



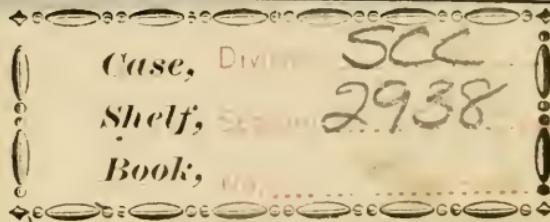
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Letter...
No.

March 15th 1855.





DISCOURSES

PREACHED BEFORE THE

HONOURABLE SOCIETY

OF

LINCOLN'S-INN,

B Y

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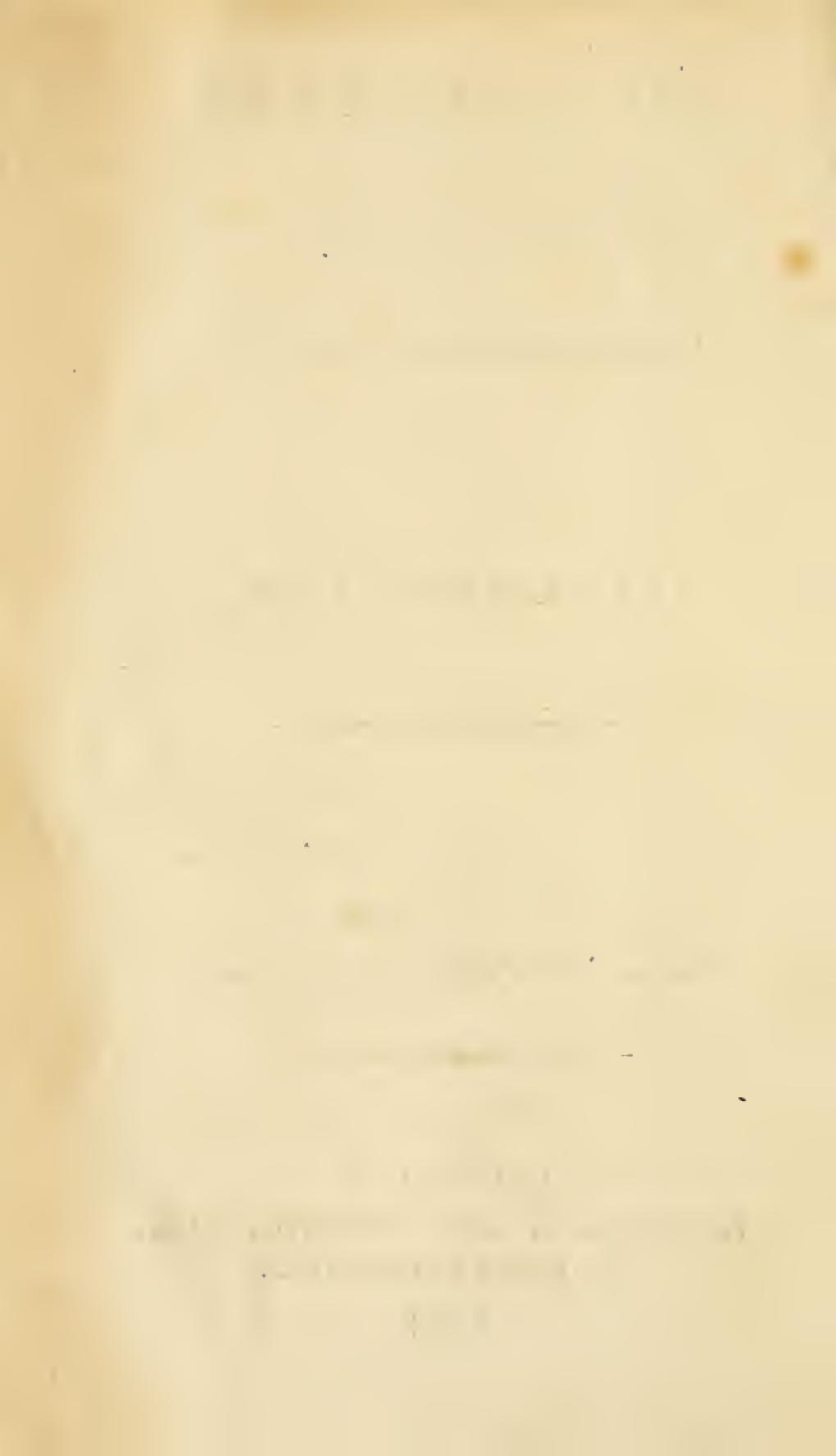
ROBERT NARES, A. M.

Chaplain to His Royal Highness the Duke of York, &c.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR F. AND C. RIVINGTON, NO 62,
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

1794.



TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE
WILLIAM PITTE,
CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER,

&c. &c. &c.

T R E A S U R E R

(FOR THE PRESENT YEAR)

TO THE
HON. SOCIETY OF LINCOLN'S INN,

THESE
D I S C O U R S E S

ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY HIS MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT,

May 1, 1794.

ROBERT NARES.

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DISCOURSE I.

ON THE MEANS OF REVIVING THE TRUE
SPIRIT OF PIETY.

ROMANS XIV. 19.

Let us [therefore] follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

THE design of the christian law is to exalt the nature of man, and make him fit for the society and fellowship of higher beings. Hence is it that, in every aspect, the contemplation of a Christian, such as he ought to be, presents us with a nobler view of human nature than we can attain by any other means. Societies of men considered without reference to any religion, merely as they exist in this world, and as having in it the beginning and the end of their being, what are they but assemblages of animals ? wonderful indeed in their faculties and pro-

perties above all others of that numerous class; but still, united with them in death, and confounded with them in the subsequent dissolution of their organs: of no higher origin, nor higher end.—Such are men, according to those who reject religion, and disclaim the doctrine of a future life. Observe their pursuits, and you will find them consonant to this account; terminating in objects of no great value or duration, yet sought with an ardour wholly disproportioned to their worth: and though the eagerness of men for these their short-lived satisfactions would be in some degree palliated by the supposition that they had nothing further to expect (which is indeed the common plea and argument of irreligious sensualists,) yet nothing can excuse the selfish and malicious manner in which they are and ever will be struggled for, by those who have no higher notions. We may indeed expect on grounds of reason, that beings who have hope in this world only, and foresight to assure them of their short continuance here, will be contentious for the pleasures which this world affords, as for their all; yet, expecting this, we cannot but regard the creatures which we find thus situated as wicked

wicked and pernicious animals, whose chief propensities incline them to injure and supplant each other.

Very different is the prospect that presents itself in the contemplation of real Christians. We see there, indeed, creatures of much infirmity, liable to fall into errors, and even into guilt, but at the same time connected with a better order of things, and tending towards it; occupied of course, in some degree, with the business and the pleasures of this present world, but considering both as subordinate and greatly inferior to the concerns of a future life, which is to be of infinitely greater duration; and, for the sake of that life, attentive rather to the *duties* of the present, than to any other of its demands. Not contentious about worldly honours, pleasures, or advantages, because intent on higher objects; yet not negligent of them in proportion to their proper estimation; and sincerely and humbly thankful for them when bestowed by providence: above all things, friendly to each other, knowing not only that the principal object of their desire is attainable by all, but that it may be better and more effectually

sought by their conspiring efforts, than by the separate attempts of any.

To these peculiar virtues of christian societies the apostle intended to direct his converts, when he exhorted them in the words which I have taken as a text, “ To follow “ after the things which make for peace, “ and things wherewith they might edify “ one another.”

By the *things which make for peace*, St. Paul meant more especially, (as the preceding verses fully show,) such actions as evince a mutual toleration of infirmities, and a quiet profession of their private sentiments, without molesting or offending others; even giving way in matters of indifference, or of small importance, rather than the spirit of contention or dissent should rise among them.

The other part of the exhortation, “ to “ follow after those things by which *we may* “ *edify one another*,” does not lie within so small a compass; since the acts are wholly innumerable by which Christians may edify each other, and mutually promote their hopes of heavenly blessings. Every thing that belongs to *instruction*, *admonition*, *reproof*, and *good example*, falls under this class; and all
of

of these are bound upon us, as duties, by this single precept of the teacher. It is our business to make the application to ourselves, and to profit by it to the utmost of our power. For my own part, I am convinced that a candid examination of the duties arising from this latter precept, with due reflection on our own neglect in the performance of them, would lead to much instruction, most important and most necessary for us. Or, to put it in another way, more convenient, perhaps, for such a view as we can take at present, let us consider the religious evils of our actual situation, and then enquire whether the duties here enjoined by the apostle would not afford us the most sure and efficacious remedy. — To know our real state is one great part of wisdom, and to know the means by which we may amend it, is yet a further advance: there is wanting beyond these, only the will to put the means in use; and this a proper statement of the former part may tend, perhaps, to excite.

It is, I think, but too undeniable, that in this age the spirit of religion has become extremely weak; far from being the exalted creatures which I have just described as real

Christians, the present Christians bear the name with very few of the distinctive marks. Many, indeed, have renounced even the name; but among those who retain it, and make a general profession of the faith, to consider the negligence there is with respect to some duties, the total contempt of others, the general indifference about christian knowledge, the forgetfulness of christian hopes, and the violence of desire and contention with which all temporal advantages are sought, may lead our imaginations rather to that picture of creatures without religion, and devoid of future hopes, which I gave in the beginning of this discourse, than to any thing that properly displays the character of Christians.

From vices, however, and even from the vice of worldly-mindedness, no times of Christianity have yet been wholly exempt: but this peculiar crime of indifference, rising frequently into a total alienation from religion, and a fear of even seeming to profess it, has never, surely, been so prevalent as within the present century.—The general cause of this has been the increase of fancied knowledge, and the pride of imaginary wisdom.—The fact is not that real knowledge has not also

also increased, and that great and solid wisdom has not also appeared ; but these good things, like every earthly advantage, have had some counterbalance of attendant evil. Vanity and presumption have always made a stride beyond the progress of real knowledge, and true wisdom ; and while these have struck out discoveries of some importance in the system of nature, and improvements in many arts, and gained a few steps in science, both moral and divine, those have hurried themselves with blind precipitation into the abyss of metaphysics ; and there, immersed in central darkness, have imagined that they discovered, and could demonstrate, whatever pernicious fancies the *ruler of the darkness of this world* thought it most expedient for his purposes to suggest.

The novelty, or at least, the apparent novelty, of these excursions, with a certain brilliancy of genius by which the results were artfully set forth, together with the dissolute manners of some corrupt courts, prevailed unhappily so far as to give them currency, and to render irreligion fashionable. If we look back a very little further into history we shall find it otherwise ; but thus it has been for

some time, and the evil, I hope, has past its height.

A favourable period seems at length to have arrived for shaking off this torpid matlady. Those writings which for a time seduced so many, have lost the grace of novelty, and have had their futility exposed; they are sinking rapidly into oblivion;—and religion, never silenced by reason, but for a time apparently overborne by clamour, may now again be heard. In the conflict she has manifested a strength which to the end of time will be her glory; and her friends have only now to improve the good position in which she has established their force.

During the continuance of these disputes, amidst abundance of raillery and ridicule, which, though they could not move the wise who were few, yet caught the weak and unsteady who were many, and kept them greatly in awe of what some sophists would gladly have established as the final *test of truth*. In these circumstances, I say, it became a kind of fashion to suppress religious sentiments, to suffer them by all imaginable methods to be disconcerted in public, and to retain them, if at all, among the secrets of the

the heart, known only to him to whom all hearts are open.

Not to expatiate upon the unchristian puerility, and the guilt of such conduct, the effect of it upon the public morals has been alarming and destructive. They who judge chiefly by appearances, and are influenced very greatly by the example of their superiors, I mean the lower orders of society, seeing so little appearance of religion in those above them, and so little anxiousness to preserve even an outward respect to it, have been tempted, in too many instances, to throw it off entirely, and we are punished for our guilty negligence by an extended profligacy, which at length is felt and lamented, but which it must be the work of time, and of many serious efforts, to repress and to reform.

The great work is, however, begun; and the zeal with which some institutions of that tendency have been taken up and supported, affords, at present, a pleasing symptom of amendment, and will, no doubt, in time produce its due effect.

