Bankruptcy may befall the first, and loss of popularity the second, while a broken constitution is the frequent lot of the third. But in sincere

and unremitting endeavours to advance our spiritual interests, there can be no failure. Such endeavours must and will prevail. There has never been an instance, in which they proved ineffectual. As surely as God is true, the man who seeks shall find, and to him that knocks the door of heaven shall be opened.

No apology, dear hearers, is requisite for the subject to which your attention has now been directed. We are all—believers as well as unbelievers—too much disposed to remissness and indolence with regard to the concerns of our souls. Our consciences testify, that we need to be often admonished of our awful delinquency and infatuation in this matter. If a heathen nation deemed it expedient always to place a human skeleton at the festive board, to prevent the guests from forgetting that they must die—if a heathen monarch caused a herald to exclaim three times a day in his ears, “Philip of Macedon, thou art mortal!”—how useful must it be to inculcate a similar lesson frequently and earnestly upon Christians! They cannot be too constantly reminded, in the midst of business and of pleasure, of that injunction from the lips of their Saviour: “Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.”

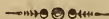
And here, brethren, permit us affectionately to ask you, whether it is not most unwise to manifest so much ardour in temporal concerns, while you are comparatively neglectful of your spiritual interests? What a great—what a ruinous—delusion! Have you yet to learn, that it will profit a man nothing to gain the whole world and lose his own soul! Can you need to be informed, that religion is the only effectual support under the inflictions of life—the only real source of serenity and joy in the crisis of

death? Wretched, indeed, must be the last moments of him who has misspent his days in the pursuit of this world's vanities. Not the recollection of the past, and still less the anticipation of the future, can administer the least solace to his mind. He is conscious, that he is utterly unprepared to render an account of his stewardship. He knows, that he has squandered the mercies of heaven. The representative of Deity within his breast—a faithful and terrific monitor—points him to the blessings of providence which he has abused—to the means of grace which he has neglected. Memory, at the call of conscience, holds up to his view a mirror of his sins, from the contemplation of which he would, if it were possible, speed his flight to the utmost verge of the universe. Miserable being! his soul is required of him, and he can neither avoid nor delay the summons. Willingly and eagerly would he part with all that the world had ever done for him, to obtain the respite of a single year—a single day—a single hour! But divine justice frowns indignant at the mere suggestion of such a barter. Weeping relatives and pious friends mingle their entreaties to the Father of mercy, that the dying culprit's term of probation may be only a little lengthened. Still the language of God is, "Cut him down; why cumbereth he the ground?"

We beseech you, then, dear hearers, to act a wiser part. O! let it be your primary object to make your peace with God, and prepare for the solemnities of judgment, and the realities of the eternity that follows. Defer not—we beg you to defer not—this business till the hour of death. Justly has it been called, "the work of a life-time, and too great a work for a life-time." We can assure you, that you have not a moment to lose.

All the time that you can possibly employ—all the effort that you can possibly put forth—will not do more than save you from destruction. Now is the crisis of your fate. To day is the season of salvation. “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near.—Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”

SERMON XIV.



MARK X. 17—22.

“And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God. Thou knowest the commandments: Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest; go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.”

WE shall first lay before you a brief review of the circumstances here presented to our consideration, and then dwell a little upon the practical lesson which the passage so impressively inculcates.

The ministry of our divine Lord excited an uncommon degree of attention throughout his native country. Wherever he appeared as a teacher, vast numbers crowded about him, and listened with the deepest interest to his instructions. His auditors also frequently made free to interrogate him respecting religious subjects; and he never failed, except where the inquiry manifestly proceeded from an improper motive, or related to a topic of no practical importance, to return a prompt, a kind, and a satisfactory answer. Several instances occur in the New Testament, of conversations between Christ and persons who took the liberty of consulting him, and asking his opinion in respect to matters involving the present

duty or the future destiny of man. In the case now before us, the inquirer was an individual of wealth and consideration, whose moral character would seem to have been what we are accustomed to call unblemished. There is no reason to presume that he approached our Lord with any sinister or unworthy object in view. His whole demeanour was marked by ingenuousness, and indicated an unfeigned desire for information and improvement. He was not like the pert lawyer, who stood up and tempted Jesus, demanding what he must do to inherit eternal life, and for whose benefit the Saviour told the story of the benevolent Samaritan. Nor did he resemble the cunning and malignant hypocrites, who, on a certain occasion, were so anxious to find out whether it was lawful for them, conscientious men, to pay tribute to Cæsar. In short, he must be looked upon as a young man correct in his life, and amiable in his manners, whose application to Christ was, in all respects, candid and commendable.

This inquirer, we are told, came to Jesus *running*—a circumstance characteristic of the ardour and impetuosity of youth. We are likewise informed, that he *kneeled* to our Lord—conduct which showed that he entertained the most profound respect for the personage whom he was going to consult.—He further manifested his sincere regard for Christ by the appellation with which he addressed him, “Good Master.”—And what was the query which he had to propose? It was one of the very highest importance, and ran in such terms as these, “What shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?” Every one who considers himself as an accountable agent, and believes that when he is done with this world, his existence shall be prolonged indefinitely in another state, must admit the momentousness of the question here recorded. To discover the method by which peace and

happiness after death are to be obtained—to know the precise course which we are required by our Maker to pursue, as the means of securing his favour, and ultimately raising us to his presence in the regions of perpetual light and bliss—is surely an object, compared with which, all the other objects of human pursuit dwindle into insignificance. And O! how unutterable the folly—how teeming with perils the condition—of him, who never thinks it worth his while to inquire, how he is to make provision for the exigencies of a coming eternity!

The language of this young man, “What shall I do?” taken in connexion with all the circumstances attending his interview with Christ, is an evidence that he was under the influence of the same error into which his countrymen had generally fallen, and believed that future happiness was to be purely the result and reward of human exertions. He did not ask whether the divine favour *could* be obtained by the doing of some good thing—the performance of one or more virtuous, and pious, and benevolent deeds. This he took for granted. It was a point relative to which he entertained not the least doubt. And so most men, or, perhaps, we should rather say, all men, before they feel the power of evangelical truth, and become Christians in the strict and peculiar sense of the term, conceive that a rigidly moral deportment, especially when united to certain religious observances, will be sufficient to procure eternal life from a merciful Divinity. We know, indeed, that they will not always say that such is their creed. But then they act, they live as if it was; and that amounts to the same thing.

Our Lord, before proceeding to answer directly the question proposed to him, made a remark by no means inappropriate, suggested by the manner in which he had been addressed. “Why callest thou me good? there is

none good but one, that is God." In the passage parallel to this, in Matthew's Gospel, a different reading is exhibited by some of the best manuscripts and most ancient versions—"Why dost thou ask me concerning the good which thou must do?" To this reading an eminent critic objects, that it furnishes a less pertinent and intelligible reply, than what we have in Mark and Luke. But the weight of authority in its favour, is too great to be counterbalanced by a consideration of this kind, even if there were more intrinsic force in the objection than we think there is. The truth is, that the scope and spirit of the Saviour's answer, are not essentially affected by the difference in the readings. It was his object to show the young querist, that there was no connexion between eternal life, and the merit of human conduct. Now, to attain this object, the heavenly Teacher began by asserting, as a fundamental principle, that the only being in the universe really *good*, was God. To no other does absolute and independent goodness belong. His creatures all derive from him, whatever rectitude and purity they may, at any time, possess; and consequently they can do nothing to *deserve*, in the proper sense of the word, his approbation. Every blessing that they enjoy is a pure gratuity on the part of "the Father of lights;" and so must be every blessing to which they can ever attain. After they have done the utmost that they can possibly effect, they are unprofitable servants. Their highest merit consists in this, that they have employed the means which their Creator confers, in acquitting themselves, to some humble degree, of the obligations under which his bounty has brought them. Such, briefly, is the nature, and such the precise amount, of human desert. And O! will any one of you, dear hearers, rely on this for salvation? Tell us, will you attach the fearful destinies of an

undying soul, to such a brittle thread? Ah! you might as well throw yourself over the brow of the precipice, and trust to the strength of the spider's web to preserve you from destruction.

We have seen, then, that the first remark of our Lord involved an exposure of the mistaken views on religion, embraced by this young inquirer.—The Saviour's next observation was, "Thou knowest the commandments;" or, as the Evangelist Matthew has it, "But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." This language, of course, cannot be understood as implying, that the happiness of heaven may be merited by a regular and faithful observance of the precepts of the moral law. Jesus certainly intended to convey no such idea as this. But he thought that it might be well to take the querist on the ground which he had selected for himself—to reason with him, for a moment, on his own principles. He therefore referred him to the decalogue, which consists of an admirable summary of all our moral and religious duties. There can be no doubt, that if it were in any respect practicable for man to purchase the favourable regards of his Maker, a result so desirable and important could be connected only with a tenour of faultless and perpetual obedience to this heaven-descended code. To this effect speaks the apostle: "If there had been a law given, that could have given life, verily righteousness would have been by the law."—Besides, the decalogue is one of the scriptural tests by which we are to try our conduct, for the purpose of ascertaining whether we are in the way to heaven. It is a rule of duty—a standard of rectitude—without which we cannot advance a single step in the great work of self-examination. You would like to know, anxious man, what is your chance for salvation. You would give us any thing, if we could only

take down the massy book of God's decrees, and remove your doubts, by assuring you that your name has a place in the register of the redeemed. We cannot do this. But we can put you in a way of obtaining the information which you seek almost as certainly and as accurately. We demand, then, whether you obey the moral law—obey it, we mean, in the spirit, no less than in the letter of it? Urge this query upon your conscience, remembering, at the same time, that the code of duties to which we refer, is designed to control the thoughts and emotions of the mind, as well as the actual movements of the body—a system of precepts, which, besides denouncing crime in the later and grosser stages of commission, extends its interdictions to the earliest impulses—the incipient propensities of the spiritual being. If you thus keep the commandments of God—not perfectly, indeed, but so as to avoid the known and habitual violation of them in any one point—you shall inherit eternal life. Your obedience, though it is far, very far from investing you with a title to everlasting happiness, is an evidence, that you have an interest in the blood of Christ, and have been regenerated by the Spirit of the Most High. No one can observe the decalogue, in that strict and comprehensive sense of its requirements on which the New Testament insists, who does not also possess, at least in some humble degree, the entire assemblage of moral or religious qualities for which the Redeemer looks in his devoted followers. He who takes the law of Sinai for the rule of his life and of his heart, will ever be an individual, whose soul has been visited with penitence for sin, whose expectations of pardon rest on the death and intercession of Jesus, and in whose bosom love to God, with all its kindred sympathies, has become the master feeling.

Thus we see, that the Saviour did not act improperly,

nor inconsistently with the spirit of the evangelical dispensation, when he referred this inquirer to the moral law, and repeated to him some of the most prominent of its requirements—"Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother."

The ingenuous youth, on hearing these commandments, promptly averred, that he had kept them all from his earliest years. We are not to consider this declaration as the offspring of vanity or arrogance. His conscience did not reproach him with the open and literal transgression of any one precept pertaining to the decalogue. He well knew, that he had never been guilty of what the world accounts and calls adultery, murder, theft, slander, fraud, or disobedience to parents; and surely it was not unbecoming for him confidently to say so. He had no just conceptions relative to the spirituality of the divine law. He was not aware, that it demanded more than external compliance with its injunctions, and so far he was sure, that he had not been delinquent. Instead of indulging in any thing like gross or obvious sin, he had, from his very youth, been assiduous in the cultivation of every moral virtue, and the observance of every religious institution. And he conceived, that in so doing he had fully obeyed the whole will of heaven, as revealed in the writings of Moses and the prophets.

Our Lord, pleased with the good qualities of this young inquirer, and pitying the error into which he had fallen, is described as contemplating him with more than ordinary interest. We are told, that "Jesus beholding him, loved him." He saw, that he was an amiable and a promising youth, and was anxious to benefit him, by turning his attention to the point in which he was still deficient, and needed amendment, ere he could become

fit for that eternal life of which he was in quest. "One thing," said Christ, "thou lackest; go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, take up the cross and follow me." But this is rather a strange requisition, you say. What? Can it be the duty of every individual who aspires to the rewards of heaven, to go at once and sell all he has in the world, and distribute the proceeds among the indigent? We answer, Not at the present day, though in the first age of Christianity the peculiar exigencies of an infant church struggling against persecution, and every other conceivable obstacle, rendered it expedient for the devoted friends of the Saviour to relinquish their individual possessions, and have "all things in common." They who then refused to make this sacrifice were counted unworthy the cause of Jesus. The test was a simple and decisive one. It settled speedily and effectually the question, whether the heart was more attached to temporal than to spiritual blessings. Thus in the case of this young inquirer, it soon showed, and in the most conclusive manner, that he was still too fond of this lower world—that his desire for eternal life was not at all commensurate with the magnitude and importance of the object—that he was unwilling to purchase heaven by the abandonment of earth. As soon as he heard the condition of salvation which our Lord, for wise reasons, thought proper to impose, his countenance and conduct evinced, that he deemed it too hard. Compliance with it was out of the question. The saying made him "sad," and he "went away grieved;" and for his thus going away, the reason is assigned, that, "he had great possessions."

Now, from this interesting portion of the New Testament, we may deduce the practical conclusion, that,

NOTHING SHORT OF SUPREME LOVE TO GOD DESERVES THE NAME OF RELIGION. Such, dear hearers, is the truth on which we would now expatiate a little.

Nothing short of supreme love to God, we have said, deserves the name of religion. His requisition to every being formed by his power, and sustained by his bounty, is, "My son, give me thy heart." Such is the language of our Maker, and it is language which sufficiently evinces, that without the cordial devotion of our whole selves to his service, we cannot become the objects of his paternal regards. Let it ever be distinctly understood, that all acceptable obedience to the divine law must emanate from a principle of sincere attachment to the honour and glory of Him by whom it has been enacted. Hence we find the several precepts of this law comprehended in that one grand injunction, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." And hence, too, we find it broadly asserted, that even if an individual were to keep the whole law, with the exception of only a single point, he must still be viewed and dealt with as a violator of it in every particular: and for an obvious reason.—His neglect of one commandment proves, that his observance of the rest is radically defective. He keeps the nine from some motives which have no connexion with love to the great Lawgiver, and if he were as strongly tempted to violate them, as he is to violate the one precept with regard to which he is delinquent, he would not be tardy in becoming a transgressor of the entire decalogue. Did he really love God, he would avoid the infraction of one commandment quite as scrupulously and as pertinaciously as he would the infraction of all. "Love," brethren, "love is the fulfilling of the law." Jehovah is not a tyrannical potentate satisfied with the slavish obedience

of his intelligent creatures. He is a parental Governor who looks for filial submission in his subjects, and will accept no other homage than that of the heart.

The general principle which we have now laid down, will assist us in detecting what there was hollow in the moral conduct and feelings of a young man, whose deportment and character were, in many respects, so correct and amiable as to recommend him to the peculiar regard and sympathy of Christ. He had obeyed the whole law, so far as he understood the purport, and felt the force of its injunctions, and was even desirous of learning what more it was necessary for him to do, in order to fulfil his duty, and provide for his well-being in eternity. So far as human judgment was competent to decide, his condition was safe, and his prospects were flattering. But the Saviour, whose eye was upon his heart, and who knew what was in him, perceived that he still “lacked one thing;” and that, alas! the all-important thing. His obedience, weighed in the balances of heaven, was found wanting. It was devoid of that vital principle of love which was essential to its acceptableness in the view of Jehovah. Here was the inquirer’s capital deficiency; and to make this manifest, nothing more was necessary than to lay upon him some injunction, to comply with which there could be no other motive than a real regard for the authority—an unpretended desire to do the will—of the Most High. He could not transgress the moral law—he could not commit adultery, murder, theft or fraud, nor could he bear false witness, or treat his parents in an undutiful manner—without forfeiting the good opinion of society, and thus subjecting himself to temporal disadvantages. But no bad consequences of this description would be likely to result from the refusal to sell all that he had, and give to the poor. The world,

instead of setting a black mark upon him for such refusal, would be loud in sounding his praise. He would be commended as a man of prudence, who knew how to take care of his own interests—a species of knowledge, by the way, in the highest repute among men, and which not a few fathers would rather confer upon their sons, than see them capable of outstripping every competitor in the loftiest fields of science. It is clear, therefore, that the command of the Saviour, “Go, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor,” was precisely and admirably fitted to expose the self-delusion under which this inquirer was unhappily labouring. It brought him directly to the point. It shut him up to the faith of the gospel. It fixed the eye of his conscience upon the one thing which he lacked. It shed the light of day into his mind, and removed his ignorance with regard to what he should do to inherit eternal life. In a word, it taught him that he did not yet love God supremely, and that this was the very pivot on which his unalterable destiny must turn.

And here, brethren, let us request you just to imagine, for a moment, that some requisition similar to that in our text, was made of you. It is not your duty, man of wealth, to sell all you have, and give to the poor. But suppose the contrary. Admit that this sacrifice was demanded by your Saviour, in such a way that you could not possibly doubt respecting his will. What, in these circumstances, would you do? Part with your possessions? or become sad, and go away grieved? And how would you act, man of ambition, if you were directed to relinquish all the honour and influence which you have acquired, and to forego the splendid prospects which have been so long dazzling with their brilliancy your mental eye? We would also ask, with what sensations would you, fond parent, hear the injunction from

the lips of your divine Lord, to surrender the son or the daughter, whose life and happiness are far dearer to you than your own?—But we leave you to pursue this train of reflection for yourselves. Try the sincerity of your religion by the criterion which our present text exhibits. Make an effort to discover whether God has the first place in your hearts. O! remember, that he will bear no rival near his throne. Whatever he requires for the promotion of his glory—whether it be your property, your standing and influence in society, or your children—a right hand, a right eye, or even life itself—must be promptly relinquished. Behold the venerable “father of the faithful” preparing, in obedience to the mysterious mandate of Heaven, to immolate, on the heights of Moriah, his only son Isaac, the child of peculiar promise, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. Learn from his example, the nature and extent of your duty, in relation to the clearly-ascertained requirements of your Maker.

We see, then, that the passage under consideration, affords an admirable test for enabling us to distinguish the various appearances of religion from religion itself. It teaches us, in a manner the plainest and most impressive, that without supreme love to God, nothing that we may do will effect our salvation. This must be the governing principle of our conduct. Mere morality will not procure for us eternal life, since we may observe the decalogue with a view to those temporal advantages which experience has shown us are annexed, in the ordinary course of Providence, to a virtuous career. Similar motives may lead us to assume what the Scriptures call the “form of godliness”—to make a profession of religion—to go through, with promptitude and assiduity, the whole routine of religious observances. There must,

therefore, be something more than moral deportment, and something more than a profession of religion, in the individual who looks to heaven as his everlasting home. He must obey and serve his Maker, simply because he loves him. Whether he eats, or drinks, or whatsoever he does, must be done to the glory of God. Thus speaks the New Testament, and the minister of the gospel, who would "nothing extenuate," is bound explicitly to say the same.

Brethren, the point to which we have now directed (or, at least, endeavoured to direct) your attention, is particularly important for those among you, who have made a formal profession of religion. In thus acting, you have performed a clear and a decided duty. But O! remember, that the profession alone will not avail for the salvation of your souls. A form of godliness, without the power thereof, is good for nothing. It is compared by the Saviour to sepulchres, which, though fair, and white, and promising on the exterior, contain only bones and putrid flesh. Piety—real, acceptable, and profitable piety—does not consist in the mere physical or outward observance of any of the means of grace. We have not done enough, when we have become regular attendants of Jehovah's sanctuary—when we have been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost—when we have partaken of bread and wine at the sacramental board—and when we have embarked in the zealous support of every plan devised for the temporal and spiritual improvement of mankind. Genuine Christianity consists not in any one, nor even in all of these things. Its essence lies in doing the will of God, from a sincere regard for the divine authority, and desire to promote the divine glory. Believe us, brethren, nothing short of this will take you to heaven. "Not every one

that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

And what we have thus said to professing Christians, is substantially applicable to all in this assembly. Yes, dear hearers, if you would inherit eternal life, you must love God in such a manner, and to such a degree, that if he were to demand of you the surrender of all your present possessions, or whatever sublunary object you hold most dear, as the condition of certain and ever-during happiness beyond the grave, you would not hesitate to submit to his will. This is, briefly, what you must do to be saved. Morality will do much for you in this world. It will secure to you the esteem and confidence of society, and administer largely to your real enjoyments. But it will not raise you to heaven. To reach that hallowed and blissful abode, you must bestow your affections supremely upon God. Now, we have nothing more to say than simply to ask you to make your election, and come to a decision. Be upright, temperate, and benevolent, and you shall have your reward here. Love God with all your heart, and soul, and strength, and mind, and you shall have your reward certainly hereafter, and probably both here and hereafter. What then will you do? We tremble to think that any of you should go away sorrowful. It is an awful thing to be near to the kingdom of heaven, and yet never enter into it—to perish at the very threshold of mercy!

SERMON XV.



JOB II. 10. (Middle Clause.)

“What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?”

It is a fact not to be denied, that in the present world, good and evil are allotted to men without much apparent regard to their moral character. The virtuous are frequently visited with affliction, while the vicious enjoy a large share of temporal comforts and blessings. The ways of providence in this respect are somewhat dark and inscrutable even to those who possess the sacred volume, which discloses to a certain extent, the plan and purposes of the Deity in the government of the universe. How much more difficult, then, must it be for those who are denied the advantages of a Revelation to account, in any thing like a satisfactory manner, for that seemingly capricious distribution of prosperity and adversity, of which we now speak? We may readily imagine, that no circumstance which comes under the observation of a reflecting pagan, is calculated to perplex his mind so much as this. He, no doubt, often asks himself the question, If there be a wise and just and powerful Divinity on the throne of nature, why is it, that men are not happy or miserable here, according to their deserts?

The book of Job, brethren, was written for the purpose of solving this very question—of clearing up this dark and bewildering point. We are here presented with the case of a man suddenly reduced from the height of prosperity to the lowest condition of adversity—his fortune

and his children torn away from him, and his calamities aggravated to the utmost by some cutaneous disease of a peculiarly painful nature. His friends beholding his misfortunes, at once took up the erroneous idea, that notwithstanding his previous reputation for integrity and piety, he had really been guilty of some secret but enormous sins, for which his unprecedented afflictions were a judgment of Heaven. Under this confident impression, they visit him, and urge him to repent and acknowledge his offences and implore the divine compassion. Job in return vehemently asserts his innocence, and, indeed, is provoked by the unfounded suspicions and injudicious remarks of his friends, to go rather past the limits of modesty and propriety in doing so. At length God himself interposes for the reproof and instruction of both parties, and the book concludes so as to illustrate and enforce the important truth, that the best of men may be greatly afflicted in this world, in order to accomplish the wise and holy designs of Heaven, and to promote their happiness beyond the grave.

The words of our text are part of Job's reply to his wife, who seeing, that, even in the extreme anguish both of body and mind which he endured, he was not tempted to murmur against Providence, exclaimed, "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God and die." We are shocked to think, that such impious advice should have proceeded from female lips, and accordingly expositors, in their exquisite tenderness for the reputation of Job's consort, have suggested several ways in which a less exceptionable construction may be put upon her language. It is, we presume, generally known, that the Hebrew term here rendered *curse*, is one so singularly ambiguous in its import, that it may also be translated *bless*. Why, then, may we not adopt this meaning in the present instance, so

as to let the passage run thus: "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? BLESS God and die?" We answer, Because if this had been all that the woman said, Job would have had no occasion to reprove her in the very severe language of which our text is a part. Some have proposed to render the passage in this way: "Dost thou still retain thine integrity, blessing God and dying?" But we are inclined to consider the common version as the natural and the true one. We suppose that Job's wife had not as much self command, nor as much piety as her husband, and that in a moment of deep dejection and extreme irritation, she gave utterance to the blasphemous sentiment here attributed to her. For this she was deservedly censured by her afflicted companion: "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

The text implies, that we all receive *good* at the hand of God. And where is the human being who can hesitate, for a single moment, in admitting this truth? Whither shall we go to find an individual ungrateful or insensible enough to deny, that the Deity has conferred upon him numerous and various favours? From whom, brethren, have we derived our existence? To whom do we owe our intellectual faculties? By whose bounty is it that we are fed and clothed? Whose unslumbering eye watches over us when we sleep, and whose untiring arm protects us amid the dangers of the day? Who supplies us with kind and affectionate friends to reciprocate our joys and sympathize in our sorrows? Who in the season of sickness furnishes the means of relief, and restores us to the possession of health? But what tongue can recount the benefactions of Jehovah? Well does the Psalmist exclaim, "Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which

thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to usward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered." And again, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies, who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."

And, brethren, what is the temporal good which we have received at the hand of God, compared with the spiritual privileges and blessings which he has been pleased so richly to confer upon mankind? The gift of his Son for our redemption immeasurably exceeds all the other favours with which he has distinguished us. How signal the exhibition of divine benignity which was afforded to the universe, when the only-begotten of the Father visited our earth in the likeness of sinful flesh, and, after a life of humiliation and sorrow, submitted to the accursed death of the cross! How many and how inestimable are the benefits which the mediation of Christ has procured for our otherwise wretched and undone world—the pardon of sin, the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, peace of conscience, and a title to everlasting happiness! How grateful, dear hearers, does it become us to be, for this amazing display of love and mercy on the part of Jehovah! How should we rejoice, that, while so many millions of our hapless race are still strangers to the glad tidings of salvation, we live under the full blaze of gospel light, and are favoured with all the means of grace. And O! how much more ardent should be our gratitude—how much more thrilling our joy—if we have any

reason to indulge the belief, that we possess a personal interest in the blessings of religion! How should our hearts burn within us, if we can discern in our views, our feelings, and our conduct, any evidence—even the slightest, of the Spirit's operation!

But it is not our present purpose to enlarge upon the fact, that we have all received good at the hand of God. We would rather direct your attention to the truth inculcated in the text, that those for whom Jehovah has done so much, have no right to complain of the occasional adverse circumstances which he permits to befall them. It is well known that men in general become impatient, and manifest a disposition to repine, when Providence visits them with affliction. They forget, in the hour of adversity, all the comforts and blessings which Heaven had previously conferred upon them. They think only of the calamity which they are called to endure, and feel and act as if their whole career on earth had been one continuous series of misfortunes. Now, such conduct as this is highly culpable. It betrays ingratitude to the Most High for past favours, and an unwillingness to confide in him as respects the future. It indicates too surely the absence of that humble and devout frame of mind, which prompted the just and pious sentiment of our text, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

The present life, though abounding with many advantages and enjoyments, has also its share of difficulties and sorrows. In one sense, "man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." Many and various are the afflictions to which he is subject. Disappointments, vexations, and trials, may come upon him from a thousand sources. To loss of property, and loss of health, he is continually exposed. And then the messenger of death may invade

his family circle, break asunder the nearest ties of attachment, terminate relations which have long subsisted, and fill his heart with unutterable grief.

No man, then, whatever may be his moral character, can calculate on passing through the world, without affliction of some kind. The Christian must not expect to escape the evils which Heaven, for wise and benevolent purposes, has rendered inseparable from the lot of humanity here below. Religion promises to her votaries no such boon as exemption from temporal calamities. Indeed, the reverse would rather seem to be promised, for the Saviour on a certain occasion said to his disciples, "In the world ye shall have tribulation;" and in another passage of the New Testament, we read that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

But although the Christian is not to calculate on exemption from affliction, yet he may hope, with the blessing and the aid of Heaven, to endure it with humble and devout submission to the divine will, and thus to render it a source of real and lasting good to his soul. He remembers that he has received many blessings from Jehovah, and he feels that it would be ungrateful in the extreme to murmur on account of providential dispensations, which, however gloomy and painful, are ordered in infinite wisdom, and may contribute largely to his ultimate happiness:—

" Good, when he gives, supremely good,
Nor less when he denies;
E'en crosses from his sovereign hand,
Are blessings in disguise."

He reviews the past mercies of God, and particularly those of a spiritual nature. He deems the pardon of his sins, which he trusts that he has obtained through the merits of his Redeemer, a bounty sufficient to make

amends for any temporary evils which may befall him during his stay in this world. He thinks of the precious seasons of religious comfort and enjoyment with which he has been blessed—seasons in which the light of Jehovah's countenance has been lifted upon him, and he has read with the eye of faith, a clear title to the mansions of eternal peace and bliss. As he looks back to such periods, he communes with his spirit in language like the following:—Can it be, that God who has dealt so mercifully with my soul in days that are past, will now forget to be gracious? Is it possible, that he who once inspired my heart with the hope of pardoned sin, and encouraged me to cherish the expectation of dwelling with him for ever, will desert me in this hour of trial and of need? Surely not. I remember his promise not to leave nor forsake me, and this shall be my stay. Here will I set up my Ebenezer. Hitherto hath the Lord helped me. His compassions cannot fail. The affliction which has come upon me is the doing of a parental Deity, who best knows what is calculated to subserve the real interests of his children. It becomes me, then, to bear with meekness and resignation whatever he thinks proper to inflict. I must not forget that passage of his own word—“Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth; therefore, despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty. For he maketh sore, and bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles; yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee.”

Let us now briefly advert to one or two of those sources of consolation, which the gospel presents to the Christian in the season of bereavement and distress. We have already seen how the recollection of the good which he has received at the hand of God, conduces to reconcile

him to the endurance of the occasional evils which he may experience. There are likewise other considerations of a similar tendency.

Thus the contemplation of the divine sovereignty is calculated to have the effect of which we speak. The Christian knows that the universe, with all its interests and all its concerns, is under the absolute control of Jehovah. He does not imagine that the Deity resides at a vast distance from our world, an indifferent and a passive spectator of human affairs. An idea so preposterous as this, his mind cannot harbour. The Scriptures teach him, that nothing can happen without the agency, or, at least, without the knowledge and permission of the Most High. He therefore sees, that to repine at the dispensations of Providence, is virtually to rebel against God. It is to say to him, What doest thou? It is nothing less than to deny that he is entitled to govern his own universe as he pleases.

Again, the Christian is led to acquiesce in the afflictive dispensations of Providence, when he thinks of his own sins. He knows how greatly he has offended against the divine Majesty: he is sensible that he has broken, in numberless instances, the precepts of Jehovah's pure and perfect law. He therefore feels, that no temporal calamities with which his lot may be embittered, can exceed the punishment to which, by his mal-conduct, he has rendered himself justly obnoxious. In fact, he is conscious that he has merited at the hand of his Maker, nothing short of indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. And how, under such circumstances, can he properly complain of the afflictions with which he is visited? What right has he to murmur, when he is compelled to admit that he deserves in strictness a larger and heavier portion of adversity than he receives? Instead

of repining, he discerns that he has, in reality, cause for thankfulness and joy, that judgment has not been laid to the line, nor righteousness to the plummet. He acknowledges, that it is of the Lord's mercy, that he has not been consumed—that he has not been dealt with according to his deserts.

Further, the Christian is enabled to submit with meekness and resignation to the divine will, in periods of bereavement and distress, by reflecting, that the present is a state of discipline, in which good men are tried and rendered fit for a condition of perfect and enduring happiness. The afflictions which they experience, are represented in the sacred Scriptures as working out for them an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. They are in the hands of a God who understands their character and knows their wants much better than they do themselves. He calculates the precise quantity of sorrow, if we may so speak, which will be necessary to qualify them for the reception and enjoyment of the amount of bliss, which it is his pleasure to confer upon them. In one word, he afflicts them as much as is requisite for their good, and no more. How consolatory is this thought to the believer! and especially when he considers, what we are persuaded the word of God warrants, that those who suffer most here, will, in general, partake of the largest share of happiness hereafter. Yes, it may be presumed, that the highest and brightest seats in heaven will be awarded to those who come out of great tribulation, and wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb.

And hence we are led to remark, in the last place, that the Christian is enabled to submit with meekness and resignation to the divine will in periods of affliction, by cherishing an habitual anticipation of the honour and felicity which are to be his final portion. He knows,

that he is here in a state of pilgrimage—that this world is a wilderness through which he is travelling to the land of promise. He, therefore, feels, that it is comparatively unimportant what may be his lot on earth, provided he succeeds in securing a title to heaven. Under this impression, he can, even in his darkest and most troubled moments, appropriate the language of the Psalmist: “Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance, and my God.” Yes, his faith enters within the veil, and lifts his thoughts and hopes to regions of perpetual quietude and blessedness above the changes and the desolations of time. He looks forward to the day which shall translate him to his everlasting home, and takes courage to his soul. He rejoices, that there is a world, where trials and sorrows are unknown—a world where friends shall be called to part no more—a world, in short, where God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of his people, and render them completely and eternally happy.

Brethren, let us learn from our subject the value and the efficacy of the Christian religion. No other system can do half so much towards sustaining and consoling the human being in the season of affliction.

“The Scripture is the only cure of wo;
That field of promise, how it flings abroad
Its odour o’er the Christian’s thorny road!”

Will you send the mourner to the volumes of ancient, or of modern philosophy for comfort? He returns as disconsolate and sad as he was before. Nor does he find any thing that deserves the name of peace and satisfaction, till he betakes himself to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

How happy is the condition of those who have secured an interest in the hopes and the promises of this religion. They

have an anchor to the soul sure and steadfast. A perennial source of comfort is theirs. Yes, Christian, you need not fear the day of adversity. Your God has said, that his grace shall be sufficient for you, and on his word you may confidently rely. He will not—he cannot—disappoint you. Bow with reverence to his sceptre. Submit with docility to his providence. Let the language of the apostle be yours: “I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus my Lord.

