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SERMONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

BY THE

REV. JOHN STEDMAN, D.D.

ASSISTANT MINISTER OF MARGARET'S CHAPEL, BATH.

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PREFACE.

THE following Sermons are a selection from the author's usual addresses from the pulpit. They are here presented to the public as they were preached, with the exception of a few trifling alterations and retrenchments.

Upon the circumstances which have led to their being thus made public, the author trusts he need not expatiate. Suffice it to say, that they were such as to render it necessary for him to make an appeal to public feeling and private friendship in the manner herein adopted. A

numerous and most respectable list of subscribers attests in what way that appeal has been answered—in the true spirit of Christian benevolence.

To those kind friends who have zealously exerted themselves in his behalf—to those who have so promptly and liberally crowned their exertions; to the Dignitaries of the Church; his brethren the Clergy; relations; connexions—to ALL his kind friends and subscribers, he now returns his sincere and grateful acknowledgments for favors so disinterested, and in extent, he candidly confesses, unexpected.

He feels that he must draw upon the same kindness to excuse the delay which has arisen in the delivery of the work.

RICHMOND HILL, BATH.

January 22, 1830.

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And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it : and if it bear fruit well : and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

MAN is an indolent, and a thoughtless being. Having an interest at stake more precious than the world he inhabits, and to secure which might demand the zeal of an angel : having a work assigned him to do, which might require almost eternity for the performance of it, he trifles away even that portion of time which is allotted him ; and when the Lord of the Vineyard comes, and demands of him an account of his labour, he is fain to beg another and another year. My text is an illustration of this sad truth ; and is taken from the parable of "the barren fig-tree" : a parable so applicable to the present season, when we have again ended one such great

B

portion of our time, and by God's mercy are entering on another, and so well suited to give effect to those serious thoughts which should possess our minds, that it shall be my present endeavour, in dependence on his grace, to draw therefrom such weighty instruction as it affords.

"Jesus spake this parable : a certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard ; and he came and sought fruit thereon and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none : cut it down ; why cumbereth it the ground ? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it : and if it bear fruit, well : and if not, then thou shalt cut it down."

The Jews were in a peculiar and primary sense God's vineyard. Among them he planted his Church. A circumstance so affectingly described in the fifth chapter of Isaiah. Our Lord, therefore, intended by this parable, to represent to them the divine displeasure for having neglected to cultivate the numerous advantages they had enjoyed : and in an awful manner to intimate, that although they had hitherto, at his intercession, been spared ; yet, that if they continued unfruitful under the additional culture and privileges they were shortly to receive, on the descent of

the Holy Spirit and the proposal of the Gospel, in its full evidence and extent, they must expect nothing less than speedy and irretrievable ruin.

It is not necessary, however, (and it would be highly injurious to this and other parables of our Lord) to restrict its application to God's peculiar people, the Jews. Like that of the Prodigal, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Sower, the Good Samaritan, and others, it is suitable to the condition and the interests of mankind, in every age, and under every dispensation. The whole world, under the Gospel, is compared by our Lord to one vast harvest, of which himself is the Lord and his Ministers the reapers. The growth of his kingdom of grace in the hearts of men is compared to seed sown, and to the subsequent process of vegetation. For you will observe, that between the spiritual and natural world there exists the closest analogy. There, as in this, effects are produced by causes ; and causes ripen by the same slow and sure degrees into effects. These degrees and these effects are accurately pointed out by Him who is equally the lord of nature and grace: and we, my brethren, and more especially we, his ministers, and labourers together with him on the same soil, in forming our estimate of the growth of religion in the heart, must take care never to disturb this har-

mony and correspondence, nor to expect more in religion than we find obtain in nature. "So is the kingdom of God," or the beginning and progress of divine truth in the heart, under the ordinary operations of the holy Spirit, "as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself: *first*, the blade; *then*, the ear; *after that*, the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." The apostle to the Gentiles makes use of the same natural illustration, and describes the same progressive effects: "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's *husbandry*." And to the Galatians: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

In the parable before us, therefore, by the fig-tree you are to understand mankind at large in his religious and responsible capacity. The vineyard is the Church of Christ, and our present

state of trial. The lord of the vineyard is God the Father ; the dresser of it God the Son. " A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none." We are here presented with an affecting display of the mercy of our heavenly Father, and our unfruitfulness and ingratitude. Mercies we have all of us received with an unsparing hand. Sins we have all committed without number : our particular sins are best known to ourselves. Every man knows, or ought to know, his own sins best ; and being ignorant for the most part of those of other people, he is to look upon himself as the greatest of sinners : because the greatest *he knows of*. Let us ask ourselves what has been the fruit of our whole lives ? Has it been in any degree commensurate with the goodness of God, or the blessings and privileges he has heaped upon us ? As Christians, it has been our high distinction to have been early planted in Christ's vineyard, his Church, by the sacred rite of baptism. Cut off as it were, from the parent stock of our fallen and corrupt nature, and separated from a world that lieth in wickedness, we have been grafted into the body of Jesus Christ, the true vine. Thus planted, we were brought into a state of reconciliation with God, and numbered among his

children. Within the pale of our truly apostolic and catholic Church, we receive through every stage of our Christian growth, the pure and "sincere milk of the word;" the former and the latter rain in its season; baptismal water, and the renewal of the Holy Ghost; every means of grace, every hope of glory, consistent with the purity of our walk and conversation. So that God may fairly and affectionately appeal to our candour and gratitude, and say to each of us, "What more could have been done for my vineyard that I have not done for it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? Do I come and seek fruit on my fig-tree, and find none?" This, my brethren, is a touching question. Seek not to evade its force. 'I come unto thee—thou art the man! I ask thee, therefore, what fruit hast thou to show? Show me thy faith by thy works. Hast thou kept thy baptismal vows pure and inviolate? Do I discover still the mark in thy forehead? Or hast thou impiously effaced it with the foul waters of sin? Thou didst then, at thy baptism, renounce "the world." Hast thou done so in reality? Thou didst resolve to fight manfully under my banner against "sin, the world, and the devil;" my enemies and thine. Hast thou mortified the flesh, and subdued sin in

thy members? I come to thee seeking "fruit." Hast thou any to show, or do I only discover upon thee the mere leaves of outward profession; I will know thee by thy fruits. By thy works thou shalt be justified. Without these thy faith is dead and cannot save thee. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit: but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.'—To which of these two classes (ask yourselves, my Christian friends) do ye belong? Their respective fruits are accurately described in the word of God, your Bibles. Try and examine your lives by that unerring standard, and you need not the voice of a minister to pronounce your condition. You stand either self-approved, or self-condemned. Your end is, either to be gathered into Christ's barn, the glorious assembly and church of the first-born; to enter into the joy of your Lord; or to be bound up with the bundles of refuse to be burnt; to be banished for ever from the presence of the Lord. Attend, therefore, to the doom of the unprofitable servant: hear the curse of unfruitfulness! "Then, said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

Whether by "three years" is to be understood in this place, the period of God's dealing with mankind, by the personal ministration of his Son ; or the usual time of the fig-tree's fruiting, from its first planting, it is of no great importance now to enquire. Both senses may well be understood as referred to. Certain it is, (and this is the point for our consideration) it had regularly deceived the hopes of the planter, and therefore had justly incurred the sentence here pronounced upon it : a sentence which must be felt in order to be understood in its full extent and import. God grant that not one of you, my Christian brethren, may ever experimentally feel its awful weight ! Judge therefore yourselves, that ye be not judged of the Lord. Set up a tribunal in your own breasts. Summon before the bar of conscience, *your departed years*. Examine into the complexion of your past lives. At this season every prudent person will be careful to arrange his worldly accounts ; to balance his gains with his losses ; and consider for the next year, how he may lawfully and honestly increase the one and prevent the other. Adopt the same course with respect to your souls. Enquire whether your account with God, your Creator and Judge, has been going backward or forward. Apply this test : how

stands your heart affected with regard to this world and the next? Should the great lord of the vineyard now descend upon us assembled within these hallowed walls, amid the general wreck of worlds, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God: should an angel step forth and swear by Him that liveth for ever and ever, that *Time shall be no more*: in such circumstances, permit me to ask you, should you be prepared to give up your account? Should you feel ready to quit the present scene? To bid adieu to your farms and your merchandize? To leave this world of vexation and sorrow, of vanity and emptiness? If you think you should be unprepared for such a call, be assured that you really are so: and if you are, remember that you are still an unprofitable servant. You must hear the sentence go forth against you—*Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground!*

Apply another test; and a most important one it is. Our divine Master has left upon record to his Church in all ages of the world, the following declaration. It is to be found in the fifteenth chapter of the gospel to St. John. There cannot be a better or a more unerring criterion, whereby to judge of our state as Christians. “I am the true vine, (they are the words of Christ himself) 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. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine : no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit ; for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withered ; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit : so shall ye be my disciples."

In this most emphatic declaration of our Lord, the whole body of Christians, comprised in his visible church throughout the world, are styled "branches;" of which himself is the centre of union and support, the principle of spiritual life and fructification. As on the same tree there are both living and dead branches, barren and fruitful ones ; so, in the visible Church, there are both true and false members ; those who by a vital union with Christ, and by deriving health and support from him, bear fruit ; and those who, having no such union with him, bear none. Now, according to this so just and natural description, the application speaks for itself. You

will enquire—‘Am I a true branch? Do I bear fruit, and thereby evidence the sincerity of my religious profession; or do I bear none?’ If your conscience determine the answer in the negative, I must tell you,—you may tell yourself, you are but a mere cumberer of the ground, whose end is to be cut down. “Examine yourselves, therefore, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” “He that keepeth his commandments, dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.”

If, on the other hand, we find, that “our heart,” on such an enquiry as I have recommended, “condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” We have a good hope through grace, that we shall not be condemned with the wicked world: that we shall in due time, by Christ’s prevailing intercession, be transplanted into the Paradise above. “And he answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit well: and if not, then after that, thou shalt cut it down.”

We have here, my brethren, in this last branch the parable, a most moving and lively picture

of our blessed Lord, set forth in another of his most important offices, that of an Intercessor. That we are saved at all (and it is our own faults if we are not), is owing to Christ's "atoning sacrifice of himself, *once* offered. That we are spared throughout the course of our natural lives, and from year to year, is owing to his intercession,—to his *often* appearing for us in the presence of God. He is the channel through which descends from the Father of lights every good and perfect gift. Sin had obstructed all communication. He opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Through Him all our wants, and all our prayers, find access to the mercy-seat of the Majesty on high. "If ye abide in me, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." "Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name," said he to his disciples, "ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you."

Thanks be unto God that we have such an advocate with the Father, as Jesus Christ the righteous. He ever liveth to make intercession for us. He stands between the dead and the living. He stays the uplifted arm of divine justice. He interposes his precious blood; and through his all prevailing merits, he takes upon him to speak to the sovereign Majesty of heaven.

and earth—‘ O let not my Lord be angry, and I will speak but this once. Let it alone *this year also*, till I shall have tried other means, other expedients to mollify and subdue this stubborn soil. If it bear fruit well: and if not, then thou shalt cut it down.’

Once more then, my brethren, by the mercy of God, and the intercession of his Son, we are put upon our trial. We stand upon the threshold of another year. Christ and his holy angels await with anxiety the result of our resolutions,—the result of our conduct. He has placed before us life and death, blessing and cursing. “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner: but that he should return from his ways and live.” “Behold,” says our adorable Redeemer,” I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

Not these “three years,” but these thirty: with some, perhaps, these fifty and sixty years—yea longer still, from the first dawning of your reasoning faculties, since the first moment you became capable of knowing the God who made you; Christ has been soliciting an entrance at the door of your hearts. With some, may we

not fear, he has ceased to knock; has discontinued his visits; consigning the unhappy persons over to a reprobate mind, to a judicial curse of permanent barrenness. With such the day of grace is ended. The calls of conscience shall never more arouse them from their fatal sleep. The stillness of death has settled upon them. Their next call shall be to judgment.—For “the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

With some few, who are not yet “past feeling,” and who would otherwise, perhaps, finally give themselves up to be swayed by the life and power of religion did not the world possess such seemingly superior attractions; with such Christ still continues his knocks. Every year they become louder and more intelligible. They feel half inclined to admit the gracious visitor into their hearts: but they must first bid them farewell that are at home. So sudden and total a separation is too painful. Thus they trim, as it were, between God and their souls, between this world and the next. Nothing gets done. No real advance is made heavenwards. Year after year only finds them the same irresolute, inde-

cisive, wavering persons. *They bring no fruit to perfection.*

It is to this latter description of 'professing Christians, that our subject seems to have especial reference. It is to such professors that God cometh, year after year, seeking fruit and findeth none. It is to such he says, Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground. Open reprobates, who finally abandon all ideas and intentions of becoming holy—with these the Lord of the vineyard knows how to act. They make no profession of religion. They look for no mercy. Such persons there are, I fear, (few I would willingly hope and believe) who thus, with a desperate consistency of character, (a consistency worthy of a better cause) are resolved to braye the tremendous realities of another world; to leap, with their eyes open, the fearful gulph which separates this world and the next, time and eternity. With such Christ's intercession for further space and time for repentance, has nothing to do; they wilfully exclude themselves from all benefit therein. No: the fig-tree in the parable was not dead, it had yet leaves thereon: just so it is those persons who, not absolutely dead to religion, make a profession, and a plausible profession thereof, who thus deceive the hopes of the Lord of the Vineyard. They lead him to

expect, year after year, that they will yet bear fruit. With such God appears, as it were, at a loss what to do : his mercy and justice stand equally poised ; till Christ comes, as he does now, and by an act of grace, altogether and entirely unmerited on their part, turns the scale in their favour ; and procures for them one other year of grace ; one more opportunity of repentance. ‘ Let it alone this last year also ; this last year of trial.’

Such being the case, permit me to conclude what has been said by a brief but solemn exhortation. Ask yourselves, ye *aged* trees in God’s vineyard : ‘ Have I yet in good earnest, begun to live to God, and to prepare for eternity ? With the outward badge and symbols of the Christian profession, have I the inward and spiritual grace, evidenced by “ a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness.” Am I yet vitally united to Christ, the true vine, by faith ? Do my aged and withered arms yet bear fruit ? Have I any works to show in plea of arrest of judgment ? Any marks of godly sincerity upon me ? Consequently, am I likely to escape the curse, “ Cut it down ;” or to be welcomed with a “ Come ye blessed of my Father,” “ Well done, good and faithful servant !” Remember your time of bearing will soon be over. Lose this

year, this week, this day, this hour, and another may never be afforded you. Time has shaken you by the hand, and Death is but a little behind. The King of terrors, it may be, has already reaped one by one the friends and acquaintance of your youth, the husband or wife of your bosom, your olive-branches; and you, "the last withered shock," await to be gleaned, and gathered to your fathers. Look well to it my aged friends. See that thou come to thy grave in a *good* old age, and in peace—peace with God, through Jesus Christ.

Ye *young* and vigorous,—to you I would say, remember this is your peculiar season of growth. As yet you bid fair to shoot your branches tall and straight. Beware that they take no unnatural and crooked turns; contract no wrong and ensnaring entanglements to hinder and distort their growth. Beware of men. Beware of *yourselves*. Know the treachery and vanity of your own hearts; the weakness and danger of self-dependence.—"Trust, therefore, in the Lord with all thy might, and lean not to your own understandings. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct your steps." Ever remembering that, young as you are, your root is in its grave; that you inherit, and inhabit, houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust;

dedicate your first-fruits to God. Death may intercept the harvest.

To ALL, I would say, be wise in time. *Be serious.* With "solemn adjuration to your souls," our friend and intercessor implores each and all of us "by his agony and bloody sweat, by his cross and passion, by his precious death and burial," to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. Renew your resolutions for the following year. Renew them—not in your own strength, but in His, "who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." Cut off your former sinful habits one by one, and see them all buried before you. Weep over them with tears of repentance, not of fondness and regret. Pray over them, that they may never rise up in judgment against you.

What thou doest do quickly. Time is on the wing—days and years steal on apace—death brings up the rear. As the tree falls, so shall it lie. "Behold," therefore, "now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.!"

Sermon II.

LOVE THE DISTINGUISHING ATTRIBUTE OF GOD.

1 JOHN 4, 8.

God is love.

THE God of Scripture, the God of the Christian, is emphatically and pre-eminently a God of love. As He shines forth "in the face of Jesus Christ," in that greatest and last display of his love to mankind made known in the Gospel, although planned and devised from eternity—there we as Christians, must look, properly speaking, for that love of God which passeth knowledge. We see, indeed, the great author of our being every where manifested round us in works of love. To whatever

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object we turn, there is love, because there is God; in the air we breathe, the light we enjoy, the food we partake of; in the first formation and structure of our bodies, as well as in their daily and hourly preservation. The same God of love "whose tender mercy is over all his works," upholds the frame of the universe, and sustains the sparrow's flight. The same glorious attribute which expands itself throughout the regions of infinite space, contracts itself also to the cradle of the infant. But it is in the page of Revelation, in those nearer though transcendent discoveries which He has made known of himself as a God of Grace, "reconciling the world to himself," that we know, and feel, we intimately appropriate, and devoutly acknowledge, "with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven," that "great love wherewith He hath loved us." Without extending our conjectures to distant worlds, or enquiring what designs of love and mercy, God has vouchsafed to, or may yet have in store for, them; of this we are assured, this truth our faith confirms to us, every feeling of our renewed nature attests and realizes, that God hath so loved *us*, so identified himself (if I may so speak,) with us his fallen creatures, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,

but have everlasting life. To search the stores of nature, inexhaustible as they are, for a God of love, for proofs of that truth which strictly belongs to, and has been reserved for revelation to make known to men, is to begin our enquiries where we ought rather to end them. In nature, as I before observed, we see indeed this principle every where displayed. In revelation we feel it. There we recognise it: here we appropriate it. Natural arguments inform the understanding: the truths of revelation convert the heart. The former leave us little better than they find us, assimilate not with our fallen and corrupt nature. Here, "we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Man, fallen, alienated, weak man, can never properly magnify the Lord, till his spirit can rejoice in God his *Saviour*; as a God of love in his son Jesus Christ, pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin. Whereas, with this key of revelation in his hand, and faith in his heart, the christian appropriates whatever of love he beholds so lavishly displayed throughout the wonderful works of God. He sees all things with new eyes, and sweetly attuned affections. "The love of God in Christ being shed abroad in his heart by the Spirit," every feeling and sentiment of his

renewed nature is in unison with the voice of joy and melody as resounded by the whole creation of God. "God is love" becomes, through the hopes and promises of the gospel, that string within his breast which vibrates and responds to the voice of nature. Hence the language and feelings of the inspired David are strictly and exclusively the true Christian's—"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. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us." To worship a God of nature, rather than a God of grace, is to the unrenewed man, to worship a God of wrath, rather than a God of love. To admire Him in his works of creation, vast and wondrous as they are, and to overlook Him as even more wondrously made known, and scripturally revealed to himself, "the chiefest of sinners;" what is this but to follow the light of a taper, rather than that of

the sun : to " grope in noon-day as in the night," when Christ " the true light shineth?"

As Christians, then, and not Deists, let us more particularly enquire, First, into the nature of that proof which the gospel furnishes for the doctrine contained in the text : and, Secondly, endeavour to enforce and apply the practical conclusion drawn therefrom by the holy Evangelist.

I. " God is love. In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Before we can form any just notions of this manifestation of the love of God in Christ Jesus, we must have a thorough knowledge of the circumstances, and condition of the object which called it forth. These are implied in the above expressions used by St. John, namely, " that we might live through Him;" and, " that he sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The apostle to the Ephesians, has joined together these two particulars : " You," says he, " hath he quickened, *who were dead in trespasses and sins.*" The object then of God's highest and last manifestation of love, was man ; man

in a state of death, and enmity with God. **But** it is from the Epistle to the Romans, that **we** derive the fullest information respecting the **fall** and restoration of our race. There we are told, that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” By one man’s offence death reigned by one.” “By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners.” “Death passed upon all men, for all have sinned.” Words lamentably explicit, lamentably descriptive of that dire and dismal change which sin introduced into the noblest work of God—for immortality, death: death, properly so called, and as the penalty of sin, as well as a seal of, and prelude to, that death of the soul, and eternal banishment from God, styled by this same evangelist, in the Revelations, “the second death.” Nor were the moral effects of man’s transgression less ruinous. The heart and affections became depraved, and alienated from God, as was to be expected in persons in a state of guilt, and sealed up to condemnation. The understanding became darkened, incapacitated for knowing God, or distinguishing properly good from evil. The will was perverted, and incapable of rising to the author of all good. The stream of the affections was polluted with sin, at its very source, and prone to follow the

course of this present evil world; "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience." Nor were the effects confined to the immediate descendants of our sinning progenitor. They are universal. Death has passed upon all men, for all have sinned. All are, "by nature the children of wrath." (Ephes. ii.)

Do you ask, 'if God is love, why did he thus permit his creatures to fall and incur so much misery?' I answer that "God giveth not account of his matters." Upon points where Scripture is silent, it becomes us to be silent also, and to adore. At the same time, there is abundance of proof, as to this argument, to show that God is love, and that this attribute even then gloriously triumphed, when it seemed to be obscured; and that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Who can for a moment doubt, but that together with his own image, in which God created man, he also communicated to this last and best of his works those higher qualities of the heart and understanding, and in the highest degree, which depend upon, and flow from free-will. God made man upright, free to stand or fall. He listened to the suggestions of the Tempter. He fell, *because* he sinned. He fell because he abused the power

which God had given him to stand. Let not Almighty God be made the author of sin. Let not a God of love be converted, in our foolish imaginations, into a God of hate. As well may we perversely argue that He has endued us with a knowledge of good and evil, in order that we might choose evil rather than good : as well may we argue that in the wonderful mechanism of our bodies, we are to behold only a provision for so much misery, so many instruments of pain and torture, rather than of health and enjoyment.

It is in overruling the dire effects of man's voluntary transgression, and in converting them into a greater blessing, that God is vindicated and exalted as a God of love. "Herein, therefore, is manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him." Had the Almighty interfered in the first instance with man's free will, by preventing his listening to the seductions of the flesh and the devil, it had no doubt been mercy, but infinitely falling below that transcendant display of his love in applying no less a remedy for the evil than the death of his only begotten Son. This we are called upon to consider. "Herein is manifested the love of God." As though the sacred writer

had said, Here is a display worthy of a God of love: herein is this essential attribute most gloriously manifested: here he is exalted above all blessing and praise—in that “he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” It was an act worthy of the same God who created the world, to interpose to save it. Love created, love saved, and restored. God created all things by his Son Jesus Christ. All things shall again be renewed, restored, and harmonized by the same divine person. “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.”

True it is, that God’s essential Justice was also such, as to require a satisfaction for sin; a proper, plenary, although vicarious sacrifice; and that no less than his only begotten Son, “the brightness of his own glory, the express image of his own person.” A God of love, my brethren, must not be confounded with a God of Justice. In the affair of man’s salvation, each attribute holds its proper place, at the same time that they both infinitely harmonize with, and set off each other. God is love, *for the very reason that he is also just*: for the very reason that his love triumphed over his justice, when a due satisfaction had first been made. When we

behold his throne established in righteousness ; Justice accepting satisfaction at the intercession of Mercy—then we properly say that “ God is love,” without imputing weakness to an infinitely wise and perfect being, which we should be guilty of doing, were we to forget that God, though merciful, is also “ righteous and just to forgive us our sins.”

Nor was the love of God in Christ Jesus the effect of any sudden emotion, a change and transition from relentless hate and aversion, to that of love and reconciliation. How can so harsh a supposition be reconciled with the text, or with that further declaration of St. John, namely, that God *so loved* the world as to give his only begotten Son for its redemption ? No, he loved his children, and he loved them from eternity. Our restoration by Christ Jesus was in the mind or counsel of God for innumerable ages before the fall of man required the execution of this scheme of benevolence. This is a truth, not more agreeable to our proper ideas of God’s essential love and foreknowledge, than it is to the doctrine of Scripture. St. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, has these words :—“ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ :

according as he hath chosen us in him *before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love : having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." The formularies of our Church recognize the same doctrine, (Art. XVII.)

II. It remains for me, in the Second place, briefly to apply and enforce the preceding remarks. What then is the practical conclusion to be drawn from this great and glorious doctrine? It is this, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." The words are striking and deserve attention. We might have expected the conclusion to have run thus, "We ought also and in like manner to love *God*." This, however, is supposed, and is afterwards expressed in words, "We love him because he first loved us." How is our love to God shown to be genuine, and such as He will accept at our hands? Only by the love we show to the brethren ; as appears from the verse following: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from Him, That he who

loveth God, love his brother also." No truth can possibly be plainer, or more explicitly laid down in so many words, as well as throughout this Epistle, than, that love to God and love to our brother cannot exist apart. He that loves God, loves his brother. And again, he who loves his brother, loves God—"If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." On the other hand, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments." So far for brotherly love, as it is the indispensable and bounden duty of the true Christian.

Very excellent things are spoken of this divine principle, as it also constitutes the distinctive mark and privilege of every child of light. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whoso doeth not righteousness is not of God, *neither he that loveth not his brother.*" "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." It is brotherly love which assimilates and unites us to God, who is relatively and essentially "Love" in its sublimest and purest form. "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." Then "we walk in the light, as He is in the light." Then only we have fellowship one with another; then only

“the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” There is yet one other characteristic of brotherly love to be noticed. “Herein, says our Evangelist, is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us.” Our love is not made perfect until we have learnt *to love our enemies*. To forgive, to receive, to pray for, to do good to an offending brother, is the surest sign that the love of God is perfected in us—that we love God and keep his commandments. When we can thus overlook our brother’s frailties, from a consideration of God’s love to us in his Son Jesus Christ, and our own manifold offences and infirmities—we have attained the pinnacle of our profession—we adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, and shine as lights in the world.

Finally. What farther schemes and provisions for the future and eternal blessedness of his redeemed children, a God of infinite love may have in store, is a subject upon which our faith may rationally and comfortably expatiate. That most gracious Being, who has all the resources of the universe under his control; and eternity and infinity in which to work the purposes of his will—that Being more especially, “who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely

give us all things?" "Beloved, 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. And every one that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as He is pure." Be it then our study and endeavour, whilst we have the light, to walk in the light as He is in the light: to resemble a God of love here, in order and preparatory to our complete union with Him hereafter.

"To Him, therefore, that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Sermon III.

PROVIDENCE MYSTERIOUS.

PSALM xxxvi. 6.

Thy judgments are a great deep.

To contemplate the movements of Divine Providence, as far as they are visible in their effects, is both the province and the privilege of the christian. Seated on a rock that is higher than ourselves, possessed with a firm and an abiding conviction, "that the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works," it is cheering to our hopes, as well as edifying to our faith, to survey this depth of infinite love and wisdom, even though our limited faculties are unable to fathom it; to look back occasionally, as from an eminence to which our faith and experience have raised us, upon that circuitous path by which a mysterious Providence has

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conducted us through all the changes and chances of this mortal life. Upon every such survey, what a retrospect opens upon the eye of the christian! How circuitous, how various, and even in some cases retrograde, appears to have been the road he has traversed! Ends the most improbable, results the most strange and inconceivable; means apparently the most inadequate; instruments the weakest; turns the most unexpected; incidents the most trifling in themselves, yet the most important and efficient in their connection, crowd upon the mind of the believer. He rises, however, from effects to causes, and from these to the first great cause. Thus, step by step, approaching the throne of infinite power, wisdom, and love, he exclaims with the holy astonishment of the apostle—"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!" Or with the psalmist, in the text, *thy judgments are a great deep*.

Speculations of this nature, piously, humbly, and soberly conducted, are the proper business of true christian philosophy. Such philosophy is the handmaid of true piety, as well as the result of deep christian experience. Thus it is that we are enabled in the fullest manner to

prove, and realize, and appropriate, the cheering and sublime maxim of the apostle—"all things work together for good to them that love God;" and by habituating this truth to our minds, by adjusting the seeming contrarieties of a mysterious, and apparently promiscuous Providence; by reducing, (as far as we have the power) with humility and reverence, the seemingly untoward and contradictory events of this chequered state, into one grand and harmonious whole, into one merciful and benevolent design of wisdom and goodness, projected, carried on, (and hereafter to be consummated,) "according to the good pleasure of his will;" we justify the ways of God to man, and build up ourselves in the knowledge, and love, and practice, of our "most holy faith;" the foundation and keystone of which faith is this, namely, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

But where, my brethren, shall we either begin or end our speculations upon the mysteries of Providence? In a subject so vast and inexhaustible where shall we most profitably fix our attention? God's judgments are not only "a great deep;" but they have a reference and extend to all time, past and future. Like the vision of the inspired Ezekiel, the movements of

Providence, "as it were a wheel in the midst of a wheel," proceed in one and the same steady course, conducting to their respective ends the interests of the universe at large, and of each and every individual composing it, be his rank and condition high or low, rich or poor. The course of this world, notwithstanding its apparent inequalities, is nevertheless, by the counsel and the hand of Omnipotence, so wisely ordered, and conducted, as best to subserve the higher and ulterior interests of his kingdom of grace. Here is sown the seed of that kingdom; and all the events and circumstances of this lower world, alike co-operate in their respective degrees, to ripen and mature it;—are alike moulded by infinite wisdom, "according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

Considerations however like these, belong more properly to those master-minds which delight to trace the movements of divine Providence as they relate to a vast and a complicated scheme. These persons see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. But yet is there a task, and a profitable task, reserved for persons of humbler capacities, for every serious and thoughtful christian, to trace the hand of God in all the circumstances and

events, which befall himself, be they prosperous or adverse; lowering or cheerful. We have all and each of us somewhat to say of the wise and gracious dealings of Providence with ourselves. And whoso is wise will ponder these things, and he shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord. Whilst people of the world either take no notice of Providence, or if they do, call it by a name little better or more intelligible than *chance* or *fate*; the humble christian refers even the minutest events that befall him, (provided that they at all affect his happiness and condition as such) to the will and pleasure of his heavenly Father; believing that he does all things well, and that fate and chance, (terms expressive only of ignorance and stupid indifference to the workings of Providence,) have no place whatever in the works and dealings of Him with whom he has to do.

The world may deem this enthusiasm. Holy Scripture, in addition to, and in proof of, the Christian's experience, shows that it is not. The most cursory reader of the sacred volume will be at no loss to find the doctrine of a special, as well as of an universal Providence abundantly, distinctly, and unequivocally recognised: and not only recognised, but as fully proved, confirmed and exemplified in the lives of those holy

persons, with whose history we have been conversant from our childhood. Shall I select the eventful and chequered lives of Abraham, of Jacob, of Joseph, for the purpose of convincing the sceptic that though God oftentimes leads his people "in paths which they have not known," yet that "all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth?" Can there be a stronger proof of the doctrine we are considering, than that which the case of the royal psalmist himself supplies? Few persons, I imagine, had so much reason to know and feel by long-tried experience, as David, that "God's judgments are a great deep?" Or shall I speak of the strange reverses of Job? of Daniel?—yea "to which of all the saints wilt thou turn?" All of whose remarkable and eventful histories, whether we view them jointly or separately, seem to have been recorded for the purpose of illustrating "the manifold wisdom of God," and his high and exclusive prerogative of bringing good out of evil; whether he effect his purposes by means and methods the most simple, or the most complicated and circuitous; or by *an union and combination of what is simple with what is complicated*; as in the case of one to whose history I have just alluded, that of Joseph. Here, if I mistake not, are united a simplicity of incident level to the capacity of a

child, with a plan worthy of the attention and admiration of a philosopher; means, as I observed, the most simple, adapted and fitted by infinite wisdom, to ends and results the most important and extensive. And the same may be said of those other histories relating to individuals above adduced, yea more or less, of all the eminent and illustrious servants of God recorded in the Old Testament. One such example is an abundant illustration of the doctrine of a special Providence.

With these most edifying narratives in your eye, I would ask you, do not your own lives and circumstances, my brethren, supply, if not a parallel, at least something similar to what these saints of old experienced under the dealings of Providence? Have *you* nothing to say of the wisdom and goodness of God? No altars to raise, no memorials to erect of his love and guidance of you and your affairs, at the different turns and stages of your lives? Which of you, in looking back for instance, upon some mysterious Providence, has not been ready, on the discovery of the divine mercy towards himself, to exclaim, with pious Jacob, "surely God was in this place," his hand was at work in this transaction, "and I knew it not!" Which of you has not recorded the overflowing feelings of

a grateful heart, on the receipt of some signal blessing from above, if not in the precise words, at least the same tone of thanksgiving, with the religious patriarch? "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands." (Gen. 32. 10.)