But in the interval we are strongly called upon to quicken and extend our diligence, and, with the general attention which the apostle

apostle enjoins, “to follow after *all things* “ wherewith we may *edify* one another.” The spirit of religion must be revived among us, and we must cease to be ashamed, with a foolish and a guilty shame, of those things which are in truth our greatest glory; not forgetting that of those who are now ashamed of Christ, he also will surely be ashamed when he sits on the tribunal of Omnipotence.

Some of those things by which we may edify one another I will here concisely enumerate, as an aid or guide to that obedience which is due to the apostle’s precept.

The first and most obvious of these is *the Education of Children*. For by edifying one another we are not to understand too strictly and literally a mutual edification, or reciprocation of instruction, but the edifying of all those in every station on whom we may have an opportunity of conferring that great benefit. With respect to children, it has been very artfully inculcated by the enemies of religion, and not without considerable effect, that the choice of religious opinions is a work of mature judgment, and therefore ought to be left altogether to the decision of mature age; and that in the mean time the mind should

should be left free from every bias of prejudice, and indifferent to every determination. This, like every other fallacy, has some foundation in truth. It is true that the final decision upon religious opinions is a work of mature judgment ; but it is not true that in this matter prejudices are so greatly to be apprehended, or that it is so difficult, as is insinuated, to throw off the early bias of education. How many have we seen who, after every care taken in their youth to impress them with Christian principles, have run the whole course of infidelity, and shown themselves throughout life exempt from every charge of prejudice in favour of religion ! Nor can the mind be kept in such a neutral state as these instructors recommend. “ He that is not for me,” says our Saviour, “ is against me,” and the child that does not learn religion will learn irreligion. Besides, the leisure of early life is the only convenient opportunity some men ever have for learning any thing of religion ; immersed afterwards in the hurry of business, and the temptations of life, they have need rather of previous knowledge to keep them steady, than of disputes about first principles. A Christian has much to learn, which

which the docile mind of a child (a pattern in that respect for man, and as such recommended to imitation) very readily receives; but which will afterwards, without more leisure than many men will choose to find, be attained but very imperfectly: and thus, by way of being impartial, we may leave one side of the question altogether unheard. The summary creed of infidelity, "*I believe nothing,*" is learned, if it be worth learning, at any time, and without any study, so that no provisions need be made for that acquirement: and if a man must of necessity set out in life with prejudices, it is better, on many accounts, for himself and for the world, that he should have such as make him feel responsible for what he does, than such as encourage him to indulge his passions, at that time the strongest, and to throw off all restraint.— For these reasons, and for many more which the subject will naturally suggest to every reasonable mind, let us begin our reformation of the times by edifying where we have most power to edify, by instilling into children, from their earliest years, the love of God and the true spirit of religion.

And,

And, as among the means of doing this, and of edifying, at the same time, a larger circle of inmates and dependents, let me strenuously recommend the excellent, but too long neglected practice of domestic prayer. The picture of a master of a family kneeling at the head of his household, and recommending them and himself, in solemn prayer, to the protection and blessing of heaven, is one of those which we know is pleasing in the sight of God; and which would be, if our taste were as correct in this, as in some inferior matters, in the sight of man, affecting and sublime. The effect of this good example would be powerful and extensive, and, as in every other case of practical goodness, much more edifying than mere admonition, instruction, or reproof, which, however, may be fitly joined with it whenever there shall be occasion. To the revival of this excellent practice, so consonant to reason, and so strongly required by religion, the chief obstacle will be the remains of that false shame of which I have already spoken, and the consequent fear of appearing, what very few are in any danger of becoming, righteous over-much.

A third great branch of the duty of *edifying one another*, and the last on which I shall at present insist, is that which has been very long neglected, from the causes above specified, of paying on all occasions an open and public respect to religion. Under this head are comprised, as necessary parts, a general veneration for the institutions of the church, and particularly for the observance of the Lord's Day, and other high days of religious commemoration, with care to set a good example in the public notice of them; a regular attendance upon public worship, which they who are vain enough to think not edifying to themselves, ought to know to be edifying in the public eye; the standing testimony of national religion, the means of extending its influence, and the only method by which we can hope to propitiate the Almighty in favour of that whole society, in the welfare of which we are most interested, and which we call our native country.

By these means, and by others analogous to these, assisted by the blessing of God, we may hope gradually to revive among us the true spirit and active zeal of Christianity; and that it may be indeed the spirit of Christianity,

tianity, and not any evil spirit in the semblance of it, such as too often has tormented the world, let us keep in mind the former part of the apostle's admonition: and be mindful while we follow those things wherewith we may edify one another, to pursue those also, which make for peace: being assured that whatever does not tend to peace and brotherly affection, is not of Christ. The effectuating these great purposes, as it must result from the joint efforts of all, is incumbent in due part and proportion, according to his means and opportunities, on every individual. Happy they who, before the final tribunal of judgment, shall be able to plead, that, throughout life, they were diligent, not only to work out their own salvation, but also to promote the peace of the church, and by all means in their power to effect the edification of others. These will surely be found worthy to have their lot with those exalted beings, a great part of whose felicity arises from the diffusion of a pure benevolence among them, accompanied by the blessing of God, which, if we fulfil these terms, will rest on us, as well as upon them, for ever and for ever.

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE II.

ON THE SUBLIMITY OF DEVOTION.

LAM: JER. iii. 41.

*Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto
God in the heavens.*

THE expression of lifting up our hearts or souls to heaven, which is not uncommon in scripture, is admirably calculated to describe that elevation and sublimity of feeling which naturally accompanies the movements of true devotion. In circumstances and situations by which these sensations are strongly excited, the soul seems almost detached from her terrestrial confinement, and united in communion with spirits congenial to herself.

This observation, the justice of which will be readily confessed by all who are capable of such feelings, leads directly to a truth which

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seems

seems to have been too little considered, being of a nature to have a powerful influence on many minds, which is this ; *that the finest and most sublime sensations of which the soul of man is susceptible, are connected with the principle of devotion.* In this remark religion is presented to us in one of the most amiable and attractive of her aspects ; an illustration of it, therefore, may be highly useful in reviving the general attachment to her, and in dispelling the cloud of prejudice from those darkened minds, which expect I know not what of dulness and insipidity in every thing pertaining to devotion. If those sweet, but powerful emotions of sublimity, for the sake of which men fly with so much eagerness to the works of exalted genius, and to produce which is their highest boast, the basis of their noblest fame, can be shown to belong more peculiarly to religion, there must be an end of that ill-founded reproach ; and it must be confessed that, in the exercises of piety, a cold and languid insensibility is disgraceful only to the heart that harbours it.

An enquiry into the nature of the sublime would be altogether unsuitable to this time and place. Let us be contented then to take the decision of the question as we find it given by

by others.—The most perfect account appears to be this, “ that it is the idea of *power*, in “ some shape or other insinuating itself, which “ produces in all cases the sensation of *subli-*
 “ *mity**.” If this theory be just, and it has every appearance of being so, we have all that we can possibly desire for the demonstration of our present remark: an assumption taken up on purpose could not more exactly accord. The contemplation of Omnipotence, the highest and most perfect power the universe contains, the fountain of all other power that does or can exist, is the due and proper province of religion. To trace the effects, to acknowledge the dominion, and to conceive as fully as possible the glory of that transcendent Power, is the essential employment of devotion. No wonder then, if we find sublimity, where its very essence is acknowledged to reside, in connection with power, and that infinite in degree: and we may rest satisfied with the full decision of theory in favour of the remark which is now selected for examination.

It remains only to illustrate the doctrine by showing it to be altogether confirmed by experience.

* Blair.

If devotion be, in its own nature, a sublime feeling, the records of the true religion ought eminently to possess that character of sublimity. In this, our expectation is not deceived: the sublimest books existing are those from which we learn our faith. The writings of the inspired penmen abound with passages for which no parallel can be found in the productions of mere genius. On these holy books the marks of the divinity are every where stamped in characters of simple dignity, and genuine, unaffected simplicity, which are not to be found in any human compositions. The sacred volume is, as it were, the tabernacle of the Most High still remaining among us, pervaded throughout by the brightness of his presence, and the transcendent majesty of his power. To recite examples of this high excellence, pleasing as it might be to do so, may fairly be esteemed superfluous; my hearers are, I trust, sufficiently acquainted with the treasures of inspiration to recal such passages to their own recollection. There are writings in which it is expressly undertaken, and the fact is in general acknowledged. Even they who have not in all respects submitted to the authority of scripture, have, in general, been obliged
to

to confess its sublimity ; though in so doing they have granted, perhaps, something more than they intended : this sublimity of holy writ being, among others, no mean argument of its authenticity. Had it contained only a vain and fabulous theology, these characters of august grandeur, and true elevation, had surely been wanting to it. The efforts of the most pre-eminent genius could scarcely raise above absurdity the dreams of the pagan system ; the most sublime and celebrated description of the supreme deity of heathenism, implies a conception of him in a human form, with the darkest hair, and overhanging eye-brows *: but the more general and purer ideas of an infinite spirit, as suggested by genuine religion ; Eternity, Immensity, Omnipresence, Omnipotence, the attributes, actions and decrees of an all-wise and all-perfect Deity,—what emotions are too elevated for them to excite, when delivered in the language of truth ? Hear the testimony of one, whose unexampled inconsistency, joined to the most exalted talents, was, in some respects, unfavourable to the cause of religion ; but whose right sentiments on this subject

* Hom. Il. A. 528.

appear to have been extorted by irresistible feeling. "The majesty of the scriptures," says this writer, "fills me with astonishment, "the holiness of the gospel speaks to my "very heart. Behold the books of the philosophers, with all their pomp, how little "are they in comparison!—Is it possible that "a book at once so wise and so sublime should "have been the production of mere men *."

Having cited this ample acknowledgement from one in many respects hostile to the cause of revealed religion, let us proceed, as a further illustration of our doctrine, to consider some of the situations of real life, which tend to prove the intimate connection between devotion, and the sources of sublime feeling within us.

First then, in the retirement of the closet to what speculations will the mind of the devout be directed? While under the impression of that principle, probably, to the contemplation of God. How much of sublimity is necessarily adjoined to the true notions of the Supreme Being, has been already suggested; nor will any one be hardy enough to assert that a more exalted topic of considera-

* Rousseau, Pensées, p. 3.

tion can possibly be conceived. But it may be said, with some plausibility, that the being and attributes of the Creator are matters much too high above us, to act upon our minds with powerful energy. That, dazzled and confounded with the prospect of infinity, the understanding of man, employed upon this subject, must sink under the sense of its own insufficiency; and, instead of experiencing the vigorous impressions of sublime emotion, must feel only the languor and the shame of baffled weakness. Thus, indeed, to unassisted man it easily might happen. But from this disappointment the nature of our divine religion rescues us: we are not left to bewilder ourselves in the labyrinth of infinity, where all we could discover would be our hopeless ignorance; it has pleased God to declare to us, in part, what he is; and to encourage us to raise our thoughts to him, by revealing to us, even in our present state of imperfection, something of the brightness of his glory. Assisted by this supernatural aid, the devout Christian, in his secret contemplations, lifts up his thoughts, not to an unknown being, like the Athenians of old, but to the Lord Jehovah, to the Creator and

Lord of heaven and earth, to the Holy One of Israel, the God of peace, of patience, and consolation * ; who, though throned in everlasting majesty, vouchsafes to look upon the sons of men ; who, though offended by innumerable transgressions, so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten Son, to the end that they who believe in him may not perish, but have everlasting life ; who hath sent, since him, the ever-blessed Comforter to guide us, if we refuse not his guidance, into all truth.—To this God, thus described and specified, to the mysterious union of this Holy Trinity, are the contemplations of christian devotion directed : to this object does the votary of true religion in solitude and retirement lift up his soul ; and, though it be with humbleness, and with a full conviction that to him the ways of God are of necessity inscrutable, yet it is with confidence that he surely knows both of his ways and of his goodness, so much at least as it hath pleased him to reveal : and ever when his own conceptions fail through weakness, and fall short of the sublimity of the subject, the sacred volume is at hand to assist and invigorate

* 1 Thess. v. 2. and Rom. xv. 5, 33.

his imagination. Whence, though hitherto I have declined it, I cannot now refrain from citing at least a single instance of the richness of its sublime description. Speaking of the power of God, it is said in the book of Job, that “ He stretcheth out the north over the “ empty place, and hangeth the earth upon “ nothing ; He bindeth up the waters in his “ thick clouds, and the clouds are not rent “ under them. He holdeth back the face “ of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud up- “ on it. He hath compassed the water with “ bounds, until the day and night come to “ an end. The pillars of heaven tremble and “ are astonished at his reproof *.” More, I think, need not be said to prove that the contemplations to which devotion leads, are in their own nature elevated and sublime.— And though they may not all turn specifically upon the attributes and perfections of the Deity, they are all related to the same subject ; and bear in them, more or less, the impression of a similar character.