But what, dear hearers, shall we say to those who are without an interest in the hopes and promises of Christianity? How shall we undertake to speak comfort to them in the day of adversity? Alas! the word of God requires us to address them in very different language. We have no warrant for assuring them, that their afflictions will be the certain means of advancing their eternal interests. The Master whom we serve has not authorized us to deliver a message of peace to their souls, until they first repent of their sins, and believe in the name of Jesus, and devote themselves to the service of their Maker. So long as they refuse or neglect to comply with the terms of the gospel, they must remain strangers to its blessings. How deplorable is their condition, especially in seasons of bereavement and distress! No cheering radiance breaks in upon their gloom. No soothing accents whisper consolation to their hearts. And what, in such circumstances, shall they do? Why, if they still determine not to yield to the demands of the New Testament, we scarcely see what better course they can adopt, than to follow the counsel of Job’s wife, and curse God and die. O! it is an awful state to which a man brings him-

self, when the afflictive visitations of providence produce no salutary impression on his moral nature—when, instead of being softened and benefited by such visitations, he remains as careless and insensible as he was before! Tell us, brethren, is there the least reason to apprehend—we appeal to your consciences—that you are in this situation? If so, we must make free to assure you, that you stand on eminently perilous ground. We would at once ring in your ears the toll-bell of alarm, and admonish you of impending dangers. We would urge you to flee from the wrath to come. Believe us, you have no time to lose. Your callousness under affliction is a lamentable indication, that unless divine grace speedily interposes for your rescue, you must go down to the world of wo. Every day that you continue in your present condition, will serve only to harden your hearts, and, of course, to diminish the probability of your final salvation. And then, what a short and an uncertain thing is life! It flies like the weaver's shuttle. It vanishes as a dream of the morning. We know not what a day, or even an hour may bring forth.—Think, impenitent sinner—O! think of this solemn fact, and be persuaded to seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. The alternative of everlasting happiness or everlasting misery is now set before you. Remember that you are just as free to choose in this matter, as you were to determine whether you would come to the house of God this morning. If you perish, you have only yourself to blame—your ruin lies upon your own head.

SERMON XVI.



EXODUS XX. 7.

“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.”

THE first remark which we have to offer, is, that the expression, “name of God,” here used, is evidently not to be taken in its most literal acceptance. The phraseology of this commandment gives no countenance to the puerile and superstitious notions entertained by the ancient Jews, in respect to the appellation JEHOVAH, by which the Deity had been pleased to reveal himself peculiarly to them. And yet we find even the modern Jews adhering, in a great degree, to these notions. They still deem it a sin to pronounce this word, and accordingly, as often as they meet with it in reading the Old Testament, they substitute another in its stead. Indeed, their Talmud denounces the heaviest malediction against the individual who should presume to act otherwise. We may add, that some of their writers profess to have discovered that the angels themselves are prohibited from attempting the pronunciation of the name JEHOVAH.

We are told in the Catechism with which many of us have been familiar almost from our infancy, that the expression “name of God,” here implies “any thing whereby he maketh himself known.” This expression we find sometimes used in the sacred Scriptures, to denote the Divinity himself, as when the Psalmist exclaims, “Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name.” But

in the present instance it may be more properly understood, as referring to the titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works of Jehovah. In short, it is applicable to every medium of communication which the invisible Spirit of eternity has been pleased to establish between himself and the intelligent inhabitants of earth.

From this brief definition of the expression, "name of God," we may at once perceive the scope and design of the third commandment. This commandment interdicts whatever is opposed to the reverential contemplation of any thing by which the Deity has manifested himself to man. Thus recurring to the phraseology which we have just used, we may say, that it prohibits the profane use of his titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works. It requires the possession of a devotional frame of mind, in all our efforts to comprehend and to adore the High and Holy One. It demands that all the conceptions which we form of his nature, correspond with the immaculate purity and unlimited benignity, which the sacred Scriptures assign to him. It also demands, that we never speak, nor even think of him, but under a deep conviction of the relation which he sustains to us as our Creator and Preserver, and a consequent sense of our accountability to him for our entire conduct.

The third commandment, taken in the very general sense in which we have now explained it, comprehends the whole of practical religion. It enjoins the devout performance of every duty which we owe to our Maker, to our fellow beings, and to ourselves; so that there is scarcely a sin that men commit, which might not be shown to involve, in a greater or less degree, the guilt of taking the Lord's name in vain.

We shall now go on to mention several particulars, in which the third commandment is most obviously transgressed.

I. In the first place, then, we remark, that this commandment is transgressed when ideas and sentiments derogatory to the Most High, are either expressed from the lips or harboured in the mind. The sin of blasphemy, to which we now allude, was punished, under the old dispensation, with death. Any individual, whether a native Jew, a proselyte, or a heathen resident among the Jews, who was guilty of this sin, was liable to be stoned by the congregation of Israel. And surely no offence can involve a higher degree of moral malignity, than the wilful and deliberate defamation of Him, in whom we live, move, and have our being. Indeed, it implies an extent of depravity, to which we may charitably suppose, that the human heart does not very often attain. There is, however, a species of *indirect blasphemy*, as we may appropriately denominate it, which is exemplified in the conduct of those who act in such a manner as to induce others to speak reproachfully of religion and its professors. As an instance of what we mean, we may refer to the case of David. The part which that monarch acted toward Bath-sheba and Uriah—first seducing the wife, and then murdering the husband—has, perhaps, contributed more to harden bad men in their sins, and to perplex good men with difficulties, than any other incident which history, sacred or profane, records. That it proved a stumbling block to many of David's own subjects, might not only be inferred from the nature of the transaction itself, but is also evident from the language of Nathan the prophet, who, when sent by God to reprove him for what he had done, declared among other things, that he had "given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." To the same kind of blasphemy the apostle Paul alludes in the second chapter of his epistle to the Romans, where he says, that the Jews by breaking

the law, caused the name of their God to be blasphemed among the Gentiles; and again in his first Epistle to Timothy, and in his Epistle to Titus, where he enforces certain duties from the consideration, that if such duties were omitted, *the name of God*, and his *word* and *doctrine* would be blasphemed.

II. Again, we remark, that the third commandment is transgressed, when the Deity is solemnly appealed to in confirmation of what is known to be false. Some have been of the opinion, that *perjury* is the sin principally contemplated and prohibited in the text. Certain it is, that this sin is a prominent and an awful instance in which the name of Jehovah is taken in vain. The provisions of the Mosaic code on this subject, were clear and positive. In the nineteenth chapter of Leviticus, it is written: "And ye shall not swear by my name FALSELY, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God." That the ancient Jews had not entirely misapprehended this part of their law, (though they had impaired its spirit by many frivolous and hair-splitting distinctions) is evident from the words of our Saviour, in his discourse on the mount, where he represents them as thus expounding it: "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thy vows." On this particular division of our subject, it were superfluous to enlarge. We cannot, for a moment suppose, that our assembly contains a solitary individual who would appeal to his Maker in attestation of a known untruth. Nor could we hope to benefit a wretch so deeply sunk in depravity, by any observations that we could offer from this sacred desk.

III. In the third place it may be observed, that this commandment is transgressed, when the Deity is formally appealed to, in confirmation of what, though true, is trivial and insignificant in its nature and import. Pro-

fane swearing, to which you all understand us as now alluding, is the sin which the casual reader probably regards as more obviously and directly prohibited in the text. That this sin prevails to a considerable extent in society, is a truth as unquestionable, as it is humiliating. Nor is its prevalence by any means confined to the vulgar and the uneducated. There are not a few belonging to what are accounted the higher and fashionable circles of the community, who season their conversation pretty plentifully with oaths. Individuals who would deem themselves grievously insulted, if they were denied the title of *gentlemen*—individuals, too, who advance pretensions to the possession of enlarged and cultivated minds—are found so utterly devoid of all that is essential to real improvement of intellect, and true refinement of manners, as to be guilty of an habitual profanation of God's holy name on the most unimportant occasions. It is mortifying to be compelled to state a fact thus disgraceful to human nature.

That swearing is an offence against that natural sense of propriety and virtue which God has implanted in our moral constitution, may be inferred from the circumstance, that most of those addicted to this abominable practice, deem it a point of etiquette to avoid an oath in the company of females. In fact, if any thing were wanting to illustrate the influence which woman exerts in ameliorating and refining social life, it might be found in the check which her presence imposes on the lips of one accustomed to the profanation of his Maker's name. How much is it to be regretted, that they who thus respect the feelings of a creature, should manifest so entire a disregard not for the feelings only, but for the express mandate of the Creator!

It is needless to dwell upon the wickedness of swear-

ing. The impiety of such a practice must be obvious to every one not absolutely lost to all sense of virtue. If any thing were necessary to strengthen our conviction of its moral turpitude, we might urge the consideration, that to the commission of this sin, men have not the same powerful temptations that they have to the commission of many other sins. In the utterance of an oath, no violent emotion of the heart is yielded to—no instinctive propensity of the animal system is obeyed. The swearer has not even the poor excuse which the robber, the drunkard and the adulterer may be imagined to urge, however ineffectually, in palliation of their respective offences. His transgression is a wanton indignity, offered without the stimulus of appetite, or the prospect of gratification, to that God, in whose hand is his breath, and from whose bounty proceed all his blessings.

Profane swearing is as absurd as it is wicked. An oath, if it be not really designed for the confirmation of truth, must be regarded by the most lenient, as an expletive devoid of meaning to those to whom it is addressed. And why should it be used, on ordinary occasions, for the confirmation of truth, unless the speaker has reason to fear, that his veracity will be suspected? If he thinks it necessary to appeal to the supreme Being, in support of almost every thing that he utters, he must imagine, that no very favourable opinion of his integrity is entertained by others. Now, we can assure him, that they who doubt his word, will not be inclined to put much confidence in an oath, pronounced in the irreverent manner in which conversational oaths are, for the most part, pronounced.—To the absurdity of this practice the poet Cowper alludes, in a strain of happy and pungent satire, such as we often meet with in his works, when he describes a Persian, who

“Hearing a lawyer grave in his address,
 With adjurations every word impress,
 Suppos’d the man a bishop, or, at least,
 God’s name so much upon his lips, a priest!
 Bow’d at the close with all his graceful airs,
 And begg’d an interest in his frequent prayers.”

Although the text directly and unequivocally condemns that kind of swearing which, as we have just said, too often obtains in the ordinary intercourse of men, yet it ought not to be understood as prohibiting absolutely and unconditionally all appeals to the divine Being in confirmation of truth. The state of human society is unhappily such as to render it impossible for appeals of this nature to be wholly dispensed with. It is hardly to be doubted, that there are those whose moral sense is so impaired, that the desire of some immediate advantage, or the fear of some immediate evil, may tempt them to hazard bare assertions, while no considerations could induce them to annex to the same assertions the solemnity of an oath. And if this be so, how can it be denied, that the use of oaths in courts of justice is essential to the discovery of truth, and, consequently, of high importance to the general and permanent interests of every community? The language of our Lord, “Swear not at all,” which is a standing quotation with those who contend against the lawfulness of oaths, must be viewed in connexion with the circumstances under which it was spoken. At the time of the Saviour’s personal ministry, profane swearing was extremely prevalent among the Jews; and to discountenance this iniquitous and odious practice, was his sole object, as any one may discover from the context, in the words which we have just quoted. That he did not intend to condemn oaths on occasions of sufficient importance and solemnity, may be proved from his own example during the mock trial which preceded his crucifixion.

When the high priest put to him the interrogatory, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God?" he did not hesitate to answer, though until then he had been silent. The apostle Paul likewise, in at least two passages of his Epistles, introduces a form of expression equivalent to an oath. Nay, the infinitely holy God himself has confirmed his promises to men by oaths; and as he could swear by none greater, he has, in such cases, sworn by his own incomprehensible existence and adorable attributes. There is, then, no reason to doubt the lawfulness of oaths, when administered on occasions of importance, and under circumstances of due solemnity. But whether oaths are not resorted to in our civil judicatories, when they might be dispensed with, and whether the frequency of their administration, and, we may add, the light manner of their administration in some instances, have not tended to diminish their efficacy, and to render perjury more common than it would otherwise be, are questions respectfully submitted to the consideration of those whose more appropriate province it is to decide on topics of this description.

IV. We proceed now to a fourth particular, in which, according to the opinion of some pious expositors, the commandment before us is transgressed. When we say that *games of chance* involve a violation of the spirit of this precept, many of our hearers, we doubt not, will be surprised. And yet all such games have been regarded by writers of high theological reputation, as coming within the scope of the third prohibition; inasmuch as they are a virtual appeal to Heaven on an unimportant occasion, and for the decision of an insignificant matter. What is chance? Simply a word expressive of our ignorance in respect to the circumstances which precede any

event as its proximate cause. In rigid accuracy of language, nothing can be accidental. All occurrences, however minute, are under the supreme control of Jehovah. In the toss of a dollar, or the throw of a die, recourse is had to the same general laws of motion which regulate the planets in their orbits, and give harmony to the universal system of matter. The agency of the Deity is not more real and direct in the one case than in the other. But the player of cards or of dice, anticipating the conclusion to be drawn from these premises, exclaims, that he never dreams of appealing to God for the decision of the game in which he is engaged. And might not the swearer urge a similar plea? Can we presume that he always thinks of the august Being, whose name he takes upon his unhallowed tongue? Let no one, however, suppose that we are now intimating, that to play a game of chance simply for amusement, is as criminal as needlessly to utter an oath. Sins that are very different in degree, may yet be the same in kind. Allowance, too, ought undoubtedly to be made for those whose education and habits of thinking, have not led them to contemplate this subject in the light in which it has now been represented. What we have given you, is to be received as the judgment of sensible and pious authors, and as such, is entitled to your serious regard.—We must not omit this opportunity of bearing our testimony against lotteries of every kind, and for every purpose. They are exceptional on several accounts. They are games of chance. They involve the principle of gambling in its worst shape. They excite absurd expectations of sudden wealth, especially among those whose pecuniary resources are limited, and thus counteract those habits of industry and frugality, on which alone every man should rely for the support of his family, and the improvement of his fortune. That

they are authorized by law, is sometimes gravely urged as a conclusive argument in their favour, by persons who seem to think that whatever our rulers do must be right, as the honest man supposed that whatever he read in a book must be true. But it is this very circumstance of their having the sanction of law, which, by exempting them in the estimation of the multitude, from the criminality attached to private gambling, endues them with a perilous efficiency in demoralizing the community. We cannot leave this subject without adding, that the acknowledgments of every friend to public virtue are due to the distinguished member of congress from New England, for the noble stand which he made, not long since, in the representative assembly of the Union, against the great and desolating evil on which we have now animadverted.

V. As another instance in which the third commandment is transgressed, we may refer to all attempts to pry, with an overweening curiosity, into the secret things of God. This precept of the decalogue utters its veto against that speculative spirit in relation to many religious topics, which so frequently attends a zeal for "the form of godliness," in those who "deny the power thereof." Men who are totally strangers to the moral influence of religion, are often heard jangling about the niceties of its doctrine, and the technicalities of its language.

Nor is this speculating disposition, which we consider as incompatible with the spirit of our text, wholly confined to those whose acquaintance with religion does not extend beyond its theory. We regret to say, that men who are on the whole decidedly pious, are sometimes prone to push their inquiries on particular subjects, connected with natural and revealed religion, past the limits of propriety. The genuine Christian is not always exempt from an intenseness of curiosity, and a boldness of

conjecture, in respect to the mysteries of the Bible, not very consonant with that humility which ought to be the prominent and distinctive feature of his character. There can be no question, that such an anxiety to be wise above what is written, has a tendency to retard the progress of vital piety in the soul. He who instead of applying his mental energies to the investigation of truths obviously revealed, and devoting his moral energies to the practice of duties plainly enjoined, occupies himself with questions which, in our present state, are incapable of solution, and which, even if they could be resolved, are yet of no importance to human virtue, or to human happiness,—he who thus acts, will discover in the end, that he has expended his strength for nought, and made, in reality, no advances in the knowledge, the fear, and the love of his Maker.

It may not be impertinent, in passing, to remark that the spirit of the third commandment has, we apprehend, been violated to an extent by no means inconsiderable, in the controversies which, in our own country, have been carried on with so much heat and virulence, on such subjects as these:—the divine sovereignty—the origin of moral evil—and the nature of the atonement. We think that some of the disputants, on either side of these questions, may probably, on due reflection, deem themselves reproved by the precept of the moral law, on which we are now commenting. If to speculate on subjects that lie beyond the grasp of our intellectual faculties—especially when such subjects relate to the character and proceedings of the Deity himself—be not to take the name of the Lord our God in vain, then it would seem as if there were scarcely a possibility of profaning that name by any thing that we may do, short of direct blasphemy.—But we trust that the period is not very distant, when a

revolution will be effected in theology, considered merely as a science, similar to that which has already taken place in physical and mental philosophy—when a proper estimate will be formed of the powers of the human mind as applied to the truths of revealed religion—when the legitimate objects of investigation will be discriminated from other objects, with regard to which our most indefatigable researches must ever terminate in results that are conjectural and barren—when, in a word, the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel will be regarded as ultimate truths, to which we should yield our full assent, without imagining, that we must demonstrate them by arguments, or that we can answer all the numberless queries that may be started in respect to their nature and consequences.

VI. The last instance of the transgression of the third commandment, to which we shall call your attention on this occasion, is exhibited in the conduct of those, who draw nigh unto the Lord with their mouths, and honour him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him. The assumption of a sanctified exterior on the part of one who has no real regard for the divine majesty, or the divine laws, whether such assumption be merely made in compliance with custom, or result from a desire to compass some important end, to the attainment of which the reputation of piety is deemed essential, must be contemplated as belonging to the general description of sins prohibited in the text. Hypocrisy, in its worst form, which implies a systematic attempt to impress men with the opinion, that we possess, in an eminent degree, virtues to which we are conscious that we are utterly strangers, is a sin indicating so much moral depravity, that we ought not, except on the most indubitable grounds, to impute it to any individual. But there is a species of minor hypocrisy, if we may be allowed the expression, which is much more

common, and from which few of us can plead entire exemption. Whenever we engage in devotional exercises, without a becoming sense of the solemnity of the transaction, we take the name of the Lord our God in vain. Even the best of Christians, from the influence of habit, or the occurrence of some adventitious circumstance, or the sudden suggestion of foreign thoughts and emotions, may, for a short period, become, in this respect, reprehensible. And how frequently does it happen, that they who have not experienced the power of religion in their souls, and who, having no strong desire to be accounted pious, cannot be called hypocrites, in the strict sense of that term, regularly observe most of the external forms of public worship which God has prescribed? Are they not guilty, to a certain extent, of taking the Deity's name in vain? Beyond all doubt they are.—Brethren, might we not here ask, whether you have been entirely free from this sin, even during the few minutes that have elapsed since we came together this evening? Tell us, have not your minds been occasionally reverting to the things of time, when they should have been absorbed in those of eternity? Is it not a fact, that the business and the pleasures of the world, have diverted your attention from those momentous subjects, with which you ought to have been exclusively occupied? Do we not assert a truth which conscience will not permit you to deny, when we say that the recollected concerns of the past week, or the anticipated concerns of the next week, have engaged a large share of those meditations, which it behooved you to employ on topics appropriate to the Sabbath and the sanctuary of Jehovah?

We might go on to point out other modes in which the third commandment is contravened. But enough has been said on the general nature, and particular applica-

tions of this commandment, to enable every individual to pursue the subject for himself, and to determine what omissions of duty involve the guilt of "taking the name of the Lord our God in vain."

We must not, however, conclude without adverting to the sanction by which the third precept of the decalogue is enforced, or, to adopt the technical style of our Shorter Catechism, "the reason annexed to" it. "For the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain." "The sinner," says Matthew Henry, "may, perhaps, hold himself guiltless, and think there is no harm in it, and that God will never call him to an account for it; to obviate which suggestion, the threatening is thus expressed, God will 'not hold him guiltless,' as he hopes he will; but more is implied, namely, that God will himself be the avenger of those that take his name in vain, and they will find it a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." The penalty thus attached to the infraction of this commandment, is of that general kind, which God has denounced against the non-observance of his pure and righteous law. His own glorious perfections, and the best interests of his moral government forbid, that transgressors should be permitted to escape with impunity. As judge of all the earth, he will inflict condign punishment on every culprit. And there is no offence which he will chastise with more rigid and unsparing severity, than that of taking his name in vain. The nature of this sin is such, that it is seldom made a subject of legislative cognizance on earth, and even when it is so made, the legal provisions relating to it are often neglected by magistrates, or evaded by offenders. But there is a tribunal in the universe, before which the profaneness of God's name, shall certainly be arraigned for trial and condemnation. He has pledged his word, that they shall

not be held guiltless, and we know, that what he has said, cannot fail of accomplishment.

And, brethren, can we need an inducement stronger and more effectual for avoiding the profanation of our Maker's name, than that which the text supplies? When we are thus solemnly assured, that on disobedience to the third commandment the Lord will not hold us guiltless, is there not presented a motive as cogent as any that could be brought to operate upon a well-constituted mind? Who does not dread the displeasure of Him, whose prerogative it is to destroy both soul and body in hell? Is there any so bold as to rush, with such a threatening staring him in the face, on the thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler? Awful, indeed, is the infatuation of those, who notwithstanding the many denunciations of Jehovah's wrath against conduct like theirs, which the sacred volume exhibits, continue to take the name of the Lord their God in vain!

It affords us no pleasure, dear hearers, to enforce the duties of morality, and the higher duties of religion, by considerations of a gloomy and an alarming nature. We would much rather bring before you topics calculated to allure to the practice of virtue, than those which have a tendency to deter from the commission of sin. But it is not for us to pursue our own course in this matter. The Master whom we serve, will not allow us to expatiate altogether on the tender mercies of our God. He requires us likewise to "persuade men," by "the terrors of the Lord." And in the present instance, when the text announces the certainty of punishment in the event of delinquency, as a reason for compliance with the precept which we have considered, it would be manifestly improper to resort to an argument of a different character.

We entreat you, then, as you would dread a verdict of

guilty at the bar of God, to avoid taking his name in vain. Never speak, nor even think of the divine Being, except with the deepest humility and profoundest reverence. Let all your attempts to worship him, be marked with sincerity and fervour. In one word, be it your constant endeavour to cultivate such a frame of mind, as will qualify you for that intimate and perpetual intercourse with him, in which consists the bliss of heaven.

SERMON XVII.



ACTS VIII. 30, 31.

“And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.”

THE martyrdom of Stephen, the first individual who shed his blood for the cause of Jesus, became the signal for that furious persecution of the Christians, which forms the opening chapter in the history of Paul. The friends of the Saviour naturally took the alarm, and sought safety in a precipitate flight from Jerusalem. We are told that they scattered themselves abroad, preaching the gospel whithersoever they went. It was the lot of Philip the evangelist to take the road to Samaria, and to be the instrument of doing much good in that central region of Palestine. His ministerial labours proved so successful, that the apostles Peter and John repaired to his assistance; and it may be presumed, that through the joint efforts of these devout and indefatigable men, not a few were convinced of sin, and brought into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

Philip, on leaving Samaria, was divinely admonished to proceed towards the south, in the direction of Gaza. As he pursued his journey, he overtook a traveller of wealth and consideration, returning from Jerusalem to Ethiopia. This individual is described by the sacred historian, as “an eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all

her treasure." We are further informed, that he had visited the metropolis of Judea "to worship"—a circumstance which leads to the inference, that he was a proselyte to the Jewish religion. Of his sincerity we have good evidence in the fact, that he employed himself as he rode homewards in perusing the word of God. Philip, moved by an internal suggestion of the Spirit, approached his chariot, and found that he was engaged with that part of Isaiah which foretells with such minute accuracy, and in strains so affecting, the vicarious sufferings of the Messiah. The evangelist accosted him with the question, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" The reply was, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" and this was immediately followed by an invitation to Philip to ascend the vehicle, and take a seat by his side. The sequel of the story we need not relate in detail. Suffice it to say, that the passage of Isaiah was explained and commented on by the evangelist with so much effect, that his distinguished auditor at once embraced the gospel of Christ, and signified his faith by receiving the sacrament of baptism.

"Understandest thou what thou readest?...How can I, except some man should guide me?"—From these words we may infer, that the exposition of the word of God by a living teacher, is the means best calculated to convert sinners, and promote the religious improvement of mankind. Such, brethren, is the proposition which it will be our object in this discourse hastily to illustrate and enforce. The topic, besides its intrinsic importance, is somewhat appropriate to the occasion on which I have been called to address you.

The exposition of the word of God by a living teacher, we have said, is the means best suited to convert sinners, and promote the religious improvement of mankind. In

attempting to establish this proposition, it is by no means necessary even to approximate the ground assumed by the Catholics, that the sacred Scriptures, in themselves, are so obscure as to be wholly unfit for popular use. We cannot conceive a stronger impeachment of the divine wisdom and benevolence, than to imagine that the Deity has revealed his will to man, in a form so little intelligible, so liable to gross and dangerous misapprehension, that they for whose benefit it was designed, may, in general, be more injured than profited by the free perusal of its pages. Far, very far, be it from us to harbour such a thought as this. We believe that the Bible, just in the state in which it came from heaven—unaccompanied by a single human note or comment—may be safely put into the hands of any individual, however ignorant, and however remote from the means of additional instruction relative to its contents. Nor can we admit that this inestimable volume has ever been, in the least degree, injurious to a solitary reader, in any other sense, than that in which the temporal bounties of God become injurious to those who employ them as the instruments of crime.

We do not propose, then, to maintain, that the sacred Scriptures are wholly unintelligible without an interpreter. On the contrary, we affirm, that although some portions of them are involved in much obscurity, yet the great outlines of human duty are therein revealed with all possible perspicuity and distinctness. The candid reader of the Bible will have no just ground of complaint, that the truths of revelation are hard to be explored—that the commandment is hidden from him—that it is far off. He will be under no necessity of climbing to heaven, or going beyond the sea, to ascertain the will of his Maker. He will find, provided he be what we have supposed, a sincere inquirer, that the word is nigh him, in his mouth

and in his heart, that he may do it.—Does any one here say, that the language of the eunuch, who intimated that he could not understand what he was reading, unless some person better informed should guide him, is at variance with what we have now asserted? We answer, that the circumstances under which this language was uttered, were somewhat peculiar. The eunuch possessed only the Old Testament. Besides, he was perusing a prediction, with the fulfilment of which, as it had so recently occurred, he was unacquainted. His case, therefore, was entirely different from that of those who have the New Testament as well as the Old, and can compare the prophecies contained in the one, with the events recorded in the other. These two portions of the Bible, reflect a degree of reciprocal light, which eminently contributes to their mutual illustration, and places the modern reader in a condition far more favourable for comprehending the doctrines and duties of revelation, than the ancient.

You now see, brethren, that we are not inclined to detract from the intrinsic value and efficacy of the sacred Scriptures, in order to support our proposition, which attributes so high an importance to the exposition of the word of God by a living teacher. We trust, that we shall be able to demonstrate the truth for which we contend, without uttering a syllable that shall authorize any person to presume, that the diligent and persevering study of the Bible in private, is not a most imperious duty, and that we who possess this heaven-descended volume, are not solemnly bound to labour, in all practicable modes, for the circulation of it, until it is read by every intelligent being on earth, “in his own tongue wherein he was born.”

The preaching of the gospel, we assert, holds the first rank among those means which God has appointed for

promoting the moral and religious improvement of mankind. It is thus represented in the New Testament. Numerous passages bearing more or less directly on the point, might be cited. We shall take only a single one. In the Epistle to the Romans, we thus read: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Now, this language is remarkably strong and explicit. We are here taught clearly and emphatically, that the preaching of the gospel is the grand instrument of leading men to that faith, in the exercise of which they can call on the name of the Lord, and be saved.—We may also appeal to the personal ministry of Christ. He appeared as a teacher come from God, and in this character made it his sole business to traverse the territory of Palestine, announcing that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and urging his hearers to repentance, as the duty without which they could not be saved. And when the risen Redeemer gave to his apostles their commission, he expressed it in terms which clearly implied that the primary object of the office with which they were invested, was to proclaim to mankind the glad tidings of redemption through the merits of the Son of God. They devoted themselves most sedulously and exclusively to the accomplishment of this object. They did not adopt the course which human prudence

would have dictated as the wisest and best—delay the oral publication of the gospel, until they had prepared an accurate record, in permanent form, of the life, ministry, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of their Lord. They entered immediately on the duty of preaching the word; and it was not until their labours had been widely extended, and abundantly blessed, and Christianity had gained a firm footing in the world, that it was judged expedient to frame those historical documents in respect to the Redeemer of our race, with which the canon of the New Testament commences. Some writers have, indeed, maintained, that the Gospel of Matthew appeared within three or four years after the crucifixion of Jesus. But there is no satisfactory evidence in support of such a conjecture; and the best critics assign to this Gospel a much later date. In fact, there is a passage in Irenæus, which would seem to show pretty conclusively, that it could not have been published before the year 61—twenty-seven years after the death of Christ. We may also remark, that only two of the Gospels are the productions of apostles; and one of these, we know, was not composed till the author had become too far advanced in life to be capable of much effort as a preacher, and, perhaps, a similar observation is applicable to the other. Paul is the only apostle who appears to have employed any considerable portion of his time in writing, and as he was a man of no ordinary education and literature, his Epistles to the churches were, it may be presumed, speedily despatched, and interfered but little with his more important duty. It should be observed, too, that his earliest inspired Epistle—the first of those to the Thessalonians—was penned at so late a period as seventeen years after his conversion. The apostles, therefore, must have considered themselves as consecrated to the

business of preaching the gospel. They must have looked upon the oral publication of evangelical truths, as the fit and potent engine for bringing the world to acknowledge and embrace the Saviour. They suffered no minor concerns to divert their attention from the one stupendous work which their Lord had given them to perform. We accordingly find, that so soon as their converts had grown numerous enough to form regular churches, they constituted an order of officers on whom was conferred the significant appellation of *deacons*, and to whom they entrusted the direction of all matters to which they could not themselves attend, without neglecting their paramount duty—the “ministry of the word.” They told the congregations which they gathered around them, that “it was not reason, that they should leave the word of God, and serve tables.” They enjoined a similar devotedness to the work of preaching the gospel, on all whom they introduced into the ministry. Nothing can exceed in explicitness the instructions of Paul to Timothy and Titus, on this point. And what was the result? The apostles lived to see Christian churches planted in almost every known region of the globe. It may aid our conceptions of the wonderful success which crowned their labours, to recollect two facts. First, our Lord, in predicting the fearful overthrow of Jerusalem, mentioned as one precursor of that event, that it should not take place, before the gospel had been “preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations.” Now, the sacred city was taken and destroyed in the years 70 and 71—about thirty-seven years after the death of Jesus. Again, Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, quotes, as applicable to the actual progress of Christianity, that beautiful passage of the Psalmist in reference to the instruction imparted by the luminaries of heaven, “Their line is gone out through

all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." The Epistle to the Romans was written about the year 58, that is, twenty-five years after the death of Jesus.

And, brethren, has not subsequent experience shown, that the preaching of the gospel is the means of grace which the great Head of the church condescends, in a peculiar manner, to own and bless as an instrument of good to Zion? Point us, if you can, to any other agency, through which results so important, and so beneficial to the highest interests of man, have been produced. We have already admitted, and we here again admit, that the perusal of the sacred Scriptures in private is a medium through which invaluable benefits of a spiritual nature are communicated to the soul. We freely concede, that the individual whose circumstances are such as to deprive him of the opportunity of attending the ministry of reconciliation, may, by a diligent and devout study of the inspired record in his closet, grow "wise unto salvation." But we contend, that it is the preaching of the word—the popular exposition of the Scriptures which has been, and will always be, the grand instrument of upholding and promoting Christianity in the world. We affirm, that the living interpreter of the Bible, if moderately qualified for the high office which he sustains, will ever make a deeper and more durable impression on any community, than the Bible itself will be seen to produce. Nor is it going too far to express a doubt, whether the mere reading of the sacred Scriptures, in the case of those who voluntarily withhold themselves from the public proclamations of Jehovah's grace, will suffice to convert a sinner to God.

The question may here be asked, Whence arise the superior efficacy and importance which we are disposed to attribute to the exposition of the word of God by a

living teacher? We might answer this query, by at once resolving the whole matter into the sovereignty of Jehovah. We might say, that the preaching of the gospel is pre-eminently an instrument of good to men, because the supreme Arbiter of all things has ordained that it should be so. Without his blessing, no means can be of the least avail; and he has thought fit, in his own good pleasure, to confer such blessing peculiarly upon the oral exposition of revealed truth. But in addition to this consideration, we think, that the phenomenon which we are called to explain, may be accounted for on known principles of human nature. It is certain, that we are so constituted, as to be more generally impressed and benefited by oral, than by graphic instruction. A plain but favourite author* of ours states the whole philosophy of this subject in just a dozen and a half of words, when he remarks, "There is a force in what is said *viva voce*, which nothing in writing can come up to." If Demosthenes, instead of addressing the Athenians in person, had contented himself with furnishing for their perusal, the most impassioned essays that his ardent mind could produce, would the result have been any thing like what his eloquence is known to have realized? Or, if the apostles, instead of going from city to city, and village to village, preaching the gospel of Christ, had set down at Jerusalem, and composed folio upon folio in illustration and defence of Christianity, could it have been affirmed, as we have seen that it was, in twenty-five or six years after the resurrection of their Lord, that, "their line had gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world?" But we need not enlarge on this point. The superiority of oral over written instruction is

* Burgh in his Dignity of Human Nature.

generally and practically acknowledged. Every one whose experience entitles him to form an opinion on the subject, is aware, that both natural and moral science are taught in our seminaries with far greater efficacy by the living lecturer, than in any other mode. And as the human mind operates by the same laws, whatever may be the species of truth presented to its attention, who can doubt, that the lessons of religion will be inculcated to most advantage, when delivered from the lips of the living preacher? We repeat it, there is a sympathy in our nature, which disposes us to receive with peculiar interest what comes directly and personally from a fellow being. And although a Dr. Johnson may sneer at the idea of any but "an assembly of brutes," as he styled the audience of Demosthenes, being influenced by the physical attributes of oratory, and although he may gravely tell us, in his authoritative way, that "as no corporeal actions have any correspondence with theological truth, they cannot enforce it," still we assert, that man, whether enlightened or ignorant, refined or barbarous, is more powerfully affected with what he hears, than what he reads, and also that his impressions will bear an exact ratio to the degree of earnestness, or, if you choose so to call it, eloquence with which he is addressed.