Have you, on the other hand, been visited by some sore and lingering affliction: wave after wave perhaps rolling over you; trial after trial, in every shape; and you have been ready to cry out in the anguish of your soul, 'Lord show me wherefore thou contendest with me?' If affliction have done its work in you, and you have been attentive in observing the ways and manner of God's dealings in that particular instance, you are now, as from a distance, enabled to view the causes of those trials in their true light. You now see, (what you did not so distinctly discern when under their immediate pressure,) that they formed so many links in a hidden chain by which a kind Providence was conducting you from sin and misery to happiness and peace. Ye were, perhaps, as children tossed to and fro; wavering betwixt God and the world. And in this state of irresolution you had still continued, had not He, with the merciful de-

sign of a true parent, led and attached you to Himself by methods which ye knew not then when ye knew not God, nor the reasons of such discipline : just as a child comprehends not the full meaning of parental chastisement, nor sees how or in what way it shall conduce to his eventual good. Now, however, by comparing the former state of your ignorance with the self-knowledge you have attained to by the transforming process of divine grace, slow perhaps (like all other operations of Providence, at least as *we* count slackness) but sure ; severe, but salutary ; so far from complaining that your way was dark, and that Providence led you through by-paths, you rather rejoice in this feature of the dispensation, inasmuch as you now know by experience, that His ways are not your ways, nor His thoughts your thoughts. You can now understand, that had your path been smooth, and strewed with flowers, you had loved this present world instead of God : and in the plenitude of sensual enjoyment, and carnal security, would have been ready to exclaim, ‘It is good for me to be here. Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.’ This had been your feeling, rather than that derived from “the wisdom which is from above ;”—‘It is good for me

to have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes. Before I was afflicted I went astray ; but now have I kept thy word.' Happy, thrice happy Christian, thus to be taught of God : thus threading, as it were, the mazes of Providence, at length to triumph in Christ, in loving God, and in knowing thyself ! Hence, with the Apostle, you "glory in tribulations : knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope : " a hope that maketh not ashamed, that deceives not the long tried, disciplined, approved Christian. You rest not your peace and serenity upon one or two moral victories achieved over the enemies of your salvation, but on perpetual warfare, a series of conquests, and not on any one great decisive blow. You know the hidden virtue of those words of holy writ, " We must through *much* tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven." We are not made *perfect* but by suffering. And whereas the sincere follower of Christ is content with nothing less than perfection, that is, a sincere desire to do the whole will of God, and to be holy in all manner of conversation ; you patiently, yea, joyfully, acquiesce in whatever dispensation God may see good to adopt respecting you.

The key, then, that unlocks to the Christian's

view the designs of a merciful though mysterious Providence is, in one word, Faith :—a deep, and rational, and experimental conviction of the power, the wisdom, the love of God, made known to him in his Son Jesus Christ. And such a faith supposes and includes, first, a spirit of simple reliance upon, and tranquil acquiescence in, the absolute right which a Scripturally revealed God, as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, exeroises over him ; that he is, in consequence, not his own, but God's ; bought with no less a price than the blood of his Son Jesus Christ. It includes, secondly, a conviction that even in his most trying dispensation he has none other end in view than the Christian's complete happiness ; the entire emancipation of his soul from the slavery of corrupt nature, the world, the flesh, and the devil. And thirdly, in all cases, but especially in such where he is at a loss to understand God's design in this or that dispensation—in such cases it is the province as well as the improvement of this heaven-implemented principle of a divine faith, implicitly to submit and reconcile itself thereto : to give up ourselves and our affairs to that safe Guide whom the winds and the sea obey, who has all the resources of the universe at his command, and who will explain to us so much of

our course as shall be consistent with the exercise of our faith and patience.

Do I then address but one such individual, one over whom God at present hangs the dark mantle of his Providence, concealing his secret end and purpose from his view in thick clouds and darkness—does it require a greater stretch of faith, a higher measure of patience than you seem to yourself to possess, in order that you may be able to bear up your head above the waters?—Bear up notwithstanding. Go on, though it be in darkness respecting his Providence. One thing is clear, namely, that as you have Scriptural grounds for believing that God loves you, *because* he thus chastens you, so also that you love God, *if you keep his commandments*. If the prayer of your heart be that he would make your ways so direct that you might keep his statutes, you cannot go wrong. Be assured that nothing befalls you that has the slightest reference to your peace here and happiness hereafter, but God is the doer of it. *The very hairs of your head are all numbered.*

But still I hear you say, you are unable in your affliction, to discern what proceeds from God and what arises from man, or is the effect of second causes, merely human agency, and therefore dismally conclude that you are under the

power and caprice of him "whose breath is in his nostrils."—O thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt? "I will answer thee; that God is greater than man." "The Lord hath made all things for himself." They serve him; they are subject to the controul of Himself, the great first cause and mover of all. By these He ordinarily acts. These are so many visible instruments in the hand of an invisible agent. And therefore it is the duty of faith to look through and beyond these; even up to Him "who ruleth in the kingdoms of men," and ordereth all things both in heaven and in earth.

As, to lean too *much* to second causes, in scanning the ways and methods of Providence towards us, is a proof of a want of faith—so also is there danger of incurring presumption in looking too *little* to second causes. Are there not cases in which, when about to take any important step in life, we are too apt to throw our cares entirely upon Providence, only as an excuse for not stirring ourselves or employing our own exertions? The Christian's rule herein, (if he would avoid the presumption of tempting God) is, that in every question of duty and conduct, he be careful so to use his own endeavours as though all the success of his plans depended thereon : so to trust in Providence as though

his own exertions were as nothing. To the ignorance of this rule, or the want of duly applying it, is owing the error of many who plead *a call of Providence* for most steps they take in life, when, in fact, they are merely following their own inclinations, the bent of their own wayward fancies. Now, my brethren, would we avoid the danger of hypocrisy, we shall be cautious how we plead a call of Providence, till we have, (and that *in the first instance*,) honestly and impartially, and to the full extent, employed all those *outward* means by which human ends are ordinarily accomplished, and by which our consciences may be safely assured that the thing is of God, or not contrary to his will. For conscience is the voice of God speaking within us, guiding our conduct, confirming our decisions. When we have done this, and spreading the matter fairly, and frequently, and humbly before God in prayer, have resigned ourselves to his will and direction, saying, ‘What wouldst thou have me to do?’—then, and not till then, we may reasonably assure ourselves that we have a call of Providence for what we do, in the step we are about to take; and that, however it succeed—all will be well in the end.

Be it then the business of our lives to eye Providence in all things. In all His dealings

with us, let us endeavour, by faith, and repentance, and prayer, to understand His gracious designs respecting us. Especially should we do this, when His judgments are upon us, and His hand presses us sore. *Then* to search out our spirits, to look well if there be any way of wickedness in us, any sin to be eradicated, any virtue to be strengthened, any good habit to be formed and perfected ; this is to fall in with the designs of Providence, and to convert the dispensation into the greatest blessing that could have been vouchsafed to us. Such persons God may vex with all his storms, all his waves may go over them : but such He will never leave nor forsake. All things shall work together for good to them that love God. All things are yours, if ye are Christ's. The godly man He hath set apart for Himself. He fashioneth all the hearts of men. Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. Hold on faith and patience Lean on the arm of the beloved. "What thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter." When thou shalt "see Him as He is," thou shalt also understand, (what is wisely withheld from thee now,) all the mysteries of his providence. The crooked shall then be made straight, the rough places be made smooth. "Here we see through a glass darkly."

In heaven “ they sing the song of Moses, and of the lamb, saying, great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty ; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints !”

Sermon IV.

THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THE POOR.

MATTHEW II. 5.

The poor have the Gospel preached unto them.

AMONG the predicted signs of the coming of Christ in the flesh to teach men righteousness, and to die for their sins, was this mentioned in the text, that the Gospel should be preached to the poor. Accordingly our Lord takes to himself those prophecies which went before concerning him, in order to show that he really was the Christ who should come ; the desire of all nations, so long expected and looked for in the world. We read in St. Luke's Gospel, that when he had sat down in the

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synagogue at Nazareth to instruct the people, "There was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised'."

In order to show in what way the Gospel in its full meaning and blessing belongs to the poor, we will consider its particular suitableness to their state, hopes and condition.

"The poor have the Gospel preached unto them." The word "poor" has more meanings in scripture than one. And first, in its more usual acceptation, it signifies the needy and necessitous; those who have but a small and scanty supply of the things belonging to this life. A large majority of such there shall always be in the world, to the end of time. "The poor ye have always with you," said our Lord. They form a large class, springing out of the very nature of things, the condition of mankind, and the state of society. But as these relative states and conditions owe their existence to Almighty God, we must suppose that it is a

strictly *divine appointment* that some should be rich and others poor. It is not more true, therefore, that "the poor shall never cease out of the land," than that "the poor have the Gospel preached to them." It is peculiarly, and by a peculiar appointment, a special adaptation, the poor's. Had not, however, the Gospel of good tidings of great joy been more immediately designed for the poor in the above sense, it were easy to show that it is full of comfort, and that of a kind particularly suited to their condition. The question with them is, not in what way the Gospel shall make them rich in a worldly sense, but how their condition may be rendered as supportable and comfortable as possible under wants and privations. And this the Gospel does for them. It confers not riches, but it teaches patience, it gives contentment under the pressure of poverty. And "godliness with contentment is great gain," says the Apostle; and he adds, as the best possible reason why the poor should be contented as well as the rich humble and charitable, those striking words, namely, *for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.* So that though the Gospel of Christ may not alter our condition, yet if it teaches us to be content therewith, and to bring our mind to that condition, it is great gain. You

have learned a lesson which the rich have too often to learn; for the tendency of riches unsanctified to the possessor, is to render him rather anxious after more, than contented with what he hath; and so to multiply wants rather than to satisfy them. And he that is always wanting something, rich though he be, is, as to unsatisfied desires, always poor.

The Gospel is also preached and full of comfort to the poor, inasmuch as they are more at liberty, for the above reason, to receive and embrace it in all its truth and simplicity. They lose none of its comfort by mixing it with, and so in fact lessening it by, the pleasures and temptations of the world. They have no interest at stake of a nature and sufficiency to keep from their view the momentous concerns of the soul and eternity. As sense is opposed to faith, and sensual pleasures and present delights, to those which are purely spiritual and future; their views are necessarily more exclusively directed to the latter. The rich would "serve two masters, God and Mammon." The poor are free from this temptation. Having no portion in the things of this life, they have a greater interest in that Gospel which offers them a life of immortal happiness, and durable riches by Jesus Christ. The rich "have received their consolation:" that of the

poor is to come, is in reversion. The Gospel contains their title thereto; the scriptures of truth are their title-deeds, and will be prized and valued accordingly.

There is also another important respect wherein the Gospel is more especially preached to the poor, viz: that they have not the same prejudices against its humbling doctrines as the rich too often entertain. Riches are apt to engender pride and a worldly spirit; both of which are enemies to the right reception of the Gospel. Lifted up with high notions of their own worth and sufficiency, the rich come not to Christ in that simplicity of heart and entire dependence upon what He has done and suffered for them, which the poor are inclined to do. "Lord help me!" "I am poor and in misery, but the Lord careth for me," is the cry of the poor dependent destitute. On this account we find the Apostle observing to the Corinthians. "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 those which are despised, hath God chosen,

yea, and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence." And St. James, "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?"

We have seen that the Gospel belongs and is preached to the indigent and necessitous as regards the things of this world, and is especially suited to their condition.

But secondly, by the poor in the text are meant the *spiritually* poor; "the poor in spirit;" they who, as sinners against the law of God, feel their utter inability to help themselves, or to atone for their sins; and who therefore fly to the cross of Christ, to the hope set before them in the gospel, for pardon and salvation. To all such the Gospel is preached. To you, my brethren, who are thus spiritually poor and helpless, we, the Ministers and Ambassadors of Christ address ourselves. We hail you in the words of our Lord to his disciples, with "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye that mourn for your sins, for ye shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek and lowly of heart, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are ye which do hunger

and thirst after righteousness, for ye shall be filled." We address you in the words of Peter and John to the poor cripple ; " Silver and gold have we none; but such as we have we give thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." All ye that labour and are heavy laden under a sense of guilt and a burdened conscience, we bid you come to Christ, and he will give you rest. His blood cleanseth you from all sin. He satisfieth the righteous judgment of God upon your innumerable transgressions. He has paid your debts to offended justice, and reconciled you to God by the blood of his cross. " He filleth the hungry with good things, and the rich He sendeth empty away." For your sakes He became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich. Though the Son of the most high God, and partaking of all the glory of the Father, yet He emptied and " made himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." He accepteth no man's *person*. Have thou but upon thee the marks of a true, penitent, godly sorrow for sin, and faith in Christ as the only atoning sacrifice for sin, and thy poverty shall recommend thee to his notice and regard. Be thou but

a sorrowing disciple, though the very lowest and meanest, and thou shalt receive a disciple's reward. If thou come to the feet of Jesus, and bathe them with thy tears, and have but "the hair of thy head" to wipe them, thy love and faith shall be memorialized and recorded on high, and be rewarded before men and angels. He shall "give unto you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness: that ye might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord." Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time. Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you. He will never leave thee nor forsake thee. "I have been young, says the psalmist, and now am old, and yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread." "Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich." Although poor in this world's esteem, your's are the unsearchable riches of Christ. Your's a gospel of peace and comfort: forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified. We no where in scripture read *Blessed are the rich*; on the contrary, they affirm "they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which

drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil ; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." They only can read their title clear to what Christ has done and suffered for them, who are rich in faith and good works. Who live by faith, and not by sight: who are not possessed of their inheritance, but through patience wait for it. Who hunger and thirst after righteousness; not those who are full in this world, and have received their consolation, and who look for no more durable possessions than what this world affords; who trust in uncertain riches, rather than in the living God. Woe to all such. Ye have drained the cup of this world's good; ye have lived in pleasure upon the earth; ye have neglected seeking the pearl of great price, and frittered away your eternal salvation, forgetful of the true riches. These, so far from being rich, though surrounded with the good things of this life, and faring sumptuously every day—"surely they are poor; they are foolish, for they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God." "Go to, now," says St. James, "ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your

garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire." Such is the woe that awaits unsanctified, abused riches. I say *abused*. For riches, like poverty, may prove a blessing in the hands of him who uses them for God, as a good steward of his manifold grace. Blessed, thrice blessed are *ye* rich! Ye shine as lights in the world. Ye "provide bags which wax not old, a treasure which is in heaven." But when riches are not so used, not so dispensed, not so blessed; no language can describe the misery and condemnation of that wicked and thoughtless servant, when he shall be called to give an account of his stewardship.

Let us therefore attend to the third description of poor, for whom also the preaching of the Gospel was designed: such as are in another, but a very different sense with the last mentioned, spiritually poor; being destitute of saving grace: though without knowing it. Such are they who trust for acceptance with God to something in themselves, the merit of their own good works, their blameless lives, and innocent conversation; and have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God, or that method of salvation which he has set forth in his Son Jesus

Christ. Good works, my brethren, and a good life, flowing from faith in Christ, and as fruits thereof, so far from being of no importance, are indispensably necessary to salvation, inasmuch as "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." But if we lay a stress upon them, a weight which they were never intended to bear, by making our works the *cause* of our justification before God, and of our being reconciled to Him, and absolved from the guilt of our past transgressions, we convert our good works to an end foreign from their primary and principal design, as the *condition*, not the cause of our salvation; we put ourselves in the place of Christ, and make the merit of his death and sacrifice utterly nugatory, and of none effect. In vain is the Gospel preached to you, except ye confess yourselves to be poor. In vain do we preach to you that Christ died for your sins, if even your *best* works may save you. This, my brethren, is a dangerous delusion. "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But "because thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of *me* gold tried in the fire,

that thou mayest be rich ; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed ; and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear ; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. (Revelations iii. 17. 18.)

You then that are rich, and think to reign without Christ, cast away your fancied righteousness, and throw yourselves wholly and entirely upon his merits and righteousness. Accept of his perfect righteousness, and God will mercifully accept, for his sake, your imperfect obedience, the deficiencies of your best works and services. Come to Him, even to your Saviour, hungering and thirsting after a better righteousness than any of your own, and ye shall be filled. Whatever course we are pursuing, short of coming to Christ for pardon and sanctification, and redemption, we are yet in darkness and know not the truth, we are skinning over the wounds which sin has made, and rejecting that alone and perfect remedy, made known to us by the Gospel which is preached unto us.

But forasmuch as there is not a more fatal hindrance in the way of coming to Christ than "*the love of money*," the bane of all religion, the enemy altogether of every serious thought respecting the ultimate destination of man ; do ye

trust in riches? be persuaded to become poor that you may be made rich. Sell all that you have and follow Christ, rather than venture your souls, and trust your eternal welfare on so brittle a good. "Riches profit not in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivereth from death." They make to themselves wings and fly away, and leave the bewildered possessor infinitely the poorer for having once had them. Be persuaded then, it deserves your diligence, and that without delay, to seek for something that may be durable enough to abide with you, and strong enough to uphold you in all conditions ; and that alone is the Gospel which is preached to you. To the school of Christ all must come spiritually poor. From it all depart rich ; made heirs with God, and joint-heirs with Christ. His is the light which can pierce the darkest dungeon, from which all other lights and comforts are shut out, and can convert the hovel of the poor into a palace. If therefore ye place your happiness in God here ; in Him ye shall have it hereafter, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. But if ye place your happiness in the things of this world, where will it be, when the world shall depart like a scroll, and there shall be no place found for it? Happy they whose hope is in the Lord their

God; who have built their foundation upon the rock of ages; have transferred their hopes and happiness to heaven, and whose hearts are with their treasures, and surely there fixed, where true joys are to be found, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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Sermon V.

HEZEKIAH AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH.

2 KINGS XIX. 14.

And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the House of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord.

HEZEKIAH was a good man, though descended from a bad father. And cheering it is to be told, after so many wicked and idolatrous kings of Judah, that "he did that which was *right* in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father," that is, his ancestor and predecessor upon the throne, "had done." Thus it often happens, that when things are reduced to extremities, and "the faithful are minished from among the children of men," God raises

up some one or more of distinguished goodness and piety, to maintain the honour of his name and religion; and designed, like salt to purify the whole mass, and to keep it from perishing.

Such was Hezekiah. He sets about the reformation of religion in good earnest. With him kindred was as nothing, when compared with the duty he owed to Him who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The father's idolatries shall not prevent the piety of the son. Accordingly we read, that "he removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made, for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it; and he called it Nehush-tan. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following Him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses. And the Lord was with him, and he prospered whithersoever he went forth."

And so shall He ever be with those who "confess Him before men," who uphold His honour in the midst of a sinful generation, even in opposition to power, interest, or kindred. "Whosoever," says our blessed Lord, "loveth

father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me." Dear and respected as are those sacred ties of relationship, we are not bound even by *them*, we are loosed from the law of a father or a mother, if they command us any thing wicked or irreligious; or attempt to shake the children's faith, and trust in God. And this is the meaning of our Saviour's rule.

Hezekiah, however, notwithstanding these acts of piety, like every other true servant of God, and like David, his predecessor in goodness and in suffering, had his troubles; for he had also his weaknesses. His heart was on one or two occasions lifted up with pride, and dazzled with the appearance of regal pomp and splendour. God therefore raised him up enemies, as well to punish the wickedness of his people, as to try what was in his heart, and to discover to him its treachery and sin. Happy, yea blessed trials, if they produce their intended effects; if they bring us back to God, our duty, and ourselves! And such was their effect on Hezekiah.

In the chapter before us we witness the excellency of his conduct, the strength of his faith and piety, on a very trying occasion. Israel was already in captivity; and he also and his people are threatened with the same evil. His very

walls are surrounded by the immense army who had carried away Israel. The same enemy whom he had before bought off with great treasures, and, (what was harder still to his pious mind,) with all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord, is at his gates. And, contrary to all faith, and to the agreement subsisting between them, Sennacherib sends to him to demand the surrender of himself and his people.

Nothing is so unreasonable as man. If, like this good Hezekiah, we comply with their demands, especially if we have gone so far as to give up to them (what ought ever to be dearer to us than life itself,) some of our *religious* principles and opinions, demands will soon increase upon us. For there are always some persons, quick-sighted enough to perceive, whether we are of a firm spirit, or on the contrary, are made but of *yielding* materials ; and they will accordingly either relinquish their hold upon us, or else follow up the blow, and be content with nothing less than a total surrender of ourselves, our judgment, our consciences ; yea, more—of our religion and our God. Look to it, therefore, my Christian brethren, well. Be firm. “ Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” Let no man take *thy* crown ! Let no man rob you of your God !

For this, I repeat, will ever be the danger of those who, in the midst of surrounding impiety, and degenerating morals, dare to be *singular*, in the cause of religion. It was the situation of Hezekiah. Yet though he before yielded too far, he now saw his error and retrieved it. He trusted in the Lord God and clave to him. This the Assyrian saw was his strong hold, and therefore he tries him in this point, by endeavouring to undermine his trust and faith in God, and then he well knew all besides would prove an easy conquest.

But, to give a colour to his injustice, as well as to facilitate his designs upon Hezekiah, he pretends a divine commission for invading him. "Am I now come up *without the Lord* against this place to destroy it? *The Lord said to me, go up against this land, and destroy it.*" Had this indeed been the case, Hezekiah might with too much reason have trembled. For how should he stand out against his God? "But he *lied* to him." He had no such commission. And thus it is, that Satan himself, by transforming himself into an angel of light, beguiles unstable souls. Thus, with the words of Scripture in his mouth, having war in his heart, he assailed, he conquered, he ruined our first parent. And thus he every day, and every

where goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. There are too many in this, our day, who like the arch-enemy of souls lie in wait to deceive—who come to you in sheeps'-clothing, but inwardly are raving wolves. But by their *fruits*, not their words, ye shall know them.

If men, my brethren, do but pretend *religion* for the advice they give us, and under the garb of sanctity, and the words of Scripture, slip in their dangerous insinuations into our minds, with the secret design and hope of loosening our hold upon the rock of ages, and of getting us finally to renounce the Lord that bought us and redeemed us, and the Holy Ghost the Comforter, who sanctifies us ; we are in far greater danger of being caught in the snare so artfully laid for our souls, and of giving up the sacred cause of God, than if such persons made no pretensions to religion at all. Boldly and at once to avow their disbelief of the great truths of the Gospel, they well know would shock us and put us on our guard. They therefore pretend, as I said, religion. And it must be confessed, that religion was never, perhaps, more in people's mouths than it is at the present day, (would that its effects upon the heart and life were but as general and visible !) but never, notwithstanding,

were plots more deeply laid for the unwary and ignorant, or baits more artfully concealed than at present. Infidelity sculks about our streets and lanes in disguise.* And where it is not actually avowed (and many I am persuaded would be shocked to avow it, and on the contrary profess to be Christians and believers in God's word,) yet do not the lives and actions of too many boldly proclaim, at least that they *practically* deny the Lord that bought them, living as they do without hope, and without God in the world? And in case our land were in the same situation as Hezekiah's, would not the lives of such, thus too visibly conformable with the designs and principles of avowed infidels, seem to cry aloud in the words of Sennacherib's idolatrous messengers, "let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the kings of Assyria. Behold thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly, and shalt thou be delivered?" This is a species of blasphemy and practical infidelity, which, if it be not avowed in words nor secretly instilled into the mind of the

* When this was written, designing persons were in the habit of hawking infidel pamphlets from door to door among the poorer classes. The practice may possibly still continue.

unstable and thoughtless, yet is not the less appalling: inasmuch as the professing to know and believe the truths of Christianity, and so fearfully to contradict them in practice, is to call down the vengeance of an offended God upon the land.

But to return to Hezekiah. In what manner does he receive the blasphemous words of the idolatrous Assyrian? Like a true son of God, deeply concerned for his honour; yea, even wounded to the quick, and fearful of the effects, he sends to the prophet of the Lord to bespeak his intercession with heaven; with this afflicting message: "This is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and *blasphemy*. It may be the Lord our God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh, with which he has reproached the living God; and will reprove the words which the Lord our God hath heard. Wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left."

Thus piously does he commend the affair to the prayers, as it were, of the Church. For himself, we are told, "and Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord." He might have summoned a council of state, and gathered the elders of the people together to deliberate

what was best to be done in so great an exigency. But no, a greater than himself, the King of Kings, the God of the armies of the earth had been insulted, and his glorious name abused. *His* honour is at stake. He repairs, therefore, to the house of the Lord, and with the obnoxious letter open before him, he gives vent to his feelings in prayer. "Bow down thine ear and hear : open Lord, thine eyes and see : and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God." Would, my brethren, that not only kings of the earth, but all people, each in his several and individual capacity, would thus "conspire to praise the name of the Lord," to vindicate his ways, and to maintain his honour in the world ! That each and all of us, not only would make religion his own personal concern, his ground of comfort in life, and of hope in death ; but would lend some portion of his time, his talent, his influence, and above all, *his example*, towards checking that torrent of sin and profligacy which threatens to overflow *our* Israel. For too true it is, that notwithstanding all that is said, (and I would fain hope, *truly* said,) of the rapid increase of light and knowledge ; *iniquity abounds*, and vice and crime of every description also increase to a fearful extent ; so that hell seems to be enlarging her

borders. O then for the spirit of Hezekiah : yea for a *double* portion of his spirit that we of this Christian land may spread the matter before the Lord, and implore him to look down from heaven, and behold and visit this vine. " Now therefore, O Lord our God, we beseech thee, to save thou us out of the hand of Infidelity, the bane of thy Church, and from sin, the disease and disgrace of thy people!"

I have thus far considered the example of Hezekiah with reference to his public character. But to public character *private* must ever be subsidiary. Hezekiah had not shone with such lustre as a king, had he not laid the foundation in private religion. This was the secret supply which rendered him so burning and shining a light. And would we, my brethren, let our light shine effectually before men, to the glory of God and the benefit of the community, private religion—the religion of the *heart* ; the religion of the closet ; the religion of the family, must feed the flame and keep it burning. We cannot even attempt to check sin in others unless we lay the axe to the root of our own vices. We cannot recommend religion to others unless we cultivate it ourselves. We cannot " contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints," unless it produce in our own lives the

peaceable fruits of righteousness. Unless religion be our own governing principle—unless *our own* lives be such, in every respect, as we recommend to others, they will give our words and public actions the lie: there will appear to be more of worldly policy and craft in all we say or do for religion, than a real zeal for the glory of God, and a sincere interest in the welfare of our fellow creatures.

Private religion and personal holiness are what men will look to: not to how we preach or how we *talk*, but how we *live*: not to what we are outwardly in the sight of men, but inwardly and before God. And the most effectual means of promoting holiness is unquestionably *prayer*. “Pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.” I would in this place, and from the subject I am treating of in this discourse, more particularly be understood by prayer to mean, *a habit of referring, not only public, but every private event to God*. To a truly pious mind, nothing is without its importance; nothing can happen to us which has even the smallest reference to our conduct as Christians, and as candidates for immortality, which may not, which ought not, to be made the subject of prayer. We have already seen in what manner

this pious king referred the public concerns of himself and people to God. *He spread the letter before the Lord* in prayer.

The prevailing habit of Hezekiah's mind appears also remarkably in a matter of an entirely *private* nature between God and his own soul. The prophet Isaiah has recorded his divine composition on the occasion.—“ The writing of Hezekiah, king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered from his sickness : ‘ I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave : I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living : I shall behold man no more, with the inhabitants of the world. Mine age is departed and is removed from me, as a shepherd's tent : I have cut off like a weaver my life : he will cut me off with pining sickness : from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. What shall I say ? He hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it : I shall go softly all my days in the bitterness of my soul. Behold, for peace I had great bitterness : but thou hast, in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption : for thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back. For the grave cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee : they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy

truth. The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day : the father to the children shall make known thy truth."

In all our distresses, we shall find it a mighty alleviation to retire from the world which troubles us, into our own hearts and closets, and there spread the matter, whatever it be, before the Lord, and pour out our hearts before Him. This truly is the house of God, and this the gate of heaven ; and none of us, my brethren, can long breathe that air without being the better for it. No man can say, that in the few moments he spends to himself and to God in sincere and humble prayer, but that the world, with all its affronts and vexations, vanish from his view. He rises above it. He stands above it. Clouds of anxious thoughts and cares it is true are at his feet, and await his descent from this mount of God ; but his heart is set above them, and trusteth in the Lord ; they have lost their power of hurting and discomposing his mind. He rejoices as though he rejoiced not ; he weeps as though he wept not. He has the same feelings and passions as the rest of mankind, but prayer has sanctified and subdued them. Consequently the objects that once disquieted him, no longer give him the same uneasiness. He has a friend to whom he flies for refuge ; to Him

he tells his griefs, and lays open the causes of his disquietude. And in such circumstances, we know, when the heart is full and the spirit vexed, it is no small relief to unburthen ourselves, and to tell our griefs even to one, like ourselves, who has little or no power to help us. Could we but be prevailed upon, in our difficulties, to "cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils," and, instead of "conferring with flesh and blood" to fly, *in the first instance* to God, and to lay the matter before Him, we should, oftener than we do, return with an answer of peace.

Had good Hezekiah trusted to an arm of flesh, rather than in Him who liveth for ever, who is king of kings and lord of lords, the day had not been his. His fears brought him to his knees: his faith led him to God; and his prayer more than did its work. Well contented as he would have been to have seen the enemy on their return to their own country, and his land once more free from these fierce invaders, his prayer was more than victorious: it brought death and the destroying angel to his assistance. Whilst he is giving sleep to his eyes, in the peaceable hope that God had heard his desire, the battle is fought—the deed is done by an invisible hand.—The morning rolled away the shadows of night only to disclose the pale and livid corpses of that vast army that,

but the preceding day, would have swallowed up Jerusalem ;—all is now still as the grave !

And shall the prayer of faith accomplish such mighty deeds as this, and is it insufficient to grapple with smaller matters. No, my brethren, “in all these things that trouble us here below, we are more than conquerors, through him that hath loved us.” Whatever be your peculiar situation, trial or temptation, (and commonly each person thinks his own to be the greatest) be it such as is utterly out of the power of human skill to rescue you from ; should even the enemy of your souls come in like a flood, we have the assurance of our merciful Redeemer, that “greater is He that is in *you* than he that is in the world ;” that is, if ye are his children, if ye are of God, and have overcome the world. “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world : and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God ? And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life ; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us : and if we know that

he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." If God be thus for us, who then can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him, also freely give us all things? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us. For 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 us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Commit then thy way unto the Lord, and He shall bring it to pass. Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you. Roll it over upon Him in faith and prayer, and be assured that "He, who is always more ready to hear than we to pray, and is wont to give more than either we desire or deserve, will put his shoulder to the burthen, and will finally, for the merits of his Son Jesus Christ, "make all things work together for good" to as many as love Him.

Sermon VI.

CHRIST THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

JOHN x. 11.

Jesus said, I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

IN order to understand the beauty and propriety of many figures of speech employed in the Holy Scriptures, attention must be paid to the customs and manners which prevailed among the people to whom they were severally addressed. The numerous hills of Judea afforded so many natural facilities for the breeding of sheep and other gregarious animals. It was consequently a common occupation. And where almost every person was a shepherd, it was both natural as well as instructive to be

addressed in language, similies and figures, which had a reference to what they so well understood, that so their ideas might naturally be led on to the comprehension of what they did not know.

This was our Lord's manner of teaching upon all occasions. In the passage before us, he styles himself the good shepherd. "I am the good shepherd." It presents an amiable picture of our blessed Lord, and of the religion he came into the world to teach ; to behold him upon this and other occasions, recommending himself and his doctrine by terms savouring of humility, love, peace. And surely nothing more powerfully bespeaks the divine authority of both, than their being characterised eminently by qualities so little calculated to ensure a popular reception among mankind ; and their making their way in opposition to deep-rooted prejudice, the selfish passions of our nature, fire and sword ; so as to be at length believed on in the world, and received as coming from God.

When our Lord made his humble entry into the world at Bethlehem, there was nothing of a worldly nature to announce it, nothing showy, noisy, or magnificent. Born in a manger, at night, without observation, (save the "rude wonder" of shepherds,) the heavenly host proclaimed before him, nothing more, "than glory

to God in the highest, and on earth *peace*, good will towards men." Words of the highest and most divine import, but unmeaning, and perhaps homely in sound to the ears of men.

His life and doctrine were of the same unobtrusive, peaceful description. He uttered not his voice in the streets; He inculcated upon his disciples the meek, retired, lowly graces, which characterised himself. "Blessed are the poor in spirit;" "blessed are the peacemakers;" was the language with which he ushered his doctrine into the world. And when he was retiring from the world, *peace* was the legacy he bequeathed to his disciples. Nay, even when he had overcome death, and vanquished the insolent malice of his enemies, he assumes no more state or consequence than he did before his triumph—"peace be unto you," was the gracious recognition he gave his disciples after his resurrection.

The above remarks, serve to show that the true spirit of Christianity is lowly and peaceable: "learn of me," said its divine author, "for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls:" and that it is consequently opposed to the high and lofty notions of mankind, and to that wisdom of the world, which the apostle tells us is foolishness with

God. "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 that 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. That no flesh should glory in his presence."

In exact accordance with the above character of his doctrine, under the title of the good shepherd, we have a lovely picture of the grace and condescension of our incarnate Redeemer. "I am the good shepherd : the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep." Is it possible for words to represent in a livelier, more affecting, more touching point of view, that lowliness of heart, that devotedness to the happiness of man, which marked his character, than the figure before us conveys? Is it possible that any other argument can affect us, any other motive prevail with us to embrace the Lord Jesus in all his offices, of friend, intercessor, prophet, priest, and king, if this, here set forth, affect us not, and produce not its full impression upon our hearts and lives? Surely not. And

our Lord himself thought so, when he said, "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend." And if a mortal like ourselves can give no higher proof, no greater demonstration of his attachment, than that of substituting his life for his friend, the argument receives an infinite weight, and comes home with overwhelming force and conviction to our hearts, when we bear in mind, that under the character of the good shepherd is shadowed forth, the eternal Son of God. St. Paul argues the matter in the same way, by an appeal to our feelings as men, in the fifth chapter to the Romans: "and hope," saith he, "maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us:" that is, we have every thing to hope from the love of such a Redeemer: "for," he adds, "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely (appealing to human friendships) for a righteous man," a merely just upright man, "will one die: yet, peradventure, for a good man," a generous person, a kind-hearted benefactor, "some would *even dare* to die;" an expression savouring of doubt and hesitation, even in a case which should seem to demand as a debt so strong a proof of gratitude and friend-

ship. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, (and consequently not friends, but enemies,) Christ died for us."

Behold then the love of our good shepherd. He laid down his life for the sheep; sheep, moreover, to use St. Peter's expression, "who were going astray," or as our Liturgy more strongly expresses it, "*lost* sheep," unable to return to the fold by any strength or will of our own: but by the grace and sacrifice of that shepherd who came to seek and to save that which was lost, we alone return, or, (as the words are well rendered,) "*are* returned, or brought back to the shepherd and bishop of our souls."