To be convinced of this, let us, instead of pursuing the devout man to his closet, attend him to the field. There, when he beholds

* Job xxvi. 7, &c.

the beauteous order of creation, the splendor and magnificence of the sky above him, the richness and variety of the earth beneath, the vigour of life and health that glows around him, and the materials of abundant enjoyment, consistent, if rightly used, with nature, with reason and religion, and poured out on every side with unbounded profusion ; then, when his heart exulting in the prospect and participation of so much collected good, yearns towards the Divine Bestower, and exclaims with fervour, “ These are thy glorious works, “ Almighty Father, and these thy bounties ! ” who shall deny that his sensations are sublime, or persuade him that the same objects, without this reference to heaven, without this assistance from the feelings of devotion, can possibly excite an equal transport. Another may enjoy the contemplation of magnificence, may be pleased with the prospect of beauty, order, and variety, and feel the warmth of admiration ; but on the devout man alone will these considerations operate with their fullest influence. He only will proceed, by a rapid transition, from the creatures to the Creator, and regard the perfections of his works as a representation, and, as it were a foretaste, of the

the infinitely higher excellencies of their holy Author. To him most truly it is that “ the “ heavens declare the glory of God !”

Or if from great and general views of expanded nature, he descend to a more minute examination of its parts, sensations of the same exalted kind will still continue to be excited. He will never, in the minutest of his researches, lose sight of the great and admirable Contriver; but tracing the unerring wisdom and unbounded power of the Deity in the smallest subdivisions of his works, will find a dignity in objects usually despised, and will perceive the truest magnificence, the marks of the most sublime intelligence, united with apparent meanness.—Such are the sensations raised by the view of nature, whether general or particular, in the mind of the pious Christian; who, though he love not *the world*, when under that name are comprehended the follies, the passions and the vices, of those who are too truly its children: yet when he surveys it as the theatre of Almighty Providence, as a specimen of unbounded Power, the result and the display of unerring Wisdom, cannot fail to have produced within him the transports of rational wonder, and the exalted fervour of grateful admiration.

“ When

“ When I consider,” says the Psalmist, “ the
“ heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon
“ and stars which thou hast ordained;—what
“ is man that thou art mindful of him, and
“ the son of man that thou visitest him? For
“ thou hast made him a little lower than the
“ angels, and hast crowned him with glory
“ and honour *.”

To such a height of noble speculation can the spirit of religion exalt the minds of its professors!—But it is not only in the contemplation of nature that these effects may be produced; in every circumstance and situation the proper operation of religious thoughts is to call up such sublime and fervent feelings.—Is the devout man in prosperity?—He acknowledges the bounty of his Almighty Father, looks up to Him with earnest gratitude, and, even in humbling himself before God, acquires a dignity, a firmness and an elevation of mind. Well knoweth he that
“ Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord,
“ that delighteth greatly in his command-
“ ments. He shall not be afraid of evil tid-
“ ings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the
“ Lord; his heart is established, he shall not

* Psal. viii. 3, &c.

“ be

" be afraid *."—Such was the triumphant song of the inspired monarch of Israel, and such is the persuasion of the religious man; a persuasion naturally accompanied with energetic and sublime emotion.

But do his worldly advantages fail, and leave him plunged in the waters of adversity? Driven from the consolations of the world, his spirit still resists, and rises beneath the pressure. He looks above this world, to a higher and more adequate assistance. " When
 " the waves of death compassed me; the
 " floods of ungodly men made me afraid;
 " the sorrows of hell compassed me about,
 " the snares of death gat hold upon me.—In
 " my distress I called upon the Lord, and
 " cried unto my God †." Encouraged to this reliance by the highest and most express authority, he turns from the afflictions that surround him, and in the prospect of another world, if not in this, sees hope and consolation beam upon him. But is this high and solemn appeal made, think you, without any sublime emotions? To pass from the dark and gloomy regions of despair, to the splen-

* Psal. cxii. 1. and 7.

† 2 Sam. xxii. 5, &c. Psal. xviii. 4.

dor of immortal hope, is it a dull or tame transition? The soul that is distressed, afflicted, and broken with the ills of life, feels it no exaltation, no warmth and energy of hope, in turning from the present evils to the fountain of all comfort, and the source of inexhaustible benevolence?—Far otherwise. This pious effort, be assured, obtains an immediate reward, in that yearning of pure delight, which we cannot refuse to class among the most exalted feelings of humanity.

It is impossible in this place to enumerate every instance in which the feelings of true religion exalt the soul almost above herself: in acts of secret and even painful obedience, in self-denials, in exertions of pure benevolence, in every private exercise of duty in which the applause of man cannot be sought, the appeal to *Him who seeth in secret*, is, and ought to be made, with joy, and inward triumph; with a sublime feeling of duty, and a consciousness of divine superintendence.—But waving the abundance of matter which thus presents itself, let us, as more especially suited to our present cause of meeting, consider the subject of adoration. From this holy act, it will not, I think, be denied, that the heart which

which standeth right is capable of feeling all that human nature can feel of fervour and sublime effect. When we kneel in private, we feel ourselves beneath the eye and in the actual presence of God ; imagination transports us to the very footstool of his throne, and unites us with those more perfect creatures who adore him everlastinglly. On the other hand, if we consider the nature of public worship, we shall find in it something which, though cold and luke-warm minds may pass over as trivial and common, a mind impressed with strong devotion will naturally consider as august ! The assembling of multitudes for the purpose of supplicating or adoring, with one consent, a Being so infinitely above them, standing as it were in a state of visible intercourse with heaven, presents a grand and magnificent idea ; and though on common occasions but little may be felt, yet what the situation is capable of producing may be conceived, if we figure to ourselves the effect which even the dullest mind would feel from the united hal-lujahs of multitudes.

The Roman church, ever studious of powerful effects, has contrived an occasion on which the operation of this active principle of devotion

tion is actually seen to exert itself with wonderful effect. On a stated day, the imagined delegate of heaven, he “ who sitteth in the “ temple of God and shows himself as God,”* comes forth in all his splendor, in the front of his principal church. His arrival is anxiously expected by thousands and ten thousands, who are eagerly assembled to receive, what he sometimes has been too little qualified to give, his blessing. At his appearance, that prodigious assembly is silent as one man, he raises his hands with a gesture of solemnity, and pronouncing the benediction distinctly, spreads them out again, as if it were to diffuse it among the crowd. At the same instant the whole multitude fall upon their knees, and when the blessing has been pronounced, the air is rent by their acclamations. Whatever, as Protestants, we may think of this ceremony, it surely is sublime; and this transcendent sublimity is evidently derived, in no small degree, from the pervading principle of devotion †.

If we would feel an impression of this kind in the utmost purity of effect, we must turn

* 2 Thess. ii. 4.

† See Brydone's Travels in Italy, &c.

to the Revelation of St. John, where the adoration of immortal spirits, the number of which was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, is described by the vivid pen of inspiration. There, if we can figure to ourselves the united Hosanna of every creature which is in heaven and in earth, and under the earth, and in the sea, and all that are in them, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, “to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, “and strength, and honour and glory”*—if we can imagine this, or any thing like this, and not feel much sublimity of effect, I will confess that all which has been said is vain.

One objection occurs to me, which I will by no means attempt to suppress. It is this, that in such an account of the effects of devout feelings, we may seem to place religion too much under the dominion of imagination: thereby encouraging superstition, and disheartening those whose souls may be less alive than some are to emotions of this active nature.—In answer to this we may say, that though the abuse of a thing be dangerous,

* Rev. v. 11, &c.

we are not therefore to relinquish its use. Imagination wandering at random, leads to infatuation and absurdity; but imagination, guided by reason, seems the only principle within us by which we can be saved from languor and lukewarmness. He who could conceive nothing beyond the actual impression of the senses, would be little capable of being excited to fervent feeling on any kind of subject: for though the senses begin the work, it is the soul alone that truly feels; and imagination is, as it were, the effort of the soul to rise above mortality. Imagination, as well as reason, is implanted in us by the divine Creator, and, doubtless, with as wise a design; the one as well as the other is frequently appealed to in scripture.

It is true that the frailty of human nature cannot always support itself in great elevation, cannot always glow with rapturous agitation; the most considerable part of life, whatever occasional fervour our feelings may excite, must be suffered to glide away along the even line of common occurrences, and in the calm tenor of ordinary sensations. It will be at particular times only, and in the exercise of particular energies, such as have been specified,

specified, that the good man, that even the best of men, can enjoy these higher transports of devotion: but if these be in their own nature delightful and sublime, if they may recur sufficiently often to enhance the general estimate of life, and if, in minds devoid of the religious principle, they cannot be excited at all, it must appear, beyond a doubt, that religion improves the soul, and exalts it above the common condition of humanity.

Let us then, as the prophet exhorts, “ Lift up our heart, with our hands unto God in the heavens.” An exhortation on which I will not now expatiate further, nor weaken the impression already made by persuasions to cultivate and encourage these devout feelings, which would be either vain or superfluous. Vain, if nothing of what has been said has been felt by those who heard it; or, if it has produced its due effect, superfluous. If I have convinced, I have thereby exhorted; if I have shown what is truly most great, exalted, and sublime, I have marked out the just object of ambition, and the attainment to which, for our own sakes, our wishes ought most earnestly to tend. To go beyond this, and add unnecessary arguments to

36 DISCOURSE II.

prove that acknowledged good demands attention, and acknowledged happiness deserves pursuit, would surely be less useful, than to leave the impression already made upon the mind, glowing in the simple but ardent colouring of truth.

Now to God, &c.

D I S-

DISCOURSE, III.

ON THE MERCY OF GOD.

PSAL. CXXX. 4.

For there is mercy with thee, therefore shalt thou be feared.—(LITURGY.)

THOUGH the image of God impressed on man at his creation, has been, since the first transgression, disfigured, and miserably defaced, yet does he retain, even in this degraded state, some traces of his pristine dignity, some remains of his original powers. This dignity of man in nothing appears more conspicuously, than in the privilege which he possesses of raising his thoughts to God, and contemplating, however imperfectly, that infinite Majesty, by which the universe is filled. That a creature whose footsteps are chained, in a manner, to this gross and senseless soil, of which also in part he is formed,

should be capable of ascending, by the steps of reason, or on the wings of imagination, to the Holy of Holies; or, to speak without a figure, should be able to consider the attributes, and investigate, in any degree, the nature of God, is a privilege so extraordinary, that there belongs not to us any faculty of equal eminence, any property of comparable glory: and a heavy proof it is of a groveling, a disgraced, and brutish disposition, when men are averse to such exalted speculations, and turn from them as insipid or disgusting.

As God, the Creator of us, and all things that have being, is consequently the sole fountain of all duty, it is most essential to our conduct throughout life, that we should entertain right notions of him; adequate notions we cannot either obtain, or receive, but those which we are able to acquire may be in their kind correct or incorrect, and the consequences of each are too many and too important to allow of any negligence in the selection. On what God is, depends altogether what we must try to render ourselves; if he be good and holy, goodness and holiness are necessarily the highest objects of pursuit

pursuit to us. If he abhor iniquity, there is nothing which with more vigilance we should be attentive to avoid.

This however is an easy question. Since the differences between good and evil have been discernible by human faculties, there have been few, if any, men presumptuous enough to deny, that good is suitable, and evil abhorrent to the nature of the *supreme Being*. The attribute of *goodness* is the first and the most evident that our reason discovers in its divine Author. The attributes of *justice* and of *mercy*, deducible from that, are much less easily comprehended, and yet have a reference, still more immediate, to our conduct of ourselves. They have even been thought irreconcileable to each other; doubtless, because imperfectly understood. But this at least is undeniably, that on the real nature of these attributes, whether we are able to discover it or not, depends every thing of the most importance which we possibly can hope or fear. Let us then make the *mercy* of God (the reconciliation of which with his justice will be found an inseparable part of the enquiry) the subject of our present contemplations.