These remarks will furnish a sufficient answer to the objection which some might be ready to urge against our argument, drawn from the importance that is every where ascribed to the preaching of the gospel in the New Testament. It might be said, that living teachers were peculiarly needful and useful in the first age of Christianity, before the history of Jesus, and the principles of his religion were committed to writing, and even afterwards, so long as books continued scarce and dear, and the great mass of the community were unable to read; but as a very

different state of things now prevails, preaching is by no means equally important. We freely admit, that the change is a most auspicious one for the Christian cause. We believe, that the invention of printing has incalculably multiplied the facilities for the spread of the gospel. We look upon it as a mighty wheel in the complicated machinery which Providence will employ in the conversion of the world to God. But if, as we have shown, the superior efficacy of preaching has its foundation in the very constitution of our nature, its importance cannot be lessened, though, blessed be God! its power of doing good may be greatly increased by any circumstances that can possibly occur in the progress of human affairs.

We are sensible that many Christians will not accord with us—at least not to the extent we are disposed to go—in our opinion relative to the importance of the preaching of the gospel compared with the other means of grace. There are those who do not hesitate to say, that they view this as of less consequence, than the more strictly devotional parts of public worship, such as singing the praises of God, reading his word, and expressing to him the desires of the heart by prayer and supplication, together with thanksgiving. Thus our brethren of the Episcopal church set a higher value on the exercises of their liturgy, than on the discourse which succeeds; and hence the former are so long, that comparatively little time is left for the latter, unless the speaker is not scrupulous about making an excessive demand on the patience of his hearers. Now, while we certainly have no wish to censure other denominations, and least of all to find fault with the denomination in question, to which for various reasons we cherish a particular attachment, we hope we may be allowed, in support of our own views on this subject, to reiterate the assertion, that the preaching

of the gospel was unquestionably regarded, in the days of apostolic Christianity, as the highest part of divine worship. In addition to what has been already stated respecting this point, we here venture to say, that it cannot be shown, that in the first assemblies of the Christians, there were any regular exercises of prayer and praise. Social meetings, no doubt, were often held, in which such exercises obtained—as when the friends of Peter met, during his imprisonment, to intercede with God for his deliverance. But there is no positive evidence, so far as we are acquainted with the New Testament, that in the public congregations convened on the Sabbath, at which an apostle or other duly commissioned teacher attended, any thing was commonly done in addition to the ministration of the word, except, perhaps, during the celebration of the Lord's supper. We would not now be understood as intimating the least doubt as to the propriety of making prayer and praise part of the regular business of the sanctuary. The circumstances of the church have undergone changes since the time of the apostles, which render the additional exercises that have been introduced, both proper and profitable. We should deeply regret to see them banished. We should be the last to breathe a syllable that might induce any to value them less. But while we freely concede, that they are important, the sacred claims of what we deem the truth, compel us to affirm, that they are not so important as the preaching of the gospel. We are persuaded, that a sensible and fervent discourse from the lips of a servant of Christ, who feels at the time his responsibility to his divine Master, will contribute far more to benefit a congregation, and promote the glory of God, than the *service*, as it is called, of any church, however excellent its matter and style.

It may here be necessary to observe, that in ascribing

so much importance to the exposition of the word of God by a living teacher, we have all along supposed the individual who preaches the gospel to be qualified, in some measure, for the high office which he sustains, by his natural endowments and literary attainments—one who has studied the inspired record with constant and persevering diligence, and who neglects no means calculated to sharpen and invigorate his intellectual faculties, and fit him for the task of elucidating and enforcing divine truth. We have no doubt, that the average success of preaching, will correspond to the solid acquirements and studious habits of those who preach; sincere piety, of course, being always presumed as an indispensable requisite. The only reason why results far more signal and glorious have not flowed from the ministry of the gospel, is, that that there has been a sad lack of the right sort of industry and zeal on the part of those who officiate in this ministry. It is vain to tell us, that neither talents, nor science, nor indefatigable labour will avail without the blessing of God, and that he can lend efficacy to any instrumentality, however feeble and defective. What! is he not at all times ready to confer his blessing? Can we harbour the thought that there is unwillingness in him to crown the preaching of the gospel with success? Surely not. He always waits to be gracious, and whenever the means of doing good which he has ordained, and pledged himself to bless, prove ineffectual, we may suspect that the fault is to be found in the manner in which these means are employed. The simple truth of the matter is, that the Deity works by instruments, fitted by their own nature to accomplish the end which he contemplates. Nor is it any unwarrantable limitation of his omnipotent energy to affirm, that he cannot endue sense and nonsense with an equal share of influence over the human mind; that is, he

cannot do this without altering, or, rather, subverting those laws of mind, which he has himself established. No passages of Scripture have been more perverted and abused, than certain texts of the New Testament, which the ignorant and foolish have understood as implying, that ignorance and folly are the qualities in a preacher on which Jehovah looks with special complacency, and which he generally seconds with the gracious operations of his Spirit. Believe us, brethren, it is true in the work of the ministry, as in the business of personal religion, and in the ordinary affairs of life, that "God helps them that help themselves." It would be interesting to pursue this topic further, did our limits permit us to do so.

We recur to our original proposition, which, we think, we have now sufficiently established, that the preaching of the gospel, or, as we termed it, the exposition of the word of God by a living teacher, is the means best adapted to convert sinners, and promote the religious improvement of mankind.—Let us next glance for a moment, at some of the practical reflections which this truth suggests.

And first, we may hence infer the absurdity, not to say the impiety of the course pursued by those who absent themselves from the sanctuary of the Most High, under the pretence, that they may be more profitably employed at home in the perusal of the sacred volume. We are aware, indeed, that persons of this description do not, in reality, trouble the Bible much, notwithstanding their professions of superior regard for its pages. We strongly suspect, that could you obtain the fabled ring which rendered its possessor the unseen spectator of any occurrence,* and thus take a look at the Sabbath studies of

* Vide Cicero De Officiis, lib. iii. cap. ix.

these individuals who prize the sacred Scriptures so highly, you would be likely to find Shakspeare, or the last Waverly, or some Review or file of newspapers, more frequently their companion than the word of God. But granting that they *do* read the Bible, we still charge them with undervaluing the first and most important of the means of grace, and, if we knew of any mode in which the admonition could be conveyed to them, we would warn them, that if they persist in such a course, their chance of salvation is a forlorn hope—they must perish in their sins.

Again, we observe, that they who are favoured with the preaching of the gospel, may hence learn how solemn and imperative is the duty of improving this most inestimable advantage. “Take heed,” brethren, “how ye hear.” Remember that your eternal well-being is involved in this matter. The truths to which your attention is called in the house of God, will exert a potent and a lasting influence over your character and condition, when every memorial of your existence shall have faded from the earth, and when even the earth itself shall have been burnt up. The minister of Christ is a saviour either of life unto life, or of death unto death, to those to whom he publishes the message of his Master’s grace. Wo to the individual who lives in a Christian land, and hears the tidings of salvation proclaimed on every returning Sabbath, and yet remains a stranger to penitence and faith—a practical rejecter of Him who died for the expiation of human guilt—a rebel against the paternal authority of his Creator. Ah! he is destined to occupy a place in the world of wo, deeper and darker—more ignominious and wretched—than that from which the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon, are now emitting the fruitless lamentations of insufferable anguish! We say

fruitless, for be it ever recollected, that the preaching of the gospel, with all its advantages, is a benefit confined to the present state. No ministry of reconciliation has been provided for those who die impenitent. The gloomy abodes of hell shall never be visited by a herald from the God of grace—no, never! What would not the agonized inmates of the bottomless pit, give for the ability to recall a single one of the many Sabbaths, with its golden opportunities, which, when on earth, they allowed to pass away unimproved? And O! will any of you, dear hearers, by imitating their example, become the partners of their despair? Pause—reflect seriously and maturely, before you decide.

We may further learn from the subject under consideration, that it is the duty of all who enjoy the preaching of the gospel themselves, to contribute, so far as circumstances will permit, to extend this invaluable privilege to those who are destitute of it. The man who views the ministry of reconciliation in its proper and scriptural light, and who has experienced its blessed influence in his own soul, cannot be other than a sincere and an ardent friend to missions, both foreign and domestic. What judgment must we form of that professor of religion, who deems it enough to save himself—who cares comparatively little for the spiritual welfare of his children—and who is wholly indifferent with regard to the everlasting destiny of others, whether in his immediate vicinity, in the remote settlements of his country, or in regions separated by intervening oceans? Such apathy might have been tolerated once, when even the best of men were not sufficiently enlightened on this point. But it can be tolerated no more. The deep night of ignorance and slumber, which so long obscured the glories and palsied the energies of Zion, has come to an end. The

sun of righteousness, with healing in his wings, has surmounted the horizon—the gloom is dispersed—the bustle of awakening agents is beginning to be heard—and the mountain-tops already glitter in the new-born radiance, and re-echo with the din of action. And O! shall any that bear the Christian name, continue lukewarm and inert under circumstances such as these? Shall one individual who comes to the table of the Lord, look without interest, and intense interest too, on the sublime efforts now making for the spread of the gospel at home and abroad? We trust not. I cannot forget that my audience is composed of Christians, who have been taught from the sacred volume, “to weep with them that weep,” and to “do good unto all men;” who have learned from the best authority, that there is a “charity that seeketh not her own”—a charity so vitally connected with the principles of genuine devotion, that it shall continue to warm and to animate the spirit, when prophecies shall fail, when tongues shall cease, and when knowledge shall vanish away.

And now, dear hearers, I come to apply these general remarks to the particular occasion on which I address you. I appear before you in behalf of the Missionary Society connected with the New Castle Presbytery.* You are aware, it is presumed, that this society has been formed for the laudable purpose of supplying the destitute districts within our own presbyterial bounds, with the benefits of the ministry of reconciliation. That our territory affords such districts, is a lamentable fact. And that it is a duty to do the utmost that our resources will allow, to place them in a better condition, will surely not be doubted by any who entertain correct views relative to

* Preached at Lancaster, 2d Sabbath of August, 1828.

the importance of a preached gospel. We ask, then, what will *you* contribute towards this object? Consider, we entreat you, before you decide. The welfare of immortal souls hangs upon the decision. Your answer, too, may have a material bearing on your own happiness through eternity. It is no trivial point which you are called on to determine. Again, therefore, we say, what, hearers of the gospel, will you this morning give, to aid in extending the precious privilege which a bountiful providence has conferred upon you, to others, who, unless the charity of their Christian brethren should interpose in their behalf, must remain ignorant and wretched for the want of some one to guide them in the study of the word of God? O! you cannot resolve that a pittance will be enough. You cannot conclude that a small contribution will suffice for this occasion. We must indulge the thought that your donations will be liberal—such as you shall not be ashamed of, when you come to die—such as you shall not tremble to have published to the universe in the day of judgment, when the New Testament leads us to anticipate, that a rigid inquiry will be instituted into the benevolent acts of men. Yes, dear hearers, we hope that you will give amply and cheerfully. This we hope for your own sakes, as well as on account of the destitute for whom we plead, since it is our sincere desire and prayer to God, not only that *they* may be furnished with the preaching of the gospel, but also that *you*, by a wise instrumentality in turning many to righteousness, may at last shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.

SERMON XVIII.



JOHN VI. 28, 29.

“Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.”

THIS passage presents us with part of a conference, which took place between Christ and the Jews in one of the synagogues of Capernaum. The Saviour was followed to that city by an immense concourse of people from the opposite shore of the sea of Tiberias, who had beheld the miracle of five thousand men, besides women and children, fed with five barley loaves and two small fishes. So stupendous an exertion of super-human power filled the spectators with astonishment, and compelled them to exclaim, “This is, in truth, that prophet that should come into the world.” Their admiration of Jesus was raised to the highest pitch of enthusiasm, inasmuch, that they determined to “take him by force,” and “make him a king.” Our Lord, to prevent an officious display of zeal so little conformable to the object of his divine mission, withdrew to a mountain, and there secreted himself till the evening. He then walked over “the sea of Tiberias,” or, as it is at other times called, “the sea of Galilee,” and “the lake of Gennesareth.” As soon as he reached Capernaum, he repaired to a synagogue, and began to deliver religious instruction to the assembly. The multitude who had crossed the water in pursuit of him, found him thus occupied, and immediately accosted him with

the question, "Rabbi, when camest thou hither?" Jesus replied, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye follow me, not because ye saw the miracle, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give you; for him hath God the father sealed." This remark introduced the conversation, the commencement of which is related in our text: "Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

Commentators are not agreed whether this conference was between Christ and the people who had followed him across the water, or between him and the citizens of Capernaum who had previously assembled in the synagogue. The inquiry, however, is one of no consequence. It cannot affect the great moral and religious truths involved in the passage. To the careful and solemn consideration of these truths we would now solicit your attention. And may the Spirit of our God open a door of entrance for the word of his grace into every heart!

The question, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" is such as must occasionally arise in every mind. We are all conscious of our dependence on some invisible power. We feel our obligations to some munificent Benefactor, from whom all our blessings flow. We have a sense of accountability to Him for the manner in which we employ his bounties. Hence results an anxiety to discover in what way the unseen Divinity may be most effectually conciliated, and most gratefully adored. The religious sentiment thus defined, is a part of that magnificent furniture with which the Creator originally adorned our moral nature. It is a sentiment indelibly engraven

on the human heart, "like that image of himself," to borrow a beautiful illustration, "which Phidias wished to perpetuate by stamping it so deeply on the buckler of his Minerva, that no one could obliterate it without destroying the entire statue." Long indulgence in evil habits may, indeed, impair the force of this sentiment. But though it may be impaired, it cannot be wholly subdued. To take an extreme case. We sometimes behold individuals in whom the "still small voice" of conscience appears to be completely silenced. They seem to have succeeded in extinguishing the moral light which Christianity had infused into their souls. They throw the sacred volume away from them in disdain. They abandon the sanctuary of Jehovah. They avoid the society of the virtuous, and mingle only with the most depraved portions of the community. And yet even these individuals cannot escape altogether from the deep-searching Spirit of the Most High. There are periods in their unhallowed career in which they awake to a momentary sense of their awful and degraded situation—periods of anxiety and alarm similar to those with which Caligula himself is said to have been visited, as often as the sound of thunder shook the heavens—periods in which they cannot help exclaiming with the utmost sincerity and the deepest interest, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?"—We perceive, then, that the question in our text is a natural, as well as a highly important one.

We proceed to remark, that the phraseology of this question deserves particular notice, inasmuch as it brings to view an error on the general subject of religion, which, we fear, is extensively prevalent. The Saviour had said to the Jews, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life."

Now, it should be observed, that the original term here rendered "Labour," is precisely the same which occurs in the subsequent inquiry, "What shall we do that we may work," or LABOUR "the works of God?" The auditors of Christ thus appear to have seized with something like avidity, on the word "labour" or "work," as if they deemed it favourable to their own views respecting the nature and requirements of religion. What those views were, we all very well know. The Pharisees conceived, that nothing more was necessary to obtain the divine favour, than a strict observance of the Levitical institutions, conjoined with such a conformity to the moral law, as fallen man is capable of rendering. Hence the language in which the young ruler addressed the Messiah: "Good master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"

Human nature is essentially the same in every age. The erroneous apprehensions entertained by the Jews eighteen hundred years ago, in respect to the proper mode of securing the approbation of Deity, are virtually embraced by not a few in our own day. Nothing is more common than to hear men talk as if they deemed religion a work which might be performed at any time, and with comparatively little effort. They do not, indeed, agree with the Pharisees of old, in looking upon forms and ceremonies as of much moment. On the contrary, they are entirely at issue with them in regard to this matter. They are far from thinking it necessary to fast twice in the week, and to give tithes of all that they possess. Nor are they so sanctimonious as to stop at the corners of the public streets, and engage in devotional exercises. But they are thoroughly persuaded, that if they only lead an upright and a temperate life, and cultivate benevolent feelings towards all around them, they cannot fail of

attaining happiness beyond the grave. While they admit that the morality inculcated in the New Testament is of a lofty and an attractive kind—fitted to promote the best interests of man, both as an individual and as a social being—while they grant all this, they must confess that they are at an utter loss to discern, why it is that so much importance is attached to a certain vague, and, as it would seem to them, involuntary act of the mind called *faith*. In other words, they do not relish the principles of the Christian economy, so far as such principles are not to be identified with bare ethical precepts. They go to church; but then they have no taste for dry theological discussions like those which are ever and anon delivered from our orthodox pulpits. They like to hear what they are pleased to style, “a good moral discourse.” They are decidedly of the opinion, that no sort of preaching is so well calculated to benefit an audience, as that in which little or nothing is said about doctrines, and much stress is laid upon practice. For their parts, they think the often-quoted maxim of the poet an excellent one—

“For modes of faith let senseless zealots fight;
His can't be wrong, whose life is in the right.”

Brethren, there is nothing more uniformly characteristic of what the New Testament denominates the “carnal mind,” than a disposition to rely on mere moral virtues as a sufficient ground of salvation. Fallen man, in his unrenewed state, is obstinately wedded to the notion, that he is competent to save himself. The experience of every Christian can point him to a period in his history, when, whatever may have been his theoretical views, he felt the practical influence of such a notion on his heart and conduct. Thus it was with the apostle Paul. He tells us, that, prior to his conversion, he was, as he expresses it, “alive without the law.” He thought that he was then

living “in all good conscience before God.” He plumed himself not a little on certain advantages, to which many others could lay no claim. He was “circumcised the eighth day;” had descended from “the stock of Israel;” was “of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” But so soon as his soul was brought under the power of divine grace, the things which had previously been gain to him, he counted loss. Yes, and all his hopes of heaven thenceforth rested on the merits of his Redeemer, which he appropriated to himself in the exercise of faith.

We may therefore venture to affirm, that the natural corruption of the human heart, is the real source of that disrelish for the peculiar doctrines of the gospel to which we have alluded. The simple fact, that “the carnal mind is enmity against God,” abundantly explains the aversion so generally manifested to pure, evangelical truth—an aversion which pervades all orders of society, but exerts a stronger sway in the circles of literature and in the ranks of fashion. The grand excellence of the Christian system consists in its tendency to humble the pride of man, by teaching him his utter inability to render suitable obedience to his Maker’s will, and thus leading him to a meek and an implicit confidence in the divine Mediator. A revolution, at once radical and entire, must therefore be effected in all his views, and feelings, and habits, before he can contemplate this system with any other emotions than those of dislike and positive opposition. Hence it is that the minister of the gospel, who commands the respectful attention and cordial assent of all his hearers, so long as he expatiates on the beauty and advantages of virtue, and denounces those vices

which militate against the dignity of man, the happiness of families, and the general good of society—has the mortification to discover, that, no sooner does he rise above the province of a mere lecturer on moral science, and bring into distinct and prominent view the topics which distinguish the religion of the New Testament from a well-fabricated scheme of ethics, than his addresses, however sensible, and sound, and fervent, are accounted, by some at least of his audience, enthusiastic and comparatively unprofitable. They consider *faith* as a useless theme; and simply because theirs are hearts “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”

The answer of our Lord to the question of the Jews, exhibits, in one short sentence, an elementary view of evangelical religion: “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” Of a similar purport is the language of John in his first general Epistle: “And this is his [God’s] commandment, that ye believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.” Many are the passages of the New Testament, in which faith is enjoined as the one great and paramount duty which Jehovah requires of man. When the jailer of Philippi exclaimed, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” the reply of Paul and Silas was, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

We have already intimated, that it is the doctrine of salvation entirely by faith, which renders the gospel so unacceptable to the majority of those to whom it is preached. Against this doctrine, which constitutes the grand peculiarity of the Christian system, philosophy has opened all its batteries—wit has exhausted all its resources of ridicule and satire. The sage politician, too, has gravely told us, how much the cause of morality is injured, and the welfare of society jeoparded, by the in-

culcation of a tenet which represents the mere metaphysical act of *believing*, as sufficient to insure the future and eternal felicity of man. To the general adoption of such a tenet, some writers *wise* in their *own conceit*, have referred many of the disorders which have prevailed in communities, while it is a fact, in support of which we may appeal to the unerring testimony of history, that a higher standard of virtue, and a greater measure of temporal happiness, have always obtained in proportion as the very doctrine in question has acquired an ascendancy over the minds of men. Tell us of any order of individuals, who, with all their extravagance and all their absurdities, achieved so real and noble a victory over the dominion of evil habits, and the contagion of vicious examples, as the memorable Puritans. And to what did they owe such victory—a triumph more splendid than the rout of armies, or the capture of cities? We answer without hesitancy, that they owed it to their practical conviction of the great truth inculcated in our text, that, “the work of God,” is to “believe on him whom he hath sent.”

We may here remark, that they who dislike this leading principle of the gospel, are wholly incompetent to decide upon its merits, because they bring to the investigation of the subject, minds obscured and perverted by ignorance and prejudice. They have not experienced the benign effects of faith, in their own hearts and on their own conduct; and, therefore, the views which they have formed in respect to the nature of this evangelical duty, are essentially erroneous. Who does not see, that under such circumstances, they are no more entitled to pronounce the Christian system fanatical and absurd, than the individual who is unacquainted with mathematical science, would have a right to reject the Newtonian theory of the universe as unfounded and preposterous.

What is faith? Does it consist in a mere speculative belief of the truths developed in the sacred volume? Is it nothing more than an act of the understanding by which credence is given to the various facts narrated by the historians of the Old and New Testaments? Is it a mental exercise precisely similar to that which takes place, when we admit that Julius Cæsar was assassinated on the ides of March in the senate-chamber of Rome; or, when after perusing a geometrical demonstration, we yield our assent to the proposition which has been clearly and conclusively proved? This, beyond doubt, is a species of faith. But it is not the faith for which the gospel calls. The latter is eminently a practical principle—a principle which works by love, purifies the heart, and overcomes the world—a principle which, like the main-spring of a watch, extends its influence directly or indirectly to every part of the moral system of man. That this account of faith is strictly accurate, may be inferred with sufficient clearness from the declaration of Scripture, that “with the HEART man believeth unto righteousness.” This language is not to be understood as implying, that faith is an act in which the understanding, properly so called, has no share. It simply imports, that the belief of revealed truth is more than an operation of pure intellect, and combines the exercise of all those internal powers by which the human being is impelled to action. “The word of God,” says Calvin, “is not received by faith, when it floats on the surface of the brain, but when it has taken deep root in the *heart*, so as to become an impregnable fortress, to sustain and repel all the assaults of temptation.” We may add, that the apostle James has drawn a clear and broad line of distinction between a mere speculative conviction of divine truth, and that faith which is inseparably connected

with salvation. To exhibit the subject in the strongest light, he tells us, that “the devils believe and tremble.” And yet their belief exerts no salutary influence on their character and destiny. It has no other effect than to increase their malignity, and augment their misery.

It is not unworthy of observation, that faith is denominated in our text, a *work*. “This is THE WORK of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” Now, we may hence infer, that faith comprises all the essential elements of that obedience which God requires of man. In other words, the belief of divine truth involves every thing that is necessary to our ultimate salvation. We are aware, that we are now approaching ground, on which we may have to combat the prejudices of the theologian, no less than those of the moralist. It has been common for systematic writers on divinity, to consider faith as the source of evangelical obedience, rather than as evangelical obedience itself. They usually describe good works as the offspring—the necessary effect—of belief in the Saviour. Now, we are not inclined, nor, indeed, prepared to deny, that this distinction, viewed as a purely metaphysical one, may be correct. But we contend that it is a distinction not very clearly sanctioned by the phraseology of the inspired record, and which, so far as we can perceive, is capable of being turned to no practical account. The Scriptures appear to us to represent faith as the vital principle—the very sum and substance—of the morality enjoined in their pages. They declare, that “Faith without works is dead,” or, in other words, DOES NOT EXIST. They allege, that the grand object of the mystery revealed in the advent of Jesus Christ, is to bring all nations to “the obedience of faith.” And what can be more explicit than the language of the apostle in his Epistle to the Galatians?—“The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of

the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." In the prophecies of Habakkuk we read, "The just shall live by faith"—a passage which seems to have been a favourite one with Paul, for it is quoted by him no less than three times in the course of his several Epistles.

We are now able to discern the true reason, why so much stress is laid upon faith in the New Testament. We see, that this term, in Scriptural phraseology, is but another name for love to God, and love to man—that all the essential constituents of evangelical obedience are united in that complex act, or, as some would call it, *habit* of the soul which receives Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of sinners, as he is offered in the gospel. It is by faith that we obtain the knowledge of our own depravity and helplessness, and are induced to seek an interest in the pardoning mercy of our God, and to rely upon him for aid in the discharge of our various duties. It is faith which delineates to our admiring view the excellence and loveliness of the Redeemer's character, and inspires us with a sincere and an ardent desire to imitate the example of his pure and benevolent life. It is faith which treads with firm but humble steps the path to glory—enters within the veil, and ascertains the reality of things invisible, thus teaching us the comparative insignificance of all terrestrial objects, and lifting our devout aspirations to an unfading inheritance in realms of celestial light and bliss. In short, it is faith which constitutes our bond of union with the Lord Jesus, and invests us with a title to all the transcendent benefits which it was the end of his mission to procure for mankind.

We must not, however, omit, in this place, to remark, that the representation which has now been given of the nature of faith, is neither designed nor calculated to countenance the idea, that the performance of this duty

can be a meritorious ground of salvation. Let it be distinctly observed, that there is not the least merit in the act or habit of believing (even when it is considered as including the whole of evangelical obedience) which atones for past omissions of duty, and entitles us to the favour of an offended God. Faith is itself a boon for which we are indebted to heaven, just as really as for any other of the numerous blessings which we enjoy. It is a duty which cannot be performed, until the heart has undergone a great moral change produced by the agency of God himself in the person of the Holy Ghost. And, in fact, all the connexion which we can trace between faith and salvation, arises from the circumstance, that the former is that peculiar exercise of the soul, in which we virtually abandon our once cherished dependence on our own virtues, and rely, with entire and exclusive confidence, on the mediation of the Son of God.

It may be presumed, that we have now said enough to elucidate the close and indissoluble alliance that subsists between evangelical faith and pure morality. The promulgation of the one is the most direct and certain means of enforcing the other. In support of this position, to which not a few will demur, we may adduce a fact which is generally and ought to be universally known. The celebrated Dr. Chalmers, than whom a more profound and philosophical observer of human nature has probably never been, informs us, that for upwards of twelve years, his ministerial labours were unsuccessful, because he had neglected, during all that time, to expound the peculiar doctrines, and insist on the peculiar duties of the gospel. He says, that he is “not sensible, that all the vehemence with which he urged the virtues and the proprieties of social life had the weight of a feather on the moral habits of his parishioners.” In a word, he has left it on record,

as the result of his own experience, that TO PREACH CHRIST, IS THE ONLY EFFECTIVE WAY OF PREACHING MORALITY IN ALL ITS BRANCHES. We might also appeal to the opinion of the distinguished Whitfield, who, on being once requested to denounce from the pulpit, theatrical entertainments, is said to have replied, that his object was to render his auditors Christians, and then they might relish such entertainments if they could. But it were superfluous to multiply authorities on this subject. We are persuaded, that there has never been a really useful preacher—we mean a preacher that converted souls to God—the burden of whose public addresses was not the great truth inculcated in our text. We venture to assert, that all the polished essays that could be penned in commendation of truth, candour, integrity, and benevolence, and all the energetic philippics that could be uttered against the opposite vices, would fail of elevating a single human being to heaven. Far—very far, be it from us to say, that topics such as these should never be adverted to in the sacred desk. We only affirm, that when the pulpit, from

“————— the sober use
Of its legitimate, peculiar pow’rs,”

is transformed into a vehicle for the conveyance of mere ethical precepts—when the minister of the gospel, who ought “to know nothing among” his hearers, “save Jesus Christ and him crucified,” keeps in the background the distinctive doctrines and duties of the New Testament, and usurps the office of a professor of moral philosophy,—the consequences must be disastrous, alike to the temporal and the spiritual interests of man.

We reiterate what we have already said, that the Christian scheme has no tendency to injure or endanger the high interests of virtue and morality. On the con-

trary, it secures these interests more—much more, effectually, than any system of any philosopher in any age. Jesus Christ is not “the minister of sin.” Of him it was foretold, in the records of ancient prophecy, that when he should “come to his temple,” as “the messenger of the covenant,” he would be “like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap”—that he would then “purify” his people as “gold and silver,” and enable them to “offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.” O! never let the doctrine of gratuitous salvation, which forms the glory of the New Testament, be calumniated, as promising happiness on terms incompatible with the promotion of love to God and benevolence to man! The charge we boldly pronounce an unfounded one. Christianity expressly and emphatically teaches, that without holiness no individual of our fallen race can be admitted into the divine presence. It gives us to understand, that we must be saved “through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth,” or, as the passage might be as well rendered, “through sanctification of the Spirit,” EVEN “the belief of the truth;” thus identifying faith with an upright and a devout life. Indeed, nothing more remarkably distinguishes the scheme which we advocate, from all other schemes that have been or are now prevalent in the world, than the inviolable affinity which it proclaims to subsist between present purity and future glory. It proffers felicity only on the rigid condition of departing from evil and doing good. Faith, the grand *sine quâ non*—the indispensable requisition of the gospel, has been shown to involve a degree of moral rectitude and beauty, surpassing all the refinements of philosophy—transcending the most exalted and brilliant visions of poetry. In short, the essence of virtue is centred in an humble and an affectionate submission to the Son of

God. It consists in "living no more to ourselves, but to him who died for us and rose again."

"Talk we of morals? O thou bleeding Love!
Thou maker of new morals to mankind!
The grand morality is love of thee."

Brethren, you have now seen the importance of faith. Your assembling within these walls to-night, is a virtual proposition to us, as the servant of Christ, of the question—"What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" And are we not bound to return the same answer which was given by our Lord himself to the inquiring Jews? Surely we must reply, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Yes, we dare not do other than announce faith as the only condition of salvation. This, dear hearers, is the grand duty which Jehovah requires of you. It is denominated in our text, "the work of God," because he both commands and enables you to perform it. "Without faith, it is impossible to please him." Nay, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." How deplorable then is the situation of those (and they are not a few) whose hopes of heaven are founded solely on their own virtues! O! for a tongue to warn them of their danger! O! for an arm of strength to break and dispel the delusion which is beguiling them down to the world of wo! Their case is, perhaps, of all others the most jeopardous. The open and conscious transgressor may be penetrated with feelings of contrition, and reclaimed from the error of his ways. But it is no easy matter to produce such feelings in the bosom of the individual who believes that his life has been, on the whole, as irreproachable as the imperfections of his nature would seem to admit, and who has long entertained the conviction, that his general integrity and benevolence will atone for his occasional failings, and insure

his happiness beyond the grave. Is there such an individual in the audience before us? We must tell you, dear friend, that there is not much probability of your salvation. We greatly fear, that you will never get to heaven. All things, indeed, are possible with God. But it rarely happens that he vouchsafes the blessed influences of his Spirit, to one in your condition.

We cannot conclude, brethren, without reminding you, that as you have been rendered acquainted with "the work of God," you are under imperious obligations to perform it. You have been told again and again, that an awful account will be exacted of those who refuse to believe on an offered Saviour. May none of us, dear hearers, come into the condemnation which shall certainly overtake such! Of the heathen, to whose abodes the Bible has never obtained access, nor the missionary of the cross found his way, charity leads us to indulge the hope, that they shall not all be lost. But what line can fathom the depths, what eye can pierce the gloom, of that dungeon which is prepared for those who sink down to endless ruin from this favoured land, where the Sabbath smiles, where the sanctuary of Jehovah rears its hallowed front, and where the glorious day-spring from on high, gladdens every valley and gilds every mountain! Ah! let me have my eternal portion with the citizens of ancient Greece and Rome—let my final residence be in that region where the spirits of departed Cherokees, Hindoos, and Tartarians are gathered—but, God of mercy! may I never experience the doom of those, who, out of the very bosom of Christianity, are cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone!

SERMON XIX.



PROVERBS XXVIII. 26. (First Clause.)

“ He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.”

ONE of the best evidences of the divine origin of the sacred Scriptures, is their tendency to humble the creature and elevate the Creator. It has been argued, that man could not be the uninspired author of a volume exhibiting such a view of the relation between God and ourselves, as compels us to admit, that we are nothing, and that he is ALL and IN ALL.