The sacrifice, moreover, was *voluntary*. True it is that the Jews, with wicked malice, crucified and slew him. It was their voluntary and deliberate act. And to them belongs the guilt of that act. On them, as they dreadfully imprecated, rests his blood. The deed is solely theirs. But let it not hence be inferred, that the Jews crucified and slew the Son of God in a way that destroyed the free will, and with his free will, that unparalleled proof of his love for the sheep in giving, freely giving his life a ransom for sinners. No. He freely came and devoted himself

in sacrifice. And in the seventeenth and eighteenth verses of this chapter, he expressly guards the doctrine from such an erroneous supposition: "therefore doth my father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. *No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down. And I have power to take it again.*"

It had been no *necessary* proof of his love to lay down a life for the sheep, which he had not power to keep. Herein consists the entire merit of that sacrifice: that when, as God, he had power to retain it, he transferred, or allowed to be transferred, that power to his enemies, till the time required that he should take it up again, by recalling that power. "In the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will O God:" 'I delight to conform myself to that scheme which Thou hast devised and ordained in thy eternal counsels of vindicating thine own honour, and saving thy lapsed creatures, by the death and sacrifice of thy son.' Thus He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. The good shepherd has given his life for the sheep. With unparalleled love and condescension, he purchased with his own blood, the life, pardon, peace, and security of that little flock which he had called out of the

world, fed with the heavenly manna of his word, and led by the still waters of comfort.

It was an ancient prophecy "Behold, the Lord will come with a strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him : behold his reward is with him, and his work before him." Declaring that to his enemies he would come in the times of the Messiah, armed with justice and authority, giving to every man according to his works. On the other hand, the prophecy proceeds, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd : he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." (Isaiah 40.) The Church of Christ is here styled a flock,—"*his* flock," in a tender and an emphatical sense. "We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." Under this name and character, the great shepherd ever delights to own and recognize his people. "Fear not, little flock," he affectionately addresses them in the Gospel, "it is your Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom."

The flock of Christ in this world, has ever been a *little* flock : distinguished by little else than the meek graces, the peaceable virtues of their shepherd. "Behold," said he to his first disciples, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." And such, precisely was the situation

of the flock for many ages : and yet it has continued a flock, and, compared with the idolatrous world at large, *no more than* a flock. And so it shall continue, secure in the care and promise of the great Shepherd, as long as they keep within the fold. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me : And I give unto them eternal life : and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Thus the present protection of the great Shepherd is secured to his flock, with more glorious promises and prospects in reversion : for he adds, "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold : them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice : and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd." By the term "other" sheep, is to be understood, the whole gentile world, when the fullness of the Gentiles, shall, like a mighty and sweeping torrent, flow into the Church : when they shall hear the voice of the good Shepherd calling them by his word and ambassadors from the four corners of the earth.

In what precise manner this great and glorious event shall be accomplished, Christians are not agreed. If we assent, however, to the opinions of those interpreters of prophecy, who fancy they behold its near approach in the present

appearance of things in the political as well as the Christian world—then, we may conclude, that the conversion of the Gentiles will be sudden and miraculous. If, on the other hand, the conversion of the Gentiles, shall not be full and complete until the Christian leaven have done its entire work, and “till the whole be leavened,” and the Gospel of the kingdom shall have been preached to and believed on in the whole world, (a supposition more agreeable to the general analogy of God’s providence, as well as to those gradual methods of moral illumination hitherto employed upon mankind)—then we may conclude that the conversion of the Gentiles is yet distant, and therefore will be no more miraculous than what we witness at present under the ordinary progress of evangelic truth by moral means and instruments. This last supposition however, appears to be at variance with such splendid prophecies as the following, “Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the people : but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about and see : all they gather themselves

together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear and be enlarged, because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls salvation and thy gates praise. *Thy people also shall be all righteous*: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: "*I the Lord will hasten it in his time.*"—(Isaiah 60.)

The latter verse, in particular, seems to point to something sudden and miraculous, and *superior* in effect to the first propagation of evangelic truth, whereby, in the short space of forty years, the Gospel was preached in almost every region of the then known world.

How long it shall please Almighty wisdom to delay these glorious times, the completion of

that kingdom for which we daily pray, it is not for us to enquire. The question for our consideration is simply this : are we *at present* of the true flock of Christ? Be it then our study to hear his voice speaking to us by his word and doctrine ; to keep close to the true fold, the true visible Church, and that most pure and reformed part of it to which it is our inestimable privilege to belong : above all, be it our daily study and endeavour *to follow our good Shepherd* ; to be assimilated to him by his word and spirit ; to transfuse the mild benignant graces which so transcendently shone in his every word and action, into our lives and practice : and above all, as the best proof that we keep his commandments, let us cultivate that love to one another which should ever characterize those of the same flock, Christians of the same name and profession : and which, flowing from a truly religious spirit, and divested of all selfish and worldly ends, would lead us (if we were called upon) to lay down our life for our friend.

Thus shall we contribute, by divine grace, in our individual degree and capacity, to increase the flock of Christ, and to hasten the glorious time when "there shall be one fold and one shepherd."

Sermon VII.

CHARACTER AND PRIVILEGES OF CHRIST'S FLOCK.

JOHN X., 27, 28.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me : And I give unto them eternal life : and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

IN the former part of this chapter, our Lord had set forth himself as "the door" into the sheep-fold, and as "the good Shepherd," of his flock ; contrasting the watchful anxiety of the true shepherd "that careth for the sheep," with the fears and negligence of the mercenary hireling "whose the sheep are not," and who therefore, in a season of danger, leaves them to themselves, mindful alone of his own safety.

In the words of the text are set forth the character and privileges of Christ's flock. By attentively surveying the former, you will be able fully to ascertain your interest in the latter. You will perceive whether or not you are his people and the sheep of his pasture in such a sense, as to entitle you to the promise of eternal life.

I. First, then, I shall direct your attention to the *character* of Christ's sheep. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." The faith and obedience of the Christian towards his Lord and master are of that absolute and implicit character denoted by the metaphorical allusion in the text to the natural habits of the most docile and patient of the irrational creation. The doctrines of Christianity are such as to claim the free and entire assent of the mind and understanding. Its precepts are such as to demand the entire surrender of the will and affections. In other words, the Christian character is made up of implicit *faith* in the heart, of uncompromising *obedience* in the life. Such is the character of Christ's sheep. He supposes the character to be *already* formed. "*My* sheep hear my voice." By faith they have received Him into their hearts as their Lord and Saviour. By confession of the mouth they

declare their assent to his doctrines, saying, 'Lord to whom shall we go, Thou hast the words of eternal life.' What are the fruits of this new character and relation?—the *righteousness* of Christ becomes theirs. They are "new creatures." "They walk in love." "The life of Jesus is manifest in them." Throughout their whole lives they practically anticipate that eternal life which Christ bestows upon his faithful disciples. But to be more particular—

1. *They hear his voice.* They render a practical obedience to his word, the calls of his grace, the intimations of his will. They receive his divine instructions with all docility and thankfulness. They know Christ. They can distinguish his voice, his doctrine, from that of the hireling. They are competent judges of true and false doctrine. They possess the unfettered privilege of judging for themselves, of proving all things, and of holding fast that which is good. They can distinguish between the "sincere milk of the word," and the adulterations of human wisdom. The declaration of the apostle holds in all ages—"I speak unto wise men, judge ye what I say." Neither do they so hear the voice of Christ, as to receive the Gospel only or even principally as a rule of faith, but as a guide to practice: not as

containing a number of abstract propositions or doctrines ; but vital, penetrating, operative *facts*. "The end of the commandment is *Love*." "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, *but a new creature*." "There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that through them we might become partakers of the *divine nature*." And above all, our Saviour's own words, "Except a man be *born again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God." These are the ultimate effects of Christianity; and, therefore, to attend mainly to *these*, is to hear the voice of Christ.

2. *And I know them*. "And" (as it follows in another verse) "I am known of mine." To hear the voice of Christ, and not to know who it is who speaks, or upon what authority he lays his commands upon us, is to follow—perhaps a pretended (though self-called *infallible*) guide. The Christian calls no man master upon earth. Even his appointed, delegated guides, he follows no farther than as they follow Christ. He is not in bondage in such cases in which they depart from true doctrine. He is not the servant of men. They have no dominion over his faith. Happily when Christ speaks, he speaks to be understood. His words require not the filtrations of human wisdom nor of human policy.

The words that He speaks, they are spirit and they are life, and therefore as such, they are level to the plainest capacity ; require no more than faithfully and affectionately to be set before the flock, and to be “ received in an honest and good heart,” that they may grow thereby.

They “ know ” Christ because they are his sheep. As he said to the Jews, “ ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you, my sheep hear my voice and I know them.” “ He that is of God, heareth God’s words.” They are his sheep, and therefore they hear the voice of the shepherd. The master calleth them, and they obey the call. They believe on him, they trust his power and his goodness to lead and conduct them safely. “ The Lord is my shepherd, therefore can I lack nothing. He shall lead me forth in the paths of righteousness for his name-sake.” As sinners, they renounce all other lords. “ All we, like sheep, have gone astray : ” have wandered from the fold ; renounced the care of the good shepherd, and followed the devices and desires of our own hearts. By nature, children of wrath ; strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. Christ the good shepherd, came to seek and to save them that are lost. And to as many as believe, to them

he gives the power to become the sons of God : which are born, not of man, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. He gives to his sheep, wandering, destitute, sought out, and found, that new nature, which is the effect of faith. He leads them into the paths of righteousness. " They be called by his spirit, and through grace, they obey the call." " They hear his voice." And although the fold of Christ is a little fold, his flock a little flock, compared to the world that lieth in wickedness, yet he speaks to all : all hear his voice, but all do not obey it. Man, in his natural corrupt state, is ready to follow any guide rather than Christ ; to hear any voice, rather than that of the good shepherd. But when once brought into the fold, once gathered in his arms, and conveyed thither on his shoulders, as to a place of rest, safety, and repose, he will then hear no other voice. " They will flee from a stranger, for they know not the voice of strangers." He is the door into the fold of God. By Him they have entered. By Him they go in and out, never venturing a single step, but as He leads. He goes before them, and they follow him. " I know them, and they follow me."

3. Having heard the voice of Christ believed his word, and embraced the doctrine of

salvation through faith, which is the gift of God, they also "follow" Christ. Sheep, I before observed, are docile animals : they will follow the shepherd wherever he leadeth them : from fold to fold, from pasture to pasture. Docility, however, excludes not discrimination. It rather supposes it : otherwise it would not be docility, but stupidity. Docile, therefore, though they be, they do not blindly entrust *every* one to lead them whither he pleases ;—"for a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers." Thus Christians follow Christ, and follow him implicitly, and whithersoever he leadeth them, even should it be circuitously and through by-paths, over wastes where no water is, through all the dark ways and leadings of his providence. They follow Him because they trust in Him. And they trust in Him because they know Him. "He calleth his own sheep by name." He knows each individual ; his character, wants, and circumstances. This is no new thing in a shepherd. He has his marks ; and so has the good Shepherd—"The Lord knoweth them that are his." Therefore they follow him, and him only. "All that ever came before me," said Christ, "are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them." There are false doors and false

keys by which to enter the fold; "false prophets among the people, and false teachers, who privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them"—promising salvation by any other method and way, than by the mediation of Christ, the Lamb of God, once offered to take away sin. Such are thieves and robbers, adulterators of the word of truth, who withhold from the flock their proper comfort and support. "These the sheep will not follow." Having once gathered the heavenly manna, the bread that came down from heaven for the life of their souls; having once tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, and by the Gospel preached to them, known the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge,—can they take up with husks, or feed and thrive upon human theories, "vain disputings of men of corrupt minds," or grow upon any thing short of "the grace of God which bringeth salvation," soundly and scripturally laid before them?

No! "They know that they are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. And they know that the Son of God is come, and hath given them an understanding, that they may know Him that is true, and they are in Him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." They follow

Christ, therefore, because reason, and Scripture, and experience, assure them that it is good, yea, best to do so: that He has the words of eternal life: that He alone hath the keys of heaven, that openeth and no man shutteth. "God hath given them an understanding to know Him that is true:" that by following him they are in the right way: that they no longer walk in darkness, but see the light of life.

4. Not contented, however, with following Christ's doctrine, *they follow his steps*. They walk even as He walked, They are careful to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things; to let their light shine before men; to live honestly, soberly, and godly, in this present world. As He who has called them is holy, so also are they holy, in all manner of conversation. They conform to the manners and disposition of the good Shepherd: gentle and affable to all; tender, charitable, and inoffensive; bearing with the infirmities of the weak; carrying the lambs in their bosom, and gently leading them that are with young: they lay down their lives for the brethren. Transcribing into their lives and conduct the admirable rules which Christ gave to his first disciples; they are "wise as serpents and harmless as doves." This, however, is a lesson of discretion, which

can only be learned by a proper attention to the manners of men like ourselves, the workings of the human mind, the springs and motives which usually influence the words and actions of mankind. Without this necessary acquaintance that other injunction of their Lord cannot be observed, namely, that they should "beware of men;" nor that no less necessary precaution, "not to let your good be evil spoken of." Christ came not to alter the customs and institutions of man. He dissolved no existing bands, broke down no necessary distinctions and landmarks of society. His principle of conduct was, "Render unto all their due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. *Christian discretion*, if I mistake not, consists in this : To view the world as much as possible with the same eyes, to make the same charitable allowance, in things indifferent, for the faults and failings of mankind, as Christ did : to distinguish between wilful depravity, and involuntary frailty and weakness.

5. *They also follow his people.* Sheep are gregarious : they herd together. Their safety and strength consist in union. True Christians also are one, as Christ and the Father are one. "I pray," said the good Shepherd, "that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me,

and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us." The habits, the tempers, dispositions and pursuits of true Christians are the same. Following their common Lord, they must needs mind the same thing, and tread in the same steps. To quarrel and separate is to let in the wolf, and to give the enemy of souls an advantage, as well as to cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of. They hold together and are in love and peace one with another. If there are some things in the manners and dispositions of those with whom they live, which seem to them at variance with "the meekness and gentleness of Christ:" if, in the religious profession of some, "whatsoever things are lovely" hold not a very conspicuous place, the true disciple and follower of Christ will be careful to distinguish between what is only seeming and what is real. Some allowance is to be made for bodily infirmity and constitutional bias. Something to be charitably conceded to education, habits, tempers. All these have their influence upon religion; and produce a re-action unfavourable to Christian sincerity. At the same time it must be observed, that by persons liable to the above faults, Christianity is too often but imperfectly understood, loosely practised, or else it has not produced all its genuine effects. The faults of professing

Christians, however, no one who is a true follower of Christ, will visit upon that *religion* which he came down from heaven to teach, and which he so richly and perfectly exemplified in his own practice. Care, therefore, should ever be taken *lest gathering the tares we pull up the wheat also*. The enemies of religion are perpetually engaged in this work, and may easily be detected by the *rancour* with which they assail the faults of professing Christians; faults which they take care to visit upon Christianity itself, and from which they conclude that they have acquired a new argument for their infidelity—a fresh sanction for their vices. How careful then should Christians be to give no offence in any thing, *that the Gospel be not blamed!* Such is the character of Christ's sheep. They hear his voice, he knows them, and they follow him.

II. We are, in the second place, to consider their *privileges*. “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”

The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is exclusively *his* gift, and purchased by the good shepherd, at the price of his own blood, and exclusively for his sheep. “I lay down my life for the sheep.” By his death, he is become the lord and giver of life.

"Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given. And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." "All power (they are the words of Christ himself after his resurrection) is given unto me in heaven and in earth." As Christ is the door through which the believer must enter into his visible Church by baptism; so also is there no other entrance into the invisible Church but through the same door. "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved. I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." Eternal life therefore is the gift of God, but still through his Son. "He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." And the reason is plain. He who purchased the gift, (and that at so great a price,) is alone worthy to be the dispenser thereof. His was the pain, the ignominy, the suffering, the death: his also is the glory, the complacency, the reward. "Them Thou hast given me, and I am glorified in them." "Father," (these were the stipulated conditions of his meritorious undertaking,) "Father I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me

where I am ; that they may behold my glory, which Thou hast given me : for Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." As certain, therefore, as the good shepherd laid down his life for the sheep, that he might take it again ; so certain is it, that he, and he alone, " gives unto them eternal life."

His word, moreover, and his power, are pledged for the security of his promised gift. He therefore adds, for the further peace and assurance of the flock, these most comfortable words : " they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." The servants of God are not exempt from trial. It was never intended they should be so. Sufferings are appointed to them, as well as a kingdom. They must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven. They therefore lay their account in troubles as well as joys. They follow the Lamb whithersoever he leadeth them, through the vale of misery, as well as by the waters of comfort : through evil report and good report : the scoffs of the world ; the buffetings of Satan ; temptations from without and fears from within. But over all these things they shall be finally victorious : nay, more than conquerors, through Him that hath loved them. Through manifold trials, the secret workings of

the evil principle, of sin still warring in their members, they may to all appearance "perish," and seem to be cast out from the presence of the Lord, and to have no hope of entering into his rest: but sin has no real power over them, so as finally to prevent their salvation. God, the keeper of souls, has appointed their great enemy bounds which he shall not pass. "Their sins, though many, are forgiven them." They are sealed unto the day of redemption. They shall never perish eventually. "Over such the second death hath no power." Christ hath overcome death, sin, and the grave, and has made the passage to immortality safe and secure to all his true followers and soldiers. This is their watchword, this their passport, 'O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory? I thank God, (or as it may be rendered,) the grace of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

It follows, therefore, as a necessary consequence, "Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." The Lord preserveth the souls of his saints. He has recovered the empire over them, which sin had forfeited. "Through death," says the Epistle to the Hebrews, "He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil." Observe, not who *has*, but who *had*, the power. This power he would fain wrest again from the hands of Christ. But his empire is broken up

and limited. He prowls about the fold, but the sheep are secure in the watchful care of the good shepherd. And though he makes them his prey who stray without the fold, and will not enter in, nor come to Christ, that they might have life; those who are in the fold and in the hand of Christ, he has no power to pluck therefrom. They are eternally safe. That wicked one toucheth them not. They are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. "My father which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one." Until therefore a power can be found, or imagined, greater than that of the good shepherd, who is the fulness of the Godhead, the Conqueror of sin, hell, and the grave, who was dead and behold he is alive for evermore, and quickeneth whom he will; till then, "no man shall pluck them out of his hand."

The subject which has been considered, is full of comfort and encouragement; which you will know how to appropriate or to refuse, according as ye are either Christ's sheep, or not of this fold. The character of the former has been described, and by that the character of the latter may be ascertained.

"Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's

pleasure to give you the kingdom." "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom." "Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world." In your wanderings here on earth, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations. But ye are kept by the power of the good shepherd, as long as ye follow on to know the Lord; and none of you shall be lost. For he knoweth them that are his, and calleth them all by their names.

Others there are who continue to follow the course of this world, the Prince of the power of the air, who worketh in the children of disobedience: who are still as sheep going astray. Who believe not because they are not of Christ's sheep; who hear not his voice, who know not Christ nor follow him. Argue not that you are for ever excluded from the fold, because you are not yet his sheep; and that Christ excludes you by an irreversible decree. No such thing. Hear his words: "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." "I came to call *sinners* to repentance." "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold, them also I must bring." You exclude *yourselves*, from present peace, and future blessedness. The good shepherd laid down his life for *all*; for lost sheep, as well as for them

who went not astray. Nay, we are told that He *rejoices* in the recovery of the lost sheep, and that this joy is communicated to the angels in heaven. They tune their harps afresh, at the return of every such stray, but recovered, sheep. Return, then, you that are going astray, "to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." Hear his voice while it is called to-day. There is salvation by none other but Christ, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby they can be saved. Enter in by this door into his fold. For there only shall ye find pasture, rest for your souls in this life, and rest in heaven, when at the last awful separation, the good shepherd shall divide the sheep from the goats, and shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. To the one he shall say "depart ye cursed." To the other, "come ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!"

Sermon VIII.

ON PRAYER.

I THESSALONIANS V. 17.

Pray without ceasing.

It was customary with the Apostle, to wind up any particular doctrinal point he had been previously discussing, with a few short practical precepts ; thereby intending to teach Christians not to rest satisfied with the knowledge of speculative truths without suffering them to be adopted, and cordially adopted, in their practice ; and that the highest doctrine then, and then only, attains its perfection, when it is suffered to ripen into exertion, and to produce the fruits of righteousness.

Such was the Apostle's design in the chapter from whence my text is taken. He had been

speaking, in the preceding chapter, of that most awful and interesting topic, the resurrection. And in the first verse of the chapter before us he anticipates a very natural inquiry to which that comfortable and cheering doctrine would give rise in the breasts of those to whom he was addressing this epistle, with regard to the time when this great event was to take place ; “ but of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say peace and safety ; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child ; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light and the day ; we are not of the night, nor of the darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober.” It is not for you to know the times and the seasons, which God hath put into his own power. Such knowledge would retard, not promote your salvation. It is your duty rather to stand prepared with your loins girt and your lights burning ; and to make a diligent use and improvement of the time which may be allotted you on earth in order to grow in grace.

And in what way, or by what method can this great end be promoted but by constant prayer for divine strength and illumination, that you may see your way clearly through the dangers and difficulties that assail the Christian in every stage of his pilgrimage, and withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Therefore *pray without ceasing*.

Prayer being the natural as well as appointed medium of communication between God and his creatures, it would seem almost superfluous for me to point out to you the duty and reasonableness of it. Some there are, I doubt not, now before me, who are in the daily habit of experiencing the privileges and sweetness of prayer, and who would not be bereft of the golden opportunities which it presents for growth in grace and godliness, for ten thousand worlds. It is however to be feared, as well as lamented, that the majority of our congregations have yet to learn that prayer is a duty of the first importance, and which cannot be neglected without open affront to God himself, and the greatest possible danger to their own souls. To such I shall, *first*, point out the duty of prayer, simply considered: and, *secondly*, show you to what extent it should be carried.

I. I shall consider the duty of prayer as enjoined in the text. “*Pray.*”

This will more clearly appear from a transient view of our circumstances as fallen creatures.

There can be no doubt, that in man’s original state of innocence, *praise*, not prayer, was the delightful language of his intercourse with heaven. This, like a pure unmingled stream, issued forth from unpolluted lips in man’s first and happy estate. In paradise, prayer had no place. Our first parents had no sins to lament, no wants that asked a supply, no dangers to guard against, so long as they continued steady in their obedience to the command of their Creator. All was love and affiance. Lord of the creation, and inferior only to God, man expressed his dependence on the hand that sustained him by one continued acknowledgement of praise, which ascended the skies as constantly and naturally as the dews of evening. Sin, alas! too soon defaced this goodly picture, and polluted this fair stream with other ingredients; with the earthly admixture of prayer. For prayer, though so inestimable a jewel, is still, my brethren, of earthly origin and of earthly extraction. Fallen and helpless, and dependent, man, now become subject to death, disease, and innumerable solicitations of want, must drop “the

garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness," and sue daily to Almighty grace for the supply of his necessities. Being fallen from innocence and abundance, having contracted guilt, and forfeited his right to all sorts of mercies, prayer is fitted for a lower dispensation ; before which, in Paradise, there was nothing but praise ; and after which, there shall be nothing but that in heaven.

Our condition, then, is a fallen one ; and as such, is liable to all the miseries, wants, and infirmities, originally entailed upon sin. And the grand means of alleviating those miseries, supplying those wants, and helping those infirmities, is prayer. This is that mighty wrestling with God ; and it shall prevail.

But let not any one imagine, that because prayer is more especially adapted to the wants and infirmities of fallen, degraded man, prayer itself is therefore a degrading employment. Quite the reverse. The example of our Saviour alone is abundantly sufficient to prevent such a surmise. His whole life was a life of prayer. It is true he had no sins to confess. He was holy, undefiled, and separate from sinners. But, by reason of his partaking of our human nature, he had the same natural wants that asked a supply ; he was subject to

hunger and thirst; he had the same spiritual trials to contend with, "being tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." He prayed, and he prayed both fervently and constantly. The mid-watches of the night, which others devote to sleep, he consecrated to prayer. He prevented the dawning of the day; and the dews of evening increased, not allayed his fervour. Herein, therefore, is our blessed Lord himself our pattern. He was a man of prayer. And what he so strenuously adopted in his own practice, the same he positively enjoined his followers, and laid it as a duty upon the Church in all after ages. "Watch and pray," said he, "lest ye enter into temptation, Pray to your Father in secret, and your Father which seeth in secret, shall reward you openly. If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father in heaven give good things to them that ask Him. Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you."

But it was in prescribing to his Church, that most perfect form of prayer, which bears his name, that he especially gave us commandment to pray, and instruction how to perform the duty. Never can we be at a loss for words wherewith to come before the Lord, as long as we have

grace in our hearts, and the language of this transcendent prayer on our lips. Never can we plead want of time and leisure as an excuse for omitting our prayers, as long as we have sufficient of both to repeat the Lord's prayer; concise, yet comprehensive; omitting in its short, but weighty sentences nothing that is necessary for the glory of God, and the temporal and eternal welfare of man. Such a prayer as this may be used at all times, and in all places and circumstances; and he who takes such an advantage of its convenient brevity, may truly be said to comply with the Apostle's injunction in the text, to *pray without ceasing*.

And this leads me in the

II. *Second* place, to point out the extent to which the duty of prayer may and ought to be carried. "Pray without ceasing."

This, and other modes of expression in scripture, it is evident on the first view; must not be taken in their literal meaning. To do so, would be not only to make scripture contradict reason, but to set scripture against itself. The Apostle, undoubtedly, my brethren, had great things in his eye when he delivered this solemn precept. He intended, doubtless, that Christians should not only soar a higher flight in prayer, than the generality of men are apt to imagine; but that

we should also take shorter and more frequent excursions. If prayer be a duty of the first importance, as I have endeavoured to show, the same reasons that make it such, render it also necessary that it be performed *constantly*, as well as devoutly. Collecting, therefore, the several particulars which may fairly be said to be comprised in the meaning of the Apostle, I observe, that by praying without ceasing, we are commanded to take every advantage, not only of stated and proper occasions for this exercise, but that we are also to *look out* for occasions in which to say our prayers, in addition to those regularly recurring seasons which nature teaches man ordinarily to devote to it. *Look out* for occasions did I say? To a truly pious, contemplative mind, a soul possessed with a constant sense of the divine goodness and omnipresence, to a soul which is taught of God, to look upon this world as a passage to a better, and the fashion thereof, as quickly passing away; to such a person, occasions for prayer are never wanting; he extracts its sweetness from the bitterest dispensation, and in the true spirit of devotion he can say, in every circumstance that happens to him, in trouble and in joy, "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the

Lord for ever.'” Such a one wants not occasions for prayer. Every thing around him affords occasion.

The generality, however, of professing Christians have need to be reminded, that it is their duty to pray not only at those peculiar seasons when they are commanded to resort, for this purpose, to the congregation of the faithful ; but also at their own houses, both in their families, and in their closets, the spirit of prayer is to be maintained : and, if they would do it with effect, and come nearer to the Apostle’s injunction, they will pour out their hearts to God in prayer, not merely at night and morning, when they lie down and when they rise up ; but also, at *some third, and intermediate time of the day*. They will reap both pleasure and profit, by thus connecting as it were, the two extremes, into one continued and sustained offering of prayer and thanksgiving. This at least was the practice of the pious psalmist—“ at morning and evening, and at noon day, will I pray, and that instantly.”

But just as is the above inference from the words of the text, I must proceed to remark, that it still falls short of that perfect standard of devotion to which the Apostle would have the Christian aspire. To pray without ceasing,

supposes something more than even an exemplary conformity to times and seasons. The truth is, prayer is not merely, or so much, an exercise, though often repeated, as it is a habit. Hence it is not tied down to times or places. Numberless as are the events, the circumstances, the casualties of this mortal life; even so numberless are the opportunities for prayer. In short, as I have before observed, there is *no* emergency which may not properly call it forth. And even supposing no actual emergency, still living as we do in an ensnaring world, surrounded as we are by numberless hidden dangers, and threatened by numberless unforeseen events, *habitual* prayer becomes absolutely necessary, that we may not fall a prey to any of these. It was with strict reference to this state of things, and well knowing that though the spirit may be willing to do what is right, and to avoid the snare laid for it, *the flesh* is nevertheless weak, that our blessed Lord pronounced those memorable words, "watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation!" The same causes that exist for watchfulness, the same there are for prayer. What those causes are, the Apostle, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, lays down in his instructions to the church militant. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, not merely with fleshly

adversaries, or the carnal principle within us, which so constantly and subtly warreth against the spirit, and enslaves our better desires and resolutions; not merely with the remaining corruptions of animal nature, which often, alas! give us such painful exercise; but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the *whole* armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

And after having completely equipped the christian soldier, before he dismisses him to the field, like a prudent general he gives him the following watch-word, or passport, as that without which his safety in the hour of temptation would be still incomplete, the victory still doubtful: "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication." Hence we arrive at the true sense of the text. If watchfulness, unceasing watchfulness, be a necessary, an indispensable requisite, if we would guard against hidden and uncertain dangers; unceasing prayer is not less necessary and indispensable for the same reason; both being in numerous passages of scripture joined together.

As, therefore, by the term watchfulness, we understand something more than the bare act, a posture of mind set and prepared to meet whatever danger our spiritual adversary may assail us with—so to pray without ceasing, supposes also a frame of mind always fitted for prayer, intent, it is true, upon our proper worldly employments, but so intent as to be able to detach itself at the shortest notice from the attraction of earth, and to cut all the cords that would hinder and impede its ascent towards Heaven. It is, to have our turbulent passions subdued and pacified, our hearts and thoughts spiritualized ; our affections elevated—in short, to have our whole soul and spirit sweetly attuned and harmonised to religion. It is not to make long prayers, nor yet formal ones ; a practice our Lord so severely reprobated in the Pharisees of his day. A sigh, a devout aspiration, a holy ejaculation, will oftener pierce the sky, and reach the ear of Omnipotence, than a long and set exercise of prayer, a minutely detailed catalogue of wants and woes, during which the spirit of prayer is too often suffered inadvertently to escape, and to leave the suppliant at last but where it found him—on earth, instead of in heaven ; entangled and perplexed about many things, and losing sight of the one thing needful. To be always *long*, is

not essential to prayers; they may acquire in fervency what they want in length. Few can long continue on the wing: and our proper callings are perhaps necessary to bring us down, lest, by forgetting *them*, we should be inclined to remain too long in unprofitable abstraction.

Much less, on the other hand, should we converse too long at a time with the world. The Christian cannot long together breathe this lower atmosphere without endangering his spiritual life, or finally quenching that spirit of devotion, which was originally kindled above. And, happily, there is no necessity for his running such a risk: since, even in our busiest moments, our most entangling perplexities, our most trying embarrassments, we may send up a sigh and a wish: and such a sigh, in the discriminating judgment of our all-merciful and all-bounteous God, will mark the character of the soul, and discover its tone. Our Lord has said, that where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also. And, that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. So it is with regard to prayer. When all the best feelings and affections of a soul habitually devout, are thus wound up to that devotional pitch implied in the text: like a well-tuned lute, the slightest impulse, the

smallest external impression, is sufficient to make it speak, and to give it utterance. On the contrary, when this world has the preponderating share of our regard and thoughts, our account with heaven is too often closed, devotion languishes and dies, the soul is out of tune, and it requires much time and previous preparation to bring it back to its proper pitch and harmony. We cannot, therefore, with such a feeling of aversion and reluctance, pray at all, at least, to any good purpose. For to pray with the soul out of tune, unprepared, unabstracted, unelevated—such a prayer must grate as harshly and offensively on the ear of sovereign grace and love, as discord in music upon the natural ear. In a word, to pray without ceasing, supposes such a constant, such an *habitual* preparation of the heart to seek the Lord, as that in every situation and circumstance of life, we may with the most natural, and easy, and decent transition, pass in our thoughts, desires, and affections, from the world of flesh, to the world of spirits—from intercourse with men to communion with God.

I have thus pointed out to you the duty and extent of prayer. I might here dwell on its divine efficacy, but the time would fail me. I leave it, therefore, to be tried by your own

experience. Pray without ceasing, and you will find yourselves in possession of a jewel beyond all estimation, all price.

To those who *omit* the duty, I would observe, that you cannot be Christians and live without prayer. Be assured, unless you pray, and pray fervently, you are very far from the kingdom of heaven. It is a true observation that 'either praying will make a man leave off sinning, or sinning will make him leave off praying.' This is most true. Prayer is the germ and first fruits of the spirit. The beginning of grace within us. This was the case with no less a man than St. Paul. *Behold he prayeth*, said the angel to Ananias. A new scene of things had commenced within his heart; from the fiery persecutor he had become the humble follower of the Cross. Prayer, therefore is necessary to show yourselves Christians in the lowest degree. Pray without ceasing, pray fervently, would you be *perfect* Christians, thoroughly instructed to the kingdom of heaven. Powerful and almost miraculous is the prayer of faith. It takes heaven by storm, and assails the Almighty on his very throne. "I will not leave thee except thou bless me," was the language of Jacob when he wrestled with the angel. On the contrary, your own experience will tell you, that you owe all your

declension in religion and relapse into sin, to *omitting prayer*. "Apostacy begins at the closet door." This opens the flood-gates to temptation. We throw away our armour, and Satan takes advantage of our defenceless situation. Pray, therefore, with all prayer and supplication, and watch thereunto with all perseverance. This is your life, and thus alone will you be strong in the Lord, and overcome the world, the flesh and the devil.

Sermon IX.

THE DIFFICULTY OF SALVATION.