In the words of my text there is an apparent opposition, which leads, however, directly to the explanation of the whole subject—
“ There is mercy with thee, therefore shalt thou be feared * :” which I have chosen to take from the earlier version inserted in the Liturgy, rather than from that in the bible translation, as making in itself a more congruous sense, and certainly as more adapted to my purpose ; which is to show, that the necessity for that justice, on account of which God is to be feared, arises actually out of his attribute of mercy ; that is, his particular justice out of his universal mercy, as I shall presently more fully explain.

Among men left solely to the exertion of their own faculties for instruction on these subjects, the most current persuasion in ancient times comprehended merely a general notion of reward to be assigned to the good, and punishment to the bad ; without any attempt to refine or speculate upon the propriety of such distributive justice, beyond the simple and obvious conclusions of natural reason ;

* Or, as it stands in the later translation, inserted in our Bibles, “ There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”

that

that God must love good and hate evil, and consequently would reward the one and punish the other. How this general doctrine was made palatable to the vulgar by gross fictions of particular and specific modes of punishing and rewarding, belongs not to our present subject. It is enough that the heathen world in general expected a state of retribution, in which men should be disposed of finally according to their respective merits.

When curious and thinking men began to enquire and reason on those subjects metaphysically, they found mercy so lovely an attribute of Godhead, that, extending it too far, they swallowed up justice in it: and establishing it as a principle, that “the Deity could neither be angry, nor inflict any kind of evil *,” subverted in their own minds all notions of future retribution for offences. This maxim, as dangerous to society, was not indeed circulated freely among mankind, but was avowed, among themselves, by most philosophers.

To prevent the general adoption of an error so inconsistent with the safety of man-

* Cic. de Off. iii. 28.—See Warburton, Div. Leg. B. iii. §. 4. p. 391.

kind,

kind, and so subversive, in truth, of the very foundations of moral and religious obligation, was worthy, if any thing in this world could be so, of Divine interference. Accordingly in the sacred oracles, of which the Jewish people were made the depositaries, the justice and the mercy of God are asserted together : “ Though he cause grief,” says Jeremiah, “ yet will he have compassion according to “ the multitude of his mercies : for he doth “ not afflict willingly, nor grieve the chil- “ dren of men *.” And though it is de- clared that he is “ long-suffering, full of “ compassion, slow to anger, not willing that “ any should perish † ;” yet is it denounced no less expressly, that “ he will reward the “ doer of evil according to his wickedness ‡ ;” that “ he will heap mischiefs upon them, “ will spend his arrows upon them, and vex “ them with all adversity § .” These decla- rations are yet more fully and plainly expressed in the scriptures of the New Testament; and with a reference more exactly pointed to a future state of being. It is there indeed unequivocally asserted, that for the unrepenting

* Lam. iii. 32, 33.

‡ 2 Sam. iii. 39.

† Psal. lxxxvi. 15.

§ Deut. xxxi. 29.

sinner grievous sufferings are appointed in the world to come. How then shall these things be reconciled? how is it consistent with the nature of him who is infinite in mercy to punish the transgressions of frail and imperfect creatures?

Though the word *vengeance* be frequently employed in scripture to express the divine retributions for sin, it is, like many other terms there used, admitted in accommodation to the gross and general conceptions of mankind; to impress the mind, and to deter from transgression. It never was imagined, I conceive, by any pious and enlightened reader of those holy books, that these passages were literally to be understood, as if the all-perfect Judge were capable of feeling any thing at all similar, or analogous to our mean and wicked passion of revenge; or that the returning of evil for evil could possibly be a principle of action in such an agent. We say of human laws that they *take vengeance for transgressions*, in the very same sense as we say it of the Almighty, because they perform that to which vengeance tends, they inflict punishment; though we know that the laws, being inanimate, are as incapable of all kinds of feeling and affection, as

God is of all dispositions that are not perfectly and consummately good.

There are but two pure motives from which the infliction of punishment can proceed; the desire of reforming the offender, and that of preserving others from the danger or contagion of transgression. Now, if we rightly interpret the scriptures which treat of these points, one of these motives, *the reformation of the offender*, can have no place in the punishments decreed to sinners in another life. For it seems to be very clearly declared, that there remains after death no opportunity for expiation or amendment; such as a man dics, such will he appear at the judgment-seat of God, and according to the works done in this life, and not to any other, will he receive his subsequent destination.—That this is the case with Christians, at least, is very certain; though there are texts which seem to leave a latitude to those who never had the truth propounded to them in this life *. If this be so, the re-

* 1 Pet. iii. 19. According to the interpretation of the fathers, &c. Christ descended into Hell, or Hades, to preach to the departed souls there, that they might repent: but see Pearson on the article “ He descended into ‘ Hell’ in the Creed.”

formation of the offenders cannot be the purpose of the punishments to be inflicted in another world. It remains then that they who are there punished must suffer for the sake of others, who either by their example may be deterred from offending the majesty of God, or by their suffering may be secured in that happiness which the impunity and freedom of bad spirits might perhaps be able effectually to interrupt.

We can judge of nothing so securely as by arguments drawn from our experience. Let us apply them to this case; and we shall find, by a single moment's reflection, that, in things which we are better able to comprehend, justice is not only compatible with mercy, but is even a part of it. It would not be a virtuous lenity, however amiable it might appear to a superficial observer, but a weak and senseless pity, which, by sparing one offender, should endanger the morals or security of innumerable unoffending persons. It is injustice and cruelty, however speciously it may be varnished over, to suffer those to corrupt and harass others, who, by undergoing what they have deserved, may be compelled to render an essential, though an unwilling, service

vice to society. On this principle do our laws proceed, which certainly in this place, and indeed in any place where they are rightly understood, it cannot be necessary to defend. It is indeed the principle of all just penal law whatsoever.

To apply this reasoning to the punishment of sinners denounced by the Gospel, we must suffer our ideas to take a wider range than we are wont to give them. In matters infinitely less sublime than the doctrines of religion, we find that right intelligence can be drawn only from great and comprehensive views. The principles of the divine law must be as extensive as the universe which is the sphere of their application. We cannot possibly have right ideas of the government of God, or indeed of any of the great features of revealed religion, if we keep our minds groveling and confined within so inconsiderable a part of the great Legislator's dominions, as this small planet which we now inhabit. The glorious scene of the incarnation, with all its wonderful consequences, appears not in any degree comprehensible, if we confine its reference to this inconsiderable spot on which it was transacted. To exalt

our

our souls to conceptions more noble, and more just, the veil of the invisible world has been drawn aside by the scriptures. There do our eyes, strengthened by faith, discover whole orders and hierarchies of spiritual beings, all concerned and interested in those miraculous transactions which took place among us; and we discern a part of that connection by which, as it seems, the whole intellectual system is knit together. The vindication of eternal justice, and its reconcilement with infinite mercy, was not a business to be transacted in secret, or in obscurity, but was that into which every moral agent in the universe had an interest to enquire.

In the case which we now examine, the punishment of sinners after death can have, as we have observed already, no tendency to their amendment, since before that period their whole probation must have been completed. Nor can it be necessary for the sake of other men yet living, or to live, within this world, since the dead are removed from us, and can neither hurt us by their vices, nor warn us by their sufferings, of which we are entirely ignorant: and the more so, because, if we understand the scriptures aright,

the

the whole existence of this world will have passed away before those sufferings shall commence, since there is to be one great day for the judgment of all mankind. It remains then that their punishment, as it cannot be inflicted for mere vengeance-sake, must be brought upon them for the sake of those who *can* be benefited by it; for the warning of moral agents still capable of transgressing, and of falling into misery by transgression, which we know may happen even to the angels themselves. For the warning and instruction of such beings, of whatever rank or denomination they may be, must these inflictions happen; whose situation and faculties must of course be such, that they will see and know their justice and their use. Thus have we an adequate and sufficient cause for that retribution for guilt which religion teaches us to expect; and a very cogent reason why it should not lightly, and upon mere compassion, be remitted: thus do we see why it is that because God hath mercy, therefore he must be just, and the object of fear to those who offend against that justice. This, it is true, is not revealed, but if it be fairly deducible by reason, as it seems to be, from
that

that which is revealed, and if it clear away some of the greatest difficulties attending on religious speculations, why should we hesitate to admit it among our approved and probable opinions? To what end are we informed of the existence and agency of other intellectual beings, if we are not to consider them as connected with us in the divine government of the universe?

By this idea we are enabled to perceive the exact analogy which subsists between the administration of divine government, and that system of things, which, doubtless, for our instruction, God has permitted to take place among ourselves. For as it would be cruelty and injustice to allow impunity in human society to crimes pernicious in example, and in operation destructive, and to favour offenders at the expence of the innocent and well-deserving; so is it inconsistent with the purity of God's nature, and even with his mercy itself, that, by forgiving our trespasses, without atonement made, or reparation offered, he should lead into temptation and into evil all those beings, whatever may be their number, who by their faculties and situation are enabled to behold the events in

which we are engaged, and principally concerned. The number of transgressors here, it is true, is great; but if we consider how we live surrounded by worlds which we can see, and, doubtless, by many more of which we have no knowledge; if we recollect that every region of space is peopled, probably, by fit inhabitants, we may easily conceive that the number of those delinquents here, however highly estimated, can bear no kind of proportion to the number of such beings, as, by the example of their punishment, may be secured in innocence and everlasting bliss.— We cannot, perhaps, prove this to be so; but if it be reasonable, if it be probable, if it be even possible, that it should be true, we are furnished with a sufficient answer to those who are daring enough to argue against the system of revealed religion, as in these points inexplicable and absurd. What can be reasonably explained in any way is not absurd, though the mode of explanation adopted may not happen to be right.

We see then the fate of that reasoning which supposes it inconsistent with the mercy of God to punish.—An error which the Gentile philosophers in general are said to have embraced;

braced; and which has not been unfashionable even in our own days: an error, pardonable indeed in those who had only the light of nature to conduct them in the search of truth, but devoid of reasonable excuse in those to whom eternal truth hath openly vouchsafed to speak; who have only to wish sincerely to discover what is right, in order to be enabled to discern it. There are writings current among us, and falsely called philosophical, in which the benevolence of God is affectedly extolled, and the frailty of man dishonestly exaggerated, for no other purpose but to lead us to the dangerous conclusion, that, as far as the divine interference is concerned, every species of enormity may be committed with entire impunity. How consistent the publication of this doctrine is with that philanthropy of which these teachers assume the pretence, let the philosophers of Greece declare, who, though they held a similar opinion, thought it not right to divulge or circulate it at large among the people, in whose eyes they always wore the appearance of assenting to the popular religion, lest by removing the strongest restraint upon the passions, for which they could propose

no substitute, they should leave the world a prey to violence, cruelty, and every species of misery arising from general and unchecked depravity. The modern *benefactors of mankind*, on the contrary, have been willing to make the experiment, dangerous as it evidently is, and for the sake of publishing what they call truth, without proving it to be so, have ventured to put into the hazard the dearest interests of humanity.

All that *mercy* could do, consistently with itself, and infinitely more than any creature could expect, was done by the redemption of the Gospel; whereby the freest grace was offered to all those who would accept it on such terms as might not be pernicious to the general interests of morality, but might afford an universal example: and, lest this grace should be abused, and a pretence be made that the more was pardoned the more the mercy of God would be multiplied, an antidote to this poison is provided in the inspired reasonings of the apostles, and particularly of St. Paul, who labours more abundantly than any other to prove, that, though the mercy of the Almighty is infinite, yet no security can thence be gained for the presumptuous

sumptuous transgressor. This Apostle having with his usual energy proposed the striking question, “ Shall we then continue in sin, that “ grace may abound?” replies decisively to himself, as reason ever must reply, being shocked at the very suggestion,—“ God forbid!”—God forbid, indeed, such presumption, such ingratitude, such folly; that because our heavenly Father has manifested a strong desire to save all those whom it was possible to reclaim, we should presume to think that we are authorized to sin, and to extend at our pleasure the limits of his forbearance, forcing it to extend itself to any point that our unreasonable passions may require. As it is a consideration full of triumph, wonder, glory, and consolation, that, to redeem us from punishment, without weakening the authority of holiness and justice, and leading other beings into sin, the eternal Son of God descended from on high, and suffered for us, bearing our infirmities, and healing us by his wounds; so is it a subject full of dread, and fitted to give us the most effectual warning against sin, to reflect, that unless that blessed Son had descended and suffered, nothing, consistently even with the mercy of God, could have done away the guilt,

guilt, or prevented the punishment of our offences.—It is an awful thing to think that when we commit a wilful crime, we cause an irregularity in the system of things, which nothing but the interposition of so miraculous a Providence could set in order: we put a stain upon the works of the divine Creator, which nothing less than the blood of his Son could wash away. Had not man offended, no atonement had been necessary; but had he offended, and been pardoned without an expiation, of the proper value of which God alone could judge, licence would have been given to all other moral agents to offend with impunity, and sin would have remained triumphant in the universe.