On the fairness and the force of this argument, it is not our present purpose to insist. Our business is only with the fact which constitutes the premises of the argument. We presume, then, that every man possessing the ordinary powers of discernment and reflection, who reads the sacred Scriptures, will grant, that they contain no very flattering estimate of the dignity and excellence of human nature. While philosophers of every sect and in every age have sought to exalt, *their* object appears to be to abase our species. They tear away the splendid and imposing drapery which moralists and poets would throw around the imperfections and pollutions of the world. They assert, in no equivocal language, that we are all aliens from the favour of our Maker—that we have contracted a deep and an inveterate hostility to his authority and laws. They declare, that the only process of recovery from this deplorable condition, consists in the most

lowly and penitent acknowledgment of our past offences, and the most unreserved reliance on the gracious aid of Heaven for the ability to avoid future offences. They dwell with emphasis upon our own insufficiency to regain the character and standing in the universe which, as fallen beings, we have lost. They assure us again and again, that the great work of our moral restoration cannot be effected without the assistance of God—that to attempt this work in our own strength, is the very height of fatuity and presumption. Thus it is written in our text, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.”

These words would claim our attention as coming from an individual distinguished for his profound knowledge of mankind—one whose extraordinary natural sagacity was quickened and matured by long experience, under circumstances the most favourable for an extensive observation of human character and conduct.—But the passage before us is of still higher authority. It has been recorded by the pen of inspiration. It proceeds, in reality, from Him who formed the heart of man, and who is therefore best acquainted with its weakness and its strength.

Brethren, how prone are we all to trust in our own hearts! We cherish the most favourable opinion of ourselves. We deem our intellectual faculties keener and more vigorous than they are. We imagine that our moral character, though not entirely exempt from blemishes, is comparatively pure and bright. In short, so high is the estimate which we form of our own ability, that there is scarcely any enterprise which we decline from a consciousness of incompetency.

This general disposition to think well of ourselves, exerts a potent influence over our views in respect to the nature and requirements of religion. We cannot help knowing, it is very true, that our conduct, in many in-

stances, has been different from what it ought to have been. But we conceive, that it is possible for us to balance our good qualities against our bad, in such a manner as to find acceptance in the presence of a Deity whose predominant attribute we believe to be mercy. We are sensible of our habitual tendency to wander from the path of rectitude. But we have an implicit confidence in our powers of self-government, and entertain no doubt, that we shall be able to resist temptation, and preserve our integrity unimpaired.—These are our natural sentiments; and they are sentiments which the word of God expressly and positively condemns—sentiments which it is the primary business of religion to eradicate from the mind of man. Hence it is, that we find *humility*—a virtue unknown to other codes of ethics—represented, in the New Testament, as the first and noblest trait of the Christian character. Hence it is, that Solomon in the text before us, pronounces the individual who trusts in his own heart, *a fool*.

We have said, that *all men* are more or less disposed to trust in their own hearts. Christianity boasts of no “faultless monsters.” They over whom the gospel has acquired the highest ascendancy, have still their imperfections. They perceive, and bitterly lament, that the feeling of self-dependence retains, in some degree, its hold in their souls. Our passage is, therefore, one from which even the best of Christians may extract appropriate and salutary instruction. But it is not our present object thus to apply the text. We would rather contemplate it in reference to the case of those, who, though in courtesy we may call them *Christians*, are strangers to the spirit of vital Christianity.

Now, there are two senses in which such men trust in their own hearts. They do this *retrospectively* and

prospectively—that is, they rely upon themselves for the expiation of past, and the prevention of future misconduct. We shall proceed to offer a few remarks on each of these particulars.

The doctrine which admits the reality and the efficacy of human merit in the matter of salvation, is so glaringly absurd, that it needs only to be enunciated in plain and direct terms, to be at once rejected by every one whose moral and religious perceptions have not been clouded by the inveterate prejudices of education. And yet some of the very persons who would discard this doctrine with feelings bordering on contempt, entertain opinions in respect to the moral character and performances of man, which, if pursued to their legitimate consequences, would be seen to be little less preposterous. There are those who cannot help thinking, in spite of what they read in the Bible on the subject, that when they have made a vigorous effort of self-denial, or when they have done an act of more than ordinary beneficence, they have really deserved a share of the divine approbation. And if they are too modest to *say* this of themselves, they are less backward in affirming it with regard to others. Take up an article of biography from the pen of one of our classical writers. How common is it to find the author admitting, that the person whose life he relates, was by no means free from faults, but zealously contending, that these were more than expiated by his good qualities, and particularly by his sufferings, if he happened to be unfortunate. Open a newspaper, and read the inflated account of an execution. You are told, that the unhappy victim displayed the firmest fortitude and courage—for every felon, it would seem, becomes a hero when he reaches the gallows—and at such an hour *atoned* for his crime by submitting to a fate which it was not in his power to avert.

Indeed, if an opinion were to be formed from the elaborate and high-coloured detail of these melancholy transactions, which the editors of newspapers are expected to furnish, we should almost be tempted to conclude, that there is no surer and easier method of getting to heaven, than by the commission of a capital offence.—We would not now be understood as intimating, that all who adopt the kind of phraseology which we have mentioned, really believe in the possibility of expiating sin, by deeds of virtue, exercises of benevolence, or the most intense and protracted sufferings of body or of mind. But the prevalence of such phraseology shows sufficiently, that the general views of men in relation to this matter, are not in strict accordance with evangelical truth.—We may add, that our most popular writers, moral and sentimental—especially our elegant essayists—commonly speak of the happiness of the future state, as if it were to be the pure reward of human merit. It has been justly said, that “this, so far as any allusions are made to the subject, is the prevailing opinion through the school of polite literature.”

Brethren, it is important for us to guard you against any degree of error in respect to the point now under consideration. If there be one truth on which peculiar stress is laid in the sacred Scriptures, and particularly in the New Testament, it is this. Recollect those awful words of revelation: “Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.” Behold, too, the estimate of human merit formed by Him who came into the world to expiate human guilt. Says our Lord to his disciples: “When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do.” Here, then is the fundamental principle of Christianity—the article

by which true religion must stand or fall. And might we not ask, to what purpose did the Son of God divest himself of his essential glories, and leave the bosom of his Father, for a life of humiliation, a pilgrimage of sorrow, and a death of torture on earth, if it had been possible for man to be saved on the ground of his own merits? The very fact, that divine wisdom and goodness have devised for our fallen race, so complicated and expensive an apparatus of salvation, may be considered as a conclusive argument in behalf of the truth asserted in our text. Yes, it must have been because we have no substantial ground of confidence in our own hearts—because we are, under all circumstances, unprofitable servants—because when we have done the utmost that we can possibly effect, we have established no valid claim to the favour or the compassion of our Creator—it was on this very account that God deemed it necessary to provide for us that Saviour, the image of himself, and the brightness of his own glory, whom the gospel reveals.

But here the question may arise, Do not the sacred Scriptures sometimes represent the future felicity of the redeemed, as a reward conferred upon them by their Father in heaven, for the zeal and diligence which they have displayed in his service? We answer in the affirmative. Thus the Saviour, on a certain occasion, addressed his disciples in these terms: “Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come, life everlasting.” And in the striking account given by our Lord of the solemnities of the final judgment, we observe, that the acceptance of those on the right hand of the Son of man, is predicated on the fact, that they had fed the hungry, furnished drink

to the thirsty, entertained the stranger, clothed the naked, visited the sick, and interested themselves in the prisoner's behalf. But these and similar passages only relate to the inseparable connexion which, according to the plan of the gospel, subsists between the present character and the ulterior destiny of man. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." But as God himself provides the means by which this holiness is to be attained—as he imparts both the inclination and the ability to perform virtuous, and pious, and benevolent deeds—the blessings thus procured cannot be said to be *merited*, in the proper sense of that word. We accordingly find, that these blessings are described in the New Testament, as the reward, not of *debt*, but of *grace*.

Beware, then, candidates for the favour of Heaven—beware of trusting in your own hearts. When you approach the throne of divine Justice, let the righteousness of Christ be your only plea. Cast it not from you, dear hearers; it is your life, your all! Cling to it as that which alone can expiate your offences, and procure for you a sentence of acquittal at the bar of your God. Build your immortal hopes entirely on this righteousness, and then you need not fear the retributions of eternity—then you may present yourselves before the tribunal of Jehovah, with the humble, yet confident language—"Lord, we have done nothing to deserve thy complacent regards—the review of our earthly career affords only matter for humiliation and regret; we dare not trust to the very best deed that we have ever performed: thy justice would doom us to misery, and we cannot expect that the general benevolence of thy nature will interpose for our rescue. We look to the merits of thy Son for security. We ask that his blood may be applied to the effacing of our transgressions from the volume of thy remembrance. Father

of mercies! take us into thy favour—admit us to thy kingdom—assign to us a place, even though it be the lowest, among the unfallen angels and redeemed spirits that circle thy throne rejoicing. Give us a crown of glory and a palm of victory, that we may lay them at the feet of Him who died for us and rose again.”

Again, men are disposed to trust in their own hearts, not only for acceptance in the sight of God, so far as their past conduct is concerned, but also for the ability to spend their future career in what they conceive to be a right and proper manner. They deem themselves competent to restrain the impulse of passion, to resist the force of temptation, and to perform at pleasure the most arduous duties of virtue. They fearlessly undertake the task of self-government, fully persuaded that they are above the control of circumstances, which have blasted the moral dignity, and destroyed the happiness of inferior individuals. They admit that it is extremely difficult to withstand the many allurements from rectitude with which every walk of life abounds—they observe all around them the bleaching bones of others, whose ruin was occasioned by a similar confidence in their own strength—the personal trial of past conflicts, and dangers, and defeats, admonishes them that they are not invincible. Still they determine to venture on the experiment. They cannot think so meanly of the understanding which God has given them, as to imagine that they are incapable of refraining from vices, which they know must inevitably lead to consequences the most ignominious and disastrous. They believe, that a moderate degree of indulgence in pleasure is perfectly allowable, and even agreeable to a benevolent Deity. Beyond the limits of moderation they have resolved not to advance a single step. Nor have they the least doubt of their ability to

say, and with effect, to the most swelling and impetuous tide of passion, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther."

But the self-confidence of which we speak is folly. It is preposterous for any man to rest his hopes of future rectitude on the strength of his own resolutions—to imagine that his inherent firmness of mind affords a sufficient guarantee for the preservation of his integrity. The individual who thus acts, is entirely ignorant of the human heart. Experience abundantly evinces the mutability of all its views and all its purposes. How often have we seen the youth who entered upon life with the brightest prospects and the fairest promise—his parents' idol, and his friends' delight—disappointing all the fond hopes which he had raised, and taking his degraded place among those, of whom the least that we can say, is, that it had been well for themselves, and all related to them, by whatever ties, if their cradle had never been rocked—if they had not been born! Yes, the lapse of a few years produces many a sad revolution in the moral feelings and character of men, transforming the honest dealer into a dexterous knave; the temperate youth into an abandoned drunkard; the dutiful son into a rebellious profligate; the tender husband and affectionate father, into a domestic tyrant. These are every-day occurrences, and they surely prove, that no one, whose sole confidence is in himself, is entitled to affirm that he will be, at any coming period, the same being as to rectitude of principle and purity of conduct, that he is at present.—"Where is the world into which I was born?" exclaimed one in surveying the ravages which death had made in the circle of his early acquaintance. And similar language may well be adopted by him who reflects on the changes which time has wrought in the moral sentiments and condition of numbers within the sphere of his observation.—Verily, "he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool."

To illustrate the interesting view which we are now taking of this text, we may be allowed to borrow an instance, much to the point, from one of the ancient philosophers. Epictetus relates, that he was once waited upon by a certain person who had just returned from banishment, and who, in the course of conversation, expressed the deepest regret for the imprudent part which he had previously acted, and declared, that it was his settled determination to shun, in future, the dangerous paths of ambition, and devote the residue of his days to literary and religious pursuits. The shrewd stoic did not doubt his visitant's sincerity. But he was too well acquainted with the human heart to give much heed to his professions, or to hope much from his resolutions. And, indeed, the mistaken man was soon himself undeceived. For before he left the house of Epictetus, a letter arrived from Cæsar inviting him to court, and opening to his view prospects, which, notwithstanding the language he had just held, he had not the ability, nor, in fact, the desire to decline. Ambition, ere long, acquired as strong a sway in his soul as it possessed prior to his exile.

Our next example shall be drawn from the sacred Scriptures. Benhadad, the Syrian monarch who flourished in the days of Elisha, was, on a certain occasion, afflicted with some dangerous disease. Hearing that that prophet had arrived at Damascus, he despatched his chief general, Hazael, to consult him respecting the issue of his illness. In the course of the conversation which took place between the officer of Benhadad and the man of God, the latter suddenly burst into tears. Hazael, surprized at an occurrence so unaccountable, at once inquired, what the prophet's grief could mean. To the question, "Why weepeth my lord?" Elisha replied, that he foresaw an assemblage of the most horrible calamities which his

visitant would be the instrument of inflicting upon "the children of Israel." Hazael indignantly exclaimed, "But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing!" Elisha briefly answered, "The Lord hath shown me, that thou shalt be king over Syria." And what was the sequel? Hazael returned home, and on the very morning after his return, murdered Benhadad, and usurped the throne of Syria. One crime prepared the way for another, until, in a short period, he perpetrated, without compunction, all the enormities which Elisha had predicted.—How forcibly does this instance confirm the doctrine of our text. Hazael, at the time of his interview with Elisha, entertained too good an opinion of himself, to deem it possible that his hands should ever be stained with the crimes, of which the prophet foresaw, that he would be guilty. We are not to do him the wrong of supposing, that when he exclaimed, "What, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing!" he played the hypocrite. Far from it. He spoke the language of ingenuousness. He was then sincerely and firmly persuaded, that he could not become so corrupt—so lost to every virtuous principle—so dead to every benevolent feeling—as to commit the outrages which Elisha anticipated. But the event showed the folly of his self-confidence.

Does any one say, that the case of Hazael is such as seldom occurs? We answer, that they who think so, are mistaken. In fact, this portion of sacred history only exhibits in strong and glowing relief, what is constantly transpiring among men. Take any individual distinguished for his crimes, and interrogate him respecting the events of his life—You will discover, if he tells you the truth, that there was a period when not even the prophetic intimation of *one risen from the dead* could

have convinced him, that he should ever become what he now is. The felon on the gallows can testify how little he once expected to die an ignominious death. The confirmed drunkard can look back to a time when he was what the world calls a temperate man—a time when he had so high an opinion of his own native energy—so much confidence in the stability of his own resolutions—that he would have deeply resented the insinuation, that it was even possible for *him* to be tempted to the slightest degree of excess.

And here we cannot refrain from adding one or two incidental remarks suggested by this last example. There are no facts in the moral history of man, which more clearly and impressively illustrate the truth of our text, than those connected with the rise and progress of intemperate habits. We behold thousands and thousands of our fellow beings the abject slaves of a vice, which all abominate, and which every one, at the commencement of his career, determines to avoid. Where is the individual who entered upon life with the intention to become a drunkard? Such an one is no where to be found. The most abandoned victim of intemperance in the vilest tavern of your city, once entertained the hope, that he should live and die a sober man. He confidently believed, that he should be able to resist temptations, by which he had seen so many others overcome. Indeed, he would have recoiled with horror from the idea, that he should ever destroy his character and his health, his fortune and his family, his body and his soul, by yielding to habits of inebriation. But he “trusted in his own heart,” and was, therefore, “a fool.” He indulged the vain hope, that he could gratify his thirst for ardent spirits, without being induced to use them to excess. Not that we would deny, that some men have realized a hope of this kind. We admit that there have been those

who persisted to the close of life, in maintaining what might be called a medium between temperate and intemperate habits. But we are sure, that for one who has succeeded in the experiment, thousands and tens of thousands have failed. And we, moreover, affirm, that every person, no matter what may be his strength of mind, who accustoms himself to approach the limitaries of temperance, is always in danger of overstepping his prescribed bounds. Indeed, a close observer of human nature—we mean Dr. Dwight—has said, “The man who drinks spirits regularly, ought to consider himself as having already entered the path of habitual intoxication.” If any one should tell us, that this language is far too strong, we have a brief answer at hand. The remark, if erroneous, is at least an error on the safer side. In entire abstinence from ardent spirits there is security; in any thing short of this there is peril.

To the youth in our audience, we would particularly utter, on this occasion, an admonitory voice. We would earnestly and affectionately caution you, dear hearers, against trusting in your own hearts, when inclination, or the solicitations of your companions, would tempt you to lay your hand on the intoxicating glass. Have a care, O young man, how you confide in the strength of your own resolutions, as a bulwark against the encroachments of intemperate habits. Avoid, as you would a nest of rattlesnakes, every haunt of debauchery. When the lovers of drink invite you to join them, let your determined language be, “O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly mine honour, be not thou united!”

But intemperance is by no means the only evil habit, the abandonment of which is as difficult, as its continuance is fatal to all the high interests of man. We might easily adduce many other instances in illustration of the general

truth for which we contend, that the individual who trusts in his own heart, for the ability to tread the steep and lofty paths of virtue, undertakes a foolish experiment. Time, however, will not permit us to multiply examples. We rest the proof of our position on the inveterate progressiveness of habit—a fact familiar to every one who has the least knowledge of human nature. Moralists in all ages have admitted and deplored it. Indeed, they have frequently expressed themselves on this subject, in language scarcely less strong and emphatic than that of the prophet, who says, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.”

With one or two general reflections we shall now close our discourse.

It was intimated, at an early period of our remarks, that the text is a passage of Scripture, from which Christians themselves may extract useful instruction. To you, then, brethren, we would first say a word. Our subject is calculated to make you humble. Indeed, of what can you be proud? Of your riches? Of your intellectual attainments, or personal endowments? Of your moral excellences? Of your pious performances?—Why, you owe them all to Jehovah; and you have abundant reason to be ashamed and mortified that you have felt so little gratitude to him for these various indications of his benignity. Beware, too, of trusting in your own hearts, for they are “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” True, they have been sanctified to a certain extent by the Spirit of God. But they retain a measure of imperfection, so that when you would do good, evil is present with you. It becomes you, therefore, to be constantly on your guard. When you recollect that even a David and a Peter were taught by bitter experience, the folly of self-confidence, you must

admit that it is the part of wisdom to act under a deep and an abiding sense of your own weakness. Live in habitual dependence on the grace of God. He has promised that that grace shall be sufficient for you. It flows from the fountain of his own fulness, and is inexhaustible. "When I am weak (says Paul) then am I strong." This language may sound paradoxical; but it breathes the essential spirit of practical Christianity. The individual who feels most truly the force of his Redeemer's saying, "Without me ye can do nothing," has the best right to exclaim with the apostle whose words we have just quoted, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."

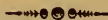
To those who are just beginning to feel a personal interest in religion, (if there be such in this assembly,) we would say, a conviction of your own inability to merit the divine favour, is the first step in the path to heaven. So long as you are destitute of this conviction, your hopes of acceptance with God are utterly fallacious. Renounce, we entreat you, every thought that you can be saved through works of righteousness performed by yourselves. Go, penitent sinner, to the cross of Christ, and learn to plead his merits alone as a ground of salvation. O! then shalt thou hear from the lips of divine Mercy, those cheering words, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

To those who are still indifferent and callous in respect to the concerns of religion, (and it were an excess of charity to doubt that there are such in this assembly,) we would say,—Your condition, dear hearers, is truly a lamentable—an awful one. You trust in your own hearts to do for you, what they are entirely insufficient to perform. We "speak the words of truth and soberness," when we tell you that you are the victims of a delusion which has proved the ruin of many a soul now in hell,

and which, if not speedily abandoned, will accomplish your destruction also. Believe us, if you are saved at all, it must be through the merits of the Son of God. In him is your only hope. Go to the bar of your Maker, and solicit acceptance on the ground of your own deserts. Ah! he will take you at your word. Yes, self-righteous man, you shall be weighed in the balances of heaven, and found wanting. The language of Jehovah to the waiting executioners of his justice, will be, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Finally, to all in this assembly—Christians, serious inquirers, impenitent sinners, old and young—we would say,—Trust not in your own hearts. To do so, is folly in the extreme. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall...Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast himself as he that putteth it off."

SERMON XX.



GENESIS XVIII. 25.

“ That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?”

THUS it was that Abraham interceded with Jehovah in behalf of Sodom. The divine intention to visit with a fearful overthrow, the degenerate inhabitants of that city, had just been communicated to him. He was anxious to avert, if possible, the impending calamity, and, therefore, ventured to converse with God on the subject. He was aware, that nothing could be said in extenuation of the guilt of the Sodomites. Their depravity was so extreme—their desert of some signal chastisement so glaring—that not a word could properly be uttered to screen them from the wrath of heaven. But the benevolent patriarch indulged the hope, that there might be a few pious persons remaining even amid the awful wickedness of Sodom, and it occurred to him, that possibly the place might be spared on their account. This was the only plea which the circumstances of the case seemed to permit him to urge. He accordingly drew near to his Maker, and thus commenced his address: “ Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should

be as the wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

This text is one among innumerable passages of Scripture, which represent the Deity as a being of the highest and most inflexible justice. He is not only the Creator and Preserver, but also the Governor of the universe. He reigns over his creatures, as their rightful Sovereign. To him they are accountable for all their conduct. His dominion, however, is not a mere arbitrary supremacy founded on infinite might. There are certain definite and immutable principles, originating in the eternal rectitude of his own nature, by which his government is administered. In pursuance of these principles, which he can no more abandon than he can cease to exist, he always deals with voluntary agents according to their moral deserts. It is impossible for him to treat the good and the bad—those who obey, and those who disobey his laws—in precisely the same manner. Of this truth Abraham, even at an early age, when the lights of reason and revelation were both comparatively dim, was fully convinced. He assumed it as a point that could not be denied, or doubted; and it formed the basis of his intercession in behalf of Sodom. He was sure, that it would be far from God to destroy the righteous with the wicked—to involve opposite characters in indiscriminate destruction. Such a procedure he scrupled not to intimate, would be *unjust* on the part of his Maker. Thus he emphatically asked, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

It is certain, then, that in the universe of God, a due distinction will, in every instance, be ultimately made between the virtuous and the vicious. We say *ultimately*, because there can be no doubt, that, in the present world, such a distinction does not uniformly obtain. Here men are not dealt with exactly according to their merits. The

sun rises to enlighten and bless the evil and the good. Rain descends on the just and on the unjust. The wicked sometimes enjoy a large measure of temporal blessings, while the righteous are visited with every kind and degree of affliction. Nor could it be otherwise in a state of probation, where voluntary agents, instead of being rewarded and punished in strict accordance with the demands of justice, are to be tried and prepared for their ulterior destination. The period is coming, when all these inequalities will be rectified—when every cloud that now seems to hang over the moral government of Deity will disappear—when his character as the Judge of all the earth will shine forth with unsullied lustre—when he will weigh, in even scales, the deserts of all intelligent beings, and determine their fate for eternity on such principles, as shall constrain the whole universe to acknowledge and feel the equity of his decisions.

The general doctrine inculcated in the text before us, is capable of many applications. The justice of God is a fruitful theme, from which a variety of important conclusions may be drawn. We propose, on the present occasion, to consider it in reference to a question, which, though not very often discussed in the pulpit, or even in books, is frequently a topic of conversation, and occasionally occupies the thoughts, and awakens the speculations, of every serious mind. We allude to the future destiny of those who die in infancy. It is a matter of equal surprise and regret, that a subject of so much interest should be so rarely adverted to by those who speak and write on the prospects of man as a religious being. To tell us, that the Scriptures reveal little or nothing in relation to this point, is not a sufficient apology for the silence maintained by preachers and writers, since other topics—such, for example, as the title of children to baptism—respect-

ing which the disclosures of Revelation are scarcely more explicit, have employed many an eloquent tongue, and many a prolific pen. Our theological libraries exhibit no deficiency of erudite and elaborate works on the comparatively unimportant point, whether infants may be baptized, while we may minutely examine the contents of whole shelves of volumes, without finding a page, or even a sentence, that has a bearing on the question, whether the large number of human beings, whom death removes from our earth before they are capable of moral error, shall be saved or lost.

This silence of so many of our most approved religious writers and speakers, in reference to the future destiny of infants, has led to a result deeply to be deplored. A very general impression has gone abroad, that theologians of our own denomination in particular, imagine, that some who die in infancy are lost. The preacher to whom you are listening, has been asked, with much gravity and concern, whether all Presbyterian ministers really held the opinion, that "there are children in hell not a span long," as it is commonly expressed. Indeed, an elaborate attempt has recently been made by the Unitarians of New-England, in one of their leading periodical works, to show, that the damnation of infants is not only an inferential point necessarily flowing from Calvinism, but an article of belief actually adopted, and explicitly avowed, by some of the most eminent Calvinistic divines. Under these circumstances it becomes, in our apprehension, the solemn duty of every minister in the Presbyterian church, publicly to declare, on all suitable occasions, what are his views in relation to this subject. By thus acting he will quiet the minds of many in his own church, at the same time that he contributes to wrest from the hands of others, a weapon which they have successfully wielded to the

detriment of the entire denomination of which he is a member.

Before we advance further, it is but fair to state, that very few, if any, Calvinistic divines have avowed a belief in the damnation of infants. The contrary impression, however generally it may prevail, and however it may have been encouraged by the erroneous representations of those who ought to know better, does not accord with the truth. The utmost that can be correctly affirmed, is that some Calvinistic divines have expressed themselves doubtfully on this subject. They have taken the ground, that, as the Scriptures are silent in relation to the future fate of infants, the readers of the Scriptures ought to consider the point as among those secret things which belong to the Lord our God, and with which, therefore, it is impertinent for human curiosity to intermeddle. On the other hand, there are some Calvinistic divines who have avowed, in terms the most explicit and unqualified, their clear and settled persuasion, that all who die in infancy shall be saved. For example, Toplady, than whom a fiercer and more thorough-going Calvinist never stepped on the arena of polemics, gives it as his unhesitating conviction, that "the souls of all departed infants are with God in glory; that in the decree of predestination to life, God hath included all whom he intended to take away in infancy; and that the decree of reprobation hath nothing to do with them." Let us next hear John Newton. In a letter of condolence to a friend on the loss of a child, he says, "I cannot be sorry for the death of *infants*. How many storms do they escape! Nor can I doubt in my private judgment, that they are included in the election of grace. Perhaps those who die in infancy, are the exceeding great multitude of all people, nations and languages, mentioned Revelation vii. 3. in distinction from the visible

body of professing believers, who were marked in their foreheads, and openly known to be the Lord's." The same author in another place, thus writes: "Children who die in their infancy, have not yet done any thing in the body, either good or bad. It is true, they are by nature evil, and must, if saved, be the subjects of a supernatural change. And though we cannot conceive how this change is to be wrought, yet I suppose few are so rash as to imagine it impossible that any infants can be saved. The same power that produces this change in some, can produce it in all; and, therefore, I am willing to believe, till the Scripture forbids me, that infants of all nations and kindreds, without exception, who die before they are capable of sinning after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who have done nothing in the body of which they can give an account, are included in the election of grace. They are born for a better world than this; they just enter this state of tribulation; they quickly pass through it; their robes are washed in the blood of the Lamb, and they are admitted for his sake before the throne." More passages of a similar purport might be quoted from other Calvinistic writers. But we shall merely add the opinion of Dr. Scott. In commenting on that saying of our divine Lord, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," he remarks, that the passage may be understood as intimating, that the "kingdom of *heavenly glory* is greatly constituted of such as die in their infancy." He further says, "Infants are as capable of regeneration as grown persons; and there is ground to conclude, that all those who have not lived to commit actual transgressions, though they share in the effects of the first Adam's offence, will also share in the blessings of the second Adam's gracious covenant; without their personal faith and obedience,

but not without the regenerating influence of the Spirit of Christ." These extracts will serve to show that there have been Calvinistic authors of the highest repute, who entertained no doubts whatever respecting the future condition of dying infants. And yet it has been solemnly affirmed,* that the doctrine which asserts the damnation of at least some such infants, is an essential feature of Calvinism, and would now be insisted on by all real and consistent Calvinistic ministers, if they thought that their people would bear it. After the quotations which have been adduced from writers like Toplady, and Newton, and Scott, we are surely entitled to say, that the affirmation is at variance with the fact.

In discussing the question of the future fate of dying infants, we shall assume, as a position not to be controverted, that they shall be either all saved, or all lost. We are wholly unable to conceive, on what ground any distinction can be made among them. They enter eternity with a moral character precisely alike, and consequently they must stand on the same footing at the bar of their Maker. To confer happiness on some, and doom others to misery, were a procedure entirely inadmissible in the righteous government of God. It will not do to say, that Jehovah is a sovereign who doeth according to his pleasure in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and that he can dispose of his creatures just as the potter works with his clay, making some vessels to honour, and others to dishonour. We are by no means inclined to call in question the sovereignty of the Most High. Far—very far—be it from us to deny to Him the prerogative of doing what he will with his own. But at the same time, we have the most implicit confidence in the

* In the Christian Examiner.

essential rectitude and benignity of the divine nature. We believe that God, however absolute as a sovereign, is still just, and holy, and good, insomuch that he pays the strictest regard to the rights, and consults for the truest interests of every being under his control. The supposition that some who die in infancy may be saved on account of their parents' faith, or their parents' good qualities, is not to be harboured for a moment. In short, it appears to us, that there is no denying our position, that those who are removed from our earth before they are capable of moral action, must be all saved, or all lost. We shall now present a few considerations to show that they shall be all saved.

And first, let us consult the testimony of the divine word. We admit that the Scriptures say nothing directly and positively in relation to this subject. There are, however, some passages which may be thought to have an incidental bearing on the point. We shall briefly advert to them. We begin with the language of David [on] the death of the infant which heaven removed from him, as a punishment for the sin of which he was guilty in the case of Uriah and Bath-sheba. We are told that during the child's illness, he was perfectly disconsolate, lying all night on the earth, and refusing to receive any sustenance. But as soon as he learned the fact of its death, he arose, and having washed and anointed himself, changed his dress, and repaired to the house of the Lord for worship, and then entered his own dwelling and partook of the refreshments that were set before him. His servants expressed their surprise at this conduct. He replied, "While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go

to him, but he shall not return to me." Now, we regard this as a somewhat remarkable passage. David, it will be observed, here speaks in a way which shows that he was free from any doubt concerning the happiness of his departed infant. "I shall go to him." This is very positive language, and when we recollect that it was spoken in reference to a child that was the offspring of adultery, and was visited with sickness and death as a judgment for the father's iniquity, we may account it presumptive evidence in behalf of the truth for which we contend. We shall next quote from the prophecies of Jeremiah two passages on which, indeed, we confess that much stress cannot be laid, but which may yet deserve at least a moment's notice. The prophet, in one place, represents Jehovah as bringing this, among other charges, against the Jews, "Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents;" and in another place he describes God as holding this language: "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle. Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents." The only observation which we have to offer on these texts, is, that the application of the term *innocents* indiscriminately to children, is not very consonant with the idea that any departed infants shall be finally and eternally lost. Nor does this idea seem quite consistent with the scope and spirit of the following passage at the close of the book of Jonah: "And should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left?" There are other pas-

sages of the Old Testament, in which much tender regard is expressed for little children. But we forbear to take up your time with the quotation of them. Let us now open the New Testament. We there meet with conduct and language on the part of our divine Lord himself, which, to say the least, are more favourable to the opinion that all who die in infancy shall be saved, than to the contrary supposition. We shall lay before you, without particular comment, the passages which we have in view. "At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me." In a subsequent verse of the chapter from which this extract is taken, the Saviour, pursuing the same strain of remark, says, "Take heed, that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." Again, "And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them; and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them." The same incident which we have thus extracted from Mark, is likewise related by Matthew and Luke.

The scriptural passages which we have now quoted, will suffice to show, that the testimony of the divine word,

so far as it can be brought to bear, with any thing like directness, on the point under consideration, is by no means unfavourable to the position which asserts the salvation of all departed infants. We have granted, that the Scriptures do not formally decide the question. But we must insist, that they warrant the confident belief that none who die in infancy shall be damned. They are addressed to us as rational beings. They appeal to our reason, and we are required to exercise our reason in the full investigation of every thing that they teach, directly or indirectly. Now, we contend that they discover to us quite enough of the character of God, and of the principles on which his moral government is administered, to authorize the conclusion, that where no actual offence has been committed, eternal punishment will not be inflicted. In fact, after what the Scriptures have so clearly and emphatically inculcated respecting the essential rectitude of the divine nature, we should deem it entirely unnecessary for them to announce, in so many words, that all who die in infancy shall be saved. And this, we conceive, is the proper mode of explaining and accounting for the silence of the inspired record on this point.

Most of the writers who have contended for the salvation of all departed infants, have been disposed to rely, for the defence of their views, chiefly on the mercy of God.* But we are rather inclined to assume a different ground. We prefer resting our confident belief, in respect to this matter, on the justice of Jehovah. We reason, as Abraham does in our present text. We are persuaded that it will be far from God to slay the righteous with the wicked. We know that the Judge of all the earth must do right. These, brethren—these are the premises from

* Jeremy Taylor, however, founds his argument relative to this subject, on the justice of God.

which we infer that no moral agents, guiltless of actual transgression, shall be damned. And while we would not diminish the glory of the divine benevolence, we venture to say, that, in all cases, it is wiser and safer to rely on the justice of Deity. We know not what obstacles the moral government of God may, in particular instances, interpose to the exercise of his mercy. But we may rest assured, that nothing can possibly occur to induce him to do what is unjust. When I stand at the bar of my Maker as a sinner, I should tremble for my fate were I compelled to cast myself entirely on his benevolence and compassion. May I then be enabled to plead his justice, satisfied, not, indeed, by any acts of my own, but by the obedience and sufferings of him who died that guilty men might live!