1 PETER iv. 18.

*If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly
and the sinner appear?*

At first hearing, these words would seem to imply a doubt as to the final salvation of the righteous, and that heaven is a place of such difficult access, that with all their exertion, and with all the assistance of God's spirit, they shall but barely enter, and no more.

But if we attend to sense, rather than to sound, it will appear, that such is not the Apostle's meaning; that although he would inspire care and watchfulness on the part of those who are apt to think their condition secure, by represent-

ing salvation to be a matter of greater difficulty than the world is accustomed to suppose ; it was not his intention to discourage us in the pursuit by representing it as a thing impossible.

The Scriptures, indeed, whilst they set forth the pleasantness of religion, represent it still as " a narrow way," and a " strait gate." The qualities themselves necessary to a successful walk in this road, and to secure a blissful entrance into life, are also in their nature strict and straight, allowing of no deviation on the right hand or the left : yet who will deny the happiness and pleasure of a virtuous course, the peace and harmony of right affections ? We are told also that the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence. But the violent take it by force : those who are truly enamoured of religion, will not relinquish their hold of it because there are difficulties therein, not so much perhaps in itself, as in the obstacles it throws in the way of corrupt nature, and low and sordid pursuits. And, it must be confessed, it adds greatly to the *credibility* of our religion, that in laying the matter of man's salvation before him, nothing is kept back. There are no *reserves* of suffering, no inflated representations of eternal happiness. In his road heavenward, the Christian meets with no difficulty, no discouragement, of which he was not

fairly apprised. So that if he thinks to be saved without many painful encounters with his spiritual foes, many vexations and disappointments, he has taken the wrong road to heaven, and has yet to learn the first elements of his religion. But though the scriptures are thus faithful in their representations of the difficulties of salvation, they no where represent it as of *doubtful* attainment to those who perseveringly use the appointed means. They promise eternal life to the righteous, and ground the promise upon the truth and power of God. And they set it forth in a manner, though not highly-drawn, sufficiently alluring to the faithful few.

So far, then, from wishing to make the entrance into heaven narrower than it is, the Apostle holds a doctrine the very reverse in other parts of his Epistle, where he says, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure : for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall : for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

To have in our mind the real difficulties which hedge up the way to heaven, is what will be useful to the confirmed Christian as well as the unawakened sinner, to stimulate exertion, and

to check presumption. And this the words of the text are calculated to do. "If the righteous *scarcely* be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" If they must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven, and *all* their vigilance and caution be necessary to secure them against falling away from their faith and stedfastness, what hope is there for the sinner? for him who takes the business of religion, his soul, and eternity, so easily as to bestow no thought thereon, and to drive it from his mind by sin and sensuality, thoughtlessness, and indifference? How shall *he* hope to be saved? Where shall he appear amid the multitude of the faithful, who have "come through much tribulation, and washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb?" The question is its own answer, being in effect as much as to affirm, that there is *no* hope for him. He *cannot* appear. He cannot be saved.

The words of the text, thus explained, present two particulars for our consideration, viz.: "The *difficulty* of salvation to the righteous:" "the *impossibility* of salvation to the sinner."

I. In addition to the remarks already made concerning the difficulties of religion, I must observe, that the doctrine of the scriptures relating to this point is greatly misunderstood or abused,

And hence arise perpetual mistake and disappointment in the subsequent progress of him who has hastily, and without examination, commenced a religious career. These he visits upon religion itself, and throws up the profession in disgust. We shall therefore be rendering essential service to Christianity, by alluring men with its hopes and promises, but still by fairly and unreservedly unfolding to them, what are its severe requisitions, its uncompromising conditions. Thus our Lord invited the young man in the gospel, by calling upon him as the first step, *to sell all that he had*. Let us, my brethren, do the same. Let us represent the profession of the gospel as a system of conscientious self denial, of wholesome relinquishment, but ample indemnification in the peace and harmony arising from subdued appetites, and chastised affections ; and by so doing we place it in the right light, the light of scripture, the light of reason. Virtue itself is a severe thing. Its path is thorny, not flowery : full of trials, not of pleasures, except such as are hidden and to the world impalpable. Such also is the character of true religion. We fairly and openly apprise you, that you should well count the cost, before you enter the strait road to heaven. The Gospel has nothing agreeable to flesh and blood, it crosses

corrupt nature at every turn : but if you value heaven above earth, spiritual things above carnal, we promise you, even by the way, the sublimest gratifications, the richest foretastes of heaven. *Therefore let religion be well understood.*

I. The righteous may be said to be scarcely, that is, with difficulty saved, if we consider, first, *their peculiar trials.*

“ Great are the troubles of the righteous.” As their’s is a prize worth contending for, so is it not to be won without great exertions. Being invisible and to come, it is an object not of sight but of faith, of future reversion, not present possession. Faith therefore must be exercised by trials and discipline, in order not only to prove its sincerity and intenseness, but that it is something more than mere belief ; that it is patient waiting for ; earnest expectation ; longing desire ; rejoicing hope ; living upon the promises of God ; dying to the world and its fleeting vanities ; Christ formed within us ; the spirit of adoption in the heart crying Abba, Father : a principle in short, capable of sustaining the believer in all conditions, and under all circumstances ; that can follow Christ as well for the sufferings it may be called upon to endure, as for the loaves and fishes, the consolations of his spirit. What the Apostle says respecting

heresies, holds with respect to the necessity of afflictions. "There must needs be (afflictions and persecutions) among you, that they which are approved, and whose faith is genuine, may be made manifest among you." All would be godly, and desire to go to heaven, provided the way thither were smooth and comfortable : all would bear the cross provided it did not cross their natural inclinations. But this will not do. We must take things as we find them, and conform ourselves and our corrupt nature, to that rule of life which Christ has made known in the Gospel, and not imagine that it will bend to and comply with the humours and caprices of mankind. And if on this account, you are disposed to quarrel with the Gospel, to be offended that salvation is placed at so high a rate as sufferings, crosses, and afflictions, it is to be feared, that you have not yet counted the cost, nor rightly considered the nature of the prize : that you have yet to learn the conditions upon which salvation is promised. Need I tell you that salvation is a covenant made between God and man? A Testament sealed with the blood of the Testator, moistened with the tears he shed, and the sweat which exuded from his sacred body : that consequently it is a *covenant of suffering* : that Christ's doctrines are such as

directly involve and suppose sufferings, and a state of affliction; that his very promises were sufferings; his beatitudes, his rewards, and his arguments to invite men to follow Him, were only taken from the sufferings of this life? All this is, or ought to be, notorious to the true Christian. The Apostle thus addresses him in this chapter. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the sake of Christ, happy are ye, for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you." He adds, (what our blessed Lord had foretold before,) "for the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God, and if it first begin at us (Christians and believers in a crucified Lord) what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?"

So that, my brethren, you see your calling. That whatever judgments God in his wisdom may think good to bring upon the world, Christians shall have their share, though it be but the skirtings of the storm. "Scenes of deep distress await us all." With some the time is already *come*; who are enduring a great fight of

afflictions, and are in heaviness through manifold temptations. To others the time seems always present; who are destined by a dispensation of apparent severity, though of real love, to experience no favourable change, no bright reverse in this life. And to you, my brethren, who may have never had your day, the fiery trial which is to try you is yet to come, which shall prove the strength of your principles, try the ground of your hearts, the reality of your faith, the spirituality of your thoughts, hopes, and desires. And if ye be true followers of Christ, you will not shrink nor flinch from the hand that deals the blow. You will think nothing too great, no trial too sharp, no affliction too heavy to show your attachment to the beloved. "Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart: prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me; and lead me in the way everlasting." Could any principle less than a divine faith have induced the Psalmist to *court* such a trial as this? To call upon Omnipotence and Omniscience to seek and try the ground of his heart; to sift his motives; lay bare all his thoughts; to discover to to him upon what grounds his religious sincerity, his love, his hopes, and fears, had their foundation? The very desire to be so tried, was

a proof that his heart was right in the sight of God : since “ he that doeth evil cometh not to the light lest his deeds should be made manifest.” And we may assume it as a general and indisputable truth, that the man who is possessed of true Christian faith, which is the gift of God, will with the Apostle rejoice in tribulations, and smile through his tears ; if for no other reason, than because the strength of his principles can alone be thus fully ascertained to his own satisfaction ; that he has “ overcome the world,” “ that he is born of God.” Nor is there less of reason, than of Christianity, in such a dispensation of suffering and affliction. Faith is the Christian’s armour. Will the soldier be desirous to take the field, before he has proved the temper of his steel, and the extent of his courage ? Will he shrink from warfare because he may probably meet with dangers and death in a thousand shapes ? Is it not in conflict and victory that he looks for promotion ? What, indeed, is the strength and reality of any boasted virtue till it be first tried ? And by what peculiar circumstance is that faith characterised, or distinguished, which has seen no fight of afflictions, endured no contradiction, made no sacrifice, nor ever been called out to scenes requiring no common exercise of patience and self denial ?

But taking all this for granted, our enquiry is, 'In what does the Christian's trial consist?' What are those peculiar troubles which make his salvation so difficult? For it would be endless to enumerate *all* those things which, in a world like this, give him pain, and make him sigh for deliverance. For you will observe, that his religion, so far from taking off the edge of his feelings, serves but to make it more sharp, and to pierce more acutely his sensitive mind. He knows that "by the sadness of the countenance, the heart is made better," and that "it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting."

But I am speaking now of those peculiar trials which threaten the hopes of the Christian, cloud his prospect, and *seem*, at least, to endanger his salvation. These are summed up by the Apostle to the Ephesians, and may well make the stoutest heart tremble, lest any or all of them should take him off his guard, and prove too much for his strength to bear. "We wrestle not," says he, "against flesh and blood alone, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." The carnal principle is not subdued. "The infection of man's nature doth remain, yea in

them that are regenerated,"—(Art. ix.) whereby the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh : and this is the frequent occasion of such painful struggles, as force the Christian to cry out with St. Paul, ' O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death ! ' In addition to this, every Christian has that *besetting sin*, whatever it be, which constantly gives him the most painful exercise : which costs him many a bitter conflict, many a defeat : which at times seems utterly subdued—to have taken its departure—but soon gives him to understand that it is only waiting for a fresh occasion, a fresh exciting cause, to give him pain and to renew its attack. The lion only sleepeth. True it is, the grace of God is sufficient for him, and will, if he endure patiently, make him more than conqueror. But still he must be—he is every day striving against this sin : gaining, if possible, new strength from every lapse and recovery, and acquiring fresh ground. His sin is every day more or less vexing and troubling him. His ascent to heaven is constantly checked by earth, and its remaining ties and attractions. His enemies are daily at hand to swallow him up. And as long as he is in the world, so long fresh fuel is administered to the fiery trial that is appointed to

exercise his faith and patience. If he retires altogether from the world, and tries to shut out troubles and vexations, they still gain admission. His sight and all his other senses are still so many inlets to objects which have power to vex and harass him. Whether in the world, therefore, or out of the world, his enemy, his besetting sin, pursues him ; for it is within, and can never be entirely ejected. We, my brethren, see only the Christian's exterior : we think him happy ; and so indeed he is, beyond all that this world can either give or imagine. But the struggle is within. The heart knoweth its own bitterness. How is he buffeted by sin and Satan ! When in view of the haven, and just about to enter, how is he driven again out to sea, and has his Christian course apparently to begin anew, and beat up a-fresh. How often is he tempted, when his faith is low, and grace apparently weak, to exclaim with David, "Then have I cleansed my heart in vain !" Where are the joys I once felt : the peace in believing, the full assurance of hope ; the sense of pardoned sin ; and of grace reigning victorious within me ! All, all are fled as a dream, and as the morning cloud. Hence a thousand times he is tempted to give over the struggle in despair of ever being able to attain that perfect and full-blown peace

of God which passeth all understanding : that ripeness and maturity of faith, without which he feels that he cannot please God : that habitual, if not complete holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

Such are some of the difficulties which threaten the salvation of the Christian, and which he who is an entire stranger to, may reasonably doubt whether he be in the safe path.

But it is in the near views of death and eternity, that Satan lets fly at the Christian his last fiery dart ; but which also the grace of God is sufficient to quench, and to convert to his great salvation. Then it is that his faith is put to the utmost possible stretch : and he is tempted to despair entirely of salvation. Then his eye takes a fearful glance into the unseen world, and death and hell present themselves before him in all their horrors and hideous deformity. Then sin appears more exceeding sinful on the one hand ; and God's most holy, but violated law, open, on the other, presents to him, as in a glass, the sins of his whole life—his most secret sins, with all their long forgotten and minutest circumstances and aggravations. Well may he cry, with his Lord and Master, when in the same circumstances, and bowed down under the load, not of his own sins (for He had none)

but of those of the whole human race—"My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death!" "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me! My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me!" This is indeed that fiery trial with which Sovereign Wisdom sometimes permits his most chosen vessels of grace and mercy to be assailed; and, my brethren, when we see or hear of men of irreproachable lives, meek and innocent conversation, great faith, and of tried patience, thus apparently given up of God, in order to enhance the glory and brightness of their crown, *we* may well be filled with trembling and dismay at the fiery trial which may be assigned to ourselves: we may well fear for our own truth and sincerity: at the same time that we should rather seek beforehand than wish to decline, our share in those trials of the saints through life, which are designed to make us perfect through suffering. We may well ask with the Apostle, "If the righteous be thus scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Which leads to the *second* particular, viz: *the impossibility of salvation to the sinner*; which is rather a conclusion from what has been said, than a distinct branch of enquiry.

II. "Lord are there few that be saved?" was a question put to our Lord, the truth of which his reply appears too sadly to confirm. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." Indeed he expressly declares as much in another Gospel—"strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it." If salvation be a matter of difficult attainment to the righteous, it follows that it is an impossibility to the impenitent sinner. It is, however, no speculative truth, but the positive declaration of scripture. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." Remove all these characters from among us, and the number of the saved will be fearfully diminished. But whether you belong to the class I have just enumerated, or come under any other description of vice not there specified, I ask any and every such, where does he think to appear when God comes to judgment, and the fiery trial is to prove every one's work, of what sort it is, whether it be good or whether it be evil? Your case is

determined. "The ungodly shall not be able to stand in the judgment, neither sinners in the congregation of the righteous."

But there are others who are careless of their salvation, and who slumber over this the greatest and most awful concern that can exercise the thoughts of man. They have no just and adequate conception of the nature of sin and its awful consequences—of what God hath done for them in his son Jesus Christ, the misery he would rescue them from; the hopes he would call them to in the Gospel. Except the name and outward profession of Christianity, the careless worldling has upon him no distinguishing mark or feature from him who professes to be guided only by the glimmering light of natural religion. Talk to him of the great truths of Christianity and they are foolishness to him. Press upon him the spirit and temper, the meekness and gentleness, the forgiveness and self-denial which should distinguish the follower of Christ, and, (so opposite do these things appear, and indeed are, to the spirit and temper of the world) that nothing can be imagined by him more senseless, more tame, or more insipid. And yet, my brethren, "*unless these things be in us and abound,*" our Apostle informs

us "we are barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." We are not giving *diligence* to make our calling and election sure : nor can we expect an entrance at all into his everlasting kingdom. We fall under the denomination of "the ungodly and sinners" in the text. For can it be soberly imagined that they shall gain a quiet and easy possession of that kingdom, who have never had a serious thought, never felt a single fear or apprehension or doubt of their salvation ; who have resisted no temptation ; strove against no sin ; vanquished none of their spiritual adversaries ; made no sacrifice for Christ and conscience sake ; with whom all is smooth and easy in this life—and all men speak well of them ; who feel that they are "whole and need not a physician" to heal their spiritual maladies and to restore them to that holiness and righteousness without which no man can see the Lord, or lift up his head in the judgment ? Is Heaven reserved for those who have had their consolation in this life, who have, at best, but trimmed between this world and the next—God and Mammon ; and have deferred the business of salvation till a more convenient season, reserving for God only the dregs of their existence, and leaving their

sins and follies only when they have left *them*? Be assured, my brethren, salvation is too glorious a thing to be thus easily attained. It is every where represented in Scripture as a prize, a victory, a conquest, a crown, a reward—not of the listless and indifferent ; but of the brave, and energetic; the fervent in spirit, the joyful in hope, the patient in tribulation ; the bearer of Christ's cross, and not of his name only : of him who dies daily to sin, and mortifies his members upon the earth. In short “the kingdom of heaven suffereth *violence*, and the violent alone take it by force.”

The use I would, in conclusion, make of the subject, is twofold, that of *caution* and *encouragement*.

1. Of caution to the *presuming* Christian. When it is seen that the highest even real attainments in religion are insufficient to stand the test of that fiery trial, which at one period of his course or other, is almost sure to be sent by Almighty Wisdom and goodness to try the Christian's faith, whether it come in the shape of grievous bodily suffering, or anguish of spirit; and we see the best and most experienced servants of God, when they come to die and to give up their account, sometimes shrink with

amazement bordering on despair, at the sight of hell and the grave; surely those of far lower attainments, but of too confident notions of themselves and their condition, would do well for the remainder of their earthly course, to “walk humbly with their God,” and not to be high-minded, *but to fear*: utterly to renounce themselves, and their own fancied attainments: not to think that all is well within, because it is well without, and men speak well of them: ever recollecting that the judgment of God differs widely from that of man. Much will always remain to be done by the humble Christian, who with St. Paul, thinks not himself to be already perfect; and that there still exists a sad and awful possibility, after all his endeavours, and notwithstanding all his attainments, of his being “*a Cast-away.*”

2. The subject speaks comfort and encouragement to the righteous—to the suffering child of God. “Say ye to the righteous it shall be well with them.” Hereunto were ye appointed. Ye fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ. “And though no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, unto them which are exercised thereby.” Though disciplined in the

school of affliction, ye are the heirs of glory ; though tried in the fiery furnace of adversity, ye shall come out purified and made perfect. One drop of your cup exceeds in value whole rivers of the world's joy. And when hell and the grave, sin and Satan, have done their worst, and spent all their malice and fury against you, the Everlasting arms shall for ever sustain thee. And in your last fiery conflict with the wicked one, call to mind the promise of God to his people, his peculiar people, his dear children : "I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy upon thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

Sermon X.

THE UNSHAKEN FAITH OF JOB.

JOB XIX., 23, 27.

*O that my words were now written ! O that they were
printed in a book !*

*That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock
for ever*

*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 :*

*Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold,
and not another.*

It is impossible not to be struck with the majesty and sublimity with which the inspired Job introduces the sublimest of all subjects, viz : the general resurrection, and the triumphs of the Redeemer's kingdom. He is

about to utter the voice of inspiration : to give birth to a sentence fit only to be recorded in the everlasting hills—"O that my words were now written! O that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!" I can only compare the sublimity of such an exordium to the solemn preparation, "the dread magnificence of heaven" which precedes the rising of the sun, when he is unloosing the barriers of the east, and preparing, as a giant, to run his course: a resemblance perhaps the more just and striking when it is considered that this splendid prediction of Job is among the earliest upon record, and points with no less than prophetic assurance, derived from special and immediate inspiration, to the final rising of the Sun of Righteousness, "glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength;" to the dawn of that eventful day, which is to crown all our hopes, banish all our fears, and when the Christian shall throw aside the sin-worn garments of mortality, and stand before God complete in his Redeemer's righteousness.

Such introductions, calculated as they are to arrest and command attention to what is to follow, are common in the sacred writings, and peculiar to those of the prophets. It is thus that

Isaiah introduces (for the purpose of especially impressing its enormity), the disobedience and ingratitude of God's peculiar people—"Hear, O heavens, and give ear O earth, for the Lord hath spoken—I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against me!" Thus, in the book of Numbers, Balaam introduces a prophecy similar to that in the text, "I shall see him, but not now : I shall behold him, but not nigh :—" Behold what?—he proceeds—"There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Seth." Well may such a subject claim the additional grandeur of an introduction. Well may our utmost attention be aroused, the whole stretch of our faculties be directed to the peculiar solemnities of that day which is to usher in the second advent of the Lord to judgment—"the day of vengeance, the year of his redeemed."

Job was prior to, or at least contemporary with Moses. He worshipped the one true God, in sincerity and truth. And though his religious knowledge was in general such as might have been derived from the early patriarchs, still the positive declaration, the sublime assurance of a Redeemer and a future judgment, contained in the text, is, by most commentators, allowed to

be the effect of immediate revelation from God. Why should he desire to see his words graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever? *For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, &c.* Whence did he know these sublime mysteries, unless from the fountain of truth and inspiration itself? Surely every admirer of sacred antiquity, every enquirer after religious instruction, will devoutly rejoice that this enraptured sentence is realized to a more effectual and unforeseen accomplishment; that while the memorable records of antiquity have mouldered from the rock, the prophetic assurance and sentiments of the holy Job are graven in Scriptures that no time shall alter, no changes shall efface.

It will be necessary, in the first place, to call your attention to the circumstances in which Job was when he delivered this prophecy, in order, secondly, to appreciate his faith, as so eminently displayed therein.

I. And first, for his *circumstances*. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, my brethren. You well know the series of trials which called it forth. From our earliest infancy his insulated story has been familiar to our ears, and consecrated in our minds. We have sympathised with him in his adversity, and rejoiced with the

holy patriarch in his first and latter state of prosperity. And although the hand of the Lord for so long a time was upon him, and pressed him sore, still we have been accustomed to regard the peculiar dispensations of the Almighty towards his afflicted servant, as a token of his love and favor, rather than as a dispensation of wrath and punishment : agreeably to the observation of the Apostle, “whom the Lord *loveth* he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” Pressed with the accumulated weight of trials, numerous, complicated, and unparalleled, though he spake unadvisedly with his lips, and justified himself before his Maker—still, who is there, that in balancing accounts between Job and his well meaning but officious friends, will not readily acknowledge, that although he erred in the assertion of his own innocence in the sight of God, the latter were at least equally in error in hastily and unwisely ascribing his trials and misfortunes to his sins. The truth is, as they were indeed but sorry comforters to him in his adversity, so were they also worse casuists. They mistook his case ; and in doing so we cannot wonder that they mistook also the remedy. Instead of sympathising with him in his affliction, alleviating his sorrows, and pouring oil and wine into his wounds, they chose

rather to fester them with accusation, to keep them open by falsely descanting upon the *cause* of them. This was not to comfort the holy man, but to drive him to despair.

My brethren, it was this injudicious conduct on the part of his friends, which embittered the sufferings of Job. It is such injudicious conduct as this (to say the least of it) which causes much mischief as well as misery in the world at large. In our distress we naturally look to the soothings and encouragements, not the taunts and scorn of a friend. That we are miserable is our misfortune, which therefore entitles us to sympathy. I use the term *misfortune*, as denoting something which happens to a man in despite of his own efforts to prevent it. Something out of the reach of human foresight and control: attributable, therefore, to the immediate agency and interference of God. Such was the misfortune of Job; and being such, his friends had no more to do with tracing and laying open the hidden cause thereof, than they had a right to scrutinize the secret counsels of Almighty wisdom, or to profess to give an account of his dealings with his creatures.

If our misery is attributable to ourselves, we know whence is the disorder, and in general, by the same knowledge, we know how to provide

a remedy, if the case is not altogether hopeless. If God is afflicting us, and calling us by a severe but merciful providence, to think on our ways and be wise, we want not the officiousness of an earthly friend to tell us our misery, much less to point out to us the invisible hand of God ; to interpret to our consciences the still small voice of his reproof or admonition. When God speaks, he speaks to be understood. But if our ways please the Lord, and if it is the main study and tendency of our lives to approve ourselves before him, and to walk in all his commandments and ordinances blameless—I say, if then, He is pleased to put our faith and obedience to a severe but wholesome test, by a single blow, or a long series of trials, of which we ourselves cannot exactly comprehend the meaning and intention, and therefore are not to be supposed cognizable by others as blind as ourselves—in such circumstances as these (and these you will remember were Job's) *the matter is entirely between God and a man's own soul*. Then is the time to pour in oil and wine, to encourage him with the heavenly message of the angel to the devout Cornelius—"Thy prayers and ~~thine~~ ~~aims~~ are come up for a memorial before God."

The grand mistake into ~~which these three~~ persons fell, viz : Eliphaz, ~~Balshazzar~~ and Zophar,

was, as I before observed, that they ascribed the misfortunes of Job to his sins : erroneously supposing too, that goodness would surely be crowned with worldly prosperity, and wickedness as surely punished with adversity.—“If thou wert pure and upright, surely now God would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous.” Daily experience might have taught them better. In a similar way, and from the same mistaken view of things, David, in the seventy-third Psalm, confesses the stumbling-block which the prosperity of the wicked had thrown in *his* way, and which tempted him to conclude that piety should go unrewarded, because he beheld the prosperous career of vice. “My feet were almost gone, my treadings had well nigh slipt—and why? I was grieved at the wicked, I do also see the ungodly in such prosperity. Lo, these are the ungodly, these prosper in the world, and these have riches in possession : and I said, Then have I cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.” The Jews were notoriously in the habit of concluding (with Job’s friends) that because a man was visited with a signal infliction, he had therefore committed some sin or other to provoke God’s wrath upon him. We meet with several instances of this

erroneous opinion in the New Testament : I shall select two. In the 13th Chapter of St. Luke we read, " There were present at that season some that told Jesus of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, ' Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things ? Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem ? I tell you, nay : but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.' " The other instance is no less a proof of their habit of arbitrarily connecting cause and effect. It occurs in the memorable story of the blind man in the 9th chapter of St. John—" And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples (men of the Jewish religion) asked him, saying, ' Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind ? ' Jesus answered, ' Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents : but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.' "

Hence, I think, it abundantly appears ; and daily experience proves the fact, that " all things happen alike to all ; " that calamity, as it is generally called, falls, perhaps, equally to

the lot of the righteous and the wicked, for purposes known unto God alone : and therefore secondly, that we can *necessarily* conclude neither good nor bad of a man's inward state, from seeing him outwardly afflicted : and thirdly, that reverence to the great Dispenser of human affairs, and charity to our fellow men, demand of us to hope the best of our afflicted brethren, and to leave them in the hands of God.

II. Having noticed the harsh and injudicious treatment which Job experienced at the hands of his friends, we are in the second place to observe the *faith* of this holy man. " 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, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another."

Such is the triumph of faith. The first chapter of his history records a melancholy detail of the unparalleled misfortunes that befel this holy man ; not such as generally happen to mankind from the operation of what is called, ' second causes,' and in the common course of things : but let loose upon him by Satan himself, with the all-wise permission of God. Five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred she asses, seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, fall in quick

succession by the hand of the destroyer. And last, not least, the blow is brought still nearer home, the feelings of his nature are strained to the utmost possible pitch, by the sudden destruction of his ten children. Yet what is this holy man's conduct : what are his words ? Are they those which human nature is so apt to give vent to ? Does he qualify his impatience under affliction so sad and complicated, by that common language of apparent submission, though in fact stubborn unsubdued will, by saying, as he very naturally might have said, ' my sheep and my oxen, my camels and servants I could have submitted to lose ; but my children, my olive branches, the prop of my declining years, this is indeed a burthen too heavy for me to bear ! ' No, my brethren, not a word of the kind escapes his lips : he shows the wonderful faith that inwardly supported him by replying ; and let fretfulness and impatience treasure up the memorable words—' naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither : the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, *blessed be the name of the Lord !*'

The hardest lesson that man has to learn in this school of his probation, is submission to the will of God. To be beaten by the wave of adversity from one strong hold after another, and

disciples, "rejoice and be exceeding glad"—what! glad under reproach and persecution? Yes: "rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven."

My brethren, is your integrity assailed, your religious motives perverted, your piety vilified; if you cannot realise the promises and hopes of the Gospel, to such a degree as to rejoice in tribulation, to take joyfully the spoiling of your good name; "know at least and consider, that in heaven ye have a better and an enduring substance:" that the unequal distribution of things here below, the depression of piety and virtue, the triumph of vice, the abounding of iniquity, the fury of the oppressor, and the troubles of the oppressed—all, all proclaim the necessity of a future judgment, a day of wrath and retribution, when shall be fully revealed the righteous judgment of God; who, we are assured on the authority of the Spirit himself, "will render to every man according to his deeds. To them who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil." To this tribunal of an all-righteous and all-just God there lies a final and universal appeal. "Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great

recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry."

"Now the just shall live by *faith*." "The life I now live in the flesh," says the Apostle, "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who hath loved me and given himself for me." Every Christian, vitally united here to Christ by a living faith, has that within him, that title to eternal blessedness, which the breath of slander can never tarnish, the false judgments of fallible mortals can never alter or annul.

It was precisely such a faith, that supported the holy Job, not only under his unparalleled privations, but under a far more galling load, the accusations and suspicions of his friends. In this painful dilemma, unable to vindicate his innocence to them who notwithstanding suspected him guilty, he is borne on the wings of faith, over the head as it were of many intervening ages, to that glorious time when he should stand before God in the imputed righteousness of his Saviour; "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

Thus it is, that in the furnace of affliction, the

spirit, it should seem, becomes more buoyant, and quits its earthly clog to converse with the invisible world. Thus it is, that the more this earthly vessel becomes purified by faith and prayer, the more fitted it is to receive the higher communications of the Spirit. And to souls thus exercised, thus purified, have in all ages of the Church, from Moses on the mount of God, to St. John in the Apocalyptic vision, been vouchsafed the sublime mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

Would you then, my Christian brethren, realise the glories and know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,—imitate the faith and patience of Job in his various states, and complicated trials.

“I know,” says he, “that my Redeemer liveth:” as if he had said, ‘although I am accused of ignorance, or vain knowledge, yet *this* one thing I know, I feel, and am confidently assured of, *that my Redeemer liveth*: who shall save my life from the power of the grave, who shall fully vindicate my innocence in the presence of men and angels, who hath in his own person vanquished the powers of hell and the grave, and that He ever liveth to make intercession for me. I know that He shall stand at the latter, the great, the judgment day, upon the earth, when

time shall be no more, and the former things, the things of this transient sublunary state, are passed away, and about to be swallowed up in the boundless ocean of eternity: I know, that although by the divine irrevocable decree passed upon every son of Adam, I must lay aside these fretted garments of mortality, the earthly house of this tabernacle, yet that in my *flesh*, my very identical body, I shall stand before God. I shall see him with my material and bodily eyes: "my own eyes shall behold him:" the same Redeemer, the same Almighty God and Father, who first breathed into my nostrils the breath of life, who created this goodly fabric from the dust of the earth, who shall level it in the dust of death, and finally shall raise, re-edify, and transform it by the power of his resurrection.' St. Paul uses nearly the same language; "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded, that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again!"

Such, my brethren, is the creed of Job; the creed of the Apostle, St. Paul, of "the goodly fellowship of the prophets;" of "the noble army of martyrs;" and as the great Head of the

Church is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever;" it is still the creed of every Christian, the measure and rule of *our* faith, the guide and standard of all *our* actions. Have *we* not all been baptised unto Jesus Christ in the laver of regeneration? Have we not all and each of us, been brought nigh unto, and reconciled I trust, to God, by the blood of his cross? Do we not all and each of us, in the blessed sacrament, eat the same spiritual meat, and drink the same spiritual drink? Do we not there behold Christ "manifestly set forth and crucified among us," to the end that the world might be daily crucified to us, and we to the world? And in the last awful period, when death has closed our eyes on this world for ever, and we are passing through the grave and gate of death, to our joyful resurrection, is not every pious follower of Christ, said by the Apostle to "fall asleep" in the arms of this adorable Redeemer? And in the very last act of all, are not our remains consecrated and embalmed by the sublime service of our Church, and especially by those soul-reviving words of our Redeemer himself, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die?"

Believe *ye* this, my dearly beloved brethren? I know that ye believe it; for why should it be thought a thing incredible that God should raise the dead? But belief is not sufficient. The devils themselves believe and tremble. Once more, therefore, to revert to our subject; the text shows us, that our interest in the Redeemer is a point that may be known and ascertained, (*I know*, says Job, that my Redeemer liveth;) and where it is known, may be triumphed in, as infinitely more than sufficient to balance all our griefs. And how may we ascertain that we know Christ? The Apostle gives us a plain and simple rule, "if any man be in Christ he is a new creature." And St. John is even more explicit: "hereby do we *know* that we know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; *hereby know we that we are in him.*"

Let us, therefore, comfort ourselves and one another, with the animating and heart-cheering assurance, that "*we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins.*" That "*he ever liveth to make intercession for us.*" That "*in our father's house are many mansions.* And ~~that~~ because He liveth, *we shall live also.*"

Sermon XI.

HOLY SCRIPTURE.

ROMANS XV. 4.

Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning ; that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.

IN illustrating and enforcing these words of the Apostle, I shall take as the groundwork of the remarks which I have to offer, that admirable collect which the Church on this day has proposed for the subject of our devout meditations.* It furnishes both an exact comment upon the words of the text ; and also, as a prayer it comprises those points which are especially essential to a profitable perusal of the

* Second Sunday in Advent.

word of God. On this account, it is the best that can be adopted previously to the study of the sacred volume. For to read the scriptures without praying for divine illumination, is to open a sealed book, to read with the veil on the heart. Those sacred books, we may reasonably conclude, though indited by the Spirit himself, were not written without prayer. The sacred penmen were not *passively* recipient of the divine oracles. They sat on their watch-towers, and listened attentively, by prayer and fasting, to what the Lord would say to them. And if this was the case with *them*, much more must the same key that opened the mind of the Spirit to the devout gaze of those "holy men of old who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," unlock to *us* their sacred communications. Such a key is prayer.

I will therefore suppose that you have retired to your chamber to converse with God in his word; that you are about to open that book which assuredly has "God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without mixture of error for its subject;" that book which alone can implant in our souls the germ and principle of a new nature, and so implanted, is able to bring it to perfection; to confirm, strengthen, settle us; that book which contains in it the

word which is to judge us at the last day, which is "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Supposing these to be the devout feelings of your mind at the moment when the word of God lies open before you, our excellent and most scriptural liturgy seeks to improve and exalt those feelings by the following petitions. And first, directing our hearts to the author of all truth, from whom descends every good and perfect gift, it instructs us to pray, "blessed Lord who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning."