Let us then bless God for his mercy, but in so doing, lest we should be tempted to presume upon it, let us remember that his justice, instead of being opposed to it, is, in truth, an essential and inseparable part of the same attribute; and that, according to my text, “as there is mercy with God, therefore must he be feared.”

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE IV.

ON WHAT IS CALLED RATIONAL CHRISTIANITY.

I COR. i. 20. part of.

Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

THE question seems extraordinary : and it is asked, we may observe, as if intended to be very strongly affirmed. It must in fact be affirmed, or the honour of God's own word will be impaired : for God hath said expressly by his prophets ; “ The wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid *.” And again, “ The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken ; lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord, and what wisdom is in them † ?” These, and other passages

* Isai. xxix. 14.

† Jer. viii. 9.

of the same nature, show that, in the mighty system of redemption, to which the prophecies referred, there was intended to be something so unlike the wisdom of this world as to defeat its expectations, and confound its reasonings.

This conclusion had been actually justified in the time of the apostle, as he himself informs us, by the coming of our Saviour; whose appearance in the flesh, so very different from what human wisdom looked for, and whose death upon the cross, so contrary to all that reason might have concluded to be fit and proper, had exposed the wisdom of the world to be most justly branded with the name of folly. How could it be otherwise, when that which men despised and stumbled at, was shown to be in truth “the power of God, and the wisdom of God *?”

When wisdom is so proudly vaunted as it is at present, and reason, as if recovered from this first defeat, presents herself, and her admirers, as competent to judge, and form decisions of irrefragable force on all things human and divine; at such a time, it may be prudent to enquire concerning Revelation,

* 1 Cor. i. 24.

whether

whether this distinctive property of confounding human reason, be constantly inherent in it, or whether it was only once, and with a retrospect to its past notions, that *God made foolish the wisdom of this world.*

We have lately heard much said within the christian world, of a profession which its admirers have denominated *rational Christianity*, or, in other words, the system of God's Revelation accommodated to the *wisdom of this world*, and made entirely level to the reach of human Reason: which, if it be true that God has formed his Revelation altogether, so as to confound the vanity of man, in arguing and disputing about heavenly things, must, it is very evident, be something different from real Christianity, and from the truth of that great system which proceeded from Almighty Wisdom.

Let us, however, before we proceed to the main question, understand clearly what is meant by turning wisdom into foolishness; and why God, who gave man such an understanding as he has, should be inclined thus to reduce it to confusion and to shame. Human wisdom is, it must be owned, the instrument that God himself has given us, to conduct

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conduct us in our progress through this life ; and it may be thought a little strange, that he should thus determine to expose its imperfections, and deprive it of our confidence.

To these previous questions the solutions are very obvious. Wisdom becomes folly when it employs itself on objects far above its comprehension. All wisdom must be estimated by comparison, and that of an inferior being, however excellent within its proper sphere, is folly when it is found in opposition to the wisdom of one infinitely higher. God, therefore, turns the wisdom of mankind to folly, when he displays his own in opposition to it, and thus detects its feeble-ness and imperfection. Why he should do this is also clear ; not to decry it altogether, or to discourage it from acting where the task is well proportioned to its powers, but to point out its proper sphere, and there confine its energy and action. This, we must confess, is worthy of the wisdom, and of the benevolence of God.

To discover whether the property of confounding human wisdom in this manner, still belongs to Revelation, let us consider in what manner it had operated, at the time when it

was

was first declared. "Howbeit," says St. Paul, "we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought; but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory. Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the *Lord of Glory* *." The matter then in which the wisdom of this world was convicted principally of foolishness, was the ignorance of men concerning the great counsels of God, and their supposition that Jesus was a mere man, who was in truth the *Lord of Glory*. In consequence of which supposition, co-operating with their evil passions, they presumed to crucify him. Surely then to that very point of folly and of wickedness have they fallen back, crucifying him afresh, and putting him, as far as in them lies, to open shame, who maintain that he who then was crucified was mere man, and not the *Lord of Glory*.

* 1 Cor. ii. 6—8.

In this point it is that the wisdom of man is most inclined to expose its weakness. For, with a great opinion of its own sagacity, it forms objections, and exclaims, how can it be that he who is the Lord of all, by whom all things were formed and still subsist, the only-begotten of the Father, should be veiled in human flesh, and subject to the insults and the tyranny of impious men?—While, on the other hand, the voice of God, regardless of these foolish doubts, declares aloud, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Thus explicitly asserting that great truth which man is so unable to conceive.

In this manner has God evinced the vanity and imperfection of man’s wisdom, by presenting to it a fact above its comprehension; concerning which, if it presumes to reason, it is lost in error, in absurdity, and guilt. The only means by which this censure can be warded off are humble faith and acquiescence: admitting the fact, because the testimony for it properly demands assent, and, for the reasons of it, trusting that they do exist, within that mind, in which all knowledge dwells devoid of imperfection.

There can be little doubt that God intended always to elude the fancied wisdom of mankind, and compel it to be humble, by the mysterious darkness of his dispensations; for the prophecies upon that subject are general, and limited to no single period of completion. God even describes himself at large, as “the “Lord, that turneth wise men backward, “and maketh their knowledge foolish *.” Nor has there any change arisen in the nature of man, or of the sacred dispensations, since St. Paul disputed on this subject; since he asked with so much energy, “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?”—In such terms does the Lord declare that he establishes a system above man’s comprehension, and yet we see men led away by the name of *rational Religion*; we hear of Christianity deprived of every difficulty, and brought down within the grasp of reason. God saith rely on me, and hope through faith; but man presumes to say, I will rely upon myself alone, and entertain no hopes but such as I can clearly comprehend.—God saith, you cannot under-

* Isai. xliv. 24.

stand my ways ; but man persists in thinking he can fully trace them out. These things, he says presumptuously, may be ; but this, and this, cannot ; and what appears to me improbable must be, at all events, explained away.

The question in my text, “ Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world ? ” may be interpreted, hath not God presented to mankind a system which they cannot comprehend ? Which leads directly to another of no less importance, why then will man torment himself to raise his understanding to it ? or, what is worse, why will he disfigure and corrupt the gift of God, to bring it downward to the standard of his powers ? It is the will of heaven to humble him, by giving him a view of things above his reach. But his pride refuses to be humbled, and what it cannot comprehend, denies.

We are frequently misled by words, and if we change our terms can better understand ourselves. *Rational Christianity*, if it were called *human Christianity*, would not be so seductive in the sound : and yet the term would be equivalent, for *rational* refers, of course, to *human reason* only. But rational, so used,

has a deception in it; for being commonly opposed to irrational, a conclusion is drawn tacitly, that the Christianity to which that epithet is not applied, has in it something contrary to reason, or inconsistent with it; and between *rational* and *irrational* belief no man of sense would hesitate a moment. But the real opposition marked by such a term, in this case, should be that between *rational* and *super-rational*, between *human* and *divine*. And in this opposition of terms, it would be equally the part not only of common sense, but even of the highest understanding, to give the preference to that which must be best; and *human Christianity*, however speciously adorned, can be but ill regarded when compared with that which is *divine*.

Could Christianity, retaining its essential properties, be made entirely level to the faculties of man, then to the triumphant question and implied affirmation of the Apostle, when he says, “Hath not God made “foolish the wisdom of this world?” we might boldly answer, No. God hath rather established and exalted the wisdom of this world, by showing that there is nothing in the most important of his counsels, or the most

most obscure of all his dispensations, that is not open to the search, and subject to the judgment of mankind. That this is not the case we have abundant assurance throughout the apostolic writings.

It is, however, only the pretended wisdom which aspires to knowledge not within its reach, that God is willing to confound: when rightly exercised, the reason of mankind may rise to real wisdom, and is by its Divine Author encouraged and approved.

If we seek the limits of that human wisdom which deserves so honourable a title, they may, in a loose and general way, be easily defined to be coincident with the extent of real knowledge that man is able to acquire. It is wise for him to reason upon subjects wherein he has the means of judging truly, and foolish for him to attempt to speculate in those wherein he has no certain grounds of knowledge to support him. To define this matter more exactly; we must have recourse to speculations of more subtlety. It seems, however, that in the present state of knowledge we may do it with sufficient accuracy.

The progress of enquiries has, in latter times, discovered whence it is that all our knowledge is derived. We are born, it appears, without distinct ideas, which afterwards, by the medium of our senses, are by slow degrees acquired, and stored for use. The mind, by its reflection on the treasures thus collected, can improve and render them more useful, and by its inward consciousness of what itself performs, can gain some further steps. But nothing of original information can it possibly collect, by its own strength, in any other way. Hence is it that, in all enquiries concerning any objects of our senses, we must invariably proceed by the means of observation and experiment, accumulating facts, and, as we go, deducing what we can from our acquirements. In matters of an intellectual nature, the mind, examining its own proceedings, and those it knows to be analogous to them, may also ascertain some facts, and deduce some general principles. Beyond these boundaries we cannot gain, by our own powers, a single step with certainty. Of things which neither our senses can descry, nor the internal survey of ourselves present, we can only form conjectures; of

facts we can know nothing but by information : And whence can information of that kind proceed ? undoubtedly, from some superior source. In divine knowledge, for example, whence can we be furnished with the truths we may require ? certainly from divine communication only ; experience and reflection can do nothing for us.

If upon such subjects information has been actually bestowed by God himself, there cannot be a doubt with what submission we should all receive it : nor is there any doubt among mankind, so far as they agree concerning the main fact, that the information has been imparted, or in the interpretation of the words in which it is conveyed. But divine truths, being communicated to us in the common language of men, are subject to partake of that uncertainty which the imperfection of all human languages occasions ; namely, a difference of interpretation, by means of which they may convey to various men dissimilar views of things, unless some certain rules can be laid down to ascertain the proper method of interpreting.

We cannot, perhaps, by any means obtain such limitations as will deliver us from all uncertainty :

tincertainty: one negative direction appears; however, sufficiently obvious; That we cannot in such subjects, as in those which lie more level to our comprehension, reject the literal meaning on our own authority, and seek another as more probable, or suited better to our preconceived opinions; for our previous notions, by our own confession, are drawn entirely from inferior objects; from what we see, or hear, or touch; or otherwise perceive upon this earth; or from what is passing in the intellectual part of our own compounded frame; in all which there is nothing that can by any means direct us rightly in divine science; nothing that can guide us to a knowledge, just or accurate, of the counsels, and still less of the peculiar mode of existence of the Deity.

If, indeed, in different communications of divine knowledge there be found any seeming variation, it will then be the proper act of reason and of judgment to examine which of them is clearest in itself, and best confirmed by other sacred oracles; and to consider afterwards by what fair steps of sound interpretation the whole may be restored to harmony; well knowing that, notwithstanding appear-

ances, there cannot be a real inconsistency. Such latitude may fairly be assumed, and must, in cases that require it, be allowed. But to determine, on the ground of human reason, that declarations, in themselves distinct and clear, originating confessedly from divine authority, are, in their nature, such as man cannot receive, and, in pursuance of that bold decision, to quit the plain and natural sense of many corresponding passages, compelling them, by forced interpretation, to conform themselves, not to other oracles of sacred origin, but to that opinion which to the interpreter may seem more worthy of assent,—this is surely vain presumption:—this is sitting as in judgment against God, and raising up the wisdom of this world above his heavenly wisdom. Of human reason so employed the proper name is *folly*; its mightiest efforts but the more expose its weakness; and the oracles of heaven, unshaken by its vain assaults, bring back to our remembrance the strong question of my text, “Hath not God made foolish the wise of this world?”—or that of Jeremiah, who exclaims of men presumptuous in their fancied knowledge, “Lo! they have rejected
“the

“ the word of the Lord, and what wisdom
“ is in them * ?”