We go on to remark, as another argument for the truth which we are attempting to defend, that no object is to be attained, so far as we can see, in the government of God, by the perdition of infants. We can readily conceive, that the punishment of actual offenders may accomplish a highly important end in the divine administration, by deterring other beings from transgression. But no imaginable good can result from inflicting misery on those who never sinned. Were the Supreme Ruler of the universe to consign the innocent to final wretchedness, the only reason that we could conceive for such a procedure would be the malevolence of his nature. But the God of the Bible has no pleasure even in the death of the wicked. He punishes them for the general good of the universe.

Besides, it deserves to be considered, whether it is not impossible, in the nature of things, for infants to endure what must constitute a primary part of the punishment inflicted on the wicked in the future world. They are surely incapable of remorse. On their spirits the worm that never

dies cannot prey. They have done no evil with which to reproach themselves. To suppose that they should feel remorse on account of Adam's sin is preposterous. No man's conscience ever has upbraided him, or ever will upbraid him for any transgressions but his own. He can no more repent of what Adam did, than he can repent of what Nero or Caligula did.

There is one objection to the salvation of infants, on which we ought, perhaps, to offer a single remark, before we close. The Scriptures, it is said, insist on faith as a condition of salvation. Now, as infants cannot believe, they cannot be saved. We answer, in one word, that God requires faith only of those who are capable of exercising it. He never demands impossibilities. And more than this, the argument to which we allude, if it proves any thing, will prove that no infants whatever can be saved, since they are all equally incapable of faith. Indeed, the more we examine this subject, the stronger becomes our conviction as to the soundness of our fundamental position, that infants must be either all saved or all lost. No medium between these extremes, is, in any respect tenable. We believe they will all be saved, and though not capable of exercising faith, their salvation will be ascribed to Him who loved them, and gave himself for them.

The subject which we have thus hastily discussed is eminently consolatory to parents, or, at least, to pious parents, whose lot it has been to be deprived of their infant offspring. There are, no doubt, such parents in the assembly which we this morning address. Brethren, we would have you to banish all sorrow from your bosoms, since we feel authorized to assure you, and on scriptural grounds, that your departed infants are far happier now than they would have been had Providence continued

them with you. Yes, they are with God in glory, and you may confidently anticipate a joyful meeting with them on the day of your own entrance into heaven. Let it then be your endeavour meekly to submit to the will of the Most High, and diligently to prepare for that better and brighter world, where parent and child shall be united to part no more.

Does any one here ask, why we have intimated a restriction to pious parents, of the consolation flowing from our present subject? We answer, because other parents, though they are warranted in the belief that their departed infants have gone to heaven, have no right to cherish the hope that they shall ever meet them there. Their own destination must be very different. This is, in truth, a solemn thought for impenitent fathers and impenitent mothers. Are there such in our audience to day? Brethren, we beg you to consider how you will endure an eternal separation from your children. Believe us, such separation is inevitable if you do not speedily repent of your sins, and become new beings. We exhort you, then, as you retain any affection for the infants whom you have lost on earth, and as you would delight to join them again in the realms of celestial purity and bliss—O! we exhort you, not to continue another hour in a state of impenitence.

But there are those in our audience to day—impenitent sinners, we mean—who are not parents. And what salutary admonition, dear hearers, does this subject address to you? We shall tell you, in a single word. It suggests the solemn reflection, that it had been far better for you to be removed from earth before the setting of the first sun that dawned upon you, than to die in your present condition. You, no doubt, rejoice that it was your good fortune to escape the many perils of infancy, and if ever you have felt any thing like gratitude to God, the emotion has

probably been excited by the contemplation of his goodness in prolonging your existence. And yet we must assure you, that what you thus count a blessing, will prove a real curse should death overtake you ere you have secured an interest in Christ. We request you, then, to carry this solemn thought home with you. But what are we saying? Carry it home with you? No, let it have its due influence on the spot. O! leave not the house of God this morning till you have resolved to repent and enter on a new course of life. Nothing can be gained by delay. The interests of eternity are at stake, and every moment, therefore, is of infinite importance to you. It is only by promptness and decision, that you can escape whatever misery is implied in—a worm that dieth not, and fire that is not quenched.

SERMON XXI.



JOB XIX. 25, 26.

“For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.”

THIS passage has been strangely considered by some as destitute of any spiritual meaning. They suppose, that Job here simply expresses the confident hope that God would at last deliver him from the misery which had come upon him in the loss of property, of children, and of health; that a calmer and happier period would arrive before the termination of his earthly career. But this exposition of the text may be shown not to be the true one, by a reference to the two verses immediately preceding. If the afflicted patriarch had been thinking merely of a temporal redemption, it is hardly to be presumed, that he would have prefaced the declaration of his cheering views on this article with words so exceedingly solemn as the following: “O that my words were now written! O that they were printed in a book! That they were engraven with an iron pen and laid in the rock for ever!” Now, surely such language, to say the least, sounds very inappropriate, as an introduction to a profession of belief, on the part of an individual, that he should one day be as rich in flocks and herds as ever, that the sons and daughters whom Providence had taken from him should be replaced by others, and that the boils which covered his

body should be cured. The whole passage is thus degraded, and rendered unworthy of the context, and, indeed, of the word of God.

Brethren, let us follow the dictates of common sense—let us conform to the sure rule of scriptural analogy—and then we shall perceive, that the text now before us, is a most remarkable expression of evangelical faith on the part of one who lived many centuries prior to the Christian economy. We have here strong and striking evidence, that the religious views of devout men, under the old dispensation, were not so indistinct and imperfect as we are apt to imagine. In short, this passage confirms the remark of Paul, that “the gospel was preached to Abraham.”

Job here refers to a personage whom he styles *Redeemer*. This, we all know, is one of the scriptural titles of the Son of God. And surely the appellation is a most appropriate and expressive one. It designates with peculiar clearness and force, his character and office as the Deliverer of mankind from sin and misery. You, Christian brethren, know its emphatic meaning. It teaches you, that you were subject to the penalty of a broken law, and have been fully released—that you were under the dominant influence of unhallowed habits, and have been set at liberty—and all this through the kind and unmerited interposition of One mighty to save. It thus implies, that all the blessings which you enjoy, or hope for, are the *purchase*—the gratuitous result—of another’s services.

And hence Job, in this passage, is not content with speaking of a Redeemer in general terms. He also makes use of the language of appropriation. He represents this Redeemer as *his*. He calls him, *my Redeemer*. Now, we shall not deny, that there is a sense in which such

phraseology as this may be adopted by every person who hears the gospel, which contains a free offer of the Lord Jesus Christ as a Saviour to the whole human family. But there is likewise another and more restricted sense, in which we may individually claim the Son of God as *our Redeemer*, when we venture to indulge the hope, that the benefits of his redemption have been actually conferred upon us. To advance a claim of this kind, is to presume that we have complied with the conditions on which these benefits are tendered to our acceptance—that we have become deeply penitent for our violations of the divine law—that we rely for pardon, and the favour of our Maker, solely on the merits of Christ—and that we are endeavouring, with the aid of Heaven, to obey the gospel as a rule of moral and religious conduct.

A question of the greatest practical importance might here present itself for consideration: Is it necessary for every one who has really obtained an interest in the highest blessings of Christianity, to be able to say, in language similar to that of Job, “The Redeemer is mine; I have a personal right to all the benefits which he has procured for our fallen world?” To such a query as this, there are those who would unhesitatingly return an affirmative reply. They assume the ground, that no person can be a true Christian, who is not aware of the fact. They conceive, that evangelical faith must always be accompanied with a consciousness of its exercise, so that the latter is essential to the very nature of the former. They tell the sinner who wants to know how he is to be saved, “You must believe, not only that Christ died for men in general, but that he died for *you* in particular.” But we would take the liberty of asking, is not this to render the gate of heaven straiter, and the way to life narrower, than the Scriptures represent? Is it not to impose

terms of salvation more rigid—more difficult to be complied with—than those which the Saviour himself has prescribed? What is the leading requisition of the New Testament? It is simply this: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” In conformity with this requisition, we find, that the confession of him whom Philip the evangelist converted and baptized, ran in such terms as these: “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” This simple declaration was regarded as sufficient to entitle him to membership in the newly established church.

It is not our present purpose to attempt a full investigation of the nature of evangelical faith. We are persuaded, that metaphysical disquisitions on this subject are calculated to do but little good. There is nothing more erroneous than to imagine, that a man cannot exercise faith, unless he knows precisely what faith is. It might just as well be affirmed, that an individual who is sick, cannot employ with efficacy and success a medicine, till he has subjected it to a chemical analysis, and ascertained the mode in which it operates upon the human system. We surely hazard nothing in saying, that Job, when he uttered the language of our text, was a stranger to the speculative questions, which, in modern times have been mooted relative to the essential attributes of faith. And so we doubt not, that there are numbers at the present day equally uninformed on this point, who have obeyed the calls of the gospel, and yielded to the Saviour the most implicit and cordial homage of their hearts. Yet we would not condemn sincere and judicious efforts to develop the nature of faith, any more than of the other duties enjoined, and doctrines revealed in the word of God. We only complain of that excessive speculation which is sometimes indulged on this subject; and we

particularly object, as we have already intimated, to the theory of those, who say, that a man must both believe, and know, that he does believe. We oppose this theory, because we look upon its practical tendency as bad. It rears a formidable obstacle to the progress of divine truth, for the simple reason before stated, that it adds to the requirements of Heaven. It demands faith, and something more. It is thus calculated to prevent the conversion of sinners, and to discourage and perplex humble Christians.

The language of Job, in the text, has sometimes been adduced as an argument in support of the theory adverted to. But the argument is not a sound one. Let us admit for a moment, that Job here expresses the firmest persuasion of his own personal interest in the Redeemer of whom he speaks. Will it follow, that a similar persuasion must be felt by every other real believer? Is there no difference in the religious attainments of good men? Are not some represented in the New Testament as babes in Christ, while others are described as full grown men? But we take a different ground. We do not think it perfectly clear and absolutely certain, that Job, in this place, expresses a firm persuasion of his personal interest in the Redeemer. He may have been blessed with such assurance. We only say, that it is not, so far as we can see, asserted, though it may be implied in the language of our text. What are his words? Does he tell us, "I know that the Redeemer is mine—that he has actually redeemed me?" No, the phraseology which he employs is different. "I know," he exclaims, "that my Redeemer liveth." Of what then is his knowledge predicated? Of the fact, that the Redeemer was his? Not so. Only of the fact, that the Redeemer liveth. It is true, indeed, that he calls this Redeemer his. But it has been already remarked, that this is a mode of expression

which may, without impropriety, be adopted by one who is not entirely sure, that the benefits of the redemption effected by the Son of God, have been really communicated to his soul.

We would not, however, be understood as intimating in any thing that we have now said, that it is impossible to attain, in the present world, to a firm persuasion of our personal interest in the Great Redeemer. We believe most confidently, that such a persuasion may be attained. If it were not attainable, what propriety would there be in that injunction of Paul to Christians, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith;" and then in language still stronger, "Prove your own selves: know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" Besides, there are instances in the sacred Scriptures, in which it is sufficiently manifest, that good men did enjoy a consolatory belief of their personal right to the highest blessings of religion. For example, what feeling short of this belief could have inspired the Psalmist to exclaim: "As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness!" Let us next hear Paul: "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded, that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." Attend likewise to another remarkable passage from the pen of the same apostle: "I am now ready to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."

We see, then, that it is not impossible for good men in the present state, to arrive at a comfortable knowledge

of the fact, that their sins have been blotted from the volume of the divine remembrance, and their names recorded in the Lamb's book of life. Brethren, this knowledge is a privilege, to the possession of which it is your duty to aspire. Who would forego, through negligence and remissness in the work of self-examination, that sacred peace and joy which it is the means of imparting to the soul! O! well may the Christian earnestly strive to attain it; and well may he exclaim with Dr. Watts,

“ When I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies,
I'll bid farewell to every fear.
And wipe my weeping eyes.”

“ I know,” says Job, “ that my Redeemer LIVETH.” This language has been considered by some, as furnishing a strong argument for the divinity of Christ. It certainly proves his pre-existence. It shows beyond doubt, that his being did not commence with his incarnation, because he is here represented as alive many hundred years prior to that event. It thus coincides with what the Saviour himself on a certain occasion asserted, when he said to the Jews, “ Before Abraham was, I am.” Let us imagine, for a moment, that Job had been a Unitarian. How in that case would he have expressed himself? He surely would not have said, “ I know that my Redeemer LIVETH.” His language would have been, “ I know that my Redeemer SHALL LIVE.” But we have merely glanced at this point, without intending to dwell upon it.

“ I know,” says Job, not only “ that my Redeemer liveth,” but also, “ that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.” This second clause of the text may be understood as referring to the incarnation of Christ. The phrase “ latter day,” and “ latter days,” is employed in

the prophetic portions of the sacred volume, to express the time of the Messiah's advent. The language of Job thus interpreted, implies an implicit confidence in the veracity of Him who had promised, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. It shows how firmly he was persuaded, that a Deliverer of our fallen race should, in the fulness of time, visit our earth—that although his coming might, for wise and benevolent purposes, be long delayed, nothing should ultimately prevent his appearance. And, brethren, with this persuasion all Job's hopes of pardon and future felicity were intimately and inseparably allied.

Again, the phrase, *latter day*, may be understood as relating to that crisis in which the Redeemer shall appear on our earth, for the purpose of conducting the solemnities of the final judgment. If this interpretation of the text be admitted, we are here presented with decisive evidence that the idea of future retribution was familiar to Job. And, indeed, this idea enters so largely and deeply into the general notion and feeling of religion—it is so irresistibly forced upon the human mind, by the anticipations of conscience—that we cannot believe that there has ever been a period since the fall, in which reflecting men were wholly unaccustomed to look beyond the grave. Nor can we conceive of any theory more improbable and preposterous than that of the distinguished English prelate, who has laboured to show that there is no allusion to the immortality of the soul in all the writings of Moses—that the Jewish legislator sought to enforce his institutions by no higher sanctions than temporal rewards and punishments. If we are asked, why it is, that the doctrine of the future being of man is not brought into view with more distinctness and emphasis in the Pentateuch, we think that we shall have little difficulty in giving a satis-

factory reply. The truth is, that Moses wrote for the benefit of those who needed no additional illumination in respect to this doctrine. They were free from any doubts on the subject. They were already sufficiently informed and convinced. He, therefore, deemed it useless to go out of his way in order to enlarge concerning an article of faith universally admitted by his countrymen, and only remotely connected with the more immediate object of many of his institutions. He might have considered too, that this article was abundantly revealed in the book whence our text is taken—a book which must have been written before he entered upon his office as legislator, and which, it is natural to presume, was received by the Jews, on his recommendation, as an inspired production. On this latter supposition—that it was Moses who recognized the divine origin of the book of Job, and delivered it to the descendants of Abraham for the directory of their faith and conduct—he became himself responsible for its contents, and reiterated every intimation of a future state which its pages exhibit.

Let us now proceed to look at the concluding clause of our text: “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” The original of this passage is involved in considerable obscurity, and accordingly various renderings have been proposed by critics. We think, however, that the common version is, on the whole, as intelligible and probably as correct as any that we have examined. The last member of the sentence, “yet in my flesh shall I see God,” might, indeed, be varied in phraseology so as to read thus: *Yet I shall see God in my flesh*—that is, “I shall behold the Redeemer of whom I have just spoken, clothed in a nature like my own.” We are informed by Dr. Scott, that this is precisely the reading adopted in the old English translation, which was in use before the present version.

The language of Job in this passage has been regarded by the plurality of commentators, as a distinct reference to the resurrection of the human body. It would seem as if the venerable patriarch, from the fact that his Redeemer should stand at the latter day upon the earth, drew the conclusion, that even after worms had consumed his body, he should again live in the flesh. We are thus reminded of that argument relative to this important subject, which the apostle Paul has illustrated at so much length, and with such conclusive energy, in the fifteenth chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians—we mean the argument founded upon the return of Christ from the tomb.

It is well known that the doctrine of the resurrection is a matter of pure revelation—one of those things which unassisted human reason never could have discovered. The ancient philosophers who professed to consider the immortality of the soul as highly probable, entertained not the most distant thought, that the body after returning to its elementary particles in the grave, could be restored to being; and when Christianity announced the certainty of such restoration, they put on the smile of derision, and were not slow in proclaiming their utter want of faith. The wise men of Athens, as soon as Paul ventured to mention the subject in their hearing, began to mock.

But why, brethren, “should it be thought a thing incredible, that God should raise the dead?” Is it more difficult, do you suppose, to re-unite after they have been separated, the component particles of the human body, than to combine those particles in the first instance, or than to produce them out of nothing? Does the mechanic find it harder to put together the works of a watch or clock, which had been taken apart, than to make a watch or clock? But we need not attempt argument in relation to this point. God is omnipotent, and can, there-

fore, readily raise the body if he will. And that he will is abundantly manifest from the sacred Scriptures. The New Testament contains numerous passages in which this truth is plainly taught; and the text now before us is an evidence that the Old Testament is not entirely silent on the subject. Indeed, it has been said by those who are most familiar with the word of God, that the future existence of the human soul is never asserted in its pages, except in connexion with the resurrection of the human body. This remark, so far as our own recollection serves, is a correct one, and merits a closer attention from the student of the Bible than it has yet received.

And, brethren, how fraught with comfort is the doctrine of the resurrection! O! how consolatory is the thought, that the grave into which these bodies of ours must ere long descend, has been consecrated by our Redeemer! We rejoice that he went down into its gloomy precincts, and returned as the first fruits of them that slept, thus affording the strongest ground of confidence to his followers, that the period is coming in which they too shall be the subjects of a signal and triumphant resurrection. Yes, it is animating to be assured, that the same omnific voice which spoke the universe into being, shall exert its energies in reviving the mouldered bodies of the deceased—that the trumpet shall sound, and the dead be raised—that this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality, and that when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory!

Finally, we remark, that Job anticipated, as a great and glorious result of his resurrection, the opportunity of beholding his Redeemer. “Yet,” says he, “in my flesh shall I see God”—an idea on which he dwells in the

verse that immediately follows our text: "Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another, although my reins be consumed within me." Yes, it was to the vision of his God, that he joyfully looked forward, as the consummation of all his hopes and wishes. He gloried in the thought, that he should one day ascend to the regions of eternal light, and there contemplate the divine image as it is reflected from the countenance of his reigning Redeemer. He felt the same thrilling foretaste of heaven which prompted the apostle John to exclaim, "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." What a blessed—what a glorious prospect is this which the gospel opens on the eye of faith! Who would exchange it for the treasures, the distinctions, or the gratifications of earth! Surely no object can be conceived more worthy the pursuit of an immortal mind, than the privilege of beholding with open face, as in a glass, the majesty of the Godhead, so as to become gradually transformed into the same image of purity and complacency. There will be afforded, in such circumstances, the highest and the noblest sphere for the exercise of that imitative principle which the Creator has implanted so deeply in human nature. In the world of bliss the Holy One himself is the pattern—the model—the standard of rectitude—to which all the inhabitants deem it at once their duty and their honour to conform. In short, to use the phraseology of a passage just quoted, they see the Deity as he is, and so become like him.

And now, brethren, we would inquire, whether you know any thing of the faith which glowed in the bosom of Job, when he uttered the language of this text. You may believe, as a speculative truth, that there is a Re-

deemer. But the question which we ask, and which we want you at once to answer to your own consciences, is, Do you act under the influence of the belief that this Redeemer liveth, and shall stand at the latter day on the earth for the purpose of calling you to a strict account for your conduct, and then pronouncing your interminable sentence? Are you consoled amid the many trials, and difficulties, and sorrows incident to the present state, and especially when meditating on death and the grave, by the reflection that Christ has arisen from the tomb, and become the first-fruits of them that slept? Do you rejoice in the hope, that though you must go down to the sepulchre, where worms shall riot on your mortal remains, yet the period approaches when you shall be raised in honour, and permitted to behold the Saviour in whom you trust, and whom you love, mantled in a nature like your own? Are these, in truth, the sublime prospects which sustain, and cheer, and animate you in your pilgrimage through the wilderness of this world?

We would have you, dear hearers, to deal faithfully and rigorously with yourselves. You may deceive your fellow men, if you are depraved enough to wish to do so. You may deceive your own hearts. But One there is whom you cannot deceive. His eye has been incessantly upon you since the first dawn of your being. No incident of your moral history has escaped his notice. He has witnessed every action of your lives—every emotion of your souls. How important, then, is the self-examination to which we now exhort you! Compare your religious feelings and views with those expressed by Job in the passage under consideration. We do not require that your faith should be the same in degree with his. But it should be the same in kind. All your hopes must cluster around the Redeemer. In his name you must

trust. On his merits you must rely. With his righteousness you must be clothed. Of his spirit you must be possessed. Along the path which he has travelled, you must cheerfully and constantly tread. To the contemplation of his glory, and the fruition of his fulness in the celestial world, you must look forward as the end of your being—the consummation of your desires. Have you, then, an interest in the Lord Jesus Christ? The query is one which, if you are not remiss in the work of self-examination, it is possible for you to answer. We have, indeed, said—and we say it again—that a full and satisfactory conviction on this point, is by no means essential to the nature and reality of faith. But it is surely a very desirable attainment—an attainment that must contribute largely to present comfort in religion, and is particularly valuable in the solemn hour of death. Ah! if the dying man is without some ground of confidence that his sins are forgiven, and that his memorial is on high, what must be the feelings and the anticipations that rend and overwhelm his soul!

This last consideration is one which we would particularly press upon the consciences of those who know that they are devoid of an interest in the great Redeemer. We cannot doubt that there are such in this assembly. Would to God, dear hearers, that we could render you sensible of your wretched condition! We say *wretched*, for it is a solemn fact, that so long as you are without a title to the salvation of Christ, you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity—you must be strangers to real peace of mind, even in this world, while the portion of your cup in the world to come, must be indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. And O! have you no desire to alter your condition? Are you content to remain in your present state? Tell us, would it

not be wiser and better to obtain the pardon of your sins, and secure the favour of your Maker, before the opportunity of doing so is withdrawn—for ever withdrawn? Why, then, do you hesitate? Why do you tarry? Your life is a span—a vapour. Your days are melting away like snow drops on the ocean. Now is the time to make your peace with God, and provide for the exigencies of eternity. Repent while the door of mercy is open. “Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Turn ye unto me, and I will turn unto you.”

SERMON XXII.



DANIEL VI. 10.

“Now when Daniel knew, that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.”

DANIEL was a descendant of one of the principal families of Judea. On the subversion of the Jewish government by Nebuchadnezzar, he was removed, with many more of his countrymen, as a captive to Babylon. His qualities, notwithstanding his extreme youth, attracted the particular notice of the conqueror, who ordered, that he and three other young men of similar rank, should be taken under the royal patronage, and furnished with the amplest opportunities of instruction, that Chaldea, then the seat of letters and science, could afford.

As Daniel advanced in years, he became distinguished for his superior wisdom and piety. He possessed the esteem and confidence, not only of Nebuchadnezzar himself, of his son Evil-merodach, and his grandson Belshazzar, but also of Darius, or, as he is otherwise called, Cyaxares, who ascended the throne of Babylon, on the capture of that magnificent metropolis, by his nephew, the celebrated Cyrus. Indeed, one of the first acts of Darius, on obtaining possession of the Chaldean empire, was the promotion of Daniel to the highest office in his gift. We are told, that he “preferred” him “above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was

in him, and the king thought to set him over the whole realm."

It was a natural consequence of this elevation of a stranger to a post of the first honour and trust, that it should excite the envy, and provoke the animosity, of the throng of courtiers about Darius, who would conceive, that they, as old friends and tried servants, had a better title to the confidence of the monarch, and a stronger claim upon his favour. They accordingly watched, with the most rigid scrutiny, the conduct of Daniel, in the hope that they could discover grounds of complaint and accusation against him. But to their great disappointment and chagrin, "neither error nor fault," was to be "found in him." The conclusion at which they arrived, deserves to be repeated, as one of the most honourable testimonies ever rendered in behalf of a human being. Their language was, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." Their ingenuity soon suggested an expedient by which they thought, that they could hardly fail of accomplishing the degradation of their rival. They insidiously proposed to the king, that he should issue "a royal statute," and "make a firm decree," the purport of which was, that "whosoever" should "ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days," with the single exception of the sovereign himself, should "be cast into the den of lions." What a precious specimen of the honour, integrity and magnanimity of courts! But such, to a greater or less extent, has always been the state of things in the high places of regal governments. Of republics we are, in duty bound, to hope better things.—Darius, not suspecting the real object for which he was solicited to pass the proposed law, and, perhaps, viewing the matter as one of minor importance, from which no evil

could result, if it should do no good, gave his assent to the measure, which his counsellors, in their collected wisdom, recommended with so much gravity and earnestness to his adoption.

What was the conduct of Daniel, on hearing of the strange enactment which his sovereign had been induced to sanction? We can readily conjecture, how some of our modern Christians would have acted in the same circumstances. They would have reasoned with themselves after this fashion: "God is a merciful being, and surely he will not expect, that we should expose ourselves to certain ruin, by violating this royal decree. We can still offer to his divine majesty the homage of our *hearts*—we can bow our *souls* before him in prayer—and this undoubtedly will be as acceptable to him, as if we were to bend our knees. We shall, therefore, avoid the open infraction of the king's edict, taking care, however, to be even more scrupulous than formerly, in cultivating a devotional frame of mind."—But so reasoned not Daniel. Very different was the course which he pursued. The text informs us, that as soon as he "knew, that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."

This passage of Scripture suggests a number of interesting and useful reflections, which we shall now proceed briefly to state, as they may occur, without aiming at a very methodical arrangement.

And first, we may hence infer, that prayer was considered by devout men, under the old dispensation, as an important duty. On this point it is needless to enlarge. Religion has been essentially the same, in all periods of the church. It is impossible, in the nature of things, that

there should ever have been a truly pious individual, who did not maintain habitual intercourse with the Father of his spirit.

Again, we may learn from this passage, that a grateful frame of mind is always necessary in our approaches to the throne of the heavenly grace. It appears that Daniel; notwithstanding the peculiarly embarrassing and distressful circumstances in which he was placed, betrayed not the least symptom of a querulous disposition in his communion with the Most High. Instead of complaining, that his lot was a hard one, he submitted with all the yielding meekness of faith, to the will of his Maker, and "gave thanks before his God," for the mercies with which his past life had been crowned, and of which he could not but feel himself to be unworthy. How differently in this respect do Christians often act? While their condition is prosperous, they acknowledge their obligations to Jehovah, and implore a continuance of his bounties. But as soon as the clouds of adversity gather in their horizon, they seem to lose, in a great measure, the recollection of the previous blessings which they enjoyed; or, at least, almost every sentiment of gratitude to their Father in heaven, who conferred upon them those blessings, is effaced from their minds. They do not, indeed, cease to pray. On the contrary, their prayers may become more frequent and importunate than they were before. But the petitions to which they give utterance, are not the breathings of thankful and contrite hearts. They are little better than murmurings against the providence of the Most High. Brethren, have a care how you thus act. Remember that your obligations to God are not cancelled by any afflictions, however numerous and overwhelming, which, in his infinite wisdom and benevolence, he may think proper to send upon you. It has been well said,

that "present troubles do not annihilate former mercies." Consider too, that the calamities which you are called to endure, though severe, are still less trying, than they might have been. There is much truth in the remark, that "in every sorrow that you have yet experienced, it would be very easy for you to imaginē what would have greatly aggravated and embittered it." And above all, reflect, that every adverse event, if duly improved, shall contribute to promote your progress in piety, and thus swell the amount of your final happiness. We are sure, that when you contemplate this subject in the light in which we have now represented it, you must be convinced, that the union of thanksgiving with prayer, in the season of affliction, is a most important duty. No supplicatory address to the mercy-seat of Heaven can be efficacious, which does not arise from a heart deeply penetrated with a sense of the divine benignity. Says the apostle Paul, "In every thing by prayer and supplication WITH THANKSGIVING, let your requests be made known unto God." Again, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same WITH THANKSGIVING." And in another place, "IN EVERY THING GIVE THANKS."

Further, we may learn from the text before us, that prayer is a duty which ought to be performed very frequently. We are here told, that Daniel entered into his chamber "three times every day," for the purpose of bowing himself before his God. There is reason to believe, that, in thus acting, he conformed to a general custom long prevalent among pious Jews. The language of the Psalmist is, "Evening and morning and at noon will I pray and cry aloud." We do not say, that this passage and the example of Daniel settle precisely the question, how many times, in the course of the twenty-four hours, the Christian should engage in devotional exercises. We

know, that this is a matter relative to which we must be governed by circumstances. One individual may have so much leisure, that it would seem as if he ought not to think it sufficient to call upon Jehovah, "evening, morning, and at noon; while another may be placed in such a situation as to have almost no time whatever at his own disposal, and may, therefore, be deemed excuseable, if he invokes his heavenly Father, before he closes his eyes in sleep at night, and before he betakes himself, on the return of the day, to his wonted occupations. The only general rule that can be laid down on this subject, is, that our stated periods of devotion should recur as frequently as is consistent with a due attention to the necessary business of life. If we adopt this rule, we shall comply at least with the spirit of the apostolic injunction, which directs us to "pray without ceasing." Yes, brethren, and if we only feel the importance of prayer—not merely performing it as a duty, but resorting to it as a privilege—we shall find time, even amid the most numerous, complicated and pressing engagements, for drawing near to the mercy-seat of our God, oftener than we might otherwise imagine. Look at the case of Daniel himself. Was he a man of leisure? Think you, that the chief minister of Darius had little to occupy his attention or distract his mind? We must surely presume the contrary. The distinguished and responsible office which he held, necessarily imposed upon him a variety of important and urgent duties. Still he persisted in withdrawing to his apartment for prayer three times in each day. And will you pretend to tell us, honest man, that the concerns of your store, your counting room, your office, your plantation, are as weighty and perplexing as those of an empire? We respect your veracity. But we must say, dear hearers, that the busiest individual among you is not oppressed with as heavy a

burden of cares, as was Daniel. And do you pray as frequently as he? We leave the question with your consciences. It is one of no ordinary moment.

We proceed to remark, that Daniel is said, in the text, to have prayed in his chamber with the "windows open." The question will at once arise, Why did he act in this manner? We answer, Not for the purpose of attracting observation, and impressing those who saw him with an opinion of his pre-eminent sanctity; nor because he conceived that his petitions would be more readily heard by Jehovah, when his windows were not closed. We may further reply, that he probably did not open his windows as an act of defiance to the monarch, whose recent decree he contravened. Had he been influenced by a motive of this kind, his conduct would have been reprehensible. A good man will not wantonly expose himself to danger, any more than he will shrink from it, when duty plainly demands, that it be encountered. We presume, that Daniel had been accustomed to pray with his windows open, and, therefore, could not, consistently with the dictates of conscience, pursue a different course, in order to circumvent his enemies, and escape the ruin with which they menaced him. He may have feared, that, by deviating from a mode of worship to which he had inured himself, he should obstruct the flow of his devotional feelings. In religion as well as in other things, man is the creature of habit. We suppose, that most Christians have found, that they enjoy more freedom and comfort in prayer under circumstances to which they have been long habituated, than when placed in a novel situation. They have probably discovered, that, when surrounded by a new set of external objects, it is unusually difficult for them to collect their thoughts, and fix their attention. Experience, we doubt not, has taught them,

that they cannot even adopt an unwonted posture, without feeling a degree of spiritual restraint consequent on the change. The train of thought into which we have now been led, reminds us of an observation which occurs in the invaluable "Remains" of Cecil—a little work, we may take the opportunity of saying, which will amply repay the partiality of those who frequently open its pages. That original thinker, and eminently pious man, remarks: "I have a favourite walk of twenty steps in my study and chamber; that walk is my oratory; but if another man were obliged to walk as he prayed, it is very probable he could not pray at all." You may tell us, that this is all imagination, and that he whose heart is in a proper state, will not be thus the slave of outward circumstances. But we are quite sure, that no one who has studied the laws of the human mind, will be disposed to call in question the general correctness of the principle which we have here assumed. The practical inference to be drawn from this principle is, that Christians ought to observe what circumstances are most helpful to them in their devotional exercises, so as to avail themselves of every auxiliary which the relations of space and time can afford. Nothing by which the interests of their souls may be, in any degree, promoted, is unworthy of their regard.

Is it next asked, why Daniel opened the windows of his apartment *towards Jerusalem*? We answer, that it was perfectly natural for the captives in Babylon to cherish the fondest recollections of their native land. Besides, it appears to have been a standing custom with the Jews, when absent from Judea, to conduct their devotional exercises with their faces in the direction of that country, just as the Mahometan now looks towards Mecca, as often as he engages in prayer. This custom was sanctioned, if not indirectly enjoined, by Solomon, when he

dedicated the temple. The prayer which he addressed to God on that occasion, contains the following passage: "If thy people go out to battle against their enemies, whithersoever thou shalt send them, and shall pray unto the Lord towards the city which thou hast chosen, and towards the house that I have built for thy name: then hear thou in heaven their prayer, and their supplication, and maintain their cause." And again, in anticipation of the captivity which awaited his countrymen, Solomon entreats, that if they should return unto the Lord with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies, and invoke the name of Jehovah, with their faces towards the city and temple of Jerusalem, their requests might be heard and fulfilled. These passages, we hope, will be accounted sufficient to exculpate Daniel from the charge of weakness and superstition, which some might be tempted to prefer against him. He opened his windows *towards Jerusalem*, not only in obedience to a natural dictate of the human heart, but in conformity to a virtual injunction of the God whom he adored.