Revelation finds man ignorant and uninformed in those all-essential points, which it chiefly concerns his interest and happiness to know. Those points are, "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." And next to the author of all good, it discovers to us the source and origin of all *evil*, that deep-rooted principle of pride, which seeking to be independent of God, and to usurp in the human heart the place and precedency of God, plunged mankind into a state of moral apostacy and degradation, as well as of penal guilt. Against this hateful prin-

ciple, so rooted in the very fibres of man's heart, and entwining its baneful luxuriance with even his best actions, and purest motives, the whole tenor of scripture, the drift and purpose of the two covenants are levelled. In proportion as scripture lays the axe to this bitter root, it plants in its place a principle directly opposite in its nature and effects ; a child-like meekness and docility, to which is attached the kingdom of heaven ; the "mind which was in Christ Jesus : " a submission of the will and affections to be controled, of the understanding to be enlightened ; the whole man to be renewed and transformed by divine grace.

The scriptures then, in addition to their saving doctrines, are designed to teach and inculcate a principle as vital and transforming in its effects, as the pride of man's fallen nature is deadly and pernicious. This is the design of the precepts, examples, parables, in short of almost every moral lesson of the scriptures, in whatever form conveyed. They point out to us our fall and disease by sin ; our rise and restoration in Jesus Christ. They have the words of eternal life. Had the light of nature been sufficient to instruct us fully upon these subjects, we had still been without the scriptures. And yet even blest as mankind is with this additional light,

there is no man who thinks, that he has too much light, except perhaps it be that person who by this very opinion shows to us that he has not *enough*, at least that he has not profited by the light which has been vouchsafed him, and has received the grace of God in vain. The truth is, that the scriptures, my brethren, do not overpower our reason, but assist it. Their light is not absolutely irresistible; for then *all* men would be believers, *all* pious consistent Christians. But is this the case? Or *do* men generally affirm, that they are demonstratively convinced of the truths of religion, or that the scriptures are the word of God? Do they generally live, as though they were so convinced? On the contrary, is it not common for many persons to *require* demonstration for these truths? a proof which revelation in its very nature, will not admit of, but only of probable or moral evidence. And such evidence, my brethren, is sufficient. There is light enough thrown by God on the page of scripture, if we will use that light. To him who *does* so use it, his "word is a lamp to his feet, and a light to his paths." The same blessed Lord who has caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning, will not deny the light of his spirit to them who are anxious, (as they value such learning,) to use and improve it.

Shall God speak, and not make himself understood? Will he bring us into judgment, and condemn us for not profiting by those scriptures, which, though he caused to be written for our learning, he has denied us, (on the above supposition) the means of learning and knowing? That be far from him. There is then light sufficient in the scriptures, if the light that be in us, in ourselves, be not darkness. If we use this light aright, that is, for the purpose for which it was given us, for the glory of God the giver, and our own instruction in righteousness, then we shall understand that the scriptures were written for our learning, that by their light and instrumentality, we might know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.

Whenever then, my brethren, we sit down to read the holy scriptures, let us endeavour to have these points thoroughly settled and fixed in our minds: first, that they are the word of God, divinely inspired, containing his will and mind. Secondly, that "He caused them to be written for our learning." And thirdly, that we have light sufficient to learn them and to profit by them, if it be not our own faults, that is, if we carefully and thankfully use *that light which God has given us*, and neither pretend on the one hand, that we have light enough, without that of

the holy scriptures, to guide us into the knowledge of God and ourselves ; nor, on the other hand, that we have too little light in the scriptures, because their truths are not absolutely forced upon our convictions, and we experience some trouble and difficulty in fully admitting them ; though no more difficulty than truths of any other kind require which are not immediately the objects of our senses.

Once thoroughly to believe that God designed all holy scriptures for our learning, is to have already profited by revelation in no small degree ; it is to receive them with all that light and evidence, and truth with which we find them vouchsafed to us, *and no more*. To look for more, to complain for want of more, is not to receive the scriptures as the word of God, but as the word of man. Truth amounting to demonstration, truth submitted even to the testimony of the senses, will fail to convince those (as in the case of the Jews with respect to the miracles of our Lord,) who use not the light that is in them ; that is, who are not careful to use and improve that gift of reason with which all men are endued. Upon this principle it was, that our Lord affirmed to his disciples, “ that to him that hath, shall more be given :” to him who rightly improves the light of reason, more light shall be afforded ; more

and more insight into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. If, my brethren, we be content to be learners under the teachings of God's holy spirit, manifesting in our tempers all that docility, humility, and simplicity, so necessary to guard our minds from being puffed up on the one hand, or discouraged on the other, we shall find with Job, that "there is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding:" and with the psalmist, that "we have more understanding than our teachers:" that is, that the knowledge of God's law is infinitely to be preferred to all other wisdom.

When we have attained to so excellent a spirit as this, and seek to know the truth, and to improve and cherish the light that is in us; we have reached precisely that point, at which we may humbly hope, that God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, will graciously aid our enquiries, and finally lead us into all truth. For as much as we thus do his will, we shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God. We shall, therefore, proceed to pray that we may "hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest," the things that are written for our learning.

The holy scriptures differ from all human compositions in many essential respects: and in this respect chiefly, that the truths they contain,

are the vehicle not so much of information for the understanding, as of moral food for the heart. It is true, indeed, that this remark is applicable, in a certain degree, to other books of high-toned morality, and of a religious cast and tendency. But theirs is a borrowed light. Such books owe all their excellency on this account to truths derived either immediately, or accidentally, and through other channels, from the volume of Inspiration; since no morality is of much value that does not flow from *that* source. Hence it is that the holy scriptures, in order to convey to us their peculiar and transcendent virtues, require to be *lived* as well as read; their waters must, in order to prove efficacious, be conveyed from the head, to the heart and affections, and from thence be wafted and diffused into every word and action of the man.

For this purpose it is evident that scripture must be 'read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested.' It must undergo a kind of moral process within us, akin to that which food undergoes in order to become in the highest degree nutritious, and conducive to the purposes of life, health, and vigour. What is inwardly digested becomes *assimilated to*, and so part of, our nature. And ~~thus~~ precisely is it with regard to a right reception of the holy

scriptures. Of what use are its highest and most important truths, precepts, maxims, and examples, if they become not incorporated as it were with our very nature, our hearts, and lives? To what purpose is it that God speaks to us in his word, and reveals himself in his various dispensations of love and mercy, if his word be not in us, and abide with us: if we endeavour not on our parts to resemble Him, as a God of love, holiness, purity, and perfection? To what purpose do we read, and even "mark and learn that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," if this truth be seated only in the understanding, and pass not to the heart, and operate in the affections and life? Then only have we digested this most vital of all truths, this sublimest of all mysteries, when we have in heart and life, in spirit and affection, in word and deed, been "reconciled to God" through the Spirit, and Christ dwells in our heart by faith; when "we are one with Christ, and Christ with us:" when we "repent truly for our sins past, amend our lives, and are in perfect charity with all men"—then, my brethren, and not till then, we have read, marked, learnt, and inwardly digested this holy scripture.

In the same way, and by the same rule, we

may ascertain whether the doctrine of salvation *as a whole* has been digested by us in the above sense of moral digestion. The question is not whether we understand the Christian scheme as a speculative, but as a *morally operative* scheme; not so much advancing the Christian in the knowledge of this "mystery of godliness," as producing in him the vital effects of that doctrine; in other words, "the life of Jesus," "the mind which was in Christ Jesus." Hence it will appear, that those persons have most profited by the Scriptures, who have imbibed more of that love which "edifieth" than of that knowledge which "puffeth up;" who are "thoroughly furnished unto every good work," rather than they who "have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mystery and all knowledge." When the scriptures have become to us a new and a transforming principle of action, a rule of *life* as well as a rule of faith, then may we truly be said to have "inwardly digested" them, and by thus becoming the principle of a new life within us, we no longer receive them as the word of men (bestowing on our bibles only the attention and interest due to a composition merely human) but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh in us. It is

then also "the power of God to our salvation," and "dwells in us richly in all wisdom."

It must, on the other hand, be obvious, that if the holy scriptures be *not* in "such wise" read, and inwardly digested, if they be not deeply entered into, their precepts and maxims made our own, by being habitually lived upon and acted upon; in a word, if they become not in a manner *part of ourselves*, by growing with our growth and strengthening with our strength, we cannot be said to have attained to the "patience and comfort of God's holy word," nor to "embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life which he has given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ."

For would you farther ascertain the progress you have made in religion under the teaching of the scriptures, you will enquire whether you have yet attained to "patience" under their searching operation. If with the knowledge of a holy God, a Redeemer, and Sanctifier, you have also acquired, not merely an insight, but a deep and an habitual conviction of your condition as a fallen creature, a transgressor from the womb, a 'miserable sinner;' you will not slightly pass over those particular scriptures which come more immediately home to your

bosom, which show you to yourself, "as in the water face answereth to face." You will be patient of their reproofs, and bring yourself under the weight of their severest rebukes. Hence, when the word of God pronounces over you, *Thou art the man* ; if you have attained to the "patience" of the scriptures, you will with heart and soul, though with unfeigned humility and contrition, reply, *I have sinned!* "Lord thou knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hidden from Thee!" "Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean : wash me and I shall be whiter than snow."

The world would reach forth its hand to the "*comfort* of God's holy word," before it has endured the smarts, the divisions, the piercing asunder, the probings thereof. It would follow Christ to a kingdom, but not to imprisonment and to death. If you, my brethren, have not so learned Christ, then have you attained to the "patience" of the scriptures, knowing that "even Christ pleased not himself, but, as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me."

To such only belongs the "comfort of God's holy word." "The bones which God has

when you on the last sabbath-day brought it with you from the house of God. With it too religion is thus resumed and laid aside *by the week*. For if the scriptures be not daily and habitually perused, and perused with seriousness, religion cannot live and thrive. Prayer and reading the word of God are the Christian's *pulse*. As these are kept up, a healthy, a vital circulation is maintained through the religious system. The soul lives, and thrives, and delights itself in the Lord. Cease or relax these—religion dies away, and the cold apathy of the world seizes upon that heart, and understanding, and affections, which were created for God.

Other books, of a light and worldly cast, are substituted in the room of the scriptures: these are read with avidity: an interest is excited: they gratify a pampered and a false appetite. The scriptures have nothing of that *kind*, of excitement which such appetites require. They excite indeed an interest, but an interest of their own. A taste for better things than those of time and sense must be produced in the heart, before the scriptures can inspire such an interest. When a "hungering and thirsting after righteousness" has taken possession of the soul—then there is no interest like that of the scriptures ;

no pleasure equal to their's who meditate in the law of the Lord. All other books, whatever be their separate interest and independent merit, when compared to the words of eternal life, are but the shaking of the leaves. To read, to delight in, to digest the scriptures, is as the gleanings of the vintage. " Their object is not to make us either poets, philosophers, or orators ; but by their instructions they confer immortality, a divine nature, and heaven."*

Such is that book, the holy scriptures. Such the things which were written for our learning : a book not to be lightly skimmed over, and then closed and laid aside, but to be read, marked, learnt, and inwardly digested. Much less will it yield its sweetness to those who seldom or never taste its fruit. Nor for the languid, desultory reader, has it either patience or comfort. But let it be resorted to *constantly* ; give it the precedence in your estimation and practice, before all other books ; each *morning* at least, and in particular, rifle its opening sweets, before you go forth into the world ; and sure I am that its sacred truths, if received into an honest and good heart, and with the blessing of God's holy spirit piously and affectionately implored,

*Justin Martyr.

will shed and diffuse a lasting fragrance over the mind ; will give a tone and character to the main employments and pursuits of life ; will direct, elevate, and season its allowable and necessary relaxations,

Sermon XII.

THE JOURNEY OF THE EASTERN MAGI.

MATTHEW II., 1, 2.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

It is natural to us to imagine that when Omnipotence had conceived the wondrous purpose of stooping to this earth, and of veiling his ineffable glories in mortal flesh, the heaven of heavens would have lowered itself for the purpose of introducing the sovereign Lord of all to this small spot in his infinite domain: that he would have come attended by thousand thousands ministering to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand ushering in the Lord of glory. The Jews expected some such display.

They looked when the coming of the Son of Man should be visibly announced in the heavens, and their Messiah should come down to lead them to conquest and to glory. In this, however, their vain expectation, they were entirely deceived. True it is, that the night preceding the glorious dawn which we this day commemorate, burst forth with a supernatural effulgence, disclosing "a multitude of the heavenly host," who announced by their praises the birth of their incarnate God. But it was not to the Jews that he was thus announced, but to "shepherds abiding in the field, and keeping watch over their flock by night." True it is that a bright star or some other luminous appearance hung in the canopy of heaven to announce the same glorious event. But it was not over the holy city, Jerusalem, that it appeared. It was not to the Jewish scribes and doctors that it gave the long-looked for intelligence; but to "wise men of the east." Neither was it over the Jewish temple that it shone, as the palace of their future monarch; but over a mean abode in an inconsiderable village, it announced to men of other tongues the Saviour of the world.

I have chosen for our present consideration that interesting event recorded in the text—the journey and offering of the eastern magi. On

which I shall bring forward a few remarks, and draw from thence some practical lessons.

The sacred history informs us that “when Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”

These wise men were astrologers : persons versed in the science of the stars and other branches of natural philosophy. They knew the true God, though they worshipped him by *fire*. They were deists. The country they came from, here called “the east,” might be either Persia, or with greater probability, Arabia : both distant from Judea, lying to the east and south-east. On the memorable night of our Lord’s nativity, their attention is aroused by what is here called a star, but which was none other than a meteor, or some luminous and moving body, by its brightness indicating some new and strange occurrence. In what manner they came to be informed that this star announced the birth of the king of the Jews, we are not told. Such a star had been foretold many ages before, in that celebrated prophecy of Balaam, in the book of Numbers—“I shall see him, but not now : I

shall behold him, but not nigh : there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth." Besides this there prevailed a general notion all over the east, that a great personage was at hand who should obtain dominion, and that Judea was to be the scene of this event.

Whether the wise men were acquainted by these means, (or what is most probable,) by immediate revelation from God, that the star was that of the Messiah of the Jews, we are not told. This much we are informed, that they undertake a long and perilous journey of some weeks, or even months, across barren and sandy deserts, infested by robbers and wild beasts, and exposed to those calamitous privations which the journies of later travellers announce as peculiar to those trackless wastes. What will not human perseverance accomplish when directed to the pursuits of *this* world? Witness the researches of the naturalist and the antiquary, over those very plains which were traversed by these eastern sages : men who can forego ease, kindred, country, and encounter death in a thousand shapes, to gratify a thirst for knowledge, implanted for wise purposes in the human breast. What will not zeal, though in the cause of a *false* religion

accomplish? Witness those multitudes of fanatical worshippers, who toil over the same thirsty regions, to pay their annual adoration at the shrine of another Herod, a sanguinary and crafty prophet. And to complete the climax, what will not a heavenly-inspired ardour accomplish, a true principle of *grace* in the soul of man, in his passage towards the Jerusalem which is above? A spirit that is enkindled by God himself in the heart of the renewed Christian, will seek its true happiness through every opposing obstacle. The human mind, that active and restless principle, will carry a man with the same ardor towards a good and suitable object, as towards the contrary. All it requires is a true impulse, a proper direction, and a power sufficient, constant, and uniform. The soul then will pursue heaven as ardently as it now pursues earthly pleasures and vanities. It will seek its proper rest in God with the same intenseness with which it now seeks it in the world. Happiness is its object. All its amazing activities are perpetually directed to an undefined good. It has an infinite provision for enjoying happiness; and, therefore, it is of the last consequence that it should have an infinite object: and that object is God alone, an incarnate God, the great Emmanuel, made

known to us by the spirit, dwelling in the heart by faith, and working in us by love. Until this day-star arise in the heart, all is natural chaos and confusion. The soul, in its occasional efforts, broods over the dark mass, and would fain by its own power reduce the jarring principles of nature, warring passions, and revolting appetites, into order and harmony. It seeks occasionally to extricate itself from dull sense and matter, and to fly upwards to its native seat. But it possesses not the true power. Divine grace must set the prisoner free ; must disengage it from corporeal pleasures, from low-thoughted cares, from prejudices, false opinions, and illusions which dazzle and perplex the moral vision, and prevent that true light from entering which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Thus at the fullness of time, when our Lord stepped as it were, into the world, without noise, without observation, the pagan world lay in darkness and the shadow of death. Human knowledge indeed, had attained its greatest height ; the sun of philosophy and science had *passed* its meridian in the schools of Greece and Rome. But moral illumination, a power sufficient to aid and conduct the mind in its search after the chief good, the author of being and happiness, there was none : it had long since been obscured by error

and depravity. Such was the condition of the world. The Jews were even in a worse condition. With the scriptures of truth in their hands, the vail was upon their hearts. They stumbled at those very prophecies which told them expressly of Christ. The key of truth they broke in the door. Possessed with worldly and carnal notions of their Messiah and his kingdom, they overlooked "the true light," and embraced in their thoughts, opinions, desires, and expectations, all that was gross, palpable, and earthly. Even the first principles of religion, "mercy and the love of God," they had entirely shaken off.

Such was the state of darkness which involved the human mind, as exemplified in the Jew and the Pagan, when Christ came down from heaven to save a lost world: to recover the divine image upon the soul which sin had effaced; to give to the moral machine a new direction and a fresh impulse.

But to return to the wise men. No sooner had they set foot upon holy ground, and had entered Jerusalem, the grand repository of divine truth, the scene of so many revelations of God's will to man, and which now, as the seat of empire, they justly apprehended to be the theatre of a grand event, the birth-place of a divine personage, than they commence their enquiries

after the object of their search—"Where is He that is born king of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him?" We may well suppose that the arrival of these strangers from a distant country, and upon such an errand, would soon reach the ears of the jealous and suspicious Herod. In a city worn out with intestine commotions, a people bleeding under the scourge of a sanguinary tyrant, expectation of deliverance wound up to the utmost pitch, hope (though so long deferred,) clinging closer and closer to the phantom of their sensual imagination, namely, a victorious Messiah; intense, various, and conflicting, must have been the feelings both of monarch and people. Accordingly, "when Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." The former having waded to the throne through blood and lawless violence, justly apprehended danger for himself from this newly announced "king of the Jews." The latter dreaded fresh bloodshed, when this lion should be again let loose against them.

Uniting to ferocity the cunning of the fox, Herod first, in order to compare the event of Christ's birth with prophecy, "gathered all the chief priests and the scribes of the people

together," those whose business it was to expound the law of Moses, and enquires of them where Christ should be born? Having learnt from them the place, namely, 'Bethlehem of Judea:' he next privately sent for the wise men, and "enquired of them diligently, or with accuracy, what time the star appeared?" Having ascertained these two points, the *place* and *time* of his birth, and so formed a conjecture of his *age*; with detestable hypocrisy, having war in his heart, he dismisses them, "Go," said he, "to Bethlehem, and search diligently for the young child: and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also." Alas! his purpose was blood and not religion. His infernal policy was to slay the holy child Jesus, under the colour of paying him divine adoration. And yet had he but accompanied the illustrious strangers to Bethlehem, and prostrated himself at his feet in deep repentance and faith, one drop of that blood which he thirsted to spill, should have atoned for those rivers of blood he had already shed. Then, too, would have been spared the lives of the innocents, the lives of innumerable victims besides. Thus thousands perish with the word of life in their hands: thousands daily neglect to prostrate themselves by repentance and faith

before the throne of mercy ; and so the truths which belong to their peace, are for ever hid from their eyes.

Let us turn from this monster of wickedness who thus was secretly conspiring against the Lord and against his anointed, to the peaceful scene in Bethlehem. " When they heard the king, they departed, and lo, the star which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was." The first appearance of the star was on the night of the nativity ; since which time it had disappeared, even during their long and dreary journey over deserts where we may suppose such a guidance had been most welcome, even admitting the assistance they might derive from their previous knowledge of the stars and their bearings. We may imagine with what emotions of gratitude and delight, they once more hailed its appearance. Accordingly we read, that ' when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.' Or (to come nearer to the sense of the original,) " they rejoiced with a *transport of joy*." They had seen this remarkable phenomenon in their own country, now distant many a league. Hence it served tenderly to revive in their memories the delights of that spot; which no traveller in a foreign land ever thinks of but with sacred emotions ; it served also as a pledge

of the care and protection of that Being whose presence is every where, and who had hitherto safely conducted their steps ; as well as to kindle a foretaste of the happiness that awaited them at Bethlehem. On all these accounts, when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. " And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him : and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts ; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

This short narrative, interesting as it is in itself, suggests to our minds a train of reflections which it would be wrong to resist, and may at this time, by the divine blessing, become profitable to our salvation.

Who, we may be disposed to ask, were these gentile philosophers, that the glorious advent of the blessed God, the divine Emmanuel, should in the first instance be vouchsafed to *them*? I answer, that it is not for us to scrutinize the counsels of omnipotence ; yet judging from the manner and character of God's dealings in general with his creatures, in the disposition of his gifts of providence and grace, (that " the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong ;") recollecting, moreover, the observation

of our Lord, that his heavenly Father had kept these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes : we may conclude, that among other reasons for his dispensation in the particular case before us, the Almighty meant to humble the pride of the arrogant and sceptical Jew by revealing his Son in the first instance to gentiles and not Jews. These eastern magi had been blest with no written revelation, had had no prophecies to consult. The volume of nature was their only book of religion, but this they had studied with the best effect ; they had improved the light that was in them ; whilst those very persons who had been for ages the depositaries of all that was certain, all that was revealed concerning the Almighty and his dealings with mankind, who possessed those very scriptures which spake of Christ, (having read them with the vail upon their hearts, and consequently were unable to understand the true nature of his kingdom,) to these, I say, no star appeared to announce that Lord whom they should obstinately reject.

Let no man then boast of *privileges*. Let no man vaunt himself in the knowledge he possesses, but seek rather to improve the gift, and bear his faculties, whatever they may be, with meekness of wisdom. Like these Gentile philosophers,

some of you, my brethren, may be poring over the volume of nature, but never once looking through nature up to nature's God : like them you may be skilled in the science of the stars, may know "the sweet influence of Pleiades, or the bands of Orion," and yet may never have seen the star of Bethlehem. You may never yet have come to Christ. You may never yet have enquired "Where is he that is born king of the Jews? Who is the Son of God that I might believe on him?" "What shall I do to be saved?" Such studies, as I before observed, are both valuable and interesting : the more they are cultivated, the greater is their legitimate tendency to increase our admiration and love of the great artificer who "hangeth the earth upon nothing." But you will remember that even this knowledge is but secondary, and till the day dawn, and the day-star of a better light arise in your hearts, you are still in darkness, and know not the truth. The wise men doubtless thought all their former knowledge to be foolishness compared with that which they acquired under a straw-built shed at Bethlehem : that holy mystery of "God manifest in the flesh."

Others, on the contrary, may, like the Jewish doctors and scribes, possess, and read, and value those scriptures which testify of Christ,

and who yet know him not. They may possess a kind of vague and indefinite regard for the scriptures, but may possess not with it the key to the true and hidden interpretation thereof. That key is *humility*, an implicit reliance on the spirit of God—a sense of our natural imbecility and blindness to the things which belong to our peace, the shortsightedness of our unassisted views of God, the spirituality of the divine law, and a fervent desire after increasing light, increasing knowledge. Had the wise men not possessed this child-like docility, they had not come to Christ : had they not been of an humble spirit, they had not fallen down and worshipped him. Had they been offended with the homeliness of what they saw, instead of recognizing in mortal habiliments that child who “is set for the rising and falling of many ;” they had not opened their treasures, and presented to him gifts only worthy of a king.

Let us, then, far from being offended with Christ and his doctrine, or the simple terms on which he offers us life and peace, gratefully acknowledge his Gospel to be the power of God to our salvation. Let us offer to him not merely our gold, our frankincense, or our myrrh, but oblations far more precious—“ourselves, our souls, and our bodies, as a reasonable, holy, and

lively sacrifice unto him." Let us adore with the lowest prostration of body and soul, the Incarnate mystery, this day made known to a lost world. And joining the chorus of the skies, the innumerable multitude of the heavenly host, let us continually praise him and say, "Blessing and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever."

Sermon XIII.

THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION.

ROMANS viii. 15.

*For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear ;
but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we
cry Abba, Father.*

THERE is no enquiry of such deep interest to the mind of man as this ; In what relation do I stand to God, the great author of my being, the rewarder or punisher of my actions ? Can I look up to Him with filial love ? Can I with comfort address Him as ‘ my Father ? ’ Or in contemplating the great first cause, do I see all that is awful, vast and incomprehensible in thought, arrayed against me, under his august titles, his incommunicable attributes ?

A reference to our state by nature and grace,

must determine this question. Our natural condition is a fallen one. "Having the understanding darkened," we are by nature "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us, because of the blindness of our hearts: being past feeling, we have given ourselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." Hence, our natural apprehensions of the great author of our being, cannot but be mingled with fear. "Enemies in our minds by wicked works," it is plain, that in no way can our fears be allayed, and love and affiance succeed to their place, but by our being reconciled unto God. The scriptures set forth the means of reconciliation. Christ is there displayed as "the way, and the truth, and the life." No man cometh to the father but by him. "Thou art a God," observes the prophet, "that hidest thyself." The light of nature makes but our darkness visible. Revelation discovers to us our blindness, and our corruption, together with our consequent inability to know God, except as a being justly incensed against his guilty creatures. From this state, as man can alone be delivered by Jesus Christ, so it follows, that *without* him, he is cut off from all communication with God as a reconciled Father; since He is the only appointed mediator between God and man. "No

man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."

Some there are who, notwithstanding the scripturally revealed God, that is, a God in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and the scripturally revealed way to the Father, that is, his son Jesus Christ, (fondly clinging to their darling reason, and rejecting the doctrine of a mediator, as unworthy of *their* apprehensions of a God of love,) frame to themselves a method of communicating with the Supreme Being *without* the intervention of a mediator; as if, all such medium of communication being removed, they were capable of knowing, and loving Him.

But, for my own part, my brethren, did I think myself at liberty, (by putting either reason, or my own adopted fancies, however plausible or agreeable, into the place of revelation,) to explain away, and so reject as unnecessary or even false, the doctrine of a divine mediator, I should feel utterly at a loss, having done away with this stepping-stone, if I may so speak, between God and man, earth and heaven, in what possible way to approach, or in what light to regard, a "jealous God." If the heavens are not pure in his sight, and he charges his angels with folly, can I look up to heaven with no feeling of apprehension? Conscious to myself of so much sin,

and of such continual violations of his law written on my heart, am I sure that my sincerest repentance will be accepted in lieu and place of any other atonement? I never can be sure of this point. To say the least, it is *doubtful*. What person, therefore, (except him who prefers speculation to revelation, pride of intellect to the submission of his understanding to the Gospel,) would choose in the matter of his eternal salvation, to rest his foot upon such uncertain ground? What person would choose, for the sake of indulging his own fancies, or those self-adopted notions which *he* conceives to be more worthy of God, (though in opposition to his expressly revealed will) to leap so awful a gulph, and thus to venture into the presence of his supposed reconciled, but *perhaps* doubly and trebly incensed God?

The truth is, my brethren, that depending on reason alone, without Christ, the revealed mediator, there is no feeling for us but of guilt; no prospect but of punishment, of darkness, and despair; "nothing to be beheld by us, but obscurity and confusion in the divine nature, and in our own."* By his authoritative voice, the holy scriptures of truth, he has declared, that

* Pascal.

“no man cometh to the Father but by his Son.” He has solemnly protested unto us, that we shall not see his face, except this our elder brother be with us.

Hence it appears, that man, by rejecting revelation, as it regards the doctrine of a mediator between God and his creatures, rejects not merely the only sure, but the only possible way of coming to the Father; and so far from acquiring more light to guide him in his enquiries, he plunges himself into impenetrable and inextricable darkness. Until he can point out some other *necessary* and *infallible* connection between God and his offending creatures, by removing guilt and punishment out of the way, or by substituting some other link in the chain than that which the Gospel supplies, some other medium of communication than Jesus Christ the righteous, he never can, with *scriptural* assurance, at least, in the true spirit of adoption cry Abba, Father.

But, it may be asked, did not the sacrifices of atonement under the Jewish law, present a sufficient medium of communication with God? Was not he preeminently the God of the Jew, “to whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promise?”

Thus placed, as it were under the very eye of heaven, in the very centre of divine attractions, surely, it may be said, God was *their* father, in the true spirit of adoption. Far from it. St. Paul is addressing converted Jews, in the chapter before us. And throughout it, as well as in all his other epistles, he contrasts the glorious privileges of the true adopted sons of God under the Gospel, with the slavish condition of those who were bound by "the law of sin and death," to render an obedience thereto, which the more imperfect it necessarily was, served but to convict them, in the same proportion, of fresh sin and guilt. Dim and obscure as was the light of nature to conduct sinful man to God and happiness, the law served, it should seem from the Apostle's argument, more fearfully to perplex him, more surely to detain him captive in the regions of sin and death. What are his remarkable and striking words? "I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." As if he had said, 'As long as I remained ignorant of that law which brought the knowledge of sin, I yet showed symptoms of life even in that alienated state of the heart from God; I was comparatively happy: but when under the prohibitions and awful sanctions of the law, and their extensive

moral obligation, I became fully acquainted with the extent also of my sinfulness and guilt, as well as total inability to do good works pleasing and acceptable to God—then sin revived in all its strength, the guilt of my unrenewed nature rose upon my mind as an armed host, and I became dead, absorbed in all the apprehensions of a guilty conscience, and with a certain fearful looking for of judgment.’ “Sin is not imputed when there is no law.” But “as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse.” “The law was weak through the flesh; and they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Hence we arrive at the conclusion, that it is under the light of the gospel dispensation alone, that man recovers his first but forfeited relationship to his God. He discovers his real pedigree, and traces it with joy to his heavenly Father. The darkness is past, and the true light shineth. “Beloved, now are we the *sons of God*.” Christ hath showed us plainly of the Father. Our fellowship is now with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. This is the title which every where runs through, and animates the writings of the saints and Apostles. “I write unto you, little children,” says St. John, “because ye have known the Father.” The salutation

in the epistles to the Churches is—"Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ." "The Father of mercies and God of all consolation." "For ye, believers, have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear: but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father."

Since, then, union with the ever blessed God and his Son Jesus Christ, is the end of all religion, the grand feature of Christianity, the perfection of our restored nature, and the real foundation of all happiness and peace in this world as well as in the next; let us enquire more particularly,

First, into the nature of this adoption;

Secondly, into its privileges; and

Thirdly, into its effects.

I. The *nature* of this adoption. Adoption is in its common and popular acceptance, an act whereby a man takes a person into his family, makes him a part of it, acknowledges him for his son, receives him into the number, and gives, makes over, and conveys to him, all the rights and privileges of true children. This act being, as the term imports, the result of a man's own free choice, is not tied in its operation and exercise to any circumstance in the adopted person

which may constitute a ground of right or claim. It is free and unfettered in its origin ; irrespective with regard to its object. Thus by the application of a term expressive of human actions, the Father of lights, from whom descends every good and perfect gift, is said, under the Gospel, to adopt, to admit into his family, to invest with his august name, his fallen creatures : to communicate of his fullness, the inexhaustible treasures of his love and mercy, to the guilty race of Adam. An act as free and uncontrouled, as I observed, in its origin and first design, as it is unlimited and irrespective in its exercise. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.” And with regard to the objects of his paternal love, whether they be his chosen children the Jews, or sinners of the Gentiles—all is the result of his own free choice and good pleasure : and it were impious and ungrateful to pry further into his eternal counsels. God giveth no account of any of his matters. Suffice it to know, and so humbling a truth may well repress either the spirit of jealousy on the one hand, or of curious enquiry on the other ; that so far from possessing any claim to such an act of grace, man was totally destitute thereof. Yea more, he was under a curse, liable to the

judgment of God ; a trembling expectant of his wrath, rather than a rightful candidate for his grace. Enemies to God by wicked works, mankind, nevertheless, might, and did receive his grace, but could possess no imaginable claim thereto, by any proper inherent right.

The adopted, then, are true believers in Christ, they rely upon the merits of his death and righteousness for pardon and reconciliation with God ; “ For to as many as receive him, to them gives he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” They are regenerated by the Spirit ; they are led by the Spirit ; they walk in the Spirit ; and “ are justified freely by grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.”

Such is briefly the nature of adoption, and the means by which it is effected through the agency of the Spirit.