It is delightful to the pride of man to fancy that his mind can vanquish every obstacle, and lay all difficulties plain before it ; but it was not to indulge that foolish pride that Jesus Christ was manifested in the flesh ; rather was it, if we will be guided by St. Paul, “ to cast down *reasonings* †, and every “ high thing that exalteth itself against the “ knowledge of God ‡.”

The wisdom of this world has scope enough to exercise its powers in many other ways, without exhausting them in vain attempts against the oracles of God. Let it pursue the system of created things, and with an honourable diligence trace out the power of God in all his various works ; collecting facts ; inventing, varying, and comparing curious trials and experiments, till nothing be unknown which such enquiries can discover. Let it employ itself in viewing man in all the wondrous movements of his intellectual powers. Let it improve the arts by

* Jer. viii. 9.

† Marginal translation. Text, *imaginations*. Greek,
λογισμοί.

‡ 2 Cor. x. 5.

which his natural powers are multiplied, and the value of his life increased. Let it form new systems of morality and government, taking care only to make the one consistent with the light of true religion, and the other with the quiet and security of man. Let it do these things, and whatever else it can perform within its proper sphere, and praise and honour will attend it to the utmost limits of that progress.

But when it comes to touch on sacred knowledge, then let human wisdom be assured, that nothing but humility can save it from the shame of being counted folly. What is plainly taught it must receive implicitly, without disputings, cavillings, or subterfuges; well knowing that it has within itself no scale by which to try or estimate that wisdom which descends from heaven. Thus cautioned, man will ever find the oracles of God a source of comfort and delight, united frequently with wonder: but if he will persist to have them level in all matters to his knowledge, and squared exactly to his pre-conceived ideas, then will they prove to him but a source of shame; and however he may vaunt himself at present, and triumph in the pride

pride of his discoveries, a day will come when he will feel, and all mankind will see, that God has turned his wisdom into folly.

Rational religion opposed to *irrational* (that is, to superstition and the dreams of error and absurdity), let us all maintain and value: but *rational* opposed to *divine*, let us leave to those who can be vain enough to think that human reason is superior to eternal wisdom; or human speculation preferable to divine instruction.

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE V.

ON THE AGENCY OF SPIRITS.

I PETER v. 8.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour.

THE whole doctrine of spirits is derived from divine revelation. By our natural senses we discern nothing but what has bodily substance; for though many accounts have been circulated in the world, of persons supposed to have had intercourse with spiritual beings, there appears not to be, in the whole mass of such narratives, sufficient real testimony fully to substantiate that belief, were it to rest upon no other authority. Every thing is conjecture concerning these beings, except what is delivered in the scriptures.

It

It is, however, very natural that we should form conjectures on this interesting subject. As far as we can examine the works of God, we find strong reason to believe that he has constructed them with a certain general analogy to each other; that is, with such a resemblance of one part to another, that what we observe in some cases, we may conclude to take place in others also, to which our actual observation cannot reach. Now as throughout that part of creation to which our knowledge extends, we perceive a regular gradation of beings downwards from ourselves: and as we are conscious that the rank in which we stand is far below the limits of imaginable perfection, even among created beings; it must appear to us a supposition highly probable, that there is also a scale of gradation extending upwards from us towards those perfections which are incommunicable. Our conjectures will not rest here. Having deemed it probable that there should be creatures better than ourselves, we are tempted to consider also of what kind they may be, and to what they may have most resemblance. Our ideas here are drawn from ourselves. Examining our

our own nature, and finding, by many irrefragable proofs, that we consist of two parts, namely, of a bodily substance, to which our senses all give evidence; and of something more subtle and excellent, which we trace in the operations of thought, and the powers of memory, reflection, judgment, and imagination; we separate these parts in our minds, and diligently compare them. It becomes immediately evident that the bodily part is very inferior to the other; which, for the sake of having a name, we call *spiritual*, without even pretending to know in what spirituality consists. We see, as we descend in the scale of existence, less and less evidence of mind or spirit, till at last we come to mere bodies destitute of all spiritual being; of all internal, actuating power.—It is natural to conclude, from this observation, that spirit, whatever it be, is the general principle of activity, and that body always partakes of the grossness and imperfection which evidently marks it, when wholly destitute of mind. On these suggestions, therefore, we form by analogy our ascending scale of beings: we suppose less body and more spirit; or, to leap at once to the extent of our

our notion thus obtained, we suppose mere spirits, divested entirely of the chains and grossness of body ; all activity and all intelligence.

For all this, however, we should have perhaps no real testimony, without the aid of revelation. Whatever strength of probability reason might assign to this opinion, and very considerable strength it must infallibly ascribe, still it would be only conjecture. No man would be able to pronounce that so it is, though many might reasonably be disposed to that belief.

From the scriptures we learn expressly, that such conjectures are not only rational, but true ; and that there are indeed orders of beings above us, as there are below.—How exact the gradation may be, is no where told; but that there do exist innumerable multitudes of spiritual creatures,—of this we have direct assurance. We learn also, from the same infallible authority, that the analogy extends yet further than we might perhaps have ever traced it by conjecture.—For it appears that even the highest orders of spirits have been subject, like ourselves, to trial ; and liable to sin : and that, in consequence
of

of a moral free agency misapplied, some of them have actually fallen from their original state of bliss, have depraved themselves, and become obnoxious to the wrath of God * : while others, who have better used their privileges, continue in unfulfilled excellence, the favoured ministers of God, and attendants on his throne and glory.

Our previous notions of general analogy are still further confirmed and extended by the particulars delivered concerning these spirits ; of whom the good are represented as active in benevolence, as rejoicing in our good, and willing by all means to promote it : the bad, as we observe among bad men, maliciously inclined to extend the dominion of evil, envious of good, which they are unable to partake, and desirous to draw others into the same condemnation under which they lie. For this reason it is that they are called our spiritual enemies, and the chief and most malignant of them, by way of eminence, *the adversary* ; with a view to whose unceasing earnestness to draw us down to sin and to perdition, it is said emphatically in my text, that “ our adversary the devil,

* Jude 6.

“ as

" as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking
" whom he may devour."

But, though so much has been revealed concerning the existence and dispositions of spirits, there still is much that remains involved in obscurity; concerning which, as in the case of every thing above our natural faculties to discern, it is necessary to maintain a modest reserve; and whatever we may guess or fancy probable, to pronounce nothing as certain, that is not authorized by the testimony of scripture. We are ignorant, for example, of the mode of communication by which spiritual beings can operate upon our minds. That there should be some mode of intercourse between spirits, even of different classes and orders, independent of corporeal organs, of which some of them are supposed to be divested, is what we cannot hesitate to pronounce most probable; that there is such intercourse the sacred writings declare; but in what manner it is carried on, we are wholly uninformed. In what manner the Holy Spirit of God acts upon our spiritual nature, so as to assist in virtuous efforts, or promote good dispositions; and in what manner the evil spirits, which are our adversaries,

faries, suggest temptations, and endeavour to lead us into evil, we are equally ignorant ; and it might be dangerous to attempt deciding any thing too rashly on the subject. It has been actually found dangerous ; and has operated to the encouragement of destructive superstitions on the one hand, and on the other ; when men, giving way to the suggestions of heated or of gloomy imagination, have fancied that they could perceive in themselves, either the manifest accessions and influx of the Holy Spirit, or the invincible inherence of the evil one.

But, though we can know nothing positively on this obscure and difficult subject ; though we know not even how the spirit of a man, which is within him, performs its functions to direct his bodily powers ; yet there is one point of *negative* knowledge to which it is very necessary for us to attend ;—we may know what to deny, though we know not what to assert.

It is then undoubtedly evident, from the whole testimony of scripture, that the agency of spirits, good or bad, and their intercourse with our spirits, whatever may be its nature, is not such as can by any means destroy the freedom

freedom of our actions: and though it may be said on some occasions, with great propriety, that evil spirits tempt and instigate, yet can these suggestions by no means be pleaded in excuse for any offence committed.

—“The devil tempted me, and I did eat,” is recorded as the excuse alledged for the first transgression in the world; nevertheless, it appears that the offender was punished, as a being perfectly at liberty to have resisted that evil, as well as to have yielded to it.—“Why,” said St. Paul to Ananias, “hath *Satan* filled thine heart, to lie to the Holy Ghost?”—a question which, as it was followed by immediate punishment, proves that Ananias might and ought to have prevented that evil operation of Satan on his heart.

From all that we can collect to throw light upon this point, it appears to be chiefly upon our bad passions that evil spirits are empowered to work. These materials must first be found within our minds, before those enemies can gain an influence by which they can direct or injure us: or, if we should allow, from certain passages of scripture, that they may be able first to instil bad dispositions, and

and then to act upon them; still it will remain undeniable that we have a free power to reject, and sufficient strength to resist, the approach of such pollutions; and that it must be owing only to our negligence and sloth that bad seeds can be sown by these bold enemies. We are commanded expressly, and a wise command implies the power of obeying, “not to give place to the devil*;” nay, we are assured yet further, that on resistance he *will fly from us* †.

My text states fully to us both the danger, and the mode of prevention: the fury of the adversary, and the means of preservation. “He walketh about,” we are told, “as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”—But, as a full security against him, we have two short precepts given in charge: “Be sober; be vigilant.”—Nor can we fail to conclude, from the style of the injunction, that whatever be the nature of this danger, we shall find in the *sobriety* and *vigilance* recommended to us, a full and perfect defence; for if these were not sufficient, other means would surely have been pointed out.—To awaken our vigilance, therefore,

* Eph. iv. 27.

† James iv. 7.

and not to overwhelm us with vain fears; we are thus informed of the terrors of the adversary. We have warning given, “that
“ we wrestle not against flesh and blood,
“ but against principalities, against powers;
“ against the rulers of the darkness of this
“ world, against spiritual wickedness in high
“ places * :”—but at the same time we are told what is the armour of God, in which a Christian should keep watch, and in which he cannot fail to be victorious.

Sobriety and *vigilance* contain the essence, and brief abstract of our duty on this subject: understanding by *sobriety*, the general command of all our passions; and by *vigilance*, the constant, necessary care to prevent all danger of surprise, assisted by those general means of preservation which our holy religion affords. We are to be *sober*, as becomes those who watch; and we are to keep our watch, secured by the sacred panoply (or whole armour) of God.

Mankind, at present, with that violent tendency to extremes which is observable in most of their proceedings and opinions, have gone from the extravagant credulity of be-

* Eph. vi. 12.

lieving every idle fable of preternatural interference, to an unwillingness, little less unreasonable, to admit of any agency beyond the ordinary powers of nature, as submitted to our senses and actual knowledge. It has become difficult even to mention the operations of spiritual beings, without giving offence to some, who, in many respects, are willing hearers of the truths of revelation: and it may serve, at least, as an illustration of the fluctuation, and, consequently, of the fallibility of human judgment, that the points wherein the greatest difficulties now are found, are those concerning which no shadow of suspicion had arisen for ages.

But what shall we say?—The doctrine of spirits, good and bad, what is it, in its first outlines, but an exact confirmation of that which, from the analogy of nature, our soundest reason teaches us to expect? In its utmost detail, what is it but a perfectly consistent extension of the same analogies; and a proof that the government of God is, in all its parts, coherent?—If there be any spiritual beings, it is most natural to suppose that their activity will be proportioned to

their other perfections: that their intelligence will pervade the works of God with much more ease than we employ our outward senses (since we know, from what is spiritual in ourselves, how much more rapidly it acts than any other power): and that they will take a zealous interest in such things, throughout the universe, as are congenial to their own inherent dispositions.—Conceive, among such beings, any fallen into depravity of will and moral character, and you have immediately, by combining this with their other discoverable properties, the very evil demons of the holy scriptures; subtle, active promoters of evil, by all means suited to their powers, and enemies of the most formidable kind to creatures of a mixed, and, in some respects, an inferior, nature, whose happiness is made to depend on goodness only.