With regard to the posture in which Daniel prayed, we have not much to say. We have no doubt that the practice of *kneeling* was in use among devout men from the earliest periods of the church. It is an attitude significant of humility and reverence, and may, therefore, be adopted with eminent propriety, in our supplicatory approaches to the throne of the divine majesty. We presume, that the great majority of Christians, at the present day, conduct their private devotions on their knees. This too is the most common posture in family prayer; though there are districts of our country in which standing is often adopted. As to the best attitude in our public congregations, we shall merely remark—and we are certainly within bounds when we make the assertion—that there is

at least as much reason to believe, that standing was the practice of the primitive church, as that kneeling was. But we are not disposed to contend for a matter so unimportant as this. There is nothing more repugnant to the genius of Christianity, than that narrow and puerile sectarian feeling, which would seek to render the mere forms and etiquette, if we may so speak, of devotion, a subject of strife and a ground of division, among those who profess to worship a common God, and to trust in a common Redeemer. Such bigotry, however some may still endeavour to cherish and extend it, is as hostile to the spirit of the age in which we live, as it is opposed to the principles of the gospel. Yes, and we venture to predict, that those denominations which are least infected by its unholy influence, will make the widest and most rapid strides in enlarging their numbers, and multiplying their means of doing good.—Brethren, we say, let every one, both in public and private, adopt that attitude in prayer, which his own experience has taught him is best adapted to promote his spiritual comfort, and accelerate his progress in piety.

No one can read the text on which we are now commenting, without being struck with the stern and uncompromising rectitude which Daniel displayed. He well knew, that if he adhered to his customary mode of devotion, in opposition to the mandate of Darius, he could not by any device, escape the threatened punishment. He was aware that a law of the Medes and Persians, whether wise or unwise, whether just or unjust, could not be revoked, and, consequently, he entertained no hope of the royal clemency in the event of his disobedience. The dreadful alternative was presented to his consideration; he must either neglect his duty to his God, or be consigned to a den of lions. It does not appear that he hesitated

for a single moment, in deciding on the part which he should act. Indeed the text informs us, that as soon as he heard of the king's decree, or, rather, as soon afterwards as the stated hour arrived, he withdrew to his chamber, and there, with the windows open, bowed himself in adoration before the august Divinity, to whom he was forbidden to render homage. Who does not admire the moral heroism which he thus exhibited!

And here let it be distinctly observed, that the edict of Darius was one, which, like all other measures in religious persecution, could only control the external conduct of Daniel. It could not prevent him from cherishing the spirit, and breathing the secret aspirations of prayer. He might have appeared to comply with the royal prohibition, at the same time that he spent almost the whole night, as he lay upon his bed, in close and fervent communion with his Father in heaven. But the prophet would not shrink even from the *profession* of his obligations and his accountability to Jehovah. His conscience would not suffer him to omit the open prostration of himself before the throne of heaven's high majesty, in obedience to the arbitrary veto of any earthly potentate. He did not stop to inquire, whether he might not conduct his devotional exercises in secret till the thirty days had elapsed, without being guilty of such a dereliction of duty, as should inflict a fatal wound on his soul. He felt that the honour of his God was concerned, and in such a case, it was not for him to act a timid and calculating part. In short, he manifested a fearless inflexibility of holy purpose, which the author of the celebrated *Essay on Decision of Character*, has not failed to note as among the happiest illustrations of his subject.

Moralists have said, and rightly said, that courage is an essential constituent of real virtue. We may with no

less truth affirm, that the same quality belongs to the nature of genuine piety. Indeed, we may appeal directly to the law and testimony of Scripture in support of this position. Solomon assigns, as one characteristic of the righteous, that they are *bold as a lion*. The apostle Peter, enumerating certain moral qualities which he exhorts Christians to add to their faith, places *valour* or *courage*—for so the original term in this instance ought to be rendered, and not *virtue*—at the head of the catalogue. Let us next hear the language of our divine Lord himself: “Fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Brethren, cultivate an undaunted and a resolute spirit in the performance of what you have once ascertained to be your duty. Let nothing intimidate you, when the dictate of conscience is clear and imperative. A good man, in such a case, will feel a measure of that heroic determination which animated the soul of the great reformer, when, regardless of the affectionate and earnest dissuasions of his friends, he declared that he would go to the Diet of Worms, though as many devils stood in array against him as there were tiles on the houses.

We shall only add, in concluding, that the conduct of Daniel, in the case under consideration, evinces the reality and the efficacy of religion. Nothing but a paramount sense of accountability to the Most High, and an invincible confidence in the divine faithfulness and benignity, could have sustained the prophet in the arduous conflict through which he was doomed to pass. Happy the individual who possesses, in any degree, the same heaven-born principle! How is it, dear hearers, with you? Tell us, do you seriously and candidly believe that, had you been placed in Daniel’s circumstances, you would have

done precisely as he did? Interrogate your consciences on this point. Or, if you regard the question as one which it may be difficult for you to answer, we have another query to propose—How often do you pray? We shall presume that none in this assembly are entirely strangers to prayer, though we almost fear that the presumption implies an excess of charity. We ask, then, how many times every day you retire to some secret apartment, and there, prostrating yourselves in spirit before your Maker, render to him a tribute of heart-felt gratitude for mercies already received, and solicit, in humble submission to his will, and entire deference to his superior wisdom, a continued supply of blessings suited to your wants as fallen, yet immortal beings? We shall add nothing to this inquiry, beyond the single request, that you will make it a subject of deep and anxious meditation, throughout the week on which you have now entered.

SERMON XXIII.



DUTERONOMY XXIX. 29.

“The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

THE tendency of the human mind to extremes is so common and striking, that it has become proverbial. This tendency is displayed in respect to all the wide variety of topics, with which we are conversant. Of course, it extends to religion. We accordingly find, that two opposite errors in relation to this general subject, are prevalent among men. There are those who desire to know too much; and there are others who are careless of knowing any thing. Now, to each of these classes of individuals, our text addresses important instruction. It condemns the unbounded curiosity of the former, by assuring them, that “secret things belong unto the Lord our God;” and it rebukes the slothful indifference of the latter, by telling them, that, “things which are revealed, belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of” the divine “law.”

Much has been said of curiosity as one of the instinctive principles of our nature. The Creator has endued us with a desire of knowledge, which is the basis of all mental improvement. There is pain in the consciousness of our ignorance, and pleasure in the removal of this ignorance, just as there is pain in the sensation of hunger,

and pleasure in the gratification of our appetite. The earliest developments of mind in children evince the existence of the principle to which we refer, and, in fact, consist in the vigorous operations of this principle. Visit the nursery, and interrupt the mother, as she is rehearsing to her infant boy some tale of marvellous tenour, and you will not fail to remark the impatience which he will manifest for your departure, or, at least, for the resumption of the narrative to which he had been listening.—Would you behold the influence of the same principle in maturer life? Enter the room where the female, “unmindful of her form,” and regardless of her dress, is tracing “with enchanted steps the mazes” of a new romance—or, repair to the study of the philosopher, before whose piercing eye a new field of intellectual research has just presented itself, and who has devoted his powers to the task of investigation, with the hope of revealing mysteries, which nature had concealed from all former inquirers. But it would be superfluous to multiply examples. The desire of knowledge is obviously among the most universal and the most active of our emotions. Nor need we now speak of “that bounteous providence of heaven,” which,

“In every breast implanted this desire
Of objects new and strange—to urge us on,
With unremitted ardour, to pursue
Those sacred stores that wait the ripening soul,
In truth’s exhaustless bosom.”

It is not to be wondered at, that the curiosity of men should extend to religious subjects. These subjects, properly considered, are among the most interesting and sublime that can claim the attention, or employ the faculties of the human intellect. They relate to the being and perfections of Him who created and who upholds all

things—to the nature and objects of that moral government which he exercises over the universe—to the provision which he has made for the pardon of sin, and the recovery of our fallen race—to the duties of our present state, and to the destinies which await us after death, and which are to constitute the momentous incidents of our history throughout eternity. Such topics surely deserve our contemplation, and so far as they are exhibited on the works of God, or in his word, they cannot be too closely and perseveringly studied. There is, therefore, a desire of knowledge in relation to sacred things, which is not only commendable, but essentially connected with our interests and happiness as moral and immortal beings. This species of curiosity, as we shall have occasion more fully to remark in the sequel, is sanctioned and indirectly enjoined by the passage now under consideration.

But there is another species of curiosity with regard to religious subjects, which the text disapproves and virtually prohibits. There is a strong propensity to know more of the history, character and purposes of God, than he has deemed it expedient to unfold. There is an anxiety to penetrate the hidden counsels of the High and Holy One, which impels its possessor to overstep the boundaries of revelation, and to spurn the divine mandate, “Thus far shalt thou go.” There is an unsanctified restlessness of mind, which is continually aspiring to be wise above what is written, and under the influence of which men are seen prying into the mysteries of the Godhead, and pushing their presumptuous way over regions which angels either visit not at all, or else visit with unsandalled feet, and trembling steps. Now, it is this excessive and unreasonable thirst for interdicted knowledge concerning sacred things, which the passage before us condemns. And deserves it not

condemnation? The circumstances of the fall exhibit it as the source of all human wo. To be "as God, knowing good and evil," was the splendid prize for the attainment of which our first parent made the fatal experiment by which himself and his posterity were undone.

That the kind of curiosity of which we now speak, is improper, and ought to be restrained, may be sufficiently shown from the simple fact, that our divine Master, when on earth, always checked and reprov'd it in his disciples. We may be allowed to mention the particular instances to which we refer. On one occasion, as he was travelling towards Jerusalem, and delivering religious instruction in the various towns and villages through which he passed, a certain person presumed to interrogate him on a subject respecting which men have generally been solicitous to obtain full information. "Lord," said he, "are there few that be saved?" Some expositors, it is true, have thought, that curiosity may not have been the motive which dictated this question. But most readers, if we are not mistaken, will differ from them in opinion. The answer of Christ was such as the querist would probably never forget. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."—Again, in one of the Saviour's last conferences with his followers prior to his ascension, the apostle Peter, whose own future destiny had just been partially foretold, was extremely anxious to be informed what would befall his friend and colleague John. Mark the pointed reply of Jesus. "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee: follow thou me." This language, indeed, seems to have been understood by the disciples as implying, that the individual of whom it was spoken should not die. But it was nothing more than a just reproof of Peter's idle and impertinent curiosity.—A third

instance occurred just before Christ was taken up from his disciples into heaven. He had assembled them together, and begun to give them some important directions relative to the course which it would be proper for them to pursue after his departure, when he was interrupted with the question, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" The satisfaction which they obtained, was this: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost hath come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."—To these replies of our Lord, we might add a passage in one of Paul's Epistles, where he speaks of those who have the boldness to intrude into what God has not revealed.

An extravagant and ill-directed curiosity on religious subjects, is by no means so common, nor does it occasion so much strife, and so many divisions in the Christian church, now as formerly. We are fallen on times rational and peaceable, compared with those which our ancestors of former centuries experienced. They who are only imperfectly acquainted with ecclesiastical history, would be surprized, as well as amused, merely to hear of some of the topics in the investigation of which the theologians of the middle ages exercised their faculties and spent their lives. Thus it was one of their most favourite inquiries respecting the Deity, whether he exists as much in imaginary space as in real. But the truth is, that they gave themselves less concern about the Deity himself, and the mode of his subsistence, than about that class of his intelligent creatures, which we are accustomed to style, in scriptural phraseology, *Angels*. This particular branch of theological science, which they termed *Angelography*,

was esteemed by them as far the most interesting and important. And what, think you, were the questions which they were wont to agitate concerning *angels*? Why, such as the following, viz. “Whether they can pass from one point of space to another, without passing through the intermediate points? Whether they can visually discern objects in the dark? Whether more than one can exist at the same moment in the same physical point?” and “Whether they can exist in a perfect vacuum, with any relation to the absolute incorporeal void?”

We smile at these futile and ridiculous queries, which were once discussed with so much pomp and ardour in all the universities of Europe. And yet the spirit which prompted them is not utterly extinct. It survived the Reformation, and exists even amid the augmented light, which distinguishes the present period of mental excitement and activity. Men have not yet learned to discriminate effectually between those secret things which belong unto the Lord our God, and those revealed things which belong to us and to our children. The divines of our own day have other puzzles equally unedifying as those just mentioned. There is still too much curiosity in respect to the mysteries of religion—too strong and ungovernable a desire to know what the Deity in his infinite wisdom and goodness, has thought it best to conceal. Let us advert, for a few moments, to one or two of the topics on which this desire is exercised—topics, in relation to which, we humbly conceive, that there are agitated questions almost as preposterous, and certainly as destitute of practical utility, as any that may be found in all the speculations of *Angelography*.

First, we shall mention the subject of the Trinity. All that the sacred Scriptures clearly reveal on this subject may be comprised in a very few words. They teach us, that

God in a certain sense is ONE, and in another sense is THREE. But men are not content with this amount of information. They are anxious to understand *how* it is, that God is both one and three. They want to have this difficulty relative to the Godhead thoroughly cleared up. They are determined to learn at least something more of the mystery than the volume of inspiration unfolds.

Again, the same improper curiosity is displayed in relation to the *nature* of the satisfaction rendered by Christ for our sins. The sacred Scriptures inform us, that the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and intercession of the Son of God constitute a system of means which the Deity has been pleased to appoint for the deliverance of men from guilt and misery. But they intimate very little respecting the manner in which these means have operated to accomplish the end proposed. And this is precisely the point, with regard to which the inquisitive theologian is so desirous of being wise above what is written. He is not content with the simple assurance, that the mediation of Jesus Christ has rendered it possible for God to be just, and yet the justifier of sinners. He has various doubts to be resolved, and difficulties to be removed. To use his own scholastic language, he must know, whether the death of Christ was a satisfaction of *common* or of *distributive* justice.

Similar curiosity is manifested in relation to the *extent* of the atonement. The sacred Scriptures inform us, that Christ died, in one sense, for the whole, and, in another sense, for only a portion, of the human family. Thus they assert, that he tasted death for *every man*, and also that he laid down his life for *his sheep*. Now there are those who, instead of admitting both these truths on the testimony of Him who cannot lie, proceed on the supposition, that they are contradictory, and, therefore, adopt the

one, and reject the other, according as prejudice or fancy may dictate. We do not scruple to say, that had a due distinction been uniformly observed between the secret things which belong to God, and the revealed things which belong to us and to our children, many a refined disquisition, many a keen and protracted controversy on the extent of the atonement might have been avoided.

We shall mention but one theological topic more, with regard to which an unsanctified curiosity is too often indulged. We allude to the general subject of the divine sovereignty in conjunction with human accountability. The sacred Scriptures expressly declare, that God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. At the same time, they teach us, that we are endowed with such a degree of liberty, as renders us moral agents, the subjects of reward and punishment. Now, it is our duty to receive both these truths, because our Maker has revealed them. Nor is it our business to perplex and harass ourselves with efforts to solve all the subtle and inexplicable queries which they suggest to the reflecting mind. And yet to what ponderous tomes of polemical divinity have such efforts given birth! We have always regarded it as one of the happiest conceptions of Milton, that he has made the misery of fallen spirits to consist partly in

“ reasonings high,
Of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,
Fix'd fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute :”

And when such was their employment, the poet need scarcely have added, that they

“ Found no end in wand'ring mazes lost.”

We have already dwelt longer on the first division of our subject, than we intended, and shall conclude with

the single remark, that it is our duty to yield an implicit credence to all the truths revealed in the sacred volume, whether we can fully comprehend them or not. If there are difficulties and seeming contradictions in the word of God, let us remember, that there are also difficulties and seeming contradictions in the works of God. Whether we look upon the natural or the moral world—whether we trace the footsteps of the Deity in the kingdom of his providence, or in the economy of his grace, we shall have abundant reason to exclaim “How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”

We proceed next to observe, that as there are those who possess too much curiosity on religious subjects, so there are others who possess not enough. Of these two extreme errors, the latter is the more common. We would not, indeed, say, that there are very many persons in our congregations at the present day, who are totally destitute of curiosity with regard to the truths of the Bible. The institutions of the gospel—especially the stated expositions of scriptural passages from the pulpit—are calculated to excite at least a transient interest in all whose minds are not too dull to think, and whose hearts are not too hard to feel. But the desire of knowledge which may be thus awakened, generally extends only to a few speculative points, or is so feeble in its influence as to produce no permanent impression on the character and conduct. It is not to be questioned, that of those who live in the ample enjoyment of all the means of grace, there are numbers who feel an almost utter indifference in respect to the cardinal subjects of Christianity. How few take up the New Testament with as much pleasure as they do a novel, a poem, a book of travels, a magazine, or even an ordinary newspaper! Look at an audience to whom a preacher is discoursing of those revealed things which belong to us

and to our children. Mark the listlessness and unconcern which so often reign throughout a large portion of the assembly. Count the number who are asleep—the number whose eyes are “turned on empty space”—and the number who are occupied in observing the dress or the countenances of those around them. Separate these and others in similar circumstances from the congregation, and we fear that you will have but a scanty remnant left.

It was before remarked, that the text indirectly rebukes those who feel little or no concern about the momentous topics of religion. It tells us, that, *the things which are revealed BELONG to us and to our children.* Now, such language evidently implies, that it is our solemn and imperious duty to attend to these things—to make them the subject of frequent, fervent, persevering study. Indeed, the very fact, that God has condescended to favour us with a revelation of his will, is a sufficient indication, that he requires us to become familiar with the important truths which it communicates. He surely did not give us the Bible to be thrown up on some dusty shelf in our library, or to be exhibited as a piece of ornamental furniture in our parlour. No, he put it into our hands, that we might make it *the man of our counsel*—that we might explore its pages by day, and meditate on its contents by night. His emphatic language to us is, *Search the Scriptures.*

But here some may tell us, the Bible is a very obscure book—exceedingly hard to be understood—so much so, that folio upon folio has been written to clear up its difficulties, and illustrate its doctrines and precepts. We might at once answer, that if the fact be as you say, it only furnishes an additional reason for diligence and perseverance in the study of the word of God. But the truth is, that the sacred Scriptures are not so dark and difficult as many imagine. The fundamental points of

faith and practice are exhibited with sufficient distinctness to be fully comprehended by the feeblest of human intellects. The path to life is so plainly laid out, that the way-faring men, though fools, need not err therein. The leading duties of man are written in characters so large and legible, that he who runs may read. Let no one suppose, that the thousand commentaries on the Old and New Testaments, which the world may contain, constitute an argument for the obscurity of sacred writ. We cannot, perhaps, set this subject in a better light, than by presenting you with the account given by the Persian traveller, in a letter to one of his friends at home, of a visit which he paid to the library of a French convent. "Father, said I to the librarian, what are these huge volumes which fill the whole side of the library? These, said he, are the interpreters of the Scriptures. There is a prodigious number of them, replied I; the Scriptures must have been very dark formerly, and very clear at present. Do there remain still any doubts? Are there now any points contested? Are there, answered he with surprise, are there? There are almost as many as there are lines. You astonish me, said I; what then have all these authors been doing? These authors, returned he, never searched the Scriptures for what ought to be believed, but for what they did believe themselves."—It is proper to add, that a few scriptural expositors—and only a few—may be exempted from the censure so happily conveyed in this pungent passage.

Brethren, the Bible is not a book of riddles and enigmas. Its cardinal truths may be readily understood by any one who sits down to the study of its pages with a sincere and an anxious desire to ascertain the will of his Maker. He will discover that the commandment is not hidden from him. He will be under no necessity of climb-

ing to heaven, or going beyond the sea, in order to learn his duty. He will find the word very nigh him, even in his mouth, and in his heart.—This, however, we say not to impress you with the idea, that a slight and casual perusal of the sacred Scriptures will suffice, but to remove any discouragement that might arise from the supposed obscurity of this precious volume, and thus incite you to the careful and constant investigation of those revealed things which belong to us and to our children. With these things it behooves us all to be fully acquainted. We may not be wise *above* what is written. But it has been justly remarked, that we should be wise *up to* that which is written.

Our limits to night will not allow us to attempt an enumeration of the various revealed truths which demand our earnest and unwearied attention. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and all Scripture, therefore, should occasionally engross our thoughts and meditations. It is certain, however, that some things contained in the sacred volume, are more important than others, and, of course, should be more frequently present to our minds. Thus whatever relates to the existence and perfections of God—to our own character and condition—to the person and offices of the Redeemer of mankind—to the means which we are to use, and the line of conduct which we are to pursue, in order to secure the favour of our Father in heaven—may be considered as primary subjects of study, and should be understood so far as they are intelligible to the human intellect in its present state.

And here let us observe in a single word, that the knowledge which we acquire of revealed truths, must be of a practical nature. Its influence must reach to the heart, the seat of our affections, and the source of our moral actions. On this particular point, however, we

shall not now say more than that it is fairly implied in the text, which tells us, that revealed things belong to us, to the end, "that we may do all the words of" the divine "law."

There is a further topic of reflection included in the text, on which it would not be proper to omit offering a few remarks. We are here told, that the things which are revealed, belong not only to *us*, but to *our CHILDREN*. This is one among several passages of Scripture, which connect with our own spiritual interests, those of our offspring. Thus it is said, that, "the promise is to us and to our children." To the pious Jew the precept of Jehovah was, "These words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." But we need not multiply quotations in support of a duty, the reality and importance of which none, it is presumed, are disposed to deny.

But although the reality and importance of this duty are so generally admitted, how exceedingly rare are the instances in which it is faithfully performed! Few, alas! are the parents who feel as much anxiety for the religious instruction of their children as they ought—as the word of God, and the spirit of Christianity enjoin. They will avoid neither care nor expense to improve the minds of their sons, and to accomplish the persons of their daughters, while the heart, the noblest part of man, from which "are the issues of life," is, to say the least, comparatively neglected.

We would not now be understood as expressing any disapprobation of the ornamental branches of female education. And still less is it our desire to say thing

against the culture of the mind in either males or females. On the contrary, no one can feel a deeper interest in the mental improvement of the community, than the speaker who now addresses you. His only object is to say, that the most important wisdom is that which pertains to the salvation of the soul, and that the noblest accomplishments are those which fit the human being for the society of heaven.

It is not our design this evening to enter into a discussion of the subject of religious education. We can merely urge upon you the importance of teaching your children to study and value that volume, which reveals the things that belong to them as well as to you. Let them learn to esteem it as the first and best of Heaven's gifts—a gift by the due improvement of which their happiness in this world, and in the next, is to be promoted. It is the appropriate and imperative duty of parents to make the study of revealed truth a part of the stated occupations of their children. This is a branch of instruction which cannot be commenced too early, nor continued too long.

But what, it may be inquired, is meant by the study of the sacred Scriptures? We answer, that it does not consist simply in the perusal—even though it be a daily perusal—of their pages. The parent must take upon himself the task of exposition and of application. He must first endeavour to make his children understand the truths of Heaven, and then he must urge upon their consciences the obligation of acting in conformity with these truths. And especially should he teach them the necessity of PRAYER, as an auxiliary to the profitable use of the inspired record. He should tell them again and again, that, without the aid and blessing of the Most High, their own efforts to comprehend the doctrines, and

to practise the precepts of the Bible, will be of no avail. And to give to this solemn lesson its proper efficacy, the parent must rely chiefly on the powerful influence of his own habitual example. He must not only point to the throne of the heavenly grace, but must himself lead the way. He must, day by day, conduct his offspring to that throne, and there unite with them in the fervent petition, "Lord, open thou our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

Three practical reflections are suggested by the text. We shall glance at them for a moment in concluding.

Learn to avoid an idle and unprofitable curiosity with regard to religious subjects. Distinguish between things secret and things revealed. Be content with the knowledge of those truths, which God, in his infinite wisdom and benevolence, has thought fit to disclose. Consume not your time in the investigation of matters which can never be fully understood in this world, and which, even if they could be fully understood, would have no perceptible nor felt influence on the moral character, and ulterior destination of man.

But while you thus guard against an overweening curiosity respecting religious subjects, beware of falling into the opposite fault of indifference. We would impress it upon you, that "the things which are revealed BELONG" to you—that they are your property, and as such should be wisely and industriously improved. The God who gave them cannot but be highly incensed should you bury them in the earth as a useless talent. Ah! has it never occurred to you, that the neglect of the Bible, and of those dread realities which it unfolds, must tend to aggravate your condemnation in the day of final retribution!—how dark and overwhelming must be the frown, which, if guilty of such neglect, you must encounter from the

judgment-seat of Christ! We can assure you, dear hearers, that, were the trumpet of the Archangel now pouring its summons on our ears, we would much rather take our chance for salvation with the red man of the west, or with the degraded inhabitants of New Holland, than with the wisest and most virtuous of those, who, in despite of Bibles and prayers and preaching, and pious examples, and all the nameless advantages of Christianity, have remained careless and unconcerned with regard to the things that pertain to their future and everlasting peace.

Finally, we would address a word of exhortation to parents in this assembly. The passage before us teaches you, that the truths of Heaven belong not only to yourselves, but to your children. And does not the voice of nature within you return an echo to the language of the text? Your interests and theirs you feel to be the same. It would do violence to all your sensibilities to think of separating them. If religion be valuable for you, it must be equally valuable for them. And if you have realized its power in your own souls, you must be inexpressibly solicitous, that they also should experience its influence, and enjoy its blessings.

Do we this evening address any who have hitherto neglected the religious instruction of their offspring. If so, we would earnestly and affectionately entreat you, brethren, to omit no longer this highest of parental duties. We] would urge you to the prompt and assiduous performance of it, by the solemn consideration, that you must ere long appear at the tribunal of your Maker, to account for all your conduct, and particularly for your conduct towards those immortal beings, whose character and destiny have been entrusted, in a certain sense, to your care. What must be your

sensations, should it then be seen that you have ruined not only yourselves, but your children! And how keen must be your anguish throughout interminable ages, should they, the companions of your despair, incessantly reproach you as the cause of their perdition as well as your own, and heap upon you their execrations for your neglect to teach them by your counsels, your example and your prayers, that the acquisition of the entire world were a poor and paltry equivalent for the loss of the soul! Yes, as surely as there are degrees of suffering in hell, the apartment where the worm devours most greedily, and the fire glows most intensely, is that in which the parent and the child are doomed to spend their eternity together.

But we turn from this heart-rending scene to one of a different description. We ask you, parents, how great must be your happiness, should you instruct your children in those revealed things which belong to them, and should your instructions, under the blessing of God, which you are authorized to solicit and expect, be the means of leading them to do all the words of the divine law! Through life, they shall be the comfort and pride of your hearts—in death they shall administer solace to your minds, and smooth the pillow that receives your last sigh—and throughout eternity they shall be joint-participants with you of the rest that remaineth for the people of God. What terms can describe the ecstasy that marks the first meeting of parent and child in the regions of perfect purity and bliss! O! could you conceive, but for a moment, the raptures of such an interview, this single conception would do more to impel you to the faithful discharge of the duty on which we insist, than the most spirit stirring-language that our feeble tongue can utter.

SERMON XXIV.



I TIMOTHY II. 5.

“ For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

THE superior excellence of Christianity as a religion precisely accommodated to the wants of mankind, has been admitted by all persons of penetration and candour. Yet we suspect, that the real ground of this superiority is not so generally understood. The distinguishing merit of the gospel consists, not so much in the doctrinal truths which it inculcates, and the ethical precepts which it delivers, as in the circumstance, that these truths and these precepts are founded on a well-authenticated statement of facts, admirably fitted to illustrate and enforce them. Other systems of religion are either composed of fables, which, besides being incredible and absurd, have no relation to the conduct of human life, or else built on visionary speculations and refined discussions which have nothing in them to interest and benefit the heart. Of the former description is the popular theology in all pagan countries, while to the latter class we may refer the theology (if it can be so called) of those who, in both pagan and Christian countries, reject the established creed, and undertake to theorize for themselves on the nature of the Divine Being, and the various duties of his intelligent creatures. Now, Christianity differs essentially from both these kinds of religion, inasmuch as it rests on real occurrences highly interesting in themselves, and peculiarly

adapted at once to render us acquainted with our duties, and to urge us to their performance. Its practical influence is identified with the moral tendency of its doctrines, and these doctrines, instead of coming to us in the form of abstract propositions, are exhibited in the shape of tangible facts.

Our hearers are probably now prepared to anticipate the remark, that the text before us points to one of those cardinal facts, on which it has been just said, that Christianity is founded. We are here presented with no array of arguments to demonstrate the necessity of a "Mediator between God and men." We are simply assured, that such a Mediator exists in the person of "the man Christ Jesus." In other portions of the inspired record we are furnished with a detail of various circumstances connected with this fact, and calculated both to render it sufficiently intelligible, and to invest it with the highest degree of interest. The Old and New Testaments are replete with incidents which throw the brightest historical splendour over the great and fundamental truth asserted in this passage—"There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

It is not our intention this morning to enter into a critical exposition of these words. There is but a single term in the sentence, respecting the precise import of which there can be any difference of opinion. We allude to the original noun rendered in the common version, *Mediator*. You will not, however, understand us as intimating, that there is really ground for much diversity of sentiment as to the true meaning even of this word. Its etymology is sufficiently expressive of its literal signification, while its sense, as applied to Christ, is determined by the general doctrine of the inspired record in relation to the character and offices of this glorious personage.

The first truth asserted in the text, is that of the divine unity. *There is ONE GOD.* On this point, however, we do not propose to detain you with many observations, since it is obviously introduced by the inspired writer in this place, merely as an incidental and auxiliary proposition. As such we would here take the liberty of bestowing a transient remark upon it.—That *there is one God*, and only *one God*, is a truth which we are entitled to infer from the harmony every where discoverable in the constitution of the universe. We behold, as far as the range of our observation extends, a singleness of design, which seems to imply that the fabric of nature is the production of one intelligent mind. And when we reflect more maturely on the subject, we think we can discern, that there is a manifest absurdity in supposing the existence of two beings possessed of infinite perfections—two beings concerning whom it may be affirmed, that they are both the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the greatest, the wisest, and the best. But after all, we must concede, that the deductions of reason on this point, do not yield to the mind the same satisfaction which flows from the clear and positive assurances of revelation. We would cheerfully exchange a thousand metaphysical arguments for one well-established and conclusive declaration, such as we have in the text.

There are those who imagine, that the mediation of Jesus Christ, as generally held by Christians, is at variance with the unity of the Supreme Being. Now, we are bold to say, that this is altogether a misapprehension of the matter. We deny, in explicit terms, that the idea of a plurality of divine essences is involved in the common method of understanding and explaining the mediation of the Son of God. The advocates of this method believe that there is—that there can be—but one Deity. Yes,

and they believe this as strictly as do any of those who would advance, by the assumption of an appropriate appellation, an exclusive title to the doctrine of the divine unity. While they acknowledge their inability to comprehend how God can be both one and three, they feel themselves under the necessity either of admitting that such is the fact, or else of rejecting the sacred Scriptures as unworthy of their credence or regard. Their ingenuity can suggest to them no other alternative.

But the truth on which we would mainly remark, is, that "there is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." This truth, we have just said, is not incompatible with the doctrine of the divine unity. It is, therefore, properly connected, in the passage before us, with the assertion, that *God is one*.

The appointment of Jesus Christ to officiate as a Mediator between the Sovereign of the universe and the intelligent inhabitants of earth, is to be viewed as the primary and fundamental fact of Christianity. This is the grand basis on which all the doctrines and duties of our religion are founded. It was to be expected, then, that the opponents of the gospel would direct their strength against this cardinal truth. We accordingly find, that no peculiarity of the Christian system has been so often, so variously, and so resolutely assaulted, as that which relates to the necessity and the actual provision of a Mediator. Let us, then, see whether reason, when modestly and legitimately interrogated on the subject, has any thing to urge against this distinguishing doctrine of the New Testament.

It has been well observed by one of the master spirits of the former century, that the whole analogy of nature, instead of furnishing a presumption against the general notion of a Mediator between God and men, is calculated

to confirm such notion. “ We find,” says the author alluded to, “ that all living creatures are brought into the world, and their life in infancy is preserved by the instrumentality of others; and that every satisfaction of it, some way or other, is bestowed by the like means.” The Sovereign of the universe, then, evidently conducts the affairs of his stupendous empire through the instrumentality of others. He carries on his vast system of government not *immediately* but *mediately*. There is not a single department of creation with which we have had an opportunity of becoming acquainted, where we do not behold the plans of the invisible Deity developed, and his designs accomplished, through the medium of subordinate agents. This is the case in both the physical and the moral world. Now, if the principle of mediation thus obtains to the utmost verge of our observation, we are surely warranted in concluding, that it may, and probably does obtain in those districts of nature which lie beyond the sphere of our observation.