II. To describe or enumerate, in the second place, the *privileges* therein contained, the hidden and secret virtue which resides in that mysterious word adoption, would require the immediate inspiration of the Spirit himself. In no passage of his animated writings does the holy Apostle so rise above himself, and seem to carry the believer along with him in the ardour and loftiness of his flight, as in this chapter

where he treats of adoption. Rising step above step, climax above climax, he makes us "to triumph in Christ," and in the contemplation of our heaven-born privilege; as well as to long for, and in some measure to realize, its ulterior joys. Witness the truth of this remark in the text and the verses following—"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear: but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Does he further describe the privilege of the adopted as regards God's fatherly protection from temporal and spiritual evils, and his provision of all things needful both for soul and body?—Hear him again, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Would he console the Christian under trials and sufferings?—"I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be

revealed. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God?" Is it another unspeakable privilege of the adopted, that God assists, hears, and answers the prayers of his children? The same Apostle tells us, "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Or lastly, would we be assured of the believer's title to the heavenly inheritance?—we have the Apostle in a sort of holy rapture enquiring: "If God be for us, who can be against us? Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." "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 us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

III. We are in the third place to describe adoption in its *effects*. "Ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father." As before, when ye knew not God, except through the fears of a guilty conscience,

all was dread and slavish apprehension : so, now that ye are known of him through the Gospel, as your reconciled Father in Christ Jesus, the first, the predominating feeling of your heart towards him is that of filial love and confidence. You no longer fear this “unknown God.” You no longer walk in darkness, in ignorance of the God who made you, but you “walk in light as he is in the light.” You behold him gloriously enthroned on the mercy seat, to receive your prayers, to sympathise in your sorrows : yea, he sits enshrined in your very hearts : and there is not a thought, or a wish, a fear or a doubt, but you make him a party thereto : saying, “My Father, henceforth thou art the guide of my youth.” In all your crosses, the language of your heart is, “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” “Thy will be done.” Does the world frown and terrify you?—you know your privileges—“We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God ; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.” Does conscience accuse ? Is a sense of your sinfulness painfully revived?—“Where should the frightened child hide his head, but in the bosom of his loving Father?”* “Ye have received the spirit of

*Hooker.

adoption." "He Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law but under grace. Ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

Such are the blessed effects which flow from our adoption—a deliverance from that habitual fear to which we were before, that is, out of Christ, enslaved; into "the glorious liberty of the children of God." The sun in the firmament, illumining and refreshing, and exhilarating the boundless expanse of creation, conveying life, light, and joy, into every heart, is, after all, but a faint, a languid picture, compared to the sunshine of that breast which was "sometime darkness, but is now light in the Lord." Only "walk as children of the light."

On the contrary, you who walk not after the spirit, but after the flesh, must be pronounced to be *not* sons of God: ye have not received the spirit of adoption. And if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his. As many only as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Ask yourselves, therefore, the question with which I commenced this discourse. The whole world cannot suggest another of equal importance. As to have within us the witness of the Spirit that we are the children of

God, is nothing less than a foretaste of heaven ; so, on the other hand, for the same Spirit to be continually whispering to our conscience that we are the children of the wicked one ; of our father, the Devil,—what is it less than the gnawing of that worm which never shall die, the kindling of that fire which never shall be quenched ? There is not within the boundaries of creation, a spectacle of so much fear and misery, and horror and darkness, as that person who belongs not to God : but who wanders farther and farther from him, like Cain, with the token of wrath upon him.

Should I now be addressing but one such wanderer, I entreat you to pause, and compare for a moment, the guilt, the agitation, the remorse, the fear of the prodigal, wasting his substance with riotous living, removed from, and forgetful of the fond eye of his father ; with the peace, the calm, the joy, that inhabited the breast of the same prodigal, when again restored to the love, and embrace of that same father. Light and darkness were not more opposite.

Arise then, and go to thy father in the same spirit of sorrow and contrition, through Jesus Christ the mediator, and thou shalt experience a like reception. Let him but speak the word,

‘thy sins be forgiven thee : peace, be still,’ and suddenly there shall be a great calm. Until that happy period arrive, and the day-star arise in your heart, make no pretensions to peace. Until you are thoroughly reconciled to God, and God to you, through Christ, you can never be said to possess this inestimable treasure.

Neither mistake, with thousands of other deluded persons, the peace of the world, pleasurable sensations arising even from good deeds, and charitable actions, for the peace of God alone flowing from the scripture doctrine of reconciliation with him, and attested by the seal of the Spirit. Without this, until this happy alliance between God and the soul has been concluded and ratified, our peace, although springing from actions good, virtuous, and praiseworthy in themselves, will yield to every gust, will be dispersed and fly away as the morning cloud. The peace of God springing from the blessed assurance, that our sins, though many, are forgiven; and this assurance made doubly sure by the witnessing seal of the Spirit within us, that we are the sons of God; such a peace is alone permanent and substantial: will stand us in the hour of need, bear up against every storm, and though we be outwardly

assailed and inwardly cast down, it will, like an angel, whisper to us—*peace at the last*. “Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” “Fear not, little flock, it is your Father’s pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Sermon XIV.

BE A BLESSING!



GENESIS xii. 2.

Thou shalt be a Blessing!

It was the observation of an enlightened heathen, "That we are not born for *ourselves alone*, but that our country and our friends have each a claim upon us." And certain it is, that of all enquiries connected with our present state as men and as Christians, there is scarcely one of greater importance than this, viz. : "In what way may I so dispose of myself and my affairs ; my time and my influence ; my situation and circumstances, so as to *be a Blessing?*" Yes, my brethren, a *Blessing!* And,

truly, a sentiment more pure, more patriotic, more *Christian*, cannot warm the heart of man. And when we behold it embodied in practice, when we behold a fellow-creature acting up to such a sentiment (be his situation in life what it may, high or low, rich or poor,) we involuntarily pronounce him to be one of the best, as well as the happiest of mankind. On the contrary, that man who is so wrapt up in self, so blind to the call of duty and religion; so overgrown with rust and idleness, sensuality and profligacy, as to forget this grand purpose of his existence—such a person may justly be denominated a curse—the most contemptible of his species.

The words of the text were addressed by God to the patriarch Abraham. Wherein, I shall consider briefly what was required of him in order to be entitled to the promise herein contained. The promise itself, made to him, “Thou shalt be a blessing;” and conclude with a practical improvement of the subject.

I. First, we are to consider, what was required of Abraham in order to be entitled to the promise in the text. He was required to obey the divine command and to leave his country, estate, relations and connections—“Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy

father's house." Whither was he to go : Where to hope for compensation for such sacrifices ? He was to follow Providence ; to trust Divine care ; and he therefore stood in need of some gracious promise to encourage him. The world may deem such a notion ridiculous and enthusiastic. To relinquish a certainty for an uncertainty ;—to exchange for a distant country that sacred spot which unites every fond association ;—to sever oneself from old friends, from present attachments ;—but above all to tear oneself from the scene of our childhood, our dearest recollections ;—from that holy and consecrated circle "*our father's house*," at the very mention of which the heart is filled with a thousand inexpressible sensations of delight and tenderness—to leave all these, I say ; and for what ? for an undefined good—"a place that I will show thee"—possibly flying before us, eluding the search ;—or even if found, certain to fall short of those immediate joys and comforts we have resigned :—all this appears at first sight to be an act of compliance which the world would probably denominate *weakness*, or doubtful policy.

Not such, however, did it appear to *Abraham*. A command of this nature we may suppose fell harshly upon his ears, and he would struggle for a moment with the feelings of humanity. Religion

was never intended to quench, or extinguish these natural feelings. It corrects, it exalts, it purifies them. It deals with us as men; and consequently requires us to make no sacrifice of feeling, to burst asunder no social band, but what it proposes to us under a clear sense of duty. God called, and Abraham obeyed. He well knew that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Omnipotence, my brethren, stands pledged, not indeed to work miracles, but to provide for the good man, the pious believer, the holy pilgrim and sojourner upon earth; seeking, with Abraham, a better country, *i. e.* a heavenly, in every possible way;—though not in every way of our own choosing. In this belief, Abraham left his country, his friends—his father's house, “not knowing whither he went,”—but still possessed with the rational expectation, the well-grounded hope, that what God had promised, he was able, and intended to make good. Thus, therefore, assured to meet *Him* in all his ways; at every turn, though of a doubtful, long, and tedious pilgrimage, to experience the blessing of Heaven,—every place was to him a country, every stranger he met, a friend, a brother, and a sister—every stage of his earthly sojourn, *his father's house.*

In imitation of faithful Abraham, the Christian is invited to make similar sacrifices, with the promise of a similar reward. "Verily I say unto you, (it is the assurance of our divine Redeemer) there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the Gospel's, but he shall receive a hundred-fold now in this time, houses and brethren, and sisters and mothers, and children and lands—and in the world to come, eternal life." In order to discover when and wherein we are called upon, by the clear voice of duty, to make this painful surrender of all we hold dear on earth, the rule is, That whatever comes in competition with religious duty, with the voice of God addressing us through the clear dictates of conscience, directed, and informed, and supported by his sacred oracles, the Holy Scriptures—whatever (be it never so dear or fondly cherished) strikes at the root of Christian growth in faith and godliness—that we must relinquish.

II. But, secondly, we are to consider the *promise* made to Abraham. "Thou shalt be a Blessing." In that memorable discourse which the Almighty condescended to hold with his faithful servant, he was pleased thus to honour and encourage him: "I will make of thee a

great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great : and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee : and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

1. Abraham was made a blessing to his *family*. From the moment he left his country at the divine call (for they had left God, and abandoned themselves to a base idolatry, worshipping the creature rather than the creator), from that moment a rich indemnification was his. If we look to the outward prosperity of his family—"the Lord blessed him greatly; and he became great: and He gave him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and men-servants, and maid-servants, and camels, and asses." And (what is reckoned by the world, and justly reckoned, the *next* blessing) "Sarah his wife bare him a *son* when she was old: and unto him he gave all that he had." Though he wandered up and down in that land, which was afterwards to become his posterity's; at the very time when he himself had none inheritance therein, no, not so much as to set his foot on, prosperity attended him at every step. Enriched himself, he had the means and the inclination and heart to enrich others. Possessing wealth sufficient to have raised himself and family to honour and distinction, he continued unostentatiously to dwell in

tents. There Abraham was resorted to in every emergency, as the helper of the oppressed; the common centre of protection and safety to his surrounding neighbours; the independent settler, though the benevolent and powerful lord.

But in a character of such singular excellence, and intrinsic worth, we must confine ourselves to those more transcendent qualities, those more illustrious achievements of a divine faith, whereby he entailed the blessing upon his posterity. Besides those sacrifices already noticed, what promise could be too great, what blessing too large, rich, and extensive, for the Almighty to confer upon that act of faith, whereby he offered up in sacrifice that very son, whose existence and preservation were so apparently necessary to perpetuate the blessing in his family? *In Isaac shall thy seed be called, and all nations be blessed.* Yet that very son, of his age, of his love, of his faith, and longing expectation; he is now called upon to offer, by a still greater act of faith, in sacrifice: "take thine only son Isaac whom thou lovest, and get thee to the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering." Never any gold was tried in so hot a fire: no faith ever put to a severer test. A command apparently so opposite to, and

destructive of the previous promise ; a command seeming to involve the strangest contradictions, as well as unnatural cruelty, would not only have staggered, but extinguished a less faith than Abraham's. But the things that are impossible with men, are possible with God. Such trials are the proofs, such the life and soul of this heaven-implanted principle. And those persons who require a reason for every dispensation of Almighty wisdom, will make no advances but where they can clearly see their way ; will make no sacrifices without a *present*, as well as promised indemnification. " Whatsoever is dearest to us upon earth, is our Isaac : happy are we if we can sacrifice it to God : those shall never rest with Abraham, that cannot sacrifice with Abraham." " He believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness."

Such heroic, uncompromising faith, entailed the richest promise ever made to mortal man. " By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore : and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies : and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be

blessed." As the blessing was fully accomplished in him to his family, so also,

2. *To future generations.* "Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

He became the father of the faithful : an illustrious example to all those who should walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had, being uncircumcised. He entailed on them, and on every son of Adam, that unspeakable blessing, which is at once the reward and object of our faith, as it constituted that of Abraham. In him, in his seed, *i. e.* in Jesus Christ, were all the families of the earth, blessed. Thus was the promise in the text illustratively verified. He was made a blessing to his family ; and to future generations.

III. I shall now make some practical *improvement* of the subject.

And first, I observe, if such be the beneficial influence of goodness, of active, operative, consistent faith and piety, as embodied in the holy

patriarch, and not in him only, but in the person of every true imitator of this holy pattern; it naturally follows, 'how dreadful is it to be a curse to others!' There are, unhappily, many blanks in God's creation; many persons of a *negative* character, neither actively good, nor actively bad. Of such persons there is perhaps a large majority. And such it is to be feared are in the habit of taking to themselves some little credit with mankind. "If they do no good they do no harm," they say. The most charitable construction that can be put upon such an avowal perhaps is—that they let others alone; they neither interfere with their property, their person, or their good name: that so far they are moral, as regards themselves; honest, as regards their neighbour; and inoffensive, peaceable members of society. And is this *all* they boast? Will this amount to the virtue even of a heathen and publican? Much less, infinitely less, will it satisfy the demands of Christ. His words are, "he that gathereth not with me, scattereth"—as though he had said, "he that lives not to be a blessing, at least, he who endeavours not to be actively beneficial to others in his calling and station—to promote, as he is a Christian, the general good; he is so far a curse, that he mars the benevolent designs of his Saviour. And if

such be the case with the negatively good, what must be his fearful responsibility who is *actively bad*?—who lives only to be a curse: who exists only to blot, obliterate, and efface that goodly order of things which God has mercifully established in the world: and in the place of peace, tranquillity, and happiness, the natural result of that merciful arrangement—sows the seeds of vice and misery, unhappiness and ruin? Language cannot utter, for idea cannot conceive, the punishment every where denounced in scripture against such a one! To this add, (if any addition can be made thereto) the curse of the living and the execration of posterity.

2. How desirable is it to be a *blessing* to others. Abraham lived not to himself. Had this been his principle of action, he had not made those unheard of sacrifices which a selfish man never could or would have made. “*Christ*, says the Apostle, pleased not himself;” “Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good, to edification.” The true patriot is the true Christian. At the call of his holy religion, he is not only ready for every good work, to scatter blessings with a liberal hand, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to comfort the distressed: but even where God has not given him the means of

doing good in this sense, his example, his faith, his piety to God, his benevolence to mankind have a pervading influence, even in cases where he is permitted to do but little; and yet *without* that little, such as personal care, soothing and attention, larger means of conferring good would want much of their efficiency. Thus actively benevolent, and rich at least *in good works*, the poorest son of Abraham, the poorest member of the Christian community, has an inestimable blessing to impart.

To be a blessing in this sense, is an honour for which all may contend—high and low, rich and poor. “To do good and to distribute, forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” But we have seen that doing good is assuredly not to be restricted to distributing to the needy from the fulness or sufficiency of our worldly stores, any more than so to distribute is always to do good. Infinite are the ways and occasions in which both may beneficially be exercised: even as infinite as are the objects. Charity and alms giving, though forming an essential and therefore an important means of conferring a blessing, are not the whole—will not, of themselves entitle a man to the high and distinguished appellation of being a blessing. The *faith of*

Abraham, the silent unostentatious influence of piety and goodness, like the beams of the sun, warm and pervade. The same disinterestedness, the same benevolent example of Abraham; the same self-denial which resigned all that was near and dear to him, will effectually ensure to us his blessing. With him we shall come to our graves (if not full of years) at least full of honour, of peace, of immortality. From our ashes shall ascend the blessing of him whom we have, if not relieved with our worldly stores, *edified and comforted by our example.*

Lastly. How gloriously pre-eminent is the character of our Lord Jesus Christ; the greatest blessing the world ever enjoyed: the glorious fulfilment of the original promise made to Abraham his type, "In thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;" for "To Abraham and to his seed were the promises made." This blessing we have and enjoy through the faith of our father Abraham; this we *appropriate* by imitating that faith. By forsaking all, as he did, and following Christ in this world, we shall attain to that typified rest in heaven which remaineth for the people of God. By sacrificing our first-born—the Isaac of our affections—by surrendering our choicest pursuits, at the call of duty and

conscience : in a word, by suffering with Christ, we shall also reign with him ; from following him here in the regeneration, and in newness of life ; from *faith* we shall pass to *fruition* ; from being a blessing to others we shall also ourselves be blessed with faithful Abraham.

Sermon XV.

TRUST IN GOD.

MATTHEW VI., 25, 26.

Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink ; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment ? Behold the fowls of the air : for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they ?

It is the duty and privilege of the Christian to repose unbounded faith and confidence in his God. He cannot believe the doctrine of an universal Providence, whose mercy is over all his works, and not also believe that he himself is a special object of his upholding care, and sustaining hand : and believing this,

he cannot but entrust the same gracious Providence with the supply of his daily wants, in the same way, and with the same simple dependence that a child looks up to a fond and tender parent for his daily bread. Does God take care of the fowls of the air, and direct them by a natural instinct to the apparently precarious supply of their wants? and do *they* trust the daily hand that feeds them, neither sowing, nor reaping, nor gathering into barns? And are ye not much better than they? Can ye by taking thought, do even the least thing, forward the growth of your natural bodies, by adding one cubit unto your stature; or assist nature, with all your cares and anxious thoughts, even in her simplest operations? And, going down a step lower, from the feeding, to the clothing of your bodies, why take ye thought for raiment? when even the "lilies of the field," the inanimate things of the Creation, pursue the ends of their existence (they toil not, neither do they spin) and yet are the objects of God's Providence, in their scale and degree, equally with ourselves; though so fleeting as to be the ornament of the ground to day, and fuel for the fire to morrow. Shall He not much more clothe *you*, O ye of little faith? Even as much more, as the life of a man is of more worth and consequence than that of a lily, and

his vital principle more durable than that which is assigned to the flower of the grass.

Such are the simplest and most obvious arguments for the duty of trust in God, which our blessed Lord presses upon us from an every-day look into nature, from contemplating the commonest objects around us ; such as the flight of a bird above, or the growth of the grass under our feet. And yet from the mere light of nature does he inforce this grand doctrine, “ *Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink ; nor yet for your body what ye shall put on.*”

I shall endeavour to set before you the true meaning of these important words ; that is, the *restrictive* sense in which they are to be taken ; and then to draw such rules of conduct from them as they seem to imply.

When our Saviour enjoins us to take no thought for our lives what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, he only cautions the true Christian to avoid all that *excessive* anxiety about the things of this life, and which pertain to a perishable body, which may take us off, and *does* in its natural tendency and effects, take us off from religion, from a due, and serious, and constant regard to the welfare of the soul. *Excessive* anxiety, painful solicitude, and engrossing care,

to the exclusion of all concern for eternity, and to our laying up treasure in Heaven, are what we are to understand by 'taking no thought : ' because, you well know, that whatever is uppermost in the thoughts, is sure to take the sole possession of the mind, to chain down the whole man and all his faculties, desires, pursuits, hopes and fears to that single and simple object, whatever it be. And upon this principle it is that the same divine teacher, our Lord Jesus Christ, lays it down as an undoubted maxim, a never-failing truth, in the words preceding the text, that "No man can serve two masters : for either he will hate the one, and love the other ; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other : ye cannot serve God and Mammon," Some one object will always have the ascendancy in our minds, to the comparative or even utter exclusion of all others. And in the case of those two grand objects which divide the heart of men, those two masters which we all serve respectively, I mean "God and Mammon"—those two pursuits of the heart and affections—this world or the next—the body or the soul :—experience shows how incompatible they are with each other—experience shows how impossible it is to serve God, at least as he ought to be served, that is, "with all the heart, with all the mind,

with all the soul, and with all the strength," and to pay an equal regard to the world and the things of the world at the same time.

Take these two objects of man's care *separately*. Put God and religion, for the moment, out of the question : and I would ask, does he whose heart, and thoughts, and desires, are centred in the world, ever think that he serves it *sufficiently* ? Will all his carefulness and thoughtfulness be able to secure to him what he deems a sufficiency of the things of this life ? Is there not always, even with the utmost stretch of his time and thoughts, is there not always a something which even *that* cannot procure ? a something wanting ? Has the world whom he so devotedly serves no further claim upon him ? Are the laws and requirements of the world, of fashion and caprice, satisfied that he has paid them nothing *less* than all his heart, all his soul, all his strength ? I fear that the most assiduous votary the world ever had, its veriest and most abject slave, was never able with all his care and fidelity, fully to satisfy *this* rigid master : but that there will always be a frown from this person, a jealousy from that, or a slight from a third. So that, you see, to serve the world, to pay undivided attention and thought to its pleasures and possessions is not possible ;

I mean so as fully and entirely to satisfy ourselves *and* it.

And with regard to God: where is the man that ever served *Him* as he ought? Where is the man that ever attended sufficiently to those things which are beyond the reach of time and sense?—the things which are not seen and eternal?—even though he has, at least in purpose, cordially and sincerely devoted himself, his time, his talents, and opportunities to God, to the almost utter exclusion of the world, and the things of the world?

And if to serve but one of these masters faithfully and exclusively, and as they each require to be served, be so difficult a thing, how can a man serve *both at once*? Experience and the word of God prove the thing to be impossible.

Hence arises the necessity of attending closely to the doctrine contained in the text, viz: that we repose our chief cares, our chief thoughts, our chief trust, in the mercy and goodness of God: since to bestow them any where else is to draw us off from what most concerns us to attend to, which is the care of the soul: and at the same time does not attain the object of its anxiety.

But as we live in the world to be active, busy, and useful to ourselves and to each other:

and where we see that none *but* the active, and sober and industrious thrive ; and that no man can support himself and his dependents without exercising these qualities, and that to the best of his power, I am, in the next place to show, in what way all this may be done consistently with our duty to God, and so as to secure our inheritance in the world that is to come.

There is then, but one way of reconciling these two duties : but one way of securing *both* these objects, (namely, our happiness in God hereafter, and a proper and sufficient portion of the things of this life) and that one way is, to attend to the direction of our blessed Lord : “To seek *first* the kingdom of God, and his righteousness :” for then, and then only, have we any reasonable warrant to expect that “all *other* things,” all necessary temporal and worldly supplies of his bounty “shall be added” unto us. Now if it be your first and chief study and endeavour to love, to please, and to honour God : to obey his will, and to keep his commandments, to seek first his kingdom of grace in your hearts by faith, and prayer, and watchfulness here, that so through his covenanted mercy in Christ Jesus, and by the merits of his death and righteousness, you may attain to his kingdom of glory hereafter : if it be your constant care to

eschew evil and to do good ; to be true and just, in all your dealings ; to bear no malice nor hatred, in your hearts ; to love your neighbour as yourselves, and to forgive your enemies as you yourselves hope to be forgiven of God ; to be holy in all manner of conversation, and to walk as children of the light and of the day :—then does your heavenly Father charge Himself and his holy angels with the care of you and yours in this world. *Ye shall want no manner of thing that is good.* Having called you through his grace, to his kingdom of glory, he will not leave you destitute of those things which are necessary for you, till such time as you arrive there. “ He knoweth that you have need of all these things,” such as bread to eat and raiment to put on. He has provided richly for your souls in the Gospel of his Son, and he will also make provision for your bodies. If he feed the young ravens that call upon him, much more will he feed you. If he sends rain on the evil and the unjust, much more will he rain down bread from Heaven upon you. If he is good to the unthankful and evil, he will not take the children’s bread and cast it to the dogs.

Knowing this, my brethren, ye will not perplex yourselves with anxious thoughts and cares from day to day, and from morning until night,

saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? And why? Because your Saviour tells you that "after all these things do the Gentiles seek." These are the heart-rending thoughts of such as know not God, nor believe the doctrine of an universal Providence, whose mercy is over all his works: who enjoy none of that rich provision which He gives to his children, his truly adopted sons by Jesus Christ. These know the hand that feeds them, the covenanted mercy that daily sustains their bodies and their souls: and "having food and raiment" they are therewith content. They can cheerfully trust that Almighty and gracious Being who first created them from the dust of the earth, who was their hope when they hanged yet on their mother's breast, with the care of themselves and their little ones: knowing and believing that He loves them infinitely better than they love themselves, and will never leave and forsake them that be His.

If such be our trust in God, such our confidence in the good Shepherd; at the same time that we shall be entirely free from those inordinate anxieties and cares about the things of this life which our blessed Lord condemns as unreasonable, unprofitable, and proceeding from a want of faith: and which only serve to disquiet

our minds and to draw them off from our spiritual and everlasting concerns ; we shall not be wanting in that proper care and concern, that moderate solicitude to support ourselves and dependents, which, so far from being wrong, criminal, or irreligious, is the height of prudence and wisdom, and also a mark of faith in God, since the contrary, viz. idleness and sloth, are condemned by the Apostle—"If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." Though, therefore, it is God that in fact feedeth us, yet must we also reach forth our hands to receive his gifts : we must make a diligent use of all those *means* which he has supplied us with in order to come at the rich provision he has laid up for us : depending upon Him for the ultimate supply of our wants and necessities, as though we looked to Him alone for our daily bread ; and using all present helps and means, such as honest industry and patient labour in our respective callings, as though every thing depended thereon. The consequence will be, that to unbounded *faith and simple trust in God*, we shall, through his grace, add *persevering and unremitting industry in our callings and occupations*. We shall labour earnestly for the meat that perisheth,

as well as for that which endureth unto eternal life.

Thus seeking *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, we shall not only be delivered from the evil of immoderate care and anxiety about the things of this life, which eat out the very soul of religion, and choke the word so that it becomes unfruitful ; but also the *objects* of our care will be brought within their due bounds. We shall neither care immoderately, nor for immoderate things. If the kingdom of God be our grand and chief aim, all other aims and desires, will be brought into subjection to this. We shall desire no more, we shall care for no more, we shall labour for no more, than is sufficient for our pilgrimage here. If our treasure be in heaven, there also will be our hearts. We shall not, therefore, lay up for ourselves treasures upon earth, we shall not seek to join house to house, and field to field, and call the lands after our own name, seeing that these things bring with them increasing cares, are perishable in themselves, and cannot accompany us farther than this life.

“ Godliness ” brings with it contentment, and that, says the Apostle, “ is great gain : for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and

raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil : which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Thus we see, that Christianity is the art of setting bounds to our desires : and this is the secret of happiness. Hence it follows, that he who lets his desires run out after riches, and possessions, is not only not happy, but is far from the kingdom of God. How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven ! With what difficulty must he be saved, if he is saved at all, that *trusts* in riches, and makes mammon his God. " Therefore," says the Psalmist, " if riches increase, set not thy heart upon them." Use them only as a means given you of God, to do good, and to distribute with ; to feed the hungry, and to clothe the naked. This is to provide for them bags which wax not old, and to transfer them to that place where a cup of cold water given in faith and love, shall by no means lose its reward.

Thus has it been made appear, that all the Gospel forbids is, immoderate and excessive care

even for the *necessaries* of life, "what we shall eat, and what we shall drink," and that, because the whole creation is God's, and his goodness sustains it: that there is, however, a particular and *special* Providence attending all those who seek first his kingdom and righteousness: that *they* are more particularly his children; and as such, shall be under the peculiar care of their heavenly father. To all that has been said on this head, I might add the testimony of good, but suffering men, in all ages. What is the experience of David? "I have been young and now am old, and yet saw I *never* the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread." No, my Christian brethren, be assured that none who ever truly trusted in God, and sincerely endeavoured to do his will in all things, and eschewed evil, were ever really and ultimately forsaken. Cares you may have; many and anxious cares. But still hope thou in the Lord, and be doing good, and verily thou shalt be fed. The Lord ordereth a good man's going, and maketh it acceptable to himself. Though he fall, he shall not be cast away; for the Lord upholdeth him with His hands.

Prayer, you will remember, is the appointed means of obtaining your desires. Not to pray, is not properly to feel your wants, is not to *express*

that sense of your dependence upon God which you say that you feel. It is true, that he knows our necessities before we ask, and that we have need of all these things ; but still he would have us sue to him for his blessings. " Ask," says our blessed Redeemer, " and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened." To which add those words of the Apostle. "*In every thing* by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make known your requests unto God."

But you will also remember, that though it is from God, the fountain and source of all blessings, yet it is through their proper conveyance, even Jesus Christ, that we receive the commonest of his mercies. " Verily, verily, said Christ to his disciples, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father *in my name*, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name, Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. At that day ye shall ask the Father in my name ; and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you ; for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and believed, that I came out from God." By Him, we have redemption, through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. He is the *bread of life* ; the nourishment, the support, the very life of our

souls. He that cometh to Him, shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Him shall never thirst. "He is the living bread which came down from heaven : if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever ; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."

How therefore, my brethren, having thus given us his Son, shall not God, with Him, also freely give us all things !

Sermon XVI.

THE NATURE AND ADVANTAGE OF HAVING SIN ALWAYS BEFORE US.

PSALM li. 3.

My sin is ever before me.

THESE words briefly but excellently express the nature of repentance: which consists not in a sudden compunction for sin: a violent and impassioned exclamation of sorrow, shame, and self-abhorrence, lasting, in too many cases, no longer than the occasion which called it forth; but in having *sin ever before us*, in arraying it from time to time, in all its native and inherent deformity, its odiousness to a God of purity: its destructiveness to our inward peace of mind in this world: and the

certainty and dreadfulness of the punishment awaiting its unrepented commission, in the next.

David had been guilty of two of the most heinous sins which human nature is capable of committing, namely, murder and adultery. We may well suppose that a mind like his, disciplined as it had been from his earliest youth with the lessons of religion and virtue, could not remain easy under such a load of guilt ; that conviction flashed in his face ; and represented to him his sins in a degree proportioned, not merely to their magnitude, but to the height of grace and privileges from which he had fallen. Under a deep sense, therefore, of his enormous guiltiness in the sight of God, he gives vent to his sorrow in the Psalm before us ; accompanying it at the same time (as all sorrow for sin, in order to prove its reality, ever *should* be accompanied) with deep acknowledgments of his guilt, devout prayers to God for forgiveness, deprecation of the divine wrath, and sincere desires for the renewing and sanctifying graces of his holy Spirit. “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness : according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly

from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

That these were the heartfelt desires of his soul, these the accents and breathings of genuine repentance, appears from the following circumstance : viz. that although this Psalm was the result of the visit he had had from Nathan, the prophet of the Lord, denouncing upon him the divine displeasure and judgment, still, a year had elapsed from the commission of the above mentioned crimes to the appearance of the prophet ; and yet, so strong are the marks of real sorrow and repentance, as conveyed in every verse (I had almost said) every word of this Psalm, that we cannot imagine stronger proofs thereof, or couched in more penitential strains, had they been uttered immediately upon his sad fall into sin.

The words of the text, moreover, indicate no momentary feeling of compunction, no transient sorrow for sin, passing away as the morning cloud, or as the dew upon the tender grass ; but show as strongly as words can show, the permanence of his sorrow ; that his repentance was no sudden ebullition ; that his sin was the constant subject of his thoughts. *My sin is ever before me.*

Hence we learn this important truth, viz.

"that sin, to be sincerely repented of, must be ever before us." Were it necessary further to explain what is meant by this expression, I might exemplify it by a corresponding expression of the same holy Psalmist, when he says, "I have set the Lord always before me." Now, as in doing so consists the very essence and nature of religion, having *Him* in all our thoughts, as the inspector, reprover, and rewarder, of our conduct ; so also, in calling our sins constantly to remembrance, as committed against a Being of infinite purity and justice, consists the nature and spirit of true repentance. The reason, moreover, for both is the same. If God is alone an object worthy of our thoughts, he is worthy of *all* our thoughts. If sin requires sorrow for its commission at all, it requires constant sorrow, because committed against infinite purity and love : and therefore, as the sin is infinitely offensive in the sight of God, so ought it to be in our own. An offence against the laws of man may be expiated by a single act of punishment, nothing more being necessary than satisfaction for the outward and visible effects thereof. The law of man takes no cognizance of any thing *more*, in that it is weak and cannot. Motives and intentions, with a variety of circumstances operating in the mind of the offender, and

(when they can be known) greatly tending to aggravate his outward guilt, come not under the eye of a human tribunal. The *act* and not the intention is the object of human punishment, and when that is attained the law is satisfied. Not so with the offended majesty of God. A single act of repentance is not enough; will never be thought to be enough but by him who, thinking lightly of sin, thinks as lightly of repentance; that is, by him who does not heartily repent of his transgression. Not, be it carefully observed, that even the longest and sincerest repentance can *atone* for sin, in the true and scriptural meaning of that term: "the blood of Jesus Christ alone, the atoning Lamb of God, cleanseth from all sin," and gives the crowning efficacy to our repentance, and makes it acceptable to God. The true and humble penitent, therefore, will have his sin ever before him. For what are his feelings? What the circumstances which he takes into his view of the case? Hear the Psalmist. "Thou requirest truth in the inward parts." God looks to the heart; to the hidden springs and motives of our actions. The sincere penitent, therefore, feels his sin to be doubly sinful, because, first, inwardly conceived; and, secondly, openly acted.

In the next place, though his misery, under a

sense of guilt, be much increased by these secondary considerations ; such as loss of character, estate, health, time squandered away and lost, (which characterise the whole of the sorrow of the world, the shallow repentance which worketh death,) the sincere penitent is chiefly concerned at the magnitude of his sin as committed against God. This is the consideration which gives to sin all its bitterness ; making it in the eye of Him and of the penitent, to be exceeding sinful. “ Against Thee, Thee *only* have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest and clear when thou judgest.” Before God sent his prophet to bring his sin to remembrance, and to denounce vengeance, it is probable, that David had little sense of the matter beyond an offence committed against man, against the injured and murdered Uriah. But when his sin is represented in its true light and deformity, he exclaims immediately, ‘ I have sinned *against the Lord!*’ He views his sin in the light of ingratitude, as committed against a God of love ; he therefore cries for forgiveness. “ Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness ; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.” A string is touched within his breast, which never vibrates

but in that of the true penitent; *viz.* a deep sense of mercies received, and of mercies abused. He implores the exercise of *that* mercy he had so greatly abused. So said he on another occasion, ‘let me now fall into the hands of *God*, for his mercies are great.’

These are the considerations which mark the sorrow of the sincere penitent; his sinning against *a God of knowledge and a God of love*. His sin, therefore, cannot but be ‘ever before him.’

II. Having considered what repentance supposes in order to be sincere; we will next point out the *benefits* arising herefrom.