I feel no scruple to affirm that this doctrine, surely not unreasonable, being once admitted, removes the greatest difficulties from the system of our holy religion. For when once, instead of considering man simply as he appears to our senses and actual knowledge, a being of some excellence, placed among inferior creatures, totally incapable of judging

judging concerning his moral properties, or any of their consequences ; we regard him as in some part spiritual himself, and connected with spiritual beings innumerable, the whole nature of his situation is changed. When we place him in a theatre in which all spirits, good and bad, are spectators of his conduct ; judges of its moral merit or demerit, of its reference to the general happiness of his species, and to the unalterable decrees of God : when we conceive the good among these hosts of spirits interested to see the wisdom, justice and mercy of God entirely justified, and his glory extended ; and the bad in league together, using all their art to corrupt, pervert, and extend the dominion of evil ; when we conceive all this, and whatever else the mind can comprehend as rationally connected with it, we no longer find it difficult to believe that for a creature so situated, whose actions are so observed, and whose good or evil conduct draws with it such extensive consequences, the Majesty of heaven itself should interfere. We see that it may have been worthy of divine wisdom to form, in such a case, a system of redemption, not only infinite in mercy to mankind, but full of

endless wonder and admiration to the hierarchies of blessed spirits; and pregnant with no less confusion to those who are rebellious and incorrigibly wicked *.

I do not say that this representation removes all wonder from our faith; on the contrary I have just said, that there are circumstances in it, at which the most perfect of created beings must for ever feel astonishment: but I say that it so far opens to us the subject, as to make us sensible of some proportion between the great act of redemption and the purposes for which it was intended: that it removes so much of difficulty as arises from the apparent want of consequence in man to employ such mighty plans in heaven for his salvation.

However, after all our reasonings, the conclusion of the whole is this: whether we can conceive it or not, whether we can see the probabilities or not that have now been represented, concerning the existence and the nature of spiritual beings, the scripture positively asserts that they do exist, and that there are among them busy, artful, and very

* This topic has been more fully handled in a former discourse.

formidable enemies to our salvation: and this, without relinquishing our christian faith, we cannot possibly deny or doubt.

We see among mankind a wonderful propensity to evil; we see that sin, when once admitted, has a tendency to increase beyond what we can readily estimate; and, in very many instances, to a degree of depravity which we cannot at all understand, but which we call infatuation; where the love of evil seems to continue in full force when every motive is removed. Of these strange things the scriptural account is, that certain evil beings, taking advantage of our tendency to depravity, and assisted by the subtlety of their own nature, delight to plunge us, step by step, continually more deep in wickedness, till we become most like themselves, and at all times the ready instruments of their iniquity.—Can we give a better account?—I doubt; nay, I deny it.

As a remedy for all this evil interference, Christianity offers to us the assistance of the *blessed* Spirit of God!—On the intercourse of other good spirits with us, and the aid they may communicate, little stress is laid, because

this alone is all-sufficient: nor can there be the smallest fear, that where the Holy Spirit has taken possession, the malignant demons will presume to make intrusion. Powerful, therefore, as our spiritual adversaries may be, we have also the most sufficient means to counteract them. The fervent prayer which a sincere conscience shall dictate in any hour of danger will infallibly put to flight the enemy, and gain the aid required. We have reason, therefore, from this doctrine, to stand upon our guard: but we have not reason either to despond, or to allege that we are ever drawn to evil irresistibly. The power of evil cannot have its hold upon us but by our own remissness, or our fault: and however our great adversary may roar and rage against us, we are furnished with a complete defence against his utmost strength in the short command of the apostle, “ Be sober, “ be vigilant.”

Now to God, &c,

DISCOURSE VI.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION.

HEBREWS xii. 25.

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.

BY an august and magnificent assemblage of images drawn from the history of the Mosaic revelation, the Apostle in this chapter endeavours to impress his disciples, of Jewish origin, with fit ideas of the dignity of the more recent word, and dispensation of God. He recalls to their minds the astonishing particulars recorded by their prophet, the mountain burning with fire, which it was death to touch; the black darkness and the tempest; the miraculous soundings of the trumpet of God; and, above all, that awful voice which

which they that heard, intreated that it should not be spoken unto them any more, lest they should perish. This so formidable an apparatus of splendor (such is the tenor of his reasoning;) this specimen of the grandeur of Omnipotence; these circumstances, which it agitates the very soul to conceive, attended the delivery of that first covenant, which was partial, which was imperfect, which was temporary. The revelation now delivered, he urges, is still of higher import and solemnity. It proceeds not from an earthly mountain, but from *the Sion of God*, the heavenly Jerusalem; the assistants at it, before whom ye stand, are the innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, the spirits of just men made perfect, God himself the judge of all, and Christ Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, by the sprinkling of whose blood the covenant is sanctified.—Thus, his argument implies, whatever were your previous conceptions of the importance of the first covenant, whatever the feelings which the circumstances of its manifestation might excite, ye are come to that which is infinitely more august!—and,

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in the words of my text, he infers the caution necessarily consequent upon that consideration. “ See that ye refuse not him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused him who spake on earth, how much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.” Finally he adds, with an implied reference to a prophecy well known by his countrymen to have reference to the coming of the Messiah, —“ whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised saying, Yet once more I shake, not the earth only, but also heaven *.”

I know not what can be conceived more impressively affecting to the imagination of man, than the idea of an address to him from heaven. We are none of us, at least in countries where the higher faculties of Reason have at all been exercised, devoid of some conception of God. This idea, imperfect as it must of necessity be in some respects, is made up of all that our minds can figure to themselves most sublime, and most transcendent. Of *Infinity*, and *Eternity*. Of *Wisdom*, before which the utmost stretch of our capacity shrinks

* Hag. ii. 6.

down to less than nothing : Of *perfect Holiness*, before which the purest human conscience cannot feel itself prepared to stand ; of *Infinite Power*, which, as it called us out of nothing into being, may in a moment also blot us from our place in the creation.— Impressed with such ideas, and such only can we have, if we think of God reasonably, what would be our feelings, what our terror, what our readiness of obedience, could we hear his awful voice addressing us from Heaven, and commanding us to receive his Revelation ?— Now, though our Ears may not perceive it, he hath spoken ; though our Eyes may not discern the Splendor of his Majesty, it is all employed in this great cause, and the Apostle has diligently endeavoured to display and paint it to our minds, in the glowing colours of inspired eloquence.

Knowing this, shall we not think it strange that such a Revelation, so supported, can possibly exist among us, and yet be by any persons disregarded ? A Revelation which we have not indeed ourselves heard delivered from heaven, for then it would be impossible to resist : nor yet from any holy mountain, amidst thunderings and terrific sounds ; but presented to

to us in all the sublime and simple Majesty of Truth, by a divine person who came from heaven to give it; foretold by *Prophecies*; established by *Miracles*; testified by the hand-writing of personal witnesses; and sealed by the blood and testimony of saints and martyrs.

Whatever might in the Apostle's time have been the necessity which led him thus to enforce the importance of the Gospel Revelation: we are sure that it is not now less cogent. Rather have we reason to apprehend, from the general tendency of things, a much more reluctant reception, minds less disposed to feel the topics of religion, and more inclined to indifference towards those things wherein it is sinful to be indifferent. While the eye-witnesses of our Saviour's miracles were living, themselves also gifted by the Holy Ghost with preternatural powers, it could not be very difficult for men so qualified to persuade their hearers, that the doctrine which originated from such a master, and by such disciples was disseminated, must be of high, of infinite importance. In fact, so strongly was this persuasion enforced, that it seems, during the first periods of Christianity, even to have counteracted nature; leading men,

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in direct opposition to all their most prevalent propensities, to an absolute renunciation of worldly gratification, and to the contempt of actual sufferings; inspiring not only a few strong and heroic minds, but even the bosoms of the weak, the tender, and the timid, with fortitude to resist the extremities of pain, and the horrors of death approaching in its most terrific forms; and this without exception, in thousands of each sex, and of every age. The writings of pagan authors bear witness to the obstinacy, as they considered it, of whole multitudes of Christians, who when life was offered, upon terms apparently so easy, as that of mere external compliance with idolatrous ceremonies, courted destruction, and contended for the honour of dying in that cause. We well know, and are ready to allow, that violent opposition may inflame the minds of men, and increase their pertinacity; but we know also, that this can only happen, when they are previously persuaded that their principles are right, and their cause important; and how can such a persuasion be produced? Certainly not by the unsupported assertions of a few ignorant men, especially in matters of fact.—The divine credentials of the

the Apostles produced this persuasion, and the recorded strength of that persuasion acts in turn to satisfy our minds that such credentials must have been exhibited. There was little of religious *indifference* in those ages, except among those who had neither seen nor heard of the wonderful transactions of the times: the rest were soon divided into persecutors and persecuted, the sincerely converted, and the obstinately unbelieving.—Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, is indeed represented as perfectly indifferent to the disputes between the Jews and St. Paul, notwithstanding his situation brought them so near to his observation; but it is evident from the history, that he was totally uninformed of their nature; for he said to them, “ If it were a matter of “ wrong, or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews; “ reason would that I should bear with you; “ but if it be a question of words and names, “ and your law, look ye to it, for I will be “ no judge of such things *.” But it is undeniable that it was nothing such; it was not a contest about words and names, or the punctilios of any law, but a question of the highest import that could be brought

* Acts xviii. 14.

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before mankind, namely, concerning a Revelation of the will of God from heaven: but of this he was uninformed, and neglected to inform himself; for though the tumults in the synagogues continued, and increased, it is added, “that *Gallio* cared for none of those things.”—But very different was the effect whenever any serious enquiry was made; as appears in the instance of Sergius Paulus, another proconsul, whose province was Cyprus: he sent for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God; and having been a witness of the judgment upon Elymas the Sorcerer, who in his presence dared to withstand the Apostles, “he believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord *.”

When the rage of persecution had subsided, and the civilized world had become Christian, the violent disputes which arose between the several sects of Christians, (who arguing upon points above the comprehension of men, necessarily fell into opposite opinions) prevented the introduction of indifference. Many individuals there doubtless must have been, who were lukewarm, and even forgot the importance of Religion itself; but the gene-

* Acts xiii. 7—12.

tal complexion of the times was not such : it was of a kind, not indeed to preserve Revelation in its purity, but rather to disfigure it with vain and pernicious subtleties ; but yet to maintain the just persuasion of its importance, and make it considered as the last thing in this world which a good man could relinquish or neglect.—Subsequent to these, were the times of overwhelming ignorance, increasing corruption, and artfully devised superstition : in which, though the high importance of Religion was impiously misapplied, and made the basis on which to exalt the power and temporal dignity of the Priest, yet still indifference was kept at a distance ; and the zeal of men was at the same time most furious, and most blind.—When the evils attendant on superstition, for which even its zeal could by no means compensate, had at length attained their height, the Reformation produced a ferment and a struggle, which could not fail to keep in view the important nature of those fundamental points for which men were contending. As long, therefore, as the contest continued with violence, we find few men of any situation in life, who did not, one way or other, feel themselves

interested in what was then in agitation; few who did not express a zeal for some persuasion or belief, and confess the necessity incumbent on them of conforming their lives, as well as they were able, to the rule they had embraced.—The subsiding of these mighty storms, at length produced a calm, in the peace of which a thousand advantages might justly be expected. A thousand advantages have arisen. The acrimony of mens minds has been corrected, persecution has become hateful, toleration, and the benevolent spirit of true Christianity have pervaded, in some degree, even those sects into which their admission appeared the most improbable: but there is this one evil to be dreaded in particular, which, if it be not guarded against, may deprive us of every advantage, namely the rise and formidable increase of religious indifference. In countries unreformed, the revolting absurdity of several tenets super-added to the simple texture of Christianity, has produced in many an absolute rejection of Revelation, in many more a kind of nominal faith, fearful to examine lest it should discover the imperfections of its system; and not sufficiently superstitious to believe strongly without

without examination. In reformed establishments, the plainness and simplicity of a doctrine unsupported by show, and uninforced by violence, seems, in some instances at least, to have wanted sufficient hold of the unstable tempers of mankind to keep them steady to their duty: and men, left to their own discretion for the performance of what religion requires, have been seduced by the tempting nature of temporal objects, to rush too blindly into the pursuit of them; and, in the tumult of these avocations almost, if not entirely, to forget Religion.