And, brethren, when we look calmly and seriously at our present condition, have we not reason to believe that unless we are saved through the instrumentality of a Mediator, we shall not be saved at all? We know, that since we became capable of moral action, we have repeatedly violated the divine law. We feel, that our conduct has been opposed to the dictates of an internal monitor which at once prescribes our duty, and reproaches us for the violation of it. We are moreover sensible, that misery is the inevitable consequence of sin. Our own personal observation and experience are amply sufficient to convince us, that pain and suffering of various kinds and degrees, are annexed as inseparable concomitants to a tenor of deportment at variance with the admonitions of conscience. In short, we are aware, that we have incurred the

displeasure of our Maker, and cannot banish the gloomy apprehension, that death may summon us to his presence to be tried as culprits, and then consigned to everlasting wretchedness and despair. Such is our situation. And how are we to obtain deliverance? Are we competent to save ourselves? Surely not. For what can be more evident, than that if we have once offended the Deity, no after services—no subsequent conformity to his will—can invest us with a title to his favour, unless, indeed, it were possible for our obedience to rise above our obligations, and thus constitute an overplus of merit—an extra fund of goodness—which we might draw on for the absolution of our former transgressions? We have often said, that between subscribing to the monstrous doctrine of supererogation, and conceding that no human being can stand at the divine bar on the footing of his own deserts, there is not, so far as we can perceive, any alternative. It follows clearly and conclusively, that the only refuge for human offenders is in the clemency of the Most High. The question, then, must arise, Will the dread Being whose law we have broken, and against whose authority we have risen in virtual rebellion, condescend to pardon our trespasses? We know, that his benevolence is unbounded; for the whole frame of nature is refulgent with the living lustre of this divine attribute. But do we know, that it is fitting for the Deity, consistently with his character as a moral governor, exercising a supreme regard to the purity and general happiness of the universe which he has made, to forgive the transgressors of his law? Is he not *just*, as well as *good*? And does not reason, therefore, render it highly probable, that some plan must be devised by which his justice may be satisfied, before he can extend his pardoning mercy to guilty men? Now the execution of such a plan would require instrumentality of some sort.

It could not take place without a suitable apparatus of means. And surely the expedient most likely to prove effectual, would be for a personage of sufficient dignity and influence to lend his friendly offices in procuring a reconciliation, on proper terms, between the Sovereign of the universe and his offending subjects.

We come, then, to the conclusion, that a mediation of some kind between God and men is necessary to redeem our fallen race from impending destruction. There is here, as in all other respects, the closest and most striking analogy between natural and revealed religion. The Christian system beautifully coincides with the universal plan of providence. The doctrine of the New Testament, in relation to a Mediator, involves the same principle, which pervades, so far as we can discern, the entire economy of the divine administration, and forms its most distinctive feature.

We proceed to remark, that it is not enough for us to know, that a mediation of some kind is necessary to our salvation. A more important item of knowledge is to be assured, that an adequate mediation has, in fact, been provided. And for this information we are indebted wholly to the sacred Scriptures. They, and they alone, impart the valuable intelligence, that there is constituted in the universe a system of means—an apparatus of agencies—for conferring upon us the pardon of sin. In short, they announce, that Jesus Christ has, in pursuance of his Father's appointment, and his own acceptance of the office, become a Mediator between God and men.

We do not propose, on the present occasion, to lay before you a detailed view of the character and offices of this Mediator. We shall merely remark, in general terms, that he is represented in the sacred Scriptures, as at once God and man—a partaker in personal unity of

two distinct natures, the divine and human—one who by his intimate relation to both parties, might, with peculiar propriety, stand in the gap, if we may so speak, between sinners and their offended Sovereign. He is also described as submitting to a life of humiliation, and a death of exquisite anguish, in order to remove any obstacles which the justice of heaven had interposed to the forgiveness of human culprits. He is further exhibited as arising from the dead to demonstrate the efficacy of his mediatorial work; and as returning to heaven, not to lay aside the gracious office which he had assumed, but to continue the execution of it by appearing as our *Advocate with the Father*—our all-prevalent Intercessor before the mercy-seat of Jehovah. He is now able to save, and that to the very uttermost, all who come unto God by him. In him there is plenteous redemption for guilty men. His blood cleanseth from all sin; and his grace is sufficient for any exigencies of those who trust in him. There is no offence which he cannot pardon—no evil which he cannot remove—no affliction which he cannot alleviate. He sits upon his mediatorial throne, creating all things new—sending forth his Spirit to hush the tumults of a disordered world—displaying the power of his grace in the resurrection to immortal life, of beings dead in trespasses and sins. In a word, it is his province to rescue human offenders from the degradation and wo to which sin, if unexpiated, must reduce the soul, and raise them to a condition of honour and felicity superior in some respects, even to that which the unfallen spirits of Paradise enjoy.

There is another important truth involved in the text, to which, in the last place, we would ask your attention. When the apostle says, that “there is ONE Mediator between God and men,” he must be understood as implying, that there is no other; just as when he says, that

“there is ONE GOD,” his object plainly is to assert the absolute unity of the divine essence.

The Scriptures expressly assure us, that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour of sinners. They unequivocally declare, that other foundation for the immortal hopes of the human soul than he, has not been laid, and cannot be laid.

And yet the only Mediator between God and men is, in many instances, rejected and even despised by those, in behalf of whom his friendly offices were performed. Yes, it is a truth which admits of no denial, that the gospel, notwithstanding its peculiar adaptation to the exigencies of mankind, meets with a reception in the world by no means suited to its merits. One whom experience and observation had not convinced of the fact, could hardly prevail on himself to believe, that a system of religion so admirably calculated to promote the highest interests of man, would be undervalued and repulsed by the majority of those to whom it was proposed. We have frequently referred to the anecdote of Melancthon, who commenced the work of the ministry with the sanguine expectation, that he should be able to exhibit the nature and the claims of the gospel in such a light as to ensure its universal acceptance. The excellence of Christianity appeared to him so decided, and its requisitions so reasonable, that, with the characteristic enthusiasm of youth, he did not for a moment doubt, that all obstacles would vanish at his touch, and that the unanimous exclamation of his hearers would be, “What must we do to be saved?” But a few experiments served to convince him, that he had been indulging an unsubstantial day-dream, and forced him to acknowledge, that old Adam was too strong for young Melancthon.

And here let it be understood, that when we speak of

the rejection of the one Mediator between God and men, we allude not merely to those who are professed infidels, but to all who do not receive Jesus Christ truly and practically as their only Saviour. Where Christianity is nominally or virtually the established religion, the great mass of the community yield a tacit and an inoperative assent to its doctrines. But *the form of godliness* is one thing; its *power* is another thing. "The picture of a man," says an energetic writer on this point, "is not a man. The mere professor of a religion, in the speculative belief of which we have been educated, and with whose forms of worship we have been familiar from our earliest years, is utterly insufficient to entitle us to the benefits of Christ's mediation. In short, the distinction between nominal and real piety, is an essential and immutable one. Now, in the view of this distinction we may surely affirm, that numbers in Christian lands reject the great and only Mediator. Yes, and may we not apprehend, that there are those even in this assembly who thus act? To conscience, dear hearers, we appeal. Tell us, is it not a fact, that while you admit the gospel to be a revelation from heaven, prescribing your present duties and unfolding your future destinies, you live as if it were all a system of imposture? How miserable is your condition! You dwell on the banks of the river of salvation, without attempting to taste its limpid stream. You repose under the shadow of the tree of life, without making an effort to grasp its golden fruits.

But why is it that any thus reject the one Mediator between God and men? How are we to account for conduct, which, on the first glance, bears all the marks of fatuity and insanity? Does it proceed from an utter indifference to the sublime blessings which the gospel promises to mankind beyond the grave? In some instances it possibly may; but generally it results from the hope,

that a shorter and an easier method of obtaining those blessings may be discovered, than that which the New Testament prescribes. The rejectors of Christianity forsake the fountain of living waters; but then they hew out for themselves cisterns elsewhere. They refuse to submit to the righteousness of God; but then they go about to establish their own righteousness. They are anxious that the leprosy of their moral nature should be cured; but then, instead of resorting to the simple and unfailing remedy which the Bible suggests, they exclaim, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May we not wash in them, and be clean?" In a word, they substitute in the room of the Christian scheme, some mode of securing the divine favour, which is more conformable to their own views and wishes.

Time will not permit us to attempt a particular examination of the various religious systems embraced by those who reject the one Mediator between God and men. A leading error in all these systems is, that they involve an undue reliance on the general benevolence of the Deity, or on the intrinsic merit of moral virtues, or on both. Some imagine that God is a being whose mercy is so unlimited, that he cannot render any of his creatures eternally miserable. They, therefore, indulge the hope, that they may live as they list, and yet attain happiness after death. Others deem it unsafe to trust to the mere compassion of their Maker, but suppose that a life of rectitude—a careful observance of the dictates of the moral sense—can hardly fail to entitle them to his approbation. Many of these individuals, so far from professing to reject the gospel, are often loud and eloquent in its praise. They pronounce it incomparably the best code of ethical precepts that has ever been formed, and

assure us, that without conformity to its requisitions, they have no hope of salvation. The question might here occur, Does their conduct exhibit, in all respects, that elevated and stern morality which their doctrine would seem to demand? But we forbear to press such an interrogatory. Let us not be too inquisitive. We would not impute to them any thing like inconsistency. Others again, depend for future felicity, not altogether either on the divine clemency, or their own merits, but on the two conjoined. They conceive that if they obey, so far as the imperfections of their present state will permit, the voice of conscience, which is the voice of God, their occasional failings will be forgiven by the merciful Potentate who governs the universe. This, perhaps, is substantially the scheme embraced by the larger portion of those who do not submit to the terms of the gospel.

Now, a grand and conclusive objection to these, and, indeed, to all other plans of salvation substituted in the room of Christ's mediation, is, that they are the mere creatures of human invention. No testimony of heaven can be adduced in their support. They are not enforced by those authoritative words "Thus saith the Lord." And surely on a subject which so nearly concerns his own honour, and the peace and happiness of his universe, God has an indubitable right to be heard. Who will deny to him the prerogative of prescribing the mode in which we may obtain reconciliation with him? And is it not most consonant with the benignity of his nature to imagine that he would condescend to reveal to us some safe and sufficient method of restoration to his favour? It is certainly not to be presumed, that he would leave us to grope our way through the darkness that here surrounds us, and send us no messenger from on high to instruct, to guide, and to save us. Thus thought one of the wisest and most

virtuous of the ancient heathen, and every reflecting mind must adopt the same opinion.

Brethren, the subject to which we have called your attention this morning, is not a mere matter of speculation. It is a topic fraught with the deepest practical importance. The fact of Christ's mediation, which constitutes the cardinal doctrine of the gospel, is directly calculated to incite us to the exercise of faith, which is the cardinal duty of the gospel. And in this we have a striking example of what was remarked in the commencement of our discourse as the distinguishing excellence of Christianity. The doctrines of no other religion have the same tendency to form in those who may receive them, a temper and disposition such as God approves. It has been pointedly asked, "Which of the adventures of Jupiter, Brama, or Osiris, could be urged as a powerful motive to excite a high moral feeling, or produce a high moral action?" But in the Christian religion "the doctrines tally with the precepts, and contain in their very substance some urgent motives for the performance of them."

The doctrine of Christ's mediation, then, has a natural and necessary tendency to produce and foster in those who understand and receive it, that peculiar operative feeling of soul which the sacred Scriptures denominate *faith*. It implies our own utter inability to save ourselves, and compels us to rely for salvation solely on the interposition of another. And what is such reliance but FAITH? The connexion between the doctrine and the duty is as obvious as it is intimate.

And here allow us, dear hearers, to inquire, whether you have secured by the exercise of faith, an interest in the one Mediator between God and men. Some of you, we trust, have, and to such we would recommend the study and imitation of the divine nature, as revealed in the

person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the image of the invisible God. It becomes you, therefore, to be followers of him as dear children. Strive to possess a portion of the same mind that was in him. Believe us, you can never be qualified to enjoy the happiness which he has procured for his saints, until you resemble him in all the essential traits of his moral character. Like him you must be active and cheerful in doing the will—the whole will—of your Father in heaven. Like him, you must cultivate a mild, placid, and forgiving temper. Like him, you must make it your primary business to do good during your stay on earth—to be useful in your day and generation. In a word, you must contemplate his entire life as an exemplar, by copying which you are to become fit for the presence and the enjoyment of God. Christian brethren, an exhortation such as we are now addressing to you, is at all times important. But it is particularly so, when you contemplate a speedy approach to the table of our Lord. This ordinance can be of no benefit to you, except so far as it expresses the real feelings of your souls, and is a token of your reliance for future bliss on the mediation of Jesus Christ. You must observe it in faith, and no evidence of the genuineness of faith is at all satisfactory, except that which consists in a life devoted to the service of God. Hence says the apostle, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.”

But are there not those in this assembly, who are without an interest in the one Mediator between God and men? Some who may truly say of themselves in the language of Job, “Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both?” And are you content, dear hearers, to continue in this awful predica-

ment?—thus unreconciled to your Maker?—thus exposed to the wrath of that dread Being, who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell? O! tell us, have you no desire to be sheltered from the curse of an offended Deity? Is peace of conscience a trivial blessing? Do you esteem tranquillity and resignation in the hour of death an unimportant attainment? Has eternal misery nothing in it to alarm you? and eternal happiness nothing to allure? We entreat you to reject no longer the Saviour whom the gospel reveals. The man Christ Jesus this day tenders to you his friendly offices as a Mediator between you and Jehovah. Believe us, should you decline to accept them, you must perish for ever. We have already told you, that you can devise no method of reinstating yourselves in the favour of God, which will bear one moment's comparison with the revelation of the New Testament.—But, perhaps, you tell us, that you fully approve the gospel plan, and are determined to embrace, at some future day, its merciful provisions. What, is this the resolution of beings, whose breath is in their nostrils!—whose life is a span!—whose days are as the grass of the field! Is it possible that they who cannot calculate with absolute certainty on a single hour, should yet venture on an indefinite postponement of a matter, with which the hopes and the interests of eternity are linked? O! can it be, that man, the proud possessor of rationality, should act a part so fraught with folly and delusion! Ah! it is all too true. Such is the deceitfulness of the human heart, that the dictates of reason and the warnings of conscience are alike unheeded, when the allurements and fascinations of the world flaunt before the sinner's eye.—Infatuated men! hearken for once to the sober voice of wisdom. The message which we deliver to you, demands your prompt at-

tention. You have not a moment to lose. Death is at hand. Your all is at stake. Wo be to the individual who persists in rejecting the one and only Mediator between God and men! He may be spared for a little while, but his term of impunity will assuredly come to an end. The divine forbearance has its limit. To-day is the accepted time, and the day of salvation.

SERMON XXV.



EXODUS XX. 8, 9, 10, 11.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.”

WE shall attempt this evening, first, to show that the Sabbath is a divine institution of perpetual obligation, and secondly, to illustrate the importance of this institution to the temporal and eternal interests of man.—An extensive field is before us; but we shall endeavour to be as brief as may be consistent with a satisfactory discussion of the subject.

It is well known, that the perpetuity of the Sabbath has been denied by many. Several Christian sects have assumed this ground as one of their peculiarities. And Dr. Paley—distinguished for his popular manner of treating every subject which he has discussed—devotes a whole chapter of his work on Moral and Political Philosophy, to an endeavour to make it appear, that the command by which the observance of a Sabbath was enjoined on the ancient Jews, is not obligatory on Christians. That this opinion is erroneous will be evident, we think, from a few considerations which we shall now proceed to state.

And first, we refer to the fact, that the precept which enjoins the observance of the Sabbath, forms a part of the Decalogue. It is incorporated in the great code of moral duties, and must, therefore, be presumed to be of perpetual obligation. If the fourth commandment has become obsolete, what ground have we for supposing, that a similar fate may not have befallen the other commandments?

Again, that the precept which enjoins the observance of the Sabbath, was not designed for the Israelites alone, appears from the very terms in which it was promulgated; for it was expressly extended to "the stranger that was within their gates," that is, to the heathen who was deemed an alien from the covenant of God, and was, therefore, debarred from the privileges of any ceremonial institution.

Further, we contend that the Sabbath was instituted by God, and observed by men, long before the Jewish nation had an existence. Does not Moses, in the beginning of the second chapter of Genesis, tell us, that the almighty Architect, after finishing the stupendous work of creation in six days, rested on the seventh day, and blessed and sanctified it? Now, we would ask, what can such language mean, if it does not imply, that a certain day of the week was then set apart for sabbatical observance? But we are told, that the sacred historian has related no instance, in which the Sabbath was observed, till the arrival of the emancipated Israelites at the wilderness of Sin. We might answer, that this is a mere omission from which no inference can be fairly drawn. We think, however, that the Scriptures do not exhibit that total silence on this point which some have attributed to them. In the fourth chapter of Genesis is the following passage: "In process of time, it came to pass that

Cain brought an offering to the Lord." That this offering was an act of divine worship, will be admitted. Now, we are informed, that the offering was presented "in process of time." To this phrase thus rendered, no determinate meaning can be attached. But if we adopt the marginal reading, which is doubtless the true one, the words become intelligible, and would seem to refer to the observance of the Sabbath. "AT THE END OF DAYS it came to pass, that Cain brought an offering unto the Lord." We understand the expression "end of days," as denoting the termination of the week, and consequently as implying, that the offering of Cain was presented on the Sabbath.

It is alleged, that the change which the Sabbath has undergone from the seventh to the first day of the week, is incompatible with the idea of its perpetuity. As much stress has been laid upon this circumstance, we shall examine it somewhat in detail.

None, we presume, will deny, that it was competent for Him who instituted the Sabbath in the first instance, to introduce the change in question. We admit, indeed, that there is no positive command for this change in the New Testament. But in the absence of such command, we have, what is scarcely less satisfactory, the example of our Lord, and that of his apostles and disciples, in connexion with the general practice of Christians in all subsequent periods.

First, we have the example of our Lord himself. In the nineteenth verse of the twentieth chapter of John, we read, "Then the same day at evening, being THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." And from the twenty-sixth verse of the

same chapter, we learn that on the first day of the week immediately following, Jesus paid a similar visit to his assembled friends.

Again, we have the example of the apostles and first disciples. We have just seen two instances in which they convened on the first day of the week. Others may also be adduced. Thus the day of Pentecost, so glorious in the annals of the church, was the first day of the week. We likewise read of the disciples coming together on the first day of the week to break bread, when Paul, who intended to leave them on the morrow, continued his discourse till midnight. Nor must we omit to refer to a passage of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, where the apostle directs that collections for the saints be taken up on the first day of every week, stating that he had issued a similar order to the churches of Galatia.

Such, then, was the practice of the apostles. And that their example was followed by the whole Christian community, is a fact, respecting which there can be no dispute. Now, we may readily conceive, that the prejudices of the Jewish converts in favour of the Sabbath to which they had been accustomed from their infancy, were so inveterate that nothing could have induced them to observe the first day of the week as the season of holy rest, but a well-founded conviction that there was sufficient authority for the change. Indeed, the more rigid of them continued, for many years, to honour both the old and the new Sabbath, thinking that thus they could not possibly err.

Brethren, we would next inquire, whether it was not proper, that the new dispensation introduced by our divine Lord, should be distinguished by a change of the Sabbath? And was it not fit that his resurrection from the dead, which took place on the first day of the week, should become the era of such change? Surely an event

so glorious in itself, and so important in its consequences, deserved to be celebrated with religious solemnity to the end of time. Now, what more appropriate mode could be devised for the celebration of this event, than the sabbatical observance of the day on which it occurred? This consideration too acquires additional force, when we recollect, that the Redeemer is styled more than once in the New Testament, "The Lord of the Sabbath." As God, he had instituted the ancient Sabbath, and was, therefore, competent to change it. We may add, that the author of the Apocalypse denominates the Sabbath *the Lord's day*—language which would seem to imply its institution by the authority of Christ.

We have thus far pursued our argument on the supposition, that the first day of the week had never been observed as a Sabbath till after the resurrection of Christ. But there are not wanting reasons for the opinion, that this was the day uniformly observed from the creation till the arrival of the Israelites in the wilderness of Sin, when a temporary change to the last day of the week was made by the authority of Heaven. We are aware, that this opinion conflicts with a well known answer in our Shorter Catechism. But while we would pay all due deference to the judgment of those who framed the formularies of our Church, we shall never relinquish the right of thinking for ourselves in relation to all religious subjects. We are far from imagining, that any creeds, catechisms, and liturgies are infallible. We look upon them just as we contemplate other human productions; remembering too, that they were formed at a period in which the facilities for exploring scriptural truth were much inferior to those which we now enjoy.

The works of creation were completed in six days, and on the seventh the Almighty rested from his labour. Now,

this day, which was set apart for sabbatical observance, being the first whole day of Adam's life, would be the era from which he would naturally begin his computation of time, and would, therefore, be the first day of his week. The first entire day of his existence he was commanded to offer as a species of first-fruits to his God. The day was certainly the seventh from the creation; but it was probably reckoned as the first day of the week.

That the primæval Sabbath was the first and not the last day of the week, might be inferred from the fact, that when mankind forsook the worship of the true God, the recollection of this day was preserved, and mingled itself with their superstitions. They continued to observe the first day of the week as a season for religious solemnities. In general, it was devoted to the idolatrous worship of the *Sun*, and was, therefore, called **SUNDAY**. The same observance of the first day of the week still prevails among the heathen nations of the East.

The argument arising from the fact which we have just mentioned, is undoubtedly a cogent one. The hebdomadal, or weekly division of time, not being indicated by any natural phenomenon, is purely artificial. And yet this division has existed from the earliest ages of which we have historical record, and is found to be co-extensive with the diffusion of the human species. Now, may we not demand, whence could this arbitrary division of time have arisen, except from the original institution of the Sabbath immediately after the creation? This circumstance, we think, sufficiently refutes the opinion of those who consider the Sabbath as a peculiarity of the Mosaic ritual, while the general observance throughout the world, of the first day of the week, as a season for religious ceremonies of some sort, would seem to demonstrate that the primitive Sabbath corresponded with that day.

We have intimated, that the Sabbath was changed from the first to the last day of the week, on the arrival of the Jews in the wilderness of Sin. In proof of this assertion we appeal to the sixteenth chapter of Exodus, where several remarkable circumstances are recorded. The manna on which the Israelites subsisted during their pilgrimage from Egypt to Canaan, began to fall from heaven for their support soon after they reached the wilderness just mentioned. They were supplied each night with precisely enough for the ensuing day, and were expressly forbidden to lay by any portion of it. Indeed it became unfit for use and offensive, if kept for the space of twenty-four hours. Yet a singular exception presented itself. On the morning of the sixth day of the week double the usual quantity of manna was found lying on the ground. The people, surprized at an occurrence so wholly unexpected, went to Moses to inquire what it could mean. He told them, that the next day would be their Sabbath, on which it would be unlawful for them to gather the miraculous food, and that God had, therefore, furnished them with sufficient to last for two days. They accordingly found, that the manna could be readily preserved during the sixth night of the week. Now from this whole transaction, some have drawn the inference, that the Sabbath was previously unknown to the Israelites. It has been thought, that their ignorance in respect to the reason why they had received a double allowance of food on the sixth day, together with the manner in which Moses then enjoined on them the religious observance of the seventh, can hardly be accounted for on any other supposition. We admit, indeed, that if the Jews had always been accustomed to observe the seventh day of the week as a Sabbath, their slowness of comprehension in this affair of the manna was rather strange. But if we suppose, that the first day of

the week had been their original Sabbath, which was now changed to the seventh, the difficulty vanishes.

Is it asked why the change which we suppose to have taken place with regard to the Sabbath was introduced? We answer, for two obvious reasons. One of which was to distinguish the Israelites from the surrounding pagan nations, who, as we have said, celebrated the idolatrous worship of the sun on the first day of the week. Another was to commemorate the deliverance of the Jews from Egyptian bondage, which might be considered as occurring on the seventh day. And hence in the repetition of the ten commandments which we find in the book of Deuteronomy, the observance of the Sabbath is enforced by the following consideration: "Remember that thou wast a servant in Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand, and by a stretched-out arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day." Hence also the Jewish Sabbath was denominated *a sign*. The rest which it afforded them, was emblematical of their emancipation from servitude.

Now, if the first day of the week had been the primitive Sabbath, it was unnecessary for our Lord to give his apostles and disciples an express command for the religious observance of that day. By his resurrection, the Mosaic economy was abrogated, and the Sabbath, as a matter of course, would revert to the original day.

Christians! what dignity does the view which we have here taken of this subject, confer on your Sabbath! You celebrate the day on which your Creator rested from his works, while the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. You also celebrate the day on which your Redeemer, having completed the sacrifice of your redemption, arose in triumph from the tomb, and

manifested his victory over the powers and principalities of darkness. Your Sabbath and the patriarchal are the same. In short, the day which you observe, is rendered illustrious by the two most memorable events in the annals of time—the creation and the redemption of the world. We may add, that such seems to be the purport of the apostle's argument in his Epistle to the Hebrews, where he says, "There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God: For he (Jesus) that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his." Nor is it unworthy of remark, that so early a writer as Justin Martyr, has expressly said, that the first day of the week was, in his time, universally observed as a Sabbath, because it was the day in which God finished the work of creation, and in which Jesus Christ our Saviour arose from the dead. Such is the language of a writer who lived in the second century, and who, therefore, may be presumed to have been acquainted with the opinion of the apostles, so far, at least, as tradition had preserved it.

We shall enlarge no further on the first head of our discourse, which was to show that the Sabbath is a divine institution of perpetual obligation.

We proposed, in the next place, to illustrate the advantages that result from the sabbatical institution. "The Sabbath," said our Lord on one occasion, "was made for man." It was designed to promote his happiness. Let us, then, inquire in what respect it conduces to this end. And first, we shall endeavour to point out, somewhat in detail, the importance of the Sabbath viewed as a merely civil institution.

The term *Sabbath*, as almost every one knows, is of Hebrew origin, and, in its verbal form, signifies *to rest*. The first aspect, then, under which the Sabbath presents

itself, is that of a *day of rest*—a day in which a general suspension of the secular occupations and pursuits of men takes place. Bishop Porteus adverting to this point, thus expresses himself: “There cannot be a more pleasing, or a more consolatory idea presented to the human mind, than that of *one universal pause of labour*, throughout the whole Christian world, at the same moment of time; diffusing rest, comfort and peace through a large part of the habitable globe, and affording ease and refreshment, not only to the lowest part of our species, but to our fellow labourers in the brute creation. Even these are enabled to join in this silent act of adoration, this mute kind of homage to the Lord of all; and although they are incapable of any *sentiment* of religion, yet by this means they become sharers in the *blessings* of it. Every man of the least sensibility must see, must feel the beauty and utility of such an institution as this.”

That a weekly interruption of the regular business of life is of immense advantage to man, whatever may be the particular sphere in which he moves—whether he is a master or a servant, a philosopher or a mechanic—is a truth, so obvious in itself, that it can hardly be rendered more evident by reasoning. Rest and recreation are necessary both to the body and the mind. By unremitting exertion, the physical and the mental faculties become alike jaded and enervated. The individual whose avidity in the acquisition of wealth, causes him to esteem the frequent recurrence of the Sabbath, an unreasonable and oppressive tax upon his time, is blind to his own secular, as well as spiritual interests. The fifty two days of the year, which he sets down as lost, furnish, in a manner not the less real for being imperceptible, a quota by no means inconsiderable to the whole quantum of his annual profits. The institution of which

he complains, is necessary to recruit his own exhausted energies, and likewise the exhausted energies of those, on whose co-operation, whether they be immediately in his employment or not, his success must, in a greater or less degree, depend, and to prepare both him and them for a more vigorous prosecution of their daily pursuits. Without this institution, then, he would be neither as healthy nor as rich as he is. And although he imagines that the day of rest returns too often, experience, an infallible guide, has decided otherwise. During the French revolution, when quite as much antipathy was manifested towards morals and religion, as towards kings and nobles, a reformation of the calender was proposed and adpoted,* in which a *decimal* division of the week was substituted for the hebdomadal. But it was soon ascertained, that the philosophers who thought the recurrence of a Sabbath in every period of ten days, preferable to the appointment of Heaven, were mistaken. They had miscalculated the exigencies of humanity. The event showed, that they did not know the precise interval between labour and rest which man requires, as accurately as his Maker.

Another general advantage of the Sabbath, in a civil point of view, has been pointed out by some writers, particularly Dr. Dwight. We allude to its tendency to promote *cleanliness of person, neatness of dress, and refinement of manners*, especially among the poorer classes of society. We shall not, however, enlarge on these topics, but proceed to consider the importance of the Sabbath as a day on which assemblies are held for communication of instruction in relation to the primary duties of human life.

We shall assume, then, that the purposes for which men

* October the 25th, 1793.

convene on the Sabbath are simply of a *moral* kind. We do not add that they are of a religious character, because though we are well aware, that the peculiar excellence of the Christian morality may be shown to result from its intimate connexion with religion, yet as it is not necessary to our present argument to point out this connexion, we are willing to assume that the instruction dispensed every week from the pulpit, is purely of an ethical nature. Now, contemplating the subject in this light, we are persuaded, that the Sabbath, with its appendages of solemn assemblies, and stated instructions on moral topics, has contributed more certainly and effectually than any thing else, to the improvement of our race. It has been justly remarked, that the non-existence of any similar institution among the ancient Greeks and Romans, was a principal cause of that licentiousness, to which, notwithstanding their attainments in science, literature and the fine arts, they were so generally addicted.

That the advantages accruing to every Christian community from the Sabbath, are great, will appear, if we consider that the instruction dispensed is both considerable in amount, and valuable in kind, and is moreover furnished on the lowest terms.

The instruction of the pulpit is considerable in amount; this is an obvious truth—a plain matter of fact which all will admit. But let us make it still more evident, if possible, by a little detail. On every Sabbath the preacher arises, either once or twice, and occasionally thrice, to address a company of hearers on their duties to their Maker, their fellow men and themselves. The discourse which he delivers, is from thirty to sixty minutes in length. Now, a discourse in the delivery of which a speaker—who pays due attention to emphasis and pause—occupies thirty minutes, will, we presume, fill not less

than thirteen pages, of the octavo form, printed with type of the common size. So that the minister who preaches but once on the Sabbath, and whose addresses are only thirty minutes long, will produce in the course of the year, an octavo volume of six or seven hundred pages. If his discourses are sixty minutes in length, he will of course, produce, in the same period, two volumes of that size. And if he preaches twice on the Sabbath, and his discourses are sixty minutes long each time, his annual productions will fill four octavo volumes of six or seven hundred pages each. You may, if you please, carry on this computation for yourselves, and estimate the number of similar volumes that such a preacher will produce in ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years, and also by having recourse to the requisite data, determine the aggregate amount of instruction communicated annually from the pulpit, by all the preachers in the United States, and indeed throughout Christendom.—We cannot conclude our remarks on this point, without adding, how much does the instruction imparted by a single preacher, in the course of the year, exceed, in quantity, that imparted, in the same time, by any one author, or by any one professor of a college?

But it may be said, and very justly too, that the *quantity*, apart from the *quality* of the instruction dispensed from the pulpit, is of little consequence. We therefore go on to remark, that the advantages accruing to every Christian community from the Sabbath, will be admitted to be of immense value, when we consider, that the truths which it brings before the public mind, not in the robes of science, but in the undress of familiar exposition, are intimately connected with the temporal, as well as with the eternal happiness of man. The weekly exposition and enforcement of a system of morality, so pure and comprehensive, as that which is inculcated in the New Tes-

tament, must exert a powerful agency in enlightening and improving society. The official expositors of this system may not be competent, in every instance, to do justice to its merits. They may not be able to present the truths of the gospel in the most interesting and imposing attitudes. They may sometimes be deficient in perspicuity, and often in originality. But they cannot, if they are honest men, possessed of common sense, and only a very ordinary share of erudition, so obscure and weaken the truths of Christianity, as to prevent these truths, when urged every week on the understandings and consciences of their hearers, from making an impression, more or less deep and permanent.

If the gospel which is proclaimed throughout Christendom on every Sabbath day, be regarded simply as a system of ethics, all judicious and impartial men will concede, that it communicates instruction of the very highest order. Few infidels have refused to acknowledge, that the morality inculcated in the New Testament, is sublime in its nature, and comprehensive in its details. In no other volume, are the great and various duties of man exhibited with so much clearness, or enforced by such solemn sanctions. We are not inclined to depreciate the merit of ancient and modern treatises on these duties. But we affirm, that when compared with the little manual of moral precepts which the Saviour and his inspired followers have left us, the speculations of philosophers, no matter by what name they are called, or at what period they have lived, appear obscure, meagre and uninteresting. The highest acumen of human intellect, abetted by all the resources of human learning, has frequently been exercised upon the New Testament—the production of Galilean fishermen—and yet neither deficiency nor inconsistency can be detected in its pages. It has stood the test

of eighteen centuries, and is confessedly the only perfect summary of moral duties that the world has seen.

Again, that the advantages accruing to every Christian community from the Sabbath, are of incalculable value, will be still more manifest, if we consider, that the instruction dispensed from the pulpit, is furnished on much cheaper terms than any other. We do not now allude directly to the fact, that the pecuniary compensation received by those who impart this instruction, is very considerably below what men in the other professions obtain for services, which, in general, demand inferior literary attainments, and less intellectual labour. But we rather allude to the circumstance, that houses for public worship are thrown open to all who choose to enter. It has ever been the glory of the Christian religion, that the blessings it confers, and the hopes which it inspires, are disseminated "without money and without price." Truths most important for the direction of human conduct on earth, as well as for the acquisition of happiness beyond the grave, are taught in a manner intelligible to the meanest capacity, on every Sabbath, in a place which is accessible to all the various ranks and classes of society. Neither poor nor rich are excluded. The man who is unable, and he who is unwilling, to pay for the privilege, are alike free to hear whatever is to be heard. From the temple of Christian science is hung out a signal of invitation, intimating, that there is room for every individual, no matter of what age or sex, complexion or country, character or condition.

Infidels have vainly perplexed themselves in attempting to account for the rapid success of Christianity in the first instance, and the ascendancy which it has ever since continued to hold over the mind, the conduct, and the destiny of so large a portion of our race. The true solution

of this phenomenon is undoubtedly to be found in the memorable promise of the Saviour to his apostles: "Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." To no ascertain'd principles of human nature, independently of an extraordinary divine interposition, can the rise and progress of the Christian religion be satisfactorily referred. We presume, however, that none are disposed to contend for a total exclusion of secondary causes in this matter. It will hardly be denied by any, that the Author of Christianity adapted this religion to the exigencies of those for whose benefit it was intended. Now we are inclined to think, that one of the most remarkable instances of such adaptation, is visible in the circumstance which we have last mentioned—the cheapness of the rate at which the instruction of the pulpit is dispensed.