Now although it may be, and is, a painful exercise to have sin always before us; to have conscience on the one hand reading us many a bitter lesson, and making us to possess the sins of our youth: and the law of God on the other hand, unfolding to us all its purity; yet is it most salutary and beneficial. The end thereof is peace. When David had confessed his sin to the Prophet, what was the instant and gracious reply of the man of God? *The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die*. God met also the Prodigal upon his return; nay, he almost *prevented* the repentance with which his heart was full. And how many are the instances recorded

in the Gospel of our Lord's merciful condescension and encouragement shown to the first returning symptom, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee;' 'go in peace;' 'her sins, though many, are forgiven her,' are phrases of perpetual occurrence. And how much more will He raise up and support those who for *years* have been bowed down under a sense of sin! Assuredly, they that sow in tears, shall reap in joy. He that now goeth on his way weeping, and beareth forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

We cannot, I repeat, have our sin ever before us, and not derive the most beneficial effects therefrom. In addition to sorrow for the past, which is the very essence of repentance, it will produce in us watchfulness and circumspection for the future. Both these effects are strikingly set forth by the Apostle to the Corinthians. "For behold, says he, this same thing that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you; yea, what clearing of yourselves; yea, what indignation; yea, what fear; yea, what vehement desire; yea, what zeal; yea, what revenge?"

It is evident, that a transient sorrow for sin, a momentary feeling of compunction, occasioned

by merely a glance at it, although appearing in all its terror and deformity, cannot involve all these particulars. It is true, indeed, that many of those cases we have alluded to which occur in scripture, of repentance, sudden as they appear to be, seem to belong to this transient kind of repentance, which we are now deprecating. But we may observe, first, that nothing more is recorded of such cases, in general, than what comes under our view at the moment. Secondly, that the spirit of God may have so touched the hearts of those persons as to produce *instantaneous* effects; and where, therefore, the ordinary steps and gradations were rendered unnecessary. These, however, are extraordinary instances of repentance and conversion; and, therefore, not applicable to our present purpose; although, thirdly, it is to be observed, that even with respect to these instances, we are not to suppose that such persons had never any further occasion for repentance; or, that even those sins, which were thus graciously forgiven them on an apparently short repentance, were *done with*, and cast behind their backs, never to return again to disquiet their consciences. Such is not the case. Their sins were, doubtless, ever before them, to humble them for the past, and to deter them for the future. Repented of, and forgiven, they

entirely want: but though forgotten by God, they could never be effaced from their own consciences. It is not only necessary, therefore, but salutary, to have sin ever before us, inasmuch as it begets in us fear, zeal, and watchfulness for the future.

Having considered the nature and benefit of this exercise as due to our past sins, and pre-ventive, through God's grace, of future trans-gressions, I shall draw a few practical remarks from the subject before us. And

First. How fearful is the condition of those whose sin is ever before them! As a tender conscience is of all blessings perhaps the greatest, so a seared one, a conscience hardened in sin, and blind to consequences, is without doubt the greatest calamity that can happen to a man. And yet this is the condition of every habitual sinner. Many is the awful check he receives from conscience in the midst of his heedless career of vice and folly; but like Pharoah, upon every successive escape from its pressure, he still hardens his heart the more, till having filled up the measure of his iniquities, he is swallowed up and lost. Or allowing that he sometimes lends an ear to conscience; that he admits it to a conference, as the Roman Governor did Paul, yet alas! the impression is but momentary, the

audience but a short one : for when it begins to reason with him of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, with Felix he trembles, and dismisses his conscience with the same answer ; “Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.” And whereas this sinful dissembling, and double-dealing with God and himself, is the case, more or less, with every habitual sinner ; and this more convenient season never arrives ; “in the primitive Church (says the Preface to the Communion) there was a godly discipline, that at the beginning of Lent, such persons as stood convicted of notorious sin were put to open penance, and punished in this world, that their souls might be saved in the day of the Lord ; and that others, admonished by their example, might be the more afraid to offend ; which said discipline it is much to be wished might be restored again.”

Greatly were it to be wished that one and all of us would take occasion of this solemn season* to present *ourselves* before God as sore and habitual offenders, and to judge ourselves, that so we may not be judged of the Lord. For much, I fear, with the strictness of ancient discipline in our Church, the business of *private*

* Lent.

repentance has been relaxed. Sorrow for sin, and bringing forth fruits meet for repentance, are in many cases, there is reason to apprehend, comparatively lost sight of in that other, equally indeed important duty of the returning sinner, yet, *second in order of time*—I mean Faith. The tears of contrition are wiped away too soon; sin is not sufficiently brought home and repented of; is not *ever* before the eyes of the sinner. Assurance too soon succeeds, joy too soon commences. The example of David may serve to show that repentance is a work of time—a work of many tears, many prayers. “Wash me *thoroughly* from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out *all* mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from me.” How far in respect to *duration* God may see fit to dispense with repentance (as in what are called *sudden* conversions) it is not for us to enquire. As sinners we are commanded to “repent and believe,” in order to forgiveness. “Out of the *deep*, have I called unto thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice. If thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide

it: for there is mercy with thee, therefore shalt thou be feared." Yes, my brethren, there is indeed mercy for the greatest sinner (and God forbid that I should seek to limit that mercy): but then it is to be sought and obtained by means of the greatest, and most heartfelt, and continued *repentance*. Then only can the bones which God hath broken have cause in the end to rejoice: then only can the humble penitent reach forth his hand, by a true and lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, to a full assurance of hope: then only, when the storm is past, and all the billows of repentance have gone over the head of the sinner, will Christ hear the voice of his complaint, and say to his troubled soul, 'Peace, be still,' and there shall be a great calm.

And in the last place, if thus it be with every sinner, that some time or other he must repent of his sins, before he can lay hold of the covenanted mercies of God in Christ; that sin, if not ever before him, must *some time or other* be before him, and brought home to his conscience; and that in such a way as to be bitterly lamented, hated, forsaken; how great should be your fear and caution in committing it! If repentance be properly the work of a whole life, a daily sorrowing

for sin, what room can *he* have for it (though he then seek it carefully and with many tears), who crowds the fearful and ever growing account into the narrow limits of a single day—the day of his death—the season of sickness, langour, and decay! With God indeed, all things are possible : and such as his majesty is, so is also his mercy. But the death-bed sinner ought perhaps to be the last to look for a miracle in his favour, seeing he has despised the *ordinary* operations of God's spirit. And if the best of men have been filled with fearful amazement when they have come to die, at one glance of the appalling images of sin and death, what must be the sinner's feelings, who, never having had his sin before him, is now presented with the catalogue, and called upon to set his house in order. For conscience is like a perpetual pulse; and though it may be interrupted and silenced by the sinner, during the course of a life of health, thoughtlessness, and pleasure, yet will it beat before he dies, and bring all his sins to remembrance. Or if even at that awful moment he should be consigned over to judicial blindness; and conscience, so often stifled, should fail him when he most wants its warning voice; yet in the *next* world will she renew her office, eternally to reproach

the sinner with his folly and madness : for conscience is that "worm that never dies, that fire that shall never be quenched."

From "*hardness of heart*, therefore, and contempt of thy word and commandment, good Lord deliver us," for Jesus Christ's sake.

Sermon XVII.

CHRIST THE SOURCE OF TRUE WISDOM.



COLOSSIANS ii. 3.

In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

THERE had sprung up in the Church at Colosse, certain teachers, who corrupted the pure and simple doctrine of the cross of Christ, by introducing “philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments and elements of the world, and not after Christ.”

There were others, who, still adhering to the mouldering relics of an obsolete and antiquated law, inculcated upon the Colossian converts the observation of the Mosaic rites and ceremonies ;

thus reducing the pure and simple truths of christianity to a strange and heterogeneous compound, made up of truth and falsehood ; of Jewish superstition and gentile ignorance.

In opposition to these false and heterodox teachers, and "lest any man should beguile them with enticing words," the Apostle recalls to their minds the grand and leading doctrines of christianity, which had been preached to them by Epaphras, "a faithful minister of Christ ;" and thereby, as well as, and more especially, in the words of the text, he sets up the transcendent excellency and superiority of the Gospel, or "the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ ; in whom, or wherein, (in which mystery) are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Simple as is the Gospel scheme of salvation, when rightly apprehended, and stripped of all vain and unnecessary, or worse than unnecessary additions, whereby some have attempted to explain it away ; for the purpose of making the doctrine of the cross more palatable to corrupt nature ; it is nevertheless a depth ; a mystery which no human sagacity can fathom, no unassisted reason fully explore : a mine, however, which to the humble and sincere follower of Christ, presents inexhaustible treasure : for

in it are laid up such good things, as pass man's understanding. Insomuch that to this wisdom we may apply the striking and sublime words of holy Job, and enquire, "but where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof, neither is it found in the land of the living. The depth saith, 'it is not in me;' and the sea saith, 'it is not with me.' Whence then cometh wisdom, and where is the place of understanding? Destruction and death say, we have heard the fame thereof with our ears; God understandeth the way thereof, and He knoweth the place thereof." It is to be found in that mystery, which though "hid from ages and from generations, is now made manifest to his saints:" to the meanest of whom we may use the Apostle's words, "say not any longer who shall descend into the deep, (*i. e.* to bring up Christ from the dead.) But the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: *i. e.* the word of faith which we preach, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him up from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Let us enquire more particularly into the nature of this wisdom and knowledge, which the Apostle tells us are laid up in Christ and the

Gospel. Wherein it differs from human wisdom, or the wisdom of the world ; and how, or in what sense, it is said by the Apostle to be hidden in Christ.

I. And, first, for its nature and character.

Wisdom has many senses, and is taken in various acceptations in the scriptures. In the Old Testament it is put for religion in general, that highest knowledge of God and his revealed will to man, which exalts him so far above the rest of the creation.

In the New it relates, by way of eminence and distinction, either to the person and character of Christ, who is "the power of God and the wisdom of God," or, (as is most frequent) to that grand scheme of redemption, and moral restoration, which He purposed in Christ from all eternity, and has now made known, and effected by the Gospel dispensation.

In the former sense, the Apostle represents the author of our salvation, as "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature. For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers : all things were created by him, and for him : and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist : in whom

we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

The latter is every where designated as a mystery, hid from ages, containing and combining the collective wisdom of all other periods and dispensations, "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." It is the centre and focus of all those rays of wisdom, mercy, and goodness, which have emanated from God to his creatures, ever since the world began. For consider *what* mysteries are herein involved. That omnipotence, that God, essentially and eternally existing; infinitely good, wise, and happy, should pause, as it were, in his sovereign counsels to bestow a thought upon man, and man's creation; this is a mystery; and a mystery infinitely enhanced by the love which gave it birth.

That man, created in the image of God, by which we must, in the very propriety of the terms, suppose a transcript of his own communicable attributes; that such a being should be permitted to fall, by listening to the suggestions of the tempter, and yet so as that the Creator should in no sense be chargeable as the author of sin; (a supposition revolting to our every idea and notion of God;) this surely is a mystery at present hid and concealed in the treasures of omniscience. And further still, (for we are not yet arrived at

that point, which both in the counsels of God and his revelations to man, combines wisdom in its highest sense, and most exalted character,) that God should further devise a plan, (if that can admit of degrees which was devised from all eternity) for again admitting such a fallen, lapsed creature to his favour, and that too, so as effectually to secure his own essential justice, manifest his infinite abhorrence of sin; and at the same time (man's sin and transgression notwithstanding) render him a fit and capable object of his favour, yea of the eternal happiness he had forfeited: that, moreover, the Almighty should show his hatred to sin, and signalize his punishment thereof, by implicating therein the innocency and spotless purity of a third person, the Son of Man, and that no less a person, at the same time, than the Son of God, "very God of very God:" that the judge of all the earth should thus, to our crude notions, condescend to an apparent (for it was no real) act of injustice, for the purpose of punishing *another's* transgression, "for the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all;"—herein, in such a depth as this, we must confess are hid ALL the treasures of wisdom and knowledge: that "without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the

spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." The lower we descend into this depth, the farther we extend our enquiries, the greater reason we find to exclaim at every step, with the bewildered Apostle, "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! for who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"

II. We were to show in the second place, in what respects "the wisdom which is hidden in Christ" differs from that of the world, from the wisdom of man derived merely from the sources of human knowledge.

And first, it differs essentially in the *means* by which it is acquired. To unlock the treasures of human learning, much time and thought and application are necessary. A quick apprehension, a sound judgment, a retentive memory, are all necessary, though all seldom meet in the same person; nor to the same extent in one, as in another. So that not only in much study is weariness of the flesh, but the most studious shall often have the mortification of finding that he is outdone by another in the extent, the variety, and depth of his laboured acquirements. Whilst on the other hand, the most learned and

sagacious (if he speak the truth) must acknowledge how very scanty is the sum total of all his knowledge, when compared with what he knows *not*, or can ever hope to know: that there still remain, after a long and painful search, farther heights to be reached, farther depths to be explored: in short, that he is still but a babe in knowledge, and only just beginning to learn and to know somewhat. How mortifying to human pride is such a reflection; how favourable, however, to humility!

Not so is it with respect to Christian knowledge. Deep and hidden as are these treasures of wisdom, no learning is required, no previous labour, no particular sagacity, to unlock, to comprehend, to enjoy these stores. Nay, indeed, so far from being even necessary, human learning and wisdom it should seem, are pronounced by Christ and his Apostles to be unfavourable to the first reception of the spiritual truths of the Gospel. "My speech and my wisdom," observes St. Paul to the Corinthians, "was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit, and of power. That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." And again: "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him

become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again: The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain." Not that human learning is here in itself condemned (for that is good and necessary to "prove all things," and to help us to judge of Christianity, whether it be of God, and agreeable to reason, or whether it be of men) but that *abuse* of learning is here denounced by the Apostle, which engenders pride, exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and thereby hinders the reception of the simple and humbling doctrines of the Cross.

Hence our blessed Lord declares to his disciples, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven." He recalls them to that child-like simplicity, and sincerity, and teachableness, which are necessary, as forming the best qualifications to receive the sincere milk of the word, and to grow thereby to a perfect man, to a measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

And this leads me to the Third particular to be considered, namely,

III. In what sense the wisdom of Christ is said by the Apostle to be hidden: "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

We have seen that the doctrine of the Cross is a mystery, vast, unfathomable, and hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.

If it has been outwardly revealed to the world, to every nation under Heaven, so also are its peculiar mysteries, its secret stores of wisdom and knowledge revealed to the faithful alone; to them only it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven. It is true they are not yet admitted to the knowledge of those peculiar circumstances which properly constitute a mystery, but yet having cordially "received Christ Jesus the Lord, and walking in Him, and being rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, and complete in Him, they walk worthy of the Lord to all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and *increasing in the knowledge of God.*"

The very term *hid*, in the text, implies that there are certain truths contained in the doctrines of the Gospel, which to the world are enveloped in impenetrable mystery, but by the wise, by the sincere and humble enquirer, may be brought to light, and *are* brought to light, and turned to abundant advantage. "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her, as for *hid treasures*, then shalt thou understand

the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." But because all do not seek nor appreciate, and therefore not discover these hid treasures, I shall state a few of the reasons which operate so unfavourably upon the reception of the doctrines of the Gospel.

The first is *pride*. They are hid to the proud. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." There is not a more dangerous enemy, a more impenetrable barrier opposed to the doctrines of the cross, than pride. In every age of the Church there have been men of perverse minds, who obey not the truth. They are proud of their outward privileges, as were the Jews in our Saviour's and the Apostles' time, who boasted that they had Abraham for their father, and still superstitiously adhered to a mouldering law. Whereas, says the Apostle, "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified." And "Christ is the end of the law to every one that believeth." With others the plea is, "We have one Father, even God:" not considering that "he that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father;" that "no man cometh to the Father but by the Son," and that "Christ and the Father are one." Others are wise beyond what is written. Mystery is with them synonymous with absurdity; and because the doctrine

of Christ crucified is, as they surmise, unworthy of the majesty of God or the dignity of man; it is rejected and sacrificed to their *own* notions of wisdom. So did they of old time. "We preach Christ crucified," (says the Apostle to the Corinthians) "unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness: But unto them which are called, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Others are proud of their own stores of wisdom and knowledge. And indeed it must be confessed, that knowledge is pleasant to the soul, and a thing to be desired to make one wise. But revelation is one thing, and human knowledge, science, and wisdom, another. Their provinces are distinct. Could human knowledge ever have discovered the doctrine of Christ crucified? Was human wisdom alone sufficient to guide man to the knowledge of the true God? Hear St. Paul,—“Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” i. e. : hath he not confounded and shamed its boasted powers by the simple revelation of his will in Christ Jesus, so far beyond human thought to conceive, or wisdom to comprehend? “For after that,” he adds, “in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew

not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

Human knowledge and learning, coming *after*, and not running before revelation, are of admirable use, and will never be discarded nor undervalued but by weak and foolish persons : nor be made the one thing needful, the all in all, but by the proud and ignorant. In Christ alone are hid the true treasures of wisdom and knowledge; such as appertain to mankind primarily and chiefly to know, whatever be their knowledge or ignorance of things pertaining to this life.

The last reason I shall assign why Christ and his doctrine may be said to be hid, is, that men do not live up to the spirit and precepts of the Gospel. "If our Gospel be hid," says the Apostle, "it is hid to them that are lost : in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." "If any man," said our Lord to the wicked and unbelieving Jews, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." And again, to the believing Jews, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and

the truth shall make you free." These are most important texts, inasmuch as they plainly prove that they who do not *live* agreeably to the precepts of the Gospel, shall not know, at least to any beneficial purpose, the truth thereof. They shall stumble in the day, the light that is in them being darkness. From such are hid the plainest truths of religion, and much more the secret treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Whatever men of perverse minds may choose to object against the truth of Christianity, whatever plea they may urge ; be assured this truth lies at the bottom of all their specious pleas, objections, and fine-drawn subtleties, namely, 'they wish Christianity to be false, and therefore they would wish to believe it such.' It contradicts their vices, condemns their lives. It is against them, and therefore they are against it. On the contrary, let such persons be prevailed upon to make the experiment proposed by our blessed Lord. Let a man endeavour sincerely, and with God's grace, to 'do his will :'
let him take for granted that the Gospel is true (and there are many other things in nature and philosophy which he is obliged to, and does take for granted ; and why not the purest, the most exalted, the most consolatory doctrines of the Gospel ?) *let him I say, take for granted its truth ;* or if he cannot

do this, let him *live* as though it were true; and he will cease to cavil against its doctrines; he will soon believe it to be so. Let him visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keep himself unspotted from the world, and he will carry in his own bosom such a comfortable earnest of the truth of the Gospel, as he will not seek to extinguish by speculatively denying it.

For, I would enquire, in the words of a pious and acute writer,* "Whether it is in the moment of victory over passion and sensual indulgence that men dispute the existence of that power which enabled them to achieve it—whether it is in the act of relieving the distresses of their afflicted brethren, that they despise the love of that Saviour, who has identified himself with them? Let a man but obey the morals of the Gospel (which are the morals of a purified and exalted reason) and he will never cavil against its doctrines. Let him that is inclined to be sceptical upon the subject of the soul's immortality, always act as if it really existed, and he will soon abandon every objection to its existence."

Let us then submit ourselves to the righteousness of God. Let us receive this last revelation

*Rennell on Scepticism.

of his will to fallen man with all humility and thankfulness. Deeply sensible in ourselves that we have understandings which require to be enlightened, hearts to be renewed and purified, wills to be sanctified, prejudices to be removed, let us come to Him in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ; let us sit at the feet of Christ, and submit all our boasted powers to his heavenly teaching ; let us “become fools that we may be wise,” and we shall make rapid advances in that knowledge which, while it humbles, reproves and corrects, exalts, purifies, edifies, and consoles. Whilst, on the other hand, the man who exalts himself against the knowledge of God, and measures the wisdom of God by his own finite understanding, “knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know,” must ere long with shame take the lowest seat, and confess himself to be “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”

Sermon XVIII.

AUTUMNAL REFLECTIONS.



ISAIAH lxiv., 6.

We all do fade as a leaf.

To a serious and devout mind every object of the natural world is full of instruction, pregnant with moral. The world, in fact, is a vast school, into which we are sent for a time to learn wisdom. And happy is every man that findeth her. Here are lessons for the young and volatile, and lessons for the old and obdurate. He who is ready to receive instruction, and to incline his heart to understanding, may every day become wiser and better: whilst the fool, the heedless, and self-conceited, departs therefrom as he came.

The frailty and mortality of our fallen nature, is one of those lessons which a wise Providence intended we should learn in this world. And, because, it should seem, we are so backward to learn it, he has written it in legible characters upon almost every object of created nature; upon the blade of grass we tread under our feet; upon the leaves of trees; in the succession of day and night, months, and years; spring-time and summer, harvest and winter. Yea, we carry the lesson about with us in our own frame, so fearfully and wonderfully made. We are *forced* in a manner oftentimes to learn it by pain and sickness. It is written in the departure of the living—on the tombs of the dead. But although ever learning, we are ever forgetting what we have learned. Although dying daily, we neglect the *moral* this truth would teach us, which is, to “learn to die”—to be dead to a world of sin and vanity, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ: not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Let us, therefore, endeavour to learn this truth once again. In the fading, falling leaf, let us contemplate our own decay; habitually anticipate our own certain dissolution. And may the meditation, by God’s grace, arrest the

careless, fix the volatile, and make us all "wise unto salvation:" yea, "so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

I shall first dwell a little on the resemblance set forth in the text: secondly, assign the true cause of human frailty: and lastly, expatiate upon the rich compensation which is made us by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

I. *We all do fade as a leaf*, if we reflect but for a moment upon the quick and constant succession of our species; "For as the leaves, so springs the race of man," was the remark of a great author of antiquity many ages ago. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh." Turn over the records of all history, ancient and modern. What is the thread which runs through all? What the great fundamental truth on which all the various events and vicissitudes therein contained depend? Even on this—*we all do fade as a leaf*. In those most ancient and most authentic of all records relating to the human species, the scriptures of the old Testament, we constantly meet with some such observation as this—'so all that generation, (whether kings or subjects,) died and were gathered to their fathers.' Where are now the tribes by whom the whole earth

was peopled and divided, the restorers of the human race, themselves as perishable as their forefathers; who were for building them a city and a tower whose top should reach to heaven, and getting themselves a name in the earth? Where too the no less ambitious destroyers of their species, shedders of human blood, the propagators of war and conquest? Where ere long shall be those vast armies on which all eyes are at this moment turned?* Where ere long shall *all* we of this generation be?—gone as a tale that is told; vanished as smoke; removed to make way for the generations that shall come after us. Awful thought! humbling to human pride; sweeping and annihilating to all human hopes and projects!

And, my brethren, is this *all* that appertains unto us; to put forth, and flourish like leaves, and like them also to be swept away promiscuously from the face of the earth, the mere sport of decay and death? To walk across the stage of life, and so pass off, as though we had no part assigned us to act; no individual character to sustain; no other name belonging to us than what is common to and derived from the generic term *the human race*? No connection with the past and the future? Because, think ye, we come

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and go, flourish and decay, with the same constancy and precision as natural objects do in spring and autumn, are we, therefore, no better than they? Does a no more glorious destination await you than to put forth again your species in your successors, and so on to eternity? God forbid! And yet one would think, (not to mention the dreams of the infidel and sceptic, but judging from the lives of too many who call themselves by another name than that of men, even Christians, and believers in the great truths of the Gospel,) that such were the persuasions of very many among us in a thoughtless and sinful generation. Know, then, and lay it to heart, that the wicked shall indeed be like the chaff which the wind scattereth away from the face of the earth: but that the leaf of the righteous shall not wither: they shall flourish like a palm-tree, in the paradise above, and have dominion over sin and the grave in the morning of the resurrection: that "verily there is a reward for the righteous: that doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth."

Thus far for the truth before us as regards the decay and succession of the species at large. It will come closer to our bosoms if we apply it to our own decay as *individuals*. And first, for our bodies. Where is that boasted vigour

of constitution, that resistance to sickness and disease, that strength of limb, and buoyancy of the animal spirits, which but some forty, fifty, or sixty years since, distinguished you, perhaps, above your fellows, and seemed to mark you out for no ordinary span? In the plenitude of health and strength you fondly imagined, it may be, that you should know no decay, and prove an exception to the general rule of mortality. A few years have undeceived you. Your bow, though still retaining some of its tone and firmness, perhaps to a degree surprizing to others, is, as *you* too well know, strangely notwithstanding altered from what it was. It will bear very little straining beyond the ordinary purposes of life and motion. And the same truth holds with respect to all the bodily members and their functions. "The keepers of the house, the arms and hands, tremble; and the strong men, the legs and supporters of this house of clay, bow themselves; and the grinders, the teeth, cease because they are few; and those that look out of the windows, the eyes, are darkened."—(Ecclesiastes 12.)

Nor does it fare much better with the mental faculties, which, though in some few persons they may retain their vigour almost unimpaired, even when the body has been reduced to a state

of infantine weakness; still, in the generality of mankind, are subject to the same natural decay and imbecility. Memory fades. The reason relaxes its grasp. The powers of reflection become dull and languid, and "thus," to borrow the words of a great Christian philosopher, "thus the ideas as well as children of our youth, often die before us; and our minds represent to us those tombs to which we are approaching, where, though the brass and marble remain, yet the inscriptions are effaced by time, and the imagery moulders away."

II. But I am to enquire, secondly, into the true *cause* of human frailty and decay. To impute effects so dire and painfully humbling to human pride to merely natural causes, is, as I before hinted, to take a very shallow view of things. The Christian extends his view of the dealings of Providence with his rational creatures infinitely beyond nature or the reach of mere unassisted reason. He knows, (what the vanity of man is fain to shut its eyes to,) that it is not merely on natural principles that we all do fade as a leaf, seeing that man is better than a leaf; but that there exists some great *moral cause*, over and above that general law which determines the dissolution of our species equally with that of the rest of created nature. That cause is

sin. Yes, my brethren, the decay of our race is coeval with the reign of sin. Sin first planted the seeds of death in our nature, and is constantly exerting its baneful influence. For this truth we have the sure word of prophecy, the authority of revelation for our safest guide. Sin and death are the curse and penalty of our species. The Almighty was pleased, you know, to try man's obedience by a single precept, viz. not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For in the day, said He, that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die; that is, become subject to death, and forfeit immortality. Is then, (asks the sceptic,) an effect so general, so universal as the dissolution of the whole human species, to be traced, to be attributed to a simple injunction contained in a short verse of the bible? I answer—it is. A thing may be simple and unimportant in itself—great, influential, and serious in its relation and effects. To which add, that if the test was simple, so also was the obedience enjoined by it: and, therefore, greater was the *disobedience* and contempt of the divine command. You too well know the result of the trial. Man transgressed that short and simple command, and sacrificed his innocency to pride and vain curiosity. He ate, he fell. Hence he entailed decay and death upon

all his posterity. His disobedience produced nothing more or less than the predicted effect—death. The whole of the bible attests this sad truth. It runs through every page, more or less, from Genesis to Revelation. Hence we quickly find the historian of this dire fact pathetically lamenting its dismal effects in words attributed to Moses, and adopted by the Church in the ninetieth Psalm, “Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest, Return ye children of men. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep; in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the evening it is cut down and withereth. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow, for it is soon cut off and we fly away.” Sin it is that makes this havoc of our species; sin rifles the opening sweets of youth, sits upon the pallid cheek, the closing eye, the faltering tongue: rages in the feverish veins, the hurried pulse the bewildered intellect. It is sin that steals from our side the brother, sister, parent: that fixes on every child of fallen man the authentic seal of death, charged with this inscription, ‘Dust

thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return!" "We all do fade as a leaf: our iniquities like the wind have taken us away." "Death hath passed upon all men, for all have sinned."

Such are the penal consequences of sin; the effects of the curse entailed upon the noblest and fairest portion of that creation which its wise and merciful author at the first pronounced to be "very good." And were we to confine our view only to this dark side of the picture, which presents a dispensation of death, nothing were more gloomy and cheerless. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ! For

III. View, in the third place, the rich compensation made to us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is yet a dispensation of life; that as sin abounded, grace might much more abound. As by the former we are subjected to the law of death; so by the latter we are morally released and made free by the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Hence, as we carry about within us the seeds of decay and death, so do we also the principle and the earnest of a new existence. Equally and alike, (although *penally*) subject to the same law which bids the flower of the field droop and die; we are also the objects of that co-extensive and merciful dispensation by which

the believer shall be raised again to life and immortality. Hence, agreeably to this two-fold designation, "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive:" as the natural body is "sown in weakness," the spiritual body shall be "raised in power."

Is then even the dispensation of sin and death one of unmingled, unmitigated wrath? Are we justified in imputing this law to the *inexorable* chastening of offended justice? God forbid! Behold also, my brethren, the provisions of Almighty and eternal love. From eternity, and consequently before man had any being, or had yet resisted his will, we are told, on the authority of the spirit, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses to them." That he "hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ-Jesus, *before the world began.*" He provided beforehand a gracious remedy, more than adequate to the extent of the disease. As, therefore, on the one hand, the wrath of God against sin, (our sins as well as Adam's,) stands awfully, and to the end of time, from generation to generation, displayed in the

destruction ; his mercy stands even more conspicuous in the *restoration* of our ruined race : verifying the assertion of the Apostle, that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Thus are we redeemed, not indeed from the general doom, but what is much more, from the power of the grave. The sting of death, which is sin, has been extracted ; our last enemy rendered comparatively weak and harmless. By the power of his resurrection, our blessed Redeemer has clothed the ghastly skeleton with immortal vigour : he has promised, that he will collect our scattered dust from the four winds ; and will say to these dry bones "live."

Thus are goodness and severity blended together by that gracious Being who "knoweth whereof we are made, and remembereth that we are but dust." In Adam we all die, without exception, because death is the penalty due to sin, the condition of our existence. But it is equally true, that *unless* we pay the penalty, we are naturally, if I may so speak, incapacitated for being again made alive in Christ. For, "except," said the Lord of nature and of grace, "except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone : but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." And St. Paul, reasoning

also upon natural principles, equally asserts,

That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die."

Do we then *all fade as a leaf*? The very analogy which we bear, in this respect, to this frail ornament of the creation, is converted into a subject of consolation, when illustrated and strengthened by the superior light of scripture truth. If, in order that we may be raised again to life at the last day, death be necessary even on natural principles, it becomes also eminently *desirable* on religious grounds, although in its very nature penal, and confessedly alarming to the feelings of our nature. The dispensation becomes totally altered in its character, thus mingled with so much love and mercy: our qualifier for and conductor to immortality.

But, that I may conclude what has been said with a short practical application, it is only to the believing and renewed Christian, that the subject we have been considering is divested of gloom and uneasiness; or that our last enemy can be converted from an executioner of punishment, into a minister and messenger of life. For true it is, that the change we shall undergo in our bodily organs and functions, by decay and dissolution, will not be more total and entire, than *that* change must also be in

this only time of our probation, which the *heart and affections* must undergo ; even from a death of sin to a life of righteousness. “ Marvel not that I said unto you, ye *must be born again*,” said our Lord to the Jewish doctor, in discussing the *moral* part of the mystery. To all such as are not thus renewed and sanctified, justified, and purified, in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, even the blood of Christ ; death is death still ; his sting is still pointed, and consequently the last penalty of our nature will only be a prelude and foretaste to those inexpressible horrors of “ the second death,” wherein the sinner shall be banished from the presence of God to all eternity, with the worm that never dieth, and the fire that never shall be quenched.

To this awful state every year, every day, every hour, brings you a step nearer. The fading and falling leaf, must, if he thinks at all, fill the mind of the sinner with unmingled bitterness and dismay. No longer then, I beseech you, by the mercies of God, which are ever open to the returning penitent, no longer continue a prey to such dismal forebodings. You have the remedy in your own hands. Apply it by repentance and faith. Burst the chains of sin, and pray for grace, to be made free with the liberty of the children of God. So shall you assert

that importance which the Gospel would confer upon you, in the scale of God's rational creation in the generations upon earth : and in those to come, ye shall have a name better than of sons and daughters.

To you, my brethren, who are living upon the hopes and promises of Christ's religion, if "to live be Christ, to die will be gain." If, by faith and holy obedience, your hearts and affections are transferred to a more durable state of existence, and your treasure be in heaven, you will not be disposed to complain, that "the fashion of this world passeth away," and that "here you have no continuing city." If you look daily for "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God," you will not be dismayed at witnessing the dismantling of your earthly house of this tabernacle. If, as "the outward man perisheth, the inward man be renewed day by day," you will long "to be clothed upon with your house from heaven," that mortality may be swallowed up of life. Looking forward and hasting to the coming of the Son of God, you will hail the time of your departure, as an event which is to release you from a world of sin and sorrow, and to transplant you, through his abundant merits, into the paradise above. Thus transformed by the power of divine

grace, daily and habitually implored, cherished, and improved, you will be enabled to adopt the language of pious resignation, and to say, with an eminent saint, long since departed in the true faith of Christ : * “ Lord show mercy to me, and let not death be terrible, and then take thine own time. I submit to it. Let thy will be done.” And when the enemy is upon you, and you are passing the dark valley of the shadow of death, you will be enabled to add in the same delightful strain, “ God hath heard my daily petitions, for I am at peace with all men, and he is at peace with me : and from that blessed assurance, I feel that inward joy, which this world can neither give, nor take away.”

* Hooker.

Sermon XIX.

THE CHRISTIAN'S TRIUMPH OVER DEATH.

PSALM xxiii. 4.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

It is plain, that none other than a sincerely good man could utter, and what is more, could feel such a measure of holy confidence in the guardian power and goodness of God, as breathes forth in these pathetic words. So awful a thing is death, so revolting to weak and timid nature the bare thought of the dissolution of this earthly tabernacle, that we may well suppose that a power not our own is necessary to

grapple with it, a faith, "which is the gift of God;" a faith such as those illustrious worthies of old possessed, as Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephtha; David also, and Samuel, and the Prophets; who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens, who "all died in faith;" the faith in short of the Christian who is called upon by the nature of his profession to *die daily*, to carry death as it were about with him, daily to feel and handle the edge of this all vanquishing weapon; no less a faith, I say, than this is requisite, if we would in any comfortable measure subdue the fear of death, and not start at the occasional risings of the thought within our breasts.

How then shall that man support himself under the apprehensions of death, who is called upon naked and unarmed, to meet him; to surrender up himself, his possessions, his hopes, and his prospects; his *all* at the call of death? The worldling, who has lived in total and habitual forgetfulness of God all his life, must needs shrink back when he is about to enter the mazes of this dark valley, without a guide to direct his steps,

a rod to protect him from its gloomy and overhanging horrors ; a staff to support and comfort him. Then it is that he becomes serious and thoughtful. This is the event that tries the ground of his heart, and discovers to him the nature and reality of his hopes and fears.

As he descends into this valley, all things around him begin to wear a graver aspect, a more sober cast. The shadows grow long, and his own among the rest ; the glorious lamp of day is fading from his view ; and being no longer able, by reason of the dimness that surrounds them, to see his beloved objects in their usual lustre ; he descends involuntarily into the retirement of his own mind, more gloomy than the objects he has just quitted. And as the present scene fades from his sight, the next world rises with all its realities. Then it is, I say, that thoughtless man first becomes thoughtful ; the careless, giddy, inconsistent, wavering mortal, becomes for the first time serious. He sees what he never saw before, the relative importance of the present and the future ; of the things of the world, and those of eternity. To such a one, death must needs be an object of alarm. He has made no preparation for the awful journey. The darkness of everlasting night is setting in ; clouds of doubt and dismay fast crowd upon his steps ;

and unless the light of the sun of righteousness, in a way no less merciful than supernatural, shine upon him ; his feet stumble upon the dark mountains ; he is bewildered and lost.

Not so the Christian. He treads, it is true, the same dark valley of the shadow of death, (for in Adam all die, and his gracious Lord has trodden the same ground, and led the way before him,) he has the same natural apprehensions ; the fears and feelings of a man ; but with an eye of faith he pierces the clouds of doubt and dismay, and contemplates that glorious dawn, when the sun of righteousness shall again rise upon him to his complete salvation. Hence, the bitterness of death is past almost before he has tasted it ; he is carried through the valley, as it were, with a bound, while he is thus looking forward to and hasting to the coming of the day of God. He sings with David, "*yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*"

In pursuing this subject, let us enquire a little further into the nature and ground of the Christian's hope, especially as regards this most momentous article—death. It is necessary to ascertain this point, inasmuch as human nature is too apt to proceed without sufficient ground;

There is no man, however profligate and vicious his life, who does not wish to die the death of the righteous, though he cannot prevail upon himself to give up his besetting sin, and to live their life. And there are many who proceed upon false grounds, and say, when they come to die, 'peace, peace,' when there is no peace, no rational, no scriptural ground for hope, that they have no evil to fear beyond the grave, or that God will be their portion for ever. "To them that sow beside the still waters shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance, for ever."

Death, then, is an event common alike to all, to every child of Adam. From this dissolution of nature, not even the Christian is exempt. He pretends no exemption: he claims none. Through this valley all must pass. We have seen, however, that all do not pass through it alike; with some remainder of natural antipathy, all, we confess, more or less, encounter the journey, but still not with the same. Death is not the same thing to the true Christian, as it is to the careless worldling. The question then is, what is it which thus alters its character, converting that event which terminates the hopes of the sinner, into the gate of life to the Christian? And it is this. *The sting of death is sin; and*

as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. If there be any mystery in the thing, these two texts of scripture, clear it all up; the riddle is dissolved; the knot is untied. As sin closes the gate of everlasting life, so Christ re-opens it. As the sin and disobedience of our hapless progenitor forfeited immortality to his posterity, and entailed on all his offspring the penalty of death, the bitter necessity of our nature, so also did a ray of the sun of righteousness gleam on the closing gates of Paradise; a glorious promise softened and allayed the curse that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. That Christ should destroy the works of the devil; that he should extract the sting of death, by satisfying the penalty due to sin; that he should *put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*. This was the glorious promise made to our fathers: a promise at once coeval with man's transgression, and commensurate with his sin. *Commensurate*, did I say? Yea, more than commensurate. For so argues the Apostle to the Romans. "But *not* as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it is by one that sinned, so is the gift: for

the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification." Here was laid the charter of our liberties. "Being made *free* from sin, and become servants to God, we have our fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Here is a death-blow aimed at *death himself*. And on this promise rests the foundation of the Christian's hope. This was the promise made to the fathers. In the faith of this promise, died all that glorious band of patriarchs and holy men to whom I have before alluded, "not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed, that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." In the faith of this promise, David also could say, "thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, (or the grave) neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption;" and those words of the text, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." For it cannot be doubted, but that it was in the faith of David's *son*, even of Christ the promised seed, that David himself passed through this valley, and

saw corruption. It cannot be doubted, that the merits and sufferings of the Son of God act prospectively and retrospectively throughout all time, enabling his servants to triumph over death and the grave; that *his* rod and *his* staff have been, and shall be, the support of good men in every age.

Thus it appears, that although death reigned from Adam over all, and to all his posterity, grace hath also reigned, that the blessing has mingled itself, and run on collaterally with the curse: and that if the malady of sin was deeply rooted in man's nature, a cure has been ever devised, and has ever been applied by each according to that measure of faith, which was respectively vouchsafed to them.

Thus if we are free from the law of sin and death, it is Christ who has made us free: if we are "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God," it is Christ who has made us free of the heavenly Jerusalem, and reinstated us in all our forfeited rights and privileges. He has tasted death for every man. And "forasmuch," says the Apostle, "as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and

deliver them who through fear of death were all their life time subject to bondage."

But if Christ has restored our lost charter of liberties, it is only for those who lay claim thereto ; in the same way as he who is free of a town, city, or any other body, can only make that liberty available to any useful or beneficial purpose by laying a personal and individual claim to the privilege. There are citizens *by birth*, who notwithstanding, for the reason now mentioned, enjoy not all the peculiar privileges of that relation: so also are there Christians who, although born to the privileges of fellow-heirs and fellow-citizens with Christ, beyond this have no further interest arising from that fellowship ; having not yet made themselves by their own special act and deed, free from sin. Outwardly they are free with "the liberty with which Christ has made them free;" but inwardly they are "entangled and enslaved with the yoke of bondage." *They are still slaves to sin.* They use their liberty for a cloak of maliciousness ; and though they call Christ "Lord, Lord," yet they do not the things which he commands. *Over such the second death hath still power.* "My sheep," says the great Shepherd, "hear my voice and follow me, and I give unto them

eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

Thus has Christ overcome death: he has vanquished the grim monster in his own territories; having descended into the grave, and burst the barriers which would have detained him. Thus he triumphed over the enemy, and has also made him an easy conquest to every sincere believer. Death is now a harmless foe: the dissolver of our bodies, the taker-down of these tabernacles, but armed with no other terrors than what either our weak fancies or our sins invest him with. For the *sting* of death is *sin*.

Christ having, as I before observed, extracted the sting, "the body is indeed dead because of sin," it undergoes the common penalty of our nature, incurred by Adam's transgression, and thence entailed upon all his posterity; but "the spirit is life because of righteousness:" over it the second death hath no power—"The dust shall return to the earth as it was, but the spirit shall return to God who gave it," arrayed in the spotless robe of Christ's righteousness, and presented blameless before the throne of God with exceeding joy.

Thus have we seen, my brethren, what is the Christian's hope and confidence in death;

even He who overcame death and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers—Jesus Christ the righteous, who was dead, and behold he liveth for evermore, and has the keys of hell and death. That although in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. That in the faith of the Redeemer, Abel, Enoch, and Noah, Moses, David, and Samuel, were laid on sleep, and gathered to their fathers. In this faith the father of the faithful, even Abraham, looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. In this faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones. And in this faith his father Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff—supporting himself upon that rod and that staff, even Christ, from which David, his type, in after ages found comfort. And in this faith, every Christian, in every age, falls asleep. Christ is that rod and that staff on which every Christian leans with humble but animating hope in the near view of death and judgment. This is that rod which upraised to heaven at that awful hour, divides the waves of this troublesome Jordan,

and makes a way over for the redemption of the
 Land to pass in their promised land, their per-
 sistent inheritance. Thus, the staff, when
 applied in fact, like the prophet Elijah's, turns
 the dead to life and immortality. This over-
 comes death, that dire and terrible monster so
 dreaded by thousands and tens of thousands,
 into a shadow, a mere shadow of that gigantic
 form—that "second death" which awaits the
 wicked and impenitent in that place of torment
 where their worm doth not and the fire is not
 quenched.

Behold, my brethren, from the subject before
 us, the power and potency of the Christian's
 hope. Whilst the world and all things therein
 are fading from his view, as he enters the dark
 valley of the shadow of death, he has a remedy
 within him against natural fears and apprehen-
 sions, and the taunts and upbraidings of con-
 science. These are the only two circumstances
 which lend to death all its bitterness, and discom-
 pose the last moments of a dying man. To the
 one he opposes the example, the fellow-feeling,
 the sufferings of Christ, who has tasted death
 for him, and will enable him also to drink
 the bitter draught: who whispers to his sinking
 soul those heart-cheering words, "When thou

passest through the waters I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee !”

To the upbraidings of his conscience, the voice of the accuser, and the fiery darts of the wicked one, he opposes the shield of faith, those comfortable words of the Apostle, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long: we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For 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 us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!”

But while the subject before us affords the sublimest comfort to the humble believing Christian, it is charged with fear and trembling for

the thoughtless and impenitent. To all such I would say, "Dare not, O sinner, to lay the flattering unction to your soul; to appropriate to yourself the hopes of the Gospel, its comfort in life, its peace in death, until you have learned to die daily to sin, and to be alive unto God through Jesus Christ. It is true you may now brave the horrors of death, and think to rush through the dark valley with desperate resolution; but remember that an enemy afar off is a very different thing from an enemy at hand; and that when death really knocks at the door, and you perceive no way of escape, your boasted courage will fail you, and you will wish that you had familiarized the thought and appearance of the great enemy to your mind in the days of your gaiety and dissipation. *You* will have *every* evil to fear; Christ's rod and staff will have no comfort for *you*. Admitting even that you betray in the awful passage, no direful forebodings; that you die and leave no sign either of hope or alarm, (as the best of Christians are sometimes at that awful period, for wise purposes known only to God, permitted to be harassed with doubts and fears) yet this destroys not the certainty of *things*; the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal—the Lord knoweth them that are his, He

hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness. He will render to every man according to his works. To the wicked there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation.

Whilst blessed are all they that die in the Lord, for their works do follow them, and they enter in through the gates into the celestial city, cursed is their state who die in unrepented sin; for without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. "And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for *the time is at hand*. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still." As death leaves a man, so judgment shall find him.

To day, therefore, while it is called to day, harden not your hearts through the deceitfulness of sin. "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn to the Lord, for he will have mercy upon him, and unto our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Sermon XX.

THE SUDDENNESS OF THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

2 PETER, iii. 10.

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night;
in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great
noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the
earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned
up.*

It is the observation of a great moralist, that "whatever withdraws us from the power of our senses; whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings."

In reference to our present subject, the observation carries with it much weight. For what, I may ask, is religion but a great counter-acting power, designed by its author to diminish the attraction which sensible and present objects have upon our thoughts, desires, and affections, by presenting in their stead others which, though invisible, yet infinitely outweigh in importance any thing which can engage our attention here. Every feeling of our nature tells us that we are not made for this world only; that we have nothing here which we can properly call our own; that earth, with all its sensible attractions and realities, is not the proper good of man, that which can become identified with our immortal nature, and continue an integral part of ourselves for ever. Yet do the mind and the affections cling to it with all the pertinacity of nature, powerfully aided by habit, association, and interest; by a strange contrariety, we are too apt to think that there is nothing real but what we see before us, nothing which deserves our endeavours to attain but what we can immediately grasp and appropriate.

What consideration, therefore, possesses in itself, if duly attended to, so much power to deaden, to counteract, to weaken these mighty prepossessions of our nature, whereby we become

so early and so devotedly attached to a world of sense, as that greatest of all events, "the day of the Lord?" a thought, which by presenting to our minds the consequences of our actions here, in this state of trial and moral probation, may make the future so predominate over the present, as that all our actions shall be directed and have a reference to that event. It is only by displaying that day which "shall come as a thief in the night," that the thoughtless can be awakened, the worldling in any tolerable manner be roused from his fatal abstraction. It is only by representing a world in flames, the elements melting, the earth and the things of the earth departing as a scroll, and leaving a state of pristine and awful vacuity, that heedless man is stunned into reflection, and induced to relinquish his grasp on these perishable things. It is only by creating an opposite, and a preponderating interest, by representing to his imagination that "new heavens and that new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness," that a desire can be produced in him to become fit for so entire a change, by having his heart and affections at length permanently fixed on things above. And it is well for us, the creatures of sense, the dupes of the present moment, curious but incredulous of the future, that there is a motive, that

there *is* a divine power residing in the word of truth which, by the grace of God, is capable of detaching us from the present scene. It is well for us that fear will sometimes do what hope will not ; that the terrors of the Lord will influence some minds which his mercies fail to affect. Were it not for this, many would be to the last as indifferent to the next world, as we commonly are to a foreign country, whose existence we are taught from habit to believe, but which we never design to visit. They would leave it to a few sanguine and hardy adventurers to go up and possess it. Since, however, it is not in our own choice to remain here, or to embark on the ocean of eternity ; but we must sooner or later push off and set sail, leaving all we hold dear in this place of our nativity : since moreover either shipwreck and loss of all we possess await us, or a gain infinitely transcending in worth any thing we have left here : and finally, and chief of all, since this loss and this gain are placed *in our own power, and made to depend upon our own choice, and our own actions*—then the doctrine of a future judgment must be allowed to form a motive sufficient to work upon every unprejudiced mind : a motive for which we cannot be too thankful.

We see indeed the truth of this doctrine at

least *practically* disputed every day. I fear we so dispute it ourselves. For which of us so lives, thinks, speaks, acts, as if he expected the day of the Lord as a thief in the night? It is our lives and actions which dispute it; not our reason and cooler reflection. It is only such "scoffers of the last days," as the Apostle sets us on our guard against, who affect speculatively and as a matter of reason and religion, to deny the doctrine. It is only *because they walk after their own lusts*. But "Scripture is still a trumpet to their fears."

"What none can prove a forgery may be true;

"What none but bad men wish exploded, must."

Or supposing that they could successfully impugn the truth of Scripture, there are other testimonies to a future state, which though of secondary importance, carry with them a force not to be resisted. If the sceptic will not hear the voice of revelation, he cannot be blind to the evidence of his senses. Does not all nature co-operate with Scripture in proclaiming that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and the unjust? The grain of wheat that he treads under his foot, the changes which the insect fluttering out his short day of enjoyment undergoes, the successive alterations sustained by his own curious frame, are all visible refutations of

the scoffings of the libertine and sensualist. He must therefore stop or change the course of nature, and annihilate his own body, before he can destroy even the *natural* arguments for a resurrection ; he must do away with all our notions of justice and retribution, and shut his eyes to the present scene as a state of moral probation, in which vice too often successfully triumphs over oppressed virtue and suffering innocence ; he must, by the aid of a power never yet possessed by mortal man, silence the voice of conscience, (and with it get rid of the existence of a righteous governor of the world altogether) stop the ordinary movements of his own mind, the course of his thoughts, the ceaseless train of his ideas, his involuntary reasonings concerning "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," before he can dispose of the *moral* proofs of this doctrine.

Still the question returns upon us, and returns with encreasing force from the preceding arguments taken from nature, reason, and scripture, How happens it that the doctrine has so slight a hold ; an influence (with a view to practical purposes) *almost next to nothing* upon the mind of man ? Where is the person who, with an ancient father of the Church, fancies that he always perceives the words 'Come to judg-

ment!' vibrating upon his ears? How few attend to this voice? How small, it is to be feared, is the number of those who speak, think, and act, with a conscientious regard to the decisions of that awful tribunal at which our very thoughts and words shall undergo a fearful scrutiny? That we *are* so insensible to the importance of looking forward to the day of the Lord, notwithstanding the number and weight of those arguments which are calculated to bring it before our eyes, and to keep it in our thoughts, can only be imputed to that deteriorated condition of our minds and affections as fallen creatures, whereby it comes to pass as I before observed, that the things of time and sense are made to predominate over those that are unseen, and eternal. Hence also it happens, that men may, and do, so give themselves over to worldly pursuits, and sensual gratifications, as to blunt and turn the point of the strongest arguments—deadens the force of the deepest convictions. Moral arguments, the truths even of revelation, (and the observation is worthy, my brethren, of the deepest consideration, especially with the *young* and unhacknied in the ways of the world,) the truths even of revelation, like the most sovereign medicines, come to lose their efficacy, when often repeated, but as often

resisted. *Stimulants*, therefore, such for instance, as awful denunciations of God's wrath against sin, and fearful descriptions of eternal punishment, are necessary in order to give them, if possible, fresh weight and pungency. The mind becomes, at length, from the habit of resistance, and of tampering with sophistical arguments, insensible to *those very proofs* which once darted conviction. A sort of film obscures and confuses the moral sense, whereby it cannot, as formerly, feel the force of truth, and yield a saving assent to convictions. Thus truth, like the light of heaven, is incapable, by being abused, of producing its first and proper effects, and instead of enlightening, directing, and cheering, it only dazzles, perplexes and condemns. Whereas, let the mind be kept *tender* under first impressions; let those impressions be improved and cherished; above all, let the life and conduct be conformable and coincident with those impressions; let men so *live*, as they profess speculatively to believe in a future judgment; and every succeeding argument (and the world is full of such arguments,) brings with it a new proof, a fresh conviction, *in addition to* those by which the mind was originally convinced.

The scoffer and the libertine, on the contrary, come by degrees, as I just observed, to lose the

force even of those first proofs : their natural freshness is gone, and nothing but a thorn beneath serves to show that the flower they so wantonly rifled and threw away, once existed. Thus do they verify the remark of our Lord, that “ whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance : but whosoever hath not, *from him shall be taken away even that he hath*, or seemeth to have.”

Let these remarks serve to show the superlative importance it is of, that we be careful to keep alive those first sacred impressions which the word of truth has produced upon our minds. If we are inattentive to do so, in a world like this, truth will soon be either entirely effaced, or what is as bad, if not worse, will become so mixed up with the false lineaments of sophistry and infidelity, that it will lose all the force, the nature, the effect, peculiar to *first* convictions. Many there are, my brethren, who would fain recall the vividness of first impressions. Recollecting the period when they first believed with all the honesty and simplicity of early convictions, how do they prefer those healthful moments of their religious existence, to the doubt, the coldness, the deadness of their present feelings concerning the truth of religion !

Has no one among *us*, my brethren, so tam-

pered with unbelief, as to feel nothing of the regret I am speaking of? Do we all of *us* believe with as much simplicity and joy of heart in the word of God, as we did in our nurseries, when as new-born babes, we desired the sincere milk of the word? And are not those sacred impressions of religion, of God, of death, judgment, heaven, and hell, enviable, when compared with that half assent, that *forced*, reluctant conviction, we now yield thereto?

The fault, that we do not retain them still, that we are children in understanding, and have need to be taught again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, is not to be imputed to the truths themselves. They, like their Divine Author, are “the same yesterday, to day, and for ever;” eternal, unchangeable. No. The things of time and sense, the pleasures of the world, the eagerness with which we pursue trifles and let go substance, these co-operating with our natural deadness to divine things, will produce if not confirmed infidelity, at least the lower degrees and modifications of the same principle, such as ‘lukewarmness in religion,’ a ‘fear of the world,’ an ‘apprehension of being thought singular.’ These are *all* incompatible with a hearty reception of divine truth. A careless, sensual life, ever has had, and ever will have,

the most sure and fatal effects in producing on the mind a practical disbelief of the things which belong to our peace.

We know from experience, that the feelings and passions in their natural effects, when not goaded on by vice, or heated by intemperance, have so much to do with our coolest speculations, our most dispassionate deliberations, that often even in the commonest questions, it is difficult to distinguish between what we really believe, and what we only *wish* (for the sake of some interest or other,) to believe: between the sober conclusions of reason, and the warpings of prejudice or of some other of our corrupt passions. Hence it is, that in matters relating to the next life, and our responsibility at the tribunal of a just God, truths which men of loose lives *wish* not to believe, they reject as false: and their own foolish theories come in time to have with them the force of truth. They have so long amused and flattered themselves with the creatures of their wicked fancies, so moulded and caressed them, that they at length assume, or seem to assume, all the reality they could wish. Thus error usurps the place of truth. Thus a false Dagon is set up in that shrine which the true God made and would sanctify for himself. We bow down before the unreal and empty

out the light that is in them turn the grace of God into licentiousness? Hath he not declared, that he will judge the world in righteousness, and yet these careless livers would have him sacrifice justice (an essential ingredient in the very notion of a righteous judgment,) to *mercy*; mercy to those who have “despised the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering?” So wild and inconsistent are the reasonings of men of corrupt minds. They would persuade themselves of one of these two things, either that there shall be no final account taken of men’s actions, or that it shall be conducted in such a manner as to do away with the nature and necessity of all moral distinctions, all moral responsibility; the consequence of which doctrine is simply this, ‘that men may live as they list.’

Let us, my brethren, who rest our belief of a future judgment upon the truth of scripture alone, ever “mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of the apostles of the Lord and Saviour,” let us, I say, direct our thoughts to the solemn realities of that day of the Lord, to which every thing we are now doing on earth as men and as Christians, has the most interesting and vital relation. What is sure to come, what

will come suddenly, what may come every moment, it is madness to disregard ; prudence, safety, and peace, devoutly to contemplate, practically to realise. What our feelings and sense of divine things will *then* be, at that awful moment when we shall be summoned from the dust of death to behold a world in flames, and all things disappearing except *ourselves*—such let them be *now*. We believe in a future judgment. It is the voice of scripture. It is the voice of God speaking within us in the whispers of conscience, in the secret approval or disapproval of our actions. What we sincerely believe, we cannot but picture often to our imaginations, as an object either of cheerful hope, or of anxious fear. The words of the Apostle are eminently calculated to assist our imaginations. They form a description at once solemn and animating.—“ Thoughts that breathe, and words that burn.”

In looking forward to the end of all things, imagine the awfulness of that pause, when time shall be no more ; when that clock whose hours and minutes, days and years, mark the existence and continuance of this world, shall then have gone down never again to be wound up ! What a pause shall that be when the busy whirl of this earth, and of millions of worlds besides,

yea even the great machine of the universe shall have come to an instantaneous, an universal stand ! What a moment of dismay to the wicked ! A pause, a stillness as fearful and heart-sinking as the succeeding storm shall be overwhelming and annihilating ! *The heavens shall pass away with a great noise !* The crash of worlds, the collision of systems, *the elements melting with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein burning*, and raging, sinking and falling into one common vortex, shall form such an assemblage of sights and sounds, as shall rouse him from his first fearful suspense, and kindle before his eyes, and in his soul, *that hell*, to which the stillness of death, and the destruction of worlds, shall be but a prelude !

But how feeble are all words to express, how languid all ideas to conceive, the condition of a soul standing naked and unprotected amid the blaze of worlds !—a soul which has wantonly thrown away the panoply of truth, the armour of righteousness ! Will he *now* seek to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one ? Alas ! he has thrown away the shield of faith, the sword of the spirit, the word of God, “the preparation of the Gospel of peace !” With this his feet were not shod in this world ;—he stood in the way of sinners, and sat in the seat of the

scornful! And now the things which should have been for his peace are for ever hidden from his eyes. Will he call upon the rocks to cover him?—the earth and the things that are therein are burned up! Lastly, will he implore the aid of the righteous?—"These are they whom he had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools accounted their life madness, and their end to be without honor. How are they numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints!" Such, my brethren, shall be the end of scoffers. They shall one day fruitlessly implore that mercy which here they have so wantonly trifled with. Their boasted principles shall then utterly fail them. No opinions shall be able to stand the test of the fiery trial which is to try them, but such as are built upon the word of God—even that faith which we preach.

Be it then our care never to trifle with truths so awfully important: never to question that word which shall judge us in the last day. Never to fritter away the hopes of that Gospel which must ere long be either our salvation or our curse. Would we avoid this peril of our souls, let us live as believe. Let our conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ. Let Him be the ground of our faith, our hope, our

trust. Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid. If Christ be not the sinner's stay, his Saviour, and his God, when nature is sinking into ruin, and the heavens flying away and vanishing as a scroll, there will be found none other refuge to flee to ; none other covert from the storm.

"Ye, therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Sermon XXI.

NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH.

2 PETER iii., 13.

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness,

IT is from the scriptures alone that we derive any just knowledge and information respecting the origin, duration, and end of this present world. There were those among the ancient philosophers, men too of the most profound sagacity, of an intellect never surpassed, seldom equalled, who yet grossly erred upon these points. And their error serves eminently to show, that when the mind, whatever be its powers, proceeds to account for the existence of things, relying upon its own resources and not

taking revelation for its guide, it cannot but err. On the other hand, let the word of God be first assumed as the standard of truth, and made the basis of such enquiries as relate to the origin and end of 'the things which are seen,' and collateral investigation, light breaking in from all sides, will serve to confirm their statement.

For instance, it was the opinion of one sect of philosophers, that the world was from eternity, and never had a beginning. Another maintained the contrary, but ascribed its origin to chance. Is there any thing in the appearance of things to confirm either of these hypotheses? Are not reason and common sense directly opposed thereto? Do not they with one voice proclaim, that if "every house is builded by some man, he that built all things is God?" Have we any records to appeal to in proof that the world has existed longer than the date we assign to it? None but what are fabulous, wild, and extravagant. On the contrary, let us take the scripture account, the writings of the inspired Moses, as the ground of certainty herein, that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth;" and that of St. Peter, "by the word of God the heavens were of old," that is, produced of old, in the beginning of time, "and the earth standing out of the water

and in the water," that is consisting of sea and land; let us, I say, believe, upon the authority of revelation, that this world once had no existence, that it began to exist, that it was created and made, and that God alone was the creator and fashioner thereof, and every thing besides, every argument deduced from reason, nature, analogy, and experience, will attest and support the same truth.

A similar train of remark is applicable to the doctrine of the world's *dissolution*. Reason alone, or rather the abuse of it, rejecting the aid of scripture, would conduct us to the same conclusion which it did those "scoffers" mentioned in this chapter, who, arguing from the apparent sameness and uniformity of things, the regular course, and the stated recurrence of times, and seasons, concluded that the world should continue for ever, and thus made the wisdom and goodness of God in upholding the universe, and that for the sake of his moral, responsible creatures, an occasion of sin, an argument for pursuing their lusts and pleasures. They asked, "where is the promise of his coming?" (the coming of Christ to judgment,) "for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." On the contrary, reason aided and assisted by

the light of scripture, perceives much in the present state of things to be convinced, that if the world was indeed created and made; being perishable, and dependent alone upon the will and pleasure of that being who created it, it is destined only for a *temporary* existence. Reason, acting upon the discoveries of revelation, sees enough to be convinced, that "the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." In short, "we look according to his promise, for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

The errors into which men have fallen upon these points, men too, as I observed, of the greatest penetration in other matters, show, that reason alone is insufficient to conduct us to certainty in these matters. Her light, but glimmering and unsteady, requires to be assisted and replenished by the lamp of scripture, "the sure word of prophecy to which we do well ever to take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place." Nor is it any disparagement to so excellent a gift of God as reason is, that it cannot see every thing, nor fathom the deep things of God, (which were reserved for revelation to make known,) any more than it is a disparagement to

the wondrous mechanism of that subtle organ the eye, that it requires light to assist it in its functions; and the mind and judgment to correct the impressions made upon us by sensible objects. Reason has its own distinct office assigned to it: it is of singular use and necessity: and it is only when it attempts to go alone, and to reject the light of revelation, that it degenerates into folly, and is lost in error and perplexity.

In considering the grand and interesting truth before us, I shall not have occasion to prove from scripture, (what none, I trust, of you, my brethren, make any doubt of,) namely, the truth of the doctrine of a future state. I shall assume with the Apostle when addressing Agrippa, that "you believe the prophets," that you are convinced that the scriptures are the word of God: that believing that the things which were made, were not made of things which do appear, you are also convinced that there is an all-wise, all-powerful, and gracious Being who made all things, and by whom all things do consist: that therefore it is "no incredible thing with you, that God should raise the dead;" that he is able by the same word of his power, by the same exertion of his will, to collect and reanimate those identical bodies which he originally called and created out

of nothing. Taking all this for granted, as well as (what I am authorised also in taking for granted,) that, (Christians in name and profession, and I would fain hope in heart and life) you are “looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God;” I shall draw your attention to the truth contained in the text, as exhibiting at once the sublimest, and the most forcible argument for the necessity of that “growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” which the belief of so great a truth not merely demands, but in its natural effects, and duly cultivated and improved, serves to produce. “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

It is the doctrine of Scripture, as it was the opinion indeed of an ancient philosopher, that the present world shall be destroyed by fire. This truth I dwelt upon with all the seriousness it required in my last discourse. “The heavens and the earth which are now, are reserved unto *fire* against the day of judgment.” The dissolution, therefore, of the present state of things we conclude will be real and entire. “The earth and the things that are therein shall be burned up.”

To the present scene, which is substantial

and palpable, shall succeed "new heavens and a new earth," spiritual and impalpable: equally real though composed of far different materials. Upon this new state of things shall be erected and perpetuated the kingdom of Christ, in its last, most pure, and most perfect stage: that kingdom which, according to the prophecy of Daniel, shall never be moved, and of which there shall be no end. All things besides this, shall be removed and vanish for ever. This shall arise gloriously amid the ruins of a flaming world, "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." The Apostle to the Hebrews speaks of the continuance and perpetuity of this kingdom. "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire." In a word then the kingdom of Christ, (here in this world, as it were in embryo and progress,) shall constitute "new heavens and a new earth," it shall be set up, perfected, and established for ever in that new state of

society of each other in bliss, such knowledge recognition, and social enjoyment must (it should seem) depend upon, and arise out of the *same relations* we here sustain to each other. In the exercise of the virtues which support and adorn these relations, (such as justice love, &c.) may not much of that very perfection of being and of happiness consist, which glorified souls shall ever be approaching throughout a never ending existence? Thus, although there shall be "neither marrying nor giving in marriage," although no *new* relationships, of the nature of those of earth, shall be there entered into; still we may rationally hope that *old* ones shall remain and be perfected. That the love of a fond husband, wife, father, child, and friend, shall hereafter be renewed, and for ever be increasing.

Considerations such as these, so far from being the mere offspring of fancy have, or *seem* to have, the light of Scripture to support them; as well as the powerful aid of that weighty argument from analogy, by which we are led to conclude that the supreme author of our existence acts like Himself through every stage of his moral government, and that the last act of man's interesting and eventful drama shall be of a piece with those which have gone before.

When Martha wept for her lost brother, what was our Saviour's remark to her?—"Thy *brother* shall rise again:" by which word it is clear that he intended to console her in the *only* way suited to the cause and removal of her grief; and that was, by assuring her that the sacred and severed relationship of brother and sister should again be renewed at the resurrection of the just. I admit that this declaration of our Lord may have had an immediate reference to the miracle he was *then* about to perform upon Lazarus. But as the answer of Martha shows that she understood it as referring to the *general* resurrection, and Christ seems to speak of himself in his general character also, 'I am the resurrection and the life,' it may, I think, fairly be adduced as an argument in favour of so pleasing and consolatory a doctrine. The recognition of Dives, who in "hell lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom," seems not so proper an argument as the former, inasmuch as the persons in the latter instance are represented as in *different* states,

The words of the Apostle, however, are express as to the *general character* of that state which awaits the saints in light, "We look for

its consummation. Then shall it be seen and felt to all eternity, that "as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

Our duties in the mean time are clearly pointed out. If "righteousness" and truth constitute the character of that God with whom we have to do; if "righteousness" shall be the essential nature of future blessedness; if none but the righteous shall be found worthy to obtain that kingdom, then the nature and character of our lives *here on earth* is determined.

For true it is, my brethren, that neither the joys nor the righteousness of our future inheritance can be either anticipated or realised, but by labouring in this state of trial and probation to acquire those pure, and holy, and self-denying qualities which shall belong to that state. We must labour to become "new creatures in Christ Jesus," "old things must pass away, before all things can become new." We must be purged from our old sins; not a taint or spot of our leprosy must adhere to us, or we shall not pass the scrutiny of our high priest. Our souls must

be daily undergoing that renovating process, assuming that new nature which it is the office of God's holy spirit to produce, carry on, and perfect in us. This world is a school wherein we are to be trained, and purified for heaven. The change must take place, the process must commence here. In this world all is progress. The mind pushes on its discoveries in intellectual matters. Its powers, by cultivation, are enlarged and expanded. And these powers and capabilities, shall hereafter be perpetually increasing in the contemplation of objects suited thereto. The more they are cultivated and improved here, the more exalted and sublime will be their exercise hereafter. In like manner, the soul, and the moral faculties must be disciplined and improved in a manner analogous to the progress of the mind. Every day, therefore, the Christian is making new advances in faith and holiness. Let us reflect, my brethren, that we are *fallen* creatures. That we are endued, nevertheless, with power to correct our depravities, and to prepare for another world. Nor does it lessen our power nor diminish our responsibility, that the Gospel represents eternal life as the gift of God in his son Jesus Christ, since nothing can render us meet for the enjoyment of that infinite reward, but our own

endeavours, assisted by his grace, to be "pure as he is pure, and holy in all manner of conversation." Salvation, from first to last, is of grace: but grace was never yet imparted to that man who refused to use it, and to grow in the knowledge and performance of God's will.

Finally, let me draw your attention to that glorious vision of the inheritance of the saints in light which was vouchsafed by the spirit to St. John, and which he describes in such glowing and affecting colours, in the twenty-first chapter of Revelation. "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