By far the largest portion of every community must be composed of the comparatively indigent—those whose labour procures for them very little or nothing more than a bare subsistence. For the instruction of these there was no provision, till the preaching of the gospel commenced. Unable to defray the expenses of an academical education for themselves or their children, they were involved in the grossest and most irremediable ignorance. The porticos of philosophy were closed against them, they had access to no teachers who were at once competent and disposed to explain the nature and extent of their moral duties, and urge them by sufficient motives to the performance of these duties. Now this was the state of things which Christianity was admirably suited to meet and to rectify. The blessings of the religion introduced by Jesus of Nazareth, were tendered especially to the poor, and from the lower classes of society the primitive converts to the faith of the gospel, were chiefly gathered.

The vast improvement in public morals, then, which

has confessedly followed the introduction of the Christian religion, is owing, in a great measure, to the cheapness of the instruction which is dispensed from the pulpit. The weekly expositions of the New Testament, which form so important a part of the exercises of every Sabbath, are accessible to the poorest classes of society, and thus a considerable quantity of information, most valuable in its kind, is communicated to those who must otherwise have remained in ignorance and in vice. They who have neither leisure nor inclination for reading, are in this manner, aroused from a state of mental torpidity—made to perceive, that they have mental faculties, and to exercise them too, on the noblest and most interesting of all subjects.

From the train of thought into which we have now been led, it will be at once perceived, that the Sabbath is eminently calculated to promote the interests of society, by diffusing and perpetuating the blessings of public order and tranquillity. Whatever contributes to enlighten and refine, in the humblest degree, every member of a community, must have a favourable influence on the community in its collective capacity. Now, although every member may not personally attend the weekly expositions of the New Testament, yet a sufficient number attend, to give a direction to the opinions, and a tone to the feelings of the whole. A little leaven, it is said, leaveneth the whole lump. An astronomical observatory established in a country, will benefit not merely the few whose scientific attainments enable them to avail themselves of the facilities which it affords for contemplating distant suns, measuring other worlds, and investigating the sublime laws which regulate the physical universe; but will further extend its advantages to the peasant, who, though remote from its site, and perhaps ignorant of its existence,

employs the little manual of tabular calculation which it may annually send forth, in the familiar form of an Almanac, for his direction in husbandry, and the other avocations of ordinary life.

A political writer of extended celebrity, has laid it down as one of his fundamental maxims, that virtue is the spring, or pervading principle, of a republican form of government. But the truth is, that virtue, taken in its proper acceptation, is essential to every kind of government; for without some degree of virtue, society could not subsist at all. It is, therefore, evident, without the parade of demonstration, that the Sabbath, as it is an effective instrument of enlightening, on the subject of morals, those classes of society which are in most danger of becoming, through ignorance, depraved and untractable, must tend to secure and preserve the blessings of a well-regulated government. The whole spirit of Christianity is in unison with the saying of the poet, that "order is Heaven's first law." The gospel inculcates submission to *the powers that be*, on the ground, that *they are ordained of God*. While its doctrines and precepts are friendly to the cause of rational liberty—while it unfolds just and philosophical views of human rights—while it looks with a propitious eye, on the struggles of an oppressed people for freedom—it nevertheless enjoins on its professors a due respect for the constituted authorities of the land, in which Providence has ordered their lot. And it moreover subjects them to a routine of moral training, the best adapted for the formation of habits of obedience, with respect to this, as well as with respect to all the injunctions which it promulges. Who, then, can estimate the advantages merely in a civil point of view, resulting to society from the weekly exposition and enforcement of a system of ethics, like that which forms so essential a part of Christianity?

We have thus shown the importance of the Sabbath to the temporal interests of man.—So much of your time has been already occupied, that we shall omit saying any thing respecting its tendency to subserve his spiritual and eternal interests; and we do so with the less reluctance, since its advantages in this respect are obviously identified with those of religion itself. No one, we presume, can, for a moment, doubt that this institution is the grand means of perserving the knowledge and the fear of God among men. In short, without the Sabbath there would be no religion in the world.

We need not wonder, then, that so much stress is laid, in the sacred Scriptures, on the duty of observing the Sabbath day. This duty, though strictly of a positive nature, has been incorporated, as we have said, in the moral law. Why? Because of its intimate connexion with human virtue and happiness. No other injunction of Heaven exerts a more direct and powerful influence over the moral character and conduct of man.

But before we proceed to enforce the duty of “remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” the question may arise, How much of the Sabbath is to be appropriated to religious exercises and pursuits? We answer, the whole of the day, except so much as is occupied in “works of necessity and mercy.” This we distinctly assert in opposition to Dr. Paley, who has said, that “what remains of Sunday, beside the part of it employed at church, must be considered as a mere rest from the ordinary occupations of civil life.” We regret to see such an erroneous and such a dangerous sentiment as this, formally delivered and vindicated in a treatise on morals, which many of our seminaries of learning have adopted as a text book, and with which most of our youth become familiar. We do not hesitate to affirm, that the contrary is the doc-

trine of the sacred Scriptures. They require us to devote the whole of the Sabbath, with the exception just mentioned, to the duties of religion, public and private. The Old Testament contains many passages besides the text, which fully support this position. It may, indeed, be replied, that these passages relate only to the Jews, and are not obligatory upon Christians. But we trust that we have said enough to convince you, that the Sabbath is an institution of perpetual obligation, and that none of the precepts which enjoin the observance of it, can become obsolete.

It has been intimated, that works of necessity and mercy may be lawfully performed on the Sabbath. On this point the sacred Scriptures are sufficiently explicit. Every reader of the New Testament recollects the instances in which our Lord evinced, both by precept and example, that it was right to do good on the Sabbath day. Indeed, it has been justly remarked, that works of necessity and mercy can hardly be considered as exceptions to the general rule, since their tendency is to promote the glory of God.

And now, brethren, we would urge upon you all, the injunction of our text, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." If Jehovah has been pleased to consecrate a particular day for the honour of his great and glorious name, you must be under an imperious obligation to observe such day, as its holy character demands. We say to you, in the language of the poet,

—Let that day be blest
With holiness and consecrated rest."

None of us, dear hearers, are disposed to deny, that it is our duty to devote the Sabbath to the service of Him who instituted it as a day of sacred rest. But alas! we are all deficient in the performance of this admitted duty.

It is true, here, as in numerous other instances, that we “know the right, and yet the wrong pursue.” There is, perhaps, scarcely any matter with regard to which the best of Christians are so deeply conscious of their delinquency, as in that of remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Not that they are habitually guilty of positive violations of this sacred day, for by such conduct they would forfeit every claim to be regarded as Christians. We should be very loth to award the title of *Christian*, in its strictest sense, to any individual who could knowingly and deliberately profane the Sabbath of the Lord his God. “Rest assured,” says Dr. Chalmers, “that a Christian, having the love of God written in his heart, and denying the Sabbath a place in its affections, is an anomaly that is no where to be found.” And again, he says, “We never, in the whole course of our recollections, met with a Christian friend, who bore upon his character every other evidence of the Spirit’s operation, who did not remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” You will not then understand us as admitting, that Christians violate the Sabbath in what may be termed a positive manner—that they consume the whole or any portion of this day in the transaction of secular business, such as looking over and posting their accounts, writing letters, and preparing in various modes for the transactions of the coming week. We will not grant that Christians are even heard exclaiming, “When will the Sabbath be gone that we may sell corn and set forth wheat?” Much less will we concede that they spend this day which the Lord has made, or any part of it, in mere amusement and recreation, such as reading newspapers and books which are not of a religious nature, riding, walking, or visiting, except in cases of necessity, or for the performance of acts of mercy. All these are things which we are bold to

affirm, that Christians cannot do—we mean they cannot do them habitually. And yet they are lamentably remiss in the proper observance of the Sabbath. They are not uniformly in the spirit on the Lord's day. They find it difficult to preserve that exclusively devotional frame of mind which they are anxious to possess. They are often diverted from that strict attention to the concerns of their souls, which the law of God, and their own interests demand. Their conversation is not so spiritual, as they would wish it to be. Their thoughts especially are prone to wander from holy ground into forbidden paths. Brethren, are not these things so? Alas! we know from our own experience, that what we have now said, is but too true. We lay claim to no superior sanctity on this, or any other point. Indeed, we are sensible, that our situation is one that renders us peculiarly liable to delinquency in the particular to which we advert. To the minister of the gospel the Sabbath is, in one sense, a day of labour, as well as of rest.—But Jehovah knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust!

We exhort you, then, brethren, to be more circumspect in the observance of the Sabbath. On your discharge of this duty, above all others, must depend your progress in virtue and piety. Jehovah has been pleased to promise peculiar tokens of his favour to those who keep the fourth commandment. Hear his language: "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a Delight, the Holy of the Lord, Honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spo-

ken it." Here you are presented with the amplest encouragement to the performance of the solemn duty on which we insist. Let it, therefore, be your constant endeavour to spend the Sabbath as a day which belongs exclusively to your Maker and Redeemer—a day which he has reserved for himself, and which is always to be devoted to his glory. It is only by such conduct, that you can become fitted for the enjoyment of that celestial Sabbath which awaits the redeemed after death—that pure and eternal *rest* which, when the toil of life is over, *remaineth for the people of God.*

We are aware, dear hearers, how much we have trespassed upon your patience. And yet we cannot conclude without adverting to a topic on which we have before expressed our sentiments. We feel the deepest anxiety, that some plan should be devised for promoting a better observance of the Sabbath, not only as a religious, but as a moral and political institution, among the inhabitants of the city in which we live. That the day which the Lord hath made, is here awfully profaned in various ways, it would surely be superfluous to go about proving. Let any one who may doubt the truth of what we now assert, look at the taverns in the suburbs of this town; and let him especially observe the number of children who are ranging the streets and the surrounding country, free from all restraint, and engaged in every species of wickedness—in every form of vice. We again call upon you, brethren, not only as Christians, but as members of society—as men—to adopt some expedient for bringing about another state of things. We trust, that we have succeeded in convincing you, that the Sabbath is the great palladium of morals, as well as of religion. We do not hesitate to say, that on the perpetuity of this institution depend the virtue, the happiness, the

liberty of our country. Is it not important, then, to endeavour to arrest the growing profanation of this sacred day? You must all answer in the affirmative. Now we conceive, that this desirable object might be, in some measure, accomplished, so far as our city is concerned, by the formation of a society of gentlemen for the general suppression of vice and immorality. We know that, in other places, much good has been done through the instrumentality of similar associations. Let the experiment be tried, and with the divine blessing upon our efforts, we promise, that they will not be wholly unsuccessful.

SERMON XXVI.



JOHN VII. 48.

“Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him?”

THIS was a query put by the Pharisees themselves to certain officers whom they had sent for the apprehension of Christ, and who returned without executing their errand. It appears, that the officers, on repairing to the spot where our Lord was, found him engaged, as usual, in addressing the multitude on the subject of religion. With so much eloquence did he speak, that a powerful effect was produced on the whole assembly, and the officers themselves, favourably impressed, did not attempt to lay violent hands on him, but went back to those who had deputed them with the remark, “Never man spake like this man.” We think that we can almost see the indignant and sarcastic scowl with which the dignitaries of the Sanhedrim replied, “Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him? But this people, who knoweth not the law, are cursed.” There was, indeed, at least one upright and liberal individual in this band of swollen and infuriated bigots, for we read, that Nicodemus (the same who visited the Redeemer by night) endeavoured to lead them to something like moderation and propriety, by modestly asking, “Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?” This, however, was truly to cast pearls before swine. It was like talking to the wind. The virtuous

and honourable Jew only brought upon himself the bitter taunt: "Art thou also of Galilee? Search and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."

You can be at no loss to perceive what we propose to make of the passage before us, when we remark, that interrogatory language is often employed to express, in the strongest manner, a proposition either affirmative or negative. The question, "Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him?" implies, that none, or, at any rate, next to none, of the rulers and Pharisees—the wealthy, the honourable, and the powerful—had believed on Jesus. The text thus interpreted involves an interesting and important truth, which, if we are not mistaken, will be found applicable to the state of Christianity, in all times and places.

If we revert to the period of the Messiah's personal ministry, we observe, that very few of the rulers and Pharisees then believed on him. The prediction of the Old Testament, which announced, that he should be "despised and rejected of men," was abundantly verified in the circumstances of his actual history. "He came to his own, and his own received him not." His career on earth was marked by an unexampled series of persecutions and sufferings. His very infancy was not exempt from perils, for the tyrant Herod sought his life, and his parents were compelled to provide for his safety by a precipitate removal to Egypt. On his return to his native land, the obscurity in which he lived for thirty years, did, indeed, shelter him, so far as we know, from calumny, insult, and violence. But it was a calm to be followed by a storm the darkest and most overwhelming. No sooner did he begin to publish the kingdom of heaven, and to perform miracles in evidence of his divine mission, than a host of enemies arose in every district of Judea. The sneer of

derision, and the strong arm of civil authority were alike employed to injure and to crush him. His motives were misrepresented—his discourses were misinterpreted—he was accused of a confederacy with infernal spirits—the charge of blasphemy was preferred against him—he was denounced as a fomenter of sedition, and one who aimed at usurping the highest authority in his country. In a word, every artifice was resorted to that malice could suggest or ingenuity invent, for the defamation of his character, and the accomplishment of his ruin.

Now, the opposition which the Saviour met with in the days of his flesh, proceeded chiefly from the higher ranks of society. The multitude, it is true, manifested, on several occasions, the most rancorous feelings of hostility. But in such instances they were evidently instigated by their superiors. The friends of Jesus—his devoted adherents—were, with scarcely an exception, individuals of humble parentage and scanty education. Look at the catalogue of his apostles. Simon Peter and Andrew his brother were fishermen. James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, were brought up to the same occupation. Matthew was a collector of the Roman revenue—an office so odious in the estimation of his countrymen, that no Jew of any standing in society could be prevailed on to accept it. Of the rest we know little more than the general fact, that their station and pursuits in life were about equally elevated. Such was the character of the Redeemer's open followers—his professed disciples. There were, indeed, one or two persons of a different description, who were secretly his friends, such as Nicodemus of whom we have already spoken, and Joseph of Arimathea, a man of considerable opulence, who procured from Pilate the crucified body of Jesus, and buried it in his own sepulchre. But these were rare exceptions. The converts of Christ,

during his abode among men, were, for the most part, poor and powerless—no better than when, soon after his death, their enemies described them in the most contemptuous terms, as the “filth of the earth”—the “off-scouring of all things.”

We see, then, that the words of our text are strictly applicable to the state of things during the period of the Saviour’s personal ministry. Well might his adversaries sneeringly ask the question before us.

But these words are not to be restricted to the period of which we have been speaking. They may be shown to be true with regard to all the subsequent periods of Christianity. For about three centuries after the ascension of our Lord, his followers were doomed to indignities and outrages, such as the eloquence of human language is inadequate to depict. It is not exaggeration to say, that, if the testimony of the most eminent historians can be at all relied on, several millions of Christians must have perished, in various ways, from the commencement of the reign of Nero to the end of that of Dioclesian. The wealthy, the powerful and the learned combined their efforts for the extinction of the gospel. The emperor and the philosopher, the patrician and the priest, arranged themselves under a common banner of hostility towards all who bore the name of Jesus of Nazareth. For any who made an undisguised profession of belief in his messiahship, there was neither peace nor safety. They who cared for the loss of property or of life, were under the necessity of concealing, with the most profound caution, their attachment to the cross. In short, the primitive Christians were hated by the Jews as bold innovators, while by the pagans they were spurned as weak enthusiasts. It is no wonder, that, under such circumstances, few of the rulers and Pharisees believed on Christ. There can be no doubt,

that Gibbon, however sinister may have been the motive which prompted the representation, is not far from the truth in saying, that “the new sect was almost entirely composed of the dregs of the populace.”

It is true, that after the reign of Dioclesian, an order of things somewhat different began to arise. Christianity gradually ceased to be an object of persecution. The gospel by this time had operated as an effective engine in enlightening and ameliorating mankind. The book of revelation, expounded by living apostles, had poured upon the world a flood of moral splendour, which undermined the temples of paganism, and swept away the abominations of polytheism. The power of divine truth proved too strong to be resisted by the sophistry of philosophers, and the artifice of priests. And now the rulers and Pharisees had sagacity enough to discern the course which it was their interest to pursue. They foresaw the rising of the tide, and by taking it at the ebb, were conducted on to fortune. Their policy now led them to court the religion which they had formerly persecuted. This memorable change commenced in the reign of Constantine, and was consummated in that of Theodosius. The latter potentate issued a formal edict for the abolition of the pagan, and the establishment of the Christian system throughout the Roman Empire. How far this revolution was favourable to the interests of pure and undefiled religion, is a question which has been frequently and warmly agitated. We believe that had Christianity never been allied to the civil authority in any land, the world would have been blessed at this day with a far more abundant measure of pure religious light and influence than it really enjoys.

Christianity, then, now appears under an aspect not altogether similar to that which it exhibited during the

life of its Author, and for two or three centuries afterwards. Since the time of Theodosius, the religion of Jesus has acquired a certain kind of favour with the wealthy and powerful. The question, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?" no longer means precisely the same thing which it meant when first asked. It does not now imply, "Are any of the rulers or of the Pharisees, the nominal friends, the professed followers of Christ?" To such a query we should have no difficulty in returning a satisfactory reply. But the import of the text in our day is briefly this, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees really and effectually believed on the Son of God; and do they evince their faith by a life devoted to the observance of his laws and the promotion of his glory?"

We are aware, dear hearers, that we are now approaching delicate ground. To discriminate between particular classes of the community, and to affirm, that a larger proportion of the Saviour's true friends is found in the one than in the other, must be rather an invidious enterprize. But the good sense of the auditors will convince them, that it cannot be our intention, as it is certainly neither our interest nor our duty to offend. And we here promise, that, in the further prosecution of our remarks, we shall carefully endeavour not to advance a single step beyond what Scripture and experience warrant.

It was foretold of the Messiah, under the old dispensation, that when he should visit the earth, he would preach glad tidings to the poor; that is, as we understand the prediction, to *the literally poor*, as well as to those who are elsewhere characterized as the "poor in spirit." To the accomplishment of this prophecy an allusion was indirectly made, when we told you, that the fruits of the Saviour's personal ministry were gathered almost exclu-

sively from the humbler classes of Society. And in the period immediately succeeding the ascension of our divine Lord, we hear the apostle Paul exclaim, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." Many are the passages of a similar purport, which, did time permit and the occasion require, might readily be adduced from the inspired record.

Now, when such language of Scripture is viewed in connexion with past history, and with the facts that come under our own personal observation, we shall have reason to fear, that few comparatively of the rulers or of the Pharisees in any age or country have truly believed on the Son of God. But we are now mainly concerned to inquire, how it is at the present day. From what class of the community does Christianity now gather most of her sincere and consistent and zealous professors? Does she number among her votaries a greater proportion of the rich and powerful, or of those of a contrary description?—Alas! if we were to look at our communion tables, as the criterion for enabling us to determine this point, we are apprehensive that we should have to regard the text as too generally and abundantly verified.

But here an explanation before hinted at must be brought more distinctly and prominently into view. When we say, that few of the rulers or of the Pharisees have believed on Christ, we do not design to convey the idea, that the opulent and influential manifest, in general, less

disposition to respect and observe some of the forms of religion, than persons of an opposite class. We are far from complaining, that a contempt for the institutions of Christianity is betrayed, at the present day, by any individual of wealth and standing, whose opinion is worth a groat. The ministers of the gospel are as respectfully and affectionately treated as they deserve. Edifices for public worship, provided they who officiate in them, are tolerably competent to the discharge of their high duties, are as much frequented by the intelligent and the fashionable, as by auditors of another description. It seems to be now almost universally agreed, that the New Testament contains the purest and most effective system of ethics, and that with the prevalence of this system the welfare of society, and the permanence of our political institutions are closely linked. We are not reluctant to concede, that, so far as mere external conduct is concerned, the higher ranks may have, in some sense, the advantage over the lower, there being possibly fewer of the former than of the latter, who utterly neglect the preaching of the gospel, and live in a state of virtual heathenism. Our proposition, then—let it be distinctly understood—is simply this, that of those who compose our actual congregations, the rulers and the Pharisees, the wealthy and the powerful, do not so frequently *believe* on the Son of God, in the proper and evangelical sense of the term, as others who move in a less conspicuous sphere.

As an evidence of the truth of this proposition, reference has already been had to the sacramental ordinance. Let it not be imagined that we consider the ordinance in question as marking with perfect accuracy, the Saviour's real friends. Far be from us the thought, that all who neglect the Lord's Supper, should be deemed, in consequence of such neglect, unbelievers in Him whose death the eucharistical

feast commemorates. Nor does even that charity which “hopeth all things,” demand of us the supposition, that every communicant is a true Christian. If a Judas was found in the little company of the apostles, who can doubt, that unsound professors exist at the present day? But, brethren, after these concessions are made, we appeal to your candour, whether the communion table may not still be regarded as the safest criterion by which to estimate the number of our Redeemer’s *little flock*. Judging by this criterion, we shall have too much reason to ask, “Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?”

Nor is it very difficult to assign the reason, why, although so many of the rulers and of the Pharisees seem anxious to enjoy the advantages, so few of them are disposed to submit to the requisitions of religion. The gospel which we preach addresses no direct appeal to the natural passions of men. It seeks to arrest and turn into another channel, the current of human affections. It would lead our thoughts from created things up to the great Creator. It represents the present as a state of discipline. It points to the future world as the only land of promise. It casts a shade over the things that are temporal, and discloses, in all their importance, the things that are eternal. Its language to the human being is, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” And again it says to men, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.”

To be more particular and explicit; the rulers and the

Pharisees—the wealthy and the powerful—may be divided into two classes—those who are engaged in the pursuit of pleasure, and those who are engaged in the pursuit of honour. Now, it may be easily shown, that the gospel of Christ is little fitted to conciliate the favour, and enlist the sympathies of either of these classes of men.

In the first place, we remark, that they who possess the means of gratifying their sensual appetites and passions, are too seldom able to resist the powerful temptations created by such a circumstance. A habit of unrestrained indulgence is thus formed, which is rarely overcome by any motive that can be presented to the mind. Hence it is, as every one knows, that the sons of the opulent so frequently fall victims to dissipation. Now, the religion of the New Testament condemns with a voice of authority and sternness, such as never emanated from the porticos of philosophy, the immoderate pursuit of pleasure. It aims to bring all our thoughts and affections under the supreme control of reason, or, as we should rather say, under that of faith, a principle more unerring in its dictates, and more commanding in its influence, than reason. It tells us, and without any of that reserve and that mincing, which disgrace the pages of so many of our moralists, that *fleshly lusts war against the soul*—are inimical and even fatal, both to our present comfort, and our future safety. In a word, it directs us to deny ourselves, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly on the earth. Can we, then, wonder, that so few of the rulers or of the Pharisees believe on the Lord Jesus Christ?

Again, Christianity looks with an eye of disdain, on the show of earthly power, and the trappings of earthly splendour. She teaches her votaries to say, with far more sincerity than the fallen courtier ever said—

“Vain pomp and glory of this world, we hate ye.”

The gospel is a system which not only tends, but openly professes to humble every aspiring imagination of the human heart—which promises the kingdom of heaven to none but those who are “poor in spirit.” And how can such a system be acceptable to the rulers and the Pharisees? Who that knows any thing of the nature and requirements of the Christian scheme, does not discern, that it is calculated to excite the hostility, rather than elicit the cordial approbation and support of men who make the attainment of popular favour and political eminence, the primary and absorbing object of their pursuit?

Upon the whole, the religion of Christ is a stern and an uncompromising religion. It gives no quarter to sin. It admits of no collusion with preconceived opinions, and long-cherished inclinations. It calls for an immediate and unconditional surrender of the heart to Jehovah. In one sense, it has entered the world not to bring peace but a sword. It wages a war of extermination with every thing that stands in opposition to the Almighty’s claims on human obedience. It demands, that the glitter of wealth, the allurements of pleasure, and the pomp of power, be sacrificed, without a murmur on the altar of Heaven. It declares, in language the most express, that the service of two masters at the same time is utterly impracticable. It tells us, that so long as Mammon exercises undisputed dominion over one inch of territory in the soul, the King of Zion will not condescend to accept the sovereignty of all that may be left. He can bear no rival near his throne. The direction of our divine Lord is, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me”—a direction which he enforces by asking that solemn question, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Enough, we presume, has now been said to explain why and how it is, that the rulers and the Pharisees are so little disposed to contemplate our religion with a favourable eye. Its terms, they say, are too rigid. Its exclusive demands they cannot brook. A partial submission to the restraints which it would impose on their conduct, they might persuade themselves to tolerate. But when they are given to understand, that an unreserved consecration of their mental faculties and physical powers to the divine service is insisted upon, their language is, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" They are anxious to reconcile the love of God with the love of the world. They are determined to try the experiment, how far an alliance may be formed between righteousness and unrighteousness, between light and darkness, between Christ and Belial, between faith and infidelity, between the temple of God and idols. In fine, they virtually contend, that although there may be no royal road to geometry, or any other science, there must be a royal road to heaven.

We now hasten to our concluding remarks.

This subject addresses itself with an energy which ought not to be resisted, to those professed followers of Christ whose lot it is to move in the more elevated regions of society. It reminds them of the peculiar temptations to which they are exposed, and urges them to the exercise of correspondent vigilance and activity. It tells them, that they have need of constant watchfulness and unceasing prayer, lest the glare of wealth, the parade of power, and the blandishments of pleasure, should so far alienate their affections from their Maker, as to render their recovery by grace, if not absolutely impossible, at least inconsistent with the principles and practice of the divine administration.

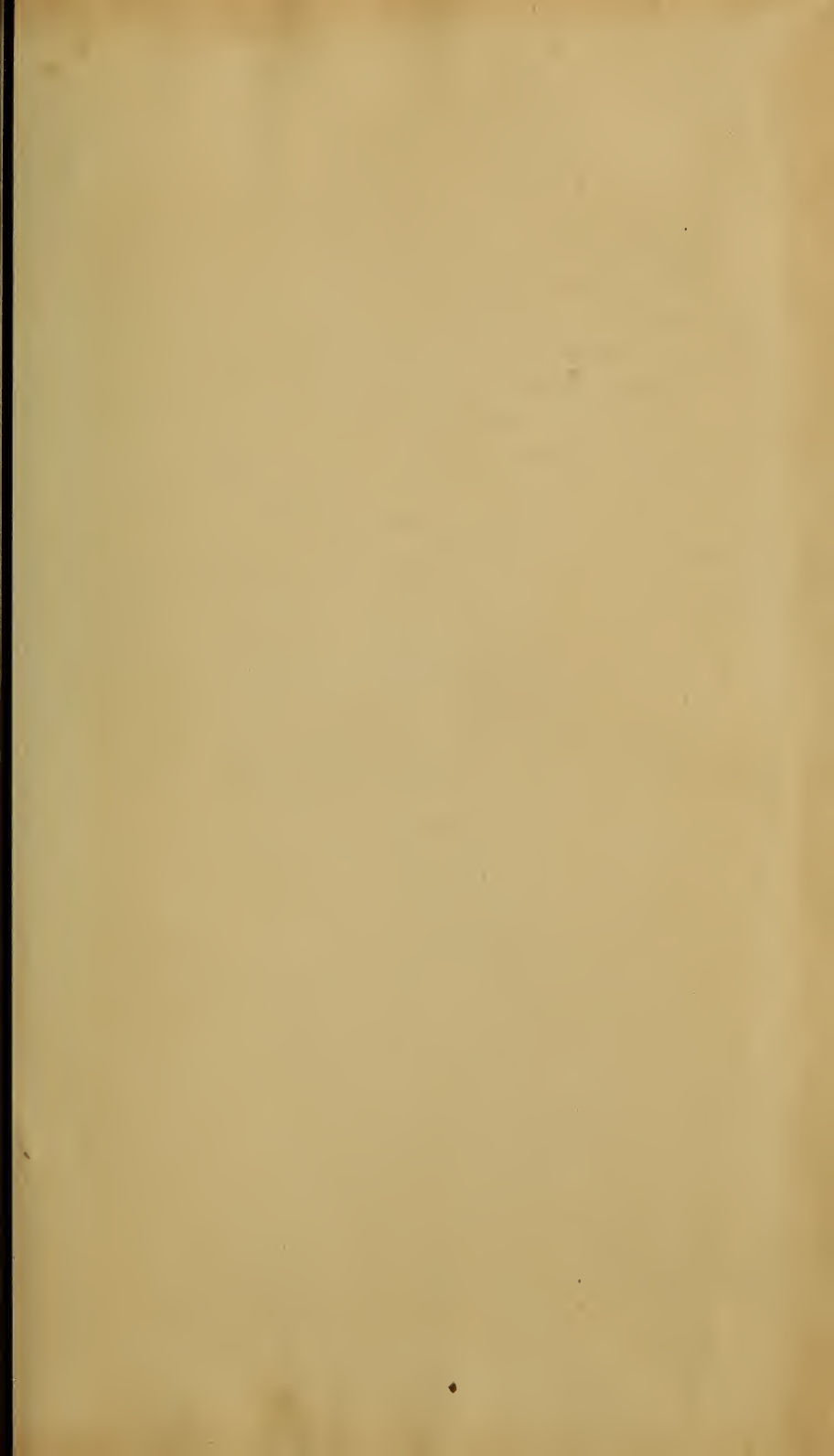
And here let it be observed, that when the opulent and the influential refuse to believe on the Son of God, they injure not only their own souls, but the souls of others. We all know the effect which their example has on the whole mass of the community. To a certain extent, they set the fashion, if we may be allowed so to speak, in morals and religion as well as in dress, furniture and literature. Who, then, can tell, how far they are chargeable with the aggregate corruption of society? This consideration, too, acquires additional force, when we reflect, that their example and influence, if in favour of real, evangelical piety, might contribute much towards the general prevalence of virtuous and devout habits, and the consequent amelioration of human nature in respect to its present condition and its future prospects. Yes, their active exertions—their zealous co-operation—with the sincere friends of Christ in the humbler walks of life, would, ere long, remove every obstacle to the arrival of that predicted period, in which purity, peace and happiness shall be diffused, through the medium of the gospel, over every continent, and among the islands of every sea.

Come, then, ye to whom providence has allotted wealth, distinction and influence, and manifest your gratitude for these favours, by an open and unhesitating acceptance of Christ's salvation. Acknowledge Jehovah as your only legitimate Sovereign. Let other lords no longer have dominion over you. And especially would we urge you to abandon for ever the idea which too many entertain, that religion—we mean real, practical religion—is a thing adapted only to the weaker and less enlightened classes of men. Such a notion, let us assure you, is wholly unfounded. We are bold to say, that it will not disgrace your intellects, whatever may be their degree of strength

and cultivation, to become followers of the Son of God. We have no fear in hazarding this assertion, when we recollect, that Newton, who according to common apprehension, is without a competitor on the arena of mind, and Locke, who, perhaps, takes the second station among the master spirits of our race, were sincere and consistent believers in Christ. To these how many more names of the highest celebrity, might we easily add?—Boyle, Hale, Milton, Addison, Johnson and others. And O! are any of you, brethren, going to spurn a religion which the understanding of such men accounted worthy of all acceptance? Where is the individual of this assembly, who, wiser and abler than Newton and Locke, is ashamed of Jesus and his words?—Ah! the shame, dear hearers, is all on the side of those who refuse to avail themselves of the glorious expedient which divine wisdom and benevolence have revealed for their deliverance from sin and misery. What, then, is your resolution? The question of accepting or rejecting the great salvation, is now submitted to you. The alternative of the gospel, life and death, is set before you. We call upon you to make your election. Now is the accepted time—to day is the day of salvation. Remember, that life is the only season for repentance. There will be no room—no opportunity—for this great duty beyond the grave. Indulge not the hope that the moral Governor of the universe will, at some remote period in eternity, unbar the prison of hell, and set free its wo-worn inmates. Infatuated man! we would this morning caution thee against any such delusive anticipation as this. We tremble to think, that thou shouldst be thus deceived, and we beg thee, as thou dost love thy soul, to renounce so fatal an error. The mercy of Deity has been justly compared to the rainbow, which cannot be seen after night. It blesses the sinner's eye

throughout the day of his probation on earth. But when the sun of righteousness has gone down, and the long, long night of eternity has set in, this cheering arch never appears, even in faintest colours, to the condemned spirit's view. Mercy has deserted him, and the farewell notes of hope linger on his ear, and haunt his imagination for ever.—Come, then, before it be too late, and secure the peace and happiness which the gospel tenders to your acceptance. Be wise, and consider your latter end. All other wisdom is folly compared with that which consists in making timely provision for eternity, by the exercise of repentance for sin, and faith in the one Mediator between God and men. These are the terms of salvation; terms suited alike to the rich and the poor—the polished and the rude—the fashionable and the vulgar—the philosopher and the peasant.—It is said, that the learned and illustrious Selden, as he approached the crisis of his earthly career, uttered this declaration: “I have taken much pains to know every thing that was esteemed worth knowing among men, but of all my acquisitions and readings nothing now remains with me, to comfort me at the close of life, but this passage of Paul, ‘It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.’ To this I cleave, and herein I find rest.”







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