Yet the change of human opinions alters not the nature of things; the importance of Religion remains:—and the warning of the Apostle still demands the most implicit attention: “ See that Ye refuse not him that speaketh!”—He who hath spoken is God, whose awful voice if man could hardly hear and live, neither can he, when it hath been uttered, possibly neglect its precepts and be guiltless.

From the notion of a Deity it is impossible for any man to separate that of the utmost veneration and most implicit obedience due to him, from every creature. In comparison

with his authority, that of every other being must be feeble and insignificant;—the laws that he has impressed on our consciences must demand exact observance, the commands that he has in any other way delivered must be received with no less perfect submission.—If there were only a vague report that God had spoken to mankind, it must become, to all who believed in his existence, an indispensable duty to examine into the truth of such an assertion. As long as it is possible that he may have spoken, there can be no excuse, but the want of means, for not enquiring whether it be so or not. In every government it is the concern of the subject to enquire out the laws which respect his own condition; the omission of that search he must abide at his peril, probably at his utmost peril. The higher the authority the more strong must be this necessity, and it is not a few desultory cavils which ought to pass with any reasonable person for arguments against that system, which is sanctioned by the awful name of God. A man must be little conversant with the artifices of misused Reason, less indeed than, in an age like this, any man can well be imagined, who has not seen, in a thousand instances unconnected with Religion,

igion, how the plainest truth may be attacked by cavil, and the most indubitable fact disfigured and rendered improbable by misrepresentation. While these arts are known to be practicable, are known to be daily practised, can it be excusable in any man to let himself be deceived by them, and in matters of eternal moment to incur even the possibility of a deception, which he might have avoided?

If then even they who think they have reason to doubt of the truth of Revelation, be required, and in reason obliged by such considerations, to examine into the merits of the cause; what shall we say of those, by much the greater number, who, without pretending to disbelieve, neglect and forget their Religion; of the multitudes who live in total negligence of that faith in which they have been bred; negligence, I mean, with respect to the study of its precepts, the performance of some of its positive duties, and of every thing which impresses and confirms that habitual veneration and respect, which every man is bound to entertain, for that which is so sacred as the word of God? Of the numbers who live thus negligently, (for unhappily in the

present age, and in our country, this description will include a numerous class,) how few are there who can pretend to disbelieve that which they cannot but confess they overlook? —But what kind of life is this? believing that God has sent down a Revelation, at least not attempting to disprove it, and living as if it were possible for such a thing to exist, and yet to have no importance.—For Heaven's sake let us be consistent!—If we can refute what is said by the assertors of Religion, let us refute it, and no longer suffer a fabric to remain, the foundations of which are placed in rottenness; but if we cannot shake it,—as, the truth is, no man can,—as it is founded on a rock against which even the powers of hell cannot prevail,—let us not suffer supineness, indolence, and an inordinate love of worldly things, to prevent us from attending to truths, which, before the foundation of the world, were established; and to precepts, the consequences of which will remain when not a trace of this globe shall be found in the volume of creation.

To plead a want of time for such enquiries, if it be not dishonesty, is self-deceit; since it is well known that whenever the high
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importance of religion has been duly felt, the most occupied of men have found abundant time for every duty that a religious life exacts. Glorious examples are recorded of men involved in the busiest of all professions, that peculiarly studied in this place, who always set apart a stated portion of their hours to such pursuits; yet felt not any want of time for such employments as their stations put upon them: and were so far from being found deficient in any thing required, that they are to this hour extolled as men who were the light and boast of their profession.

Nor can it possibly be urged that an application of this nature is not requisite.

If other principles besides those delivered by Revelation can guide us equally well, Revelation was from the first unnecessary, and we must be inclined, upon such grounds, to doubt its proofs.—But if the proofs of it are such as never can be invalidated, then must there of necessity be in it such treasures as cannot elsewhere be discovered. The morality of the world, the best substitute that can be found, is deficient in a thousand points, but most materially in these, that it leaves am-

bition, pride, covetousness, an earnest attachment to the gratifications of this life, and a thousand other faults of human nature uncorrected, unrepressed ; nay frequently augmented and inflamed. The spirit of Christianity can only be imbibed by a study of its sacred books ; and without that amiable, that angelic spirit, so beautifully exemplified in the humble and beneficent life of the divine Saviour on earth, and there only to be studied and acquired, there is little reason to suppose that man can ever become qualified for the society of the blessed in heaven. If this be a reward worth seeking, or if the punishment of the contrary neglect be a reasonable object of fear, let us throw off that torpid negligence which has but too generally prevailed among us ; and considering what is to be expected “ if we “ turn away from him that speaketh from “ heaven,” return to him with penitence for the past, and fervour for the future ; and become an holy people zealous of good works. What attraction there is in other studies is well known to those who pursue them ; and if, on the same ground, the testimony of one long employed in the study of religion may be received, there is in it, according to the Psalmist,

Psalmist, “that which converteth the soul, maketh wise the simple, enlighteneth the eyes, rejoiceth the heart; that which is more to be desired than fine gold, and sweeter than the honeycomb *.”—The superiority of the second covenant to the first is acknowledged; yet even of that were these things said, even of that were men ordered to lay up the words in their hearts and in their souls; to bind them as a sign upon their hands, and as a frontlet between their eyes; to teach them to their children, speaking of them when they sat in their houses, when they walked by the way, when they lay down, and when they rose up †. Let us not do less for the more perfect Revelation of Christ; but holding fast the form of sound words which we have heard, become not negligent of the word, but careful hearers; and not hearers only, but doers also.

Now to God, &c.

* Psalm xix. &c.

† Deut. xi.



DISCOURSE VII.

ON THE HISTORY OF THE SEDUCED
PROPHET.

I KINGS xiii. 1.

And behold, there came a man of God out of Judah, by the word of the Lord unto Bethel.

AS the narrative which describes the fate of this man of God is a part of sacred history which, when read as the lesson for the day, may leave some doubts and difficulties on the mind of the attentive hearer, and as it comprises also many topics of instruction useful to be explained to all, I have determined to make it the subject of this day's discourse.

The circumstances are briefly these. Soon after the division of the Jewish kingdom, Jeroboam, whose interest it was to keep the ten revolted tribes as much as possible apart from the two of Judah and Benjamin, from a wicked

a wicked policy, set up idols in the two extremities of his kingdom, at Dan and Bethel, that his people might worship them, and not go up at the stated feasts to Jerusalem, according to the Mosaic ordinance. This daring violation of the most sacred laws, for which we find him generally stigmatized in holy writ by the name of *the man who caused Israel to sin*, was soon followed by a public token of divine displeasure.—A prophet was sent from Judah to Bethel, to denounce the destruction of the altar and its priests; and, in confirmation of the prophecy, miraculous signs were exhibited upon the altar, and even on the person of the king himself. But the man of God, who had gone out under a strict prohibition from abiding, or even taking refreshment, in that polluted place, was, by another prophet, seduced from obeying the command he had received, and, by a miraculous interposition of divine power, suffered death for his transgression.

In this history there are three principal matters which strike most readers as extraordinary.

i. That the old prophet who lived at Bethel, and who, from several circumstances, appears

appears to have been truly a prophet, should have been desirous to seduce the other from his duty.

2. That the prophet of Judah should have fallen under the deception.

3. That, if the latter was indeed deceived, his punishment should have been so severe and exemplary.

It will be our most convenient method to consider these points separately.

I. In the first place, for the purpose of explaining the character and motives of the old prophet of Bethel, we must correct some general notions with respect to the nature of prophetic inspiration.—To the gift of prophecy we are apt to annex the notion of perfect holiness, and even of infallibility. But we forget that an infallible man is a contradiction. Man is a frail and fallible being; by his own efforts he certainly cannot attain infallibility; and had he, by the same Spirit that gave him the power of foretelling future events, been rendered infallible, he would have been raised above the condition of his nature. We are far from having any warrant of scripture for confirming such an imagination. Balaam is a striking instance of a prophet

phet yielding to the seduction of vicious dispositions; and even St. Paul, who, as a prophet under the Gospel dispensation, was, by the testimony of Christ himself, far superior even to the greatest under the law, has in his writings told us of his vigilance and care over himself as necessary, lest, with all his high advantages, he might himself fall under condemnation. We should recollect that under the theocracy, or divine government of Israel, prophets, in the early times, at least, were very numerous: colleges are said to have been established for the regular education of persons to that high branch of ministry; and though we do not know that all who were thus brought up were actually favoured with divine intelligenices, yet we are sufficiently assured that many were. Had all these individuals been supernaturally rendered infallible, what a deviation would there have been from the general laws of Providence! what a number of men exempted from the universal condition of a probationary state! this could not reasonably have been expected; and from scripture, the only existing record of such facts, we learn that it was not so ordered. At particular times, and for particular purposes only,

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a prophet was inspired. In the general conduct of life he was left to act as a man, from the impulses of his own mind, and the suggestions of his own disposition. It might happen, therefore, though doubtless the consciousness of so high a privilege as the gift of prophecy would operate as a strong restraint from many sins ; it might, however, happen, that a prophet might become depraved, and so it appears to have been in the instance now before us. The old prophet lived at Bethel, the very seat of the newly-established idolatry. Had he been worthy of his office, he would, probably, have been called forth to denounce the vengeance of God against these crimes : had he been zealous for the honour of God, he would either have deserted a place so defiled, or would, at least, have testified, in some manner, his abhorrence of this idolatrous worship ; instead of which it appears from the history, that he suffered his sons to be actually present at the sacrifices. Of his motive, therefore, for deceiving the prophet of Judah we shall not, perhaps, judge too harshly if we suppose it to have been envy : his corrupted heart, though backward to exert itself in the cause of religion, repined to see another called

forth, in preference, to that distinguished office. Or if he were not envious, at least he was officious, and wished to try the faith of one whose inspiration, after what his sons had related, he certainly had no right to doubt.

II. But how then, in the second place, can we account for the success of his deceit? Here again we have an instance of the fallibility of a prophet, and of the necessity of vigilant resolution, even to one actually employed under a divine commission: we have still more, we have an instance calculated to prove that even the clearness of the divine revelation might itself be made the means of trial to him to whom it was communicated. The command of God to this prophet, howsoever conveyed, had doubtless been explicit. In the presence of Jeroboam the prophet spake of it with the utmost firmness: “ If thou wilt give me half thine house I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place: for so it was charged me by the word of the Lord, saying, Eat no bread, nor drink water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest.” But when the old prophet came to solicit him, whether it was hunger that had

had abated his resolution, or whether it was fatigue, for he was found resting himself under an oak, he refused with much less steadiness : he no longer declared that nothing should prevail upon him, but merely said, “ *I may not return with thee:*” *I may not,* implying, perhaps, that he greatly wished he might.—When a duty is clearly and positively known, the listening to false and frivolous arguments against it, is not merely weak, but criminal : it is yielding not to real conviction, but to corrupt inclination : it is deceiving ourselves by a false pretence, and voluntarily relinquishing the candid use of judgment, lest that judgment should counteract our wishes.—There was nothing in what was said by the man of Bethel which could have deceived the prophet of Judah, had he not been already more than half deceived by his own desires : “ He said unto him, I am a “ prophet of the Lord as thou art ; and an “ angel spake unto me by the word of the “ Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee “ into thine house, that he may eat bread “ and drink water.” Was this a testimony sufficient to counterbalance a command which had been positively and clearly revealed ?—

“ I am a prophet.”—How did that appear? merely by his own assertion, or at most perhaps by his dress*.—“ A revelation was given “ to me directly contrary to that which was “ previously given to you.”—This was in itself very suspicious:—the divine Spirit cannot be supposed to act so capriciously:—if the Almighty think fit to dispense with a command, he will surely reveal the dispensation to him who received the injunction. “ But who is “ this man who calls himself a prophet, and “ perhaps is so, but pretends to have received “ this inconsistent revelation?—He is one who “ lives in Bethel, a place where I, as a man “ of God, am forbidden to make an hour’s “ abode; a place where I have been ordered “ to avoid even taking the slightest refresh- “ ment, lest I should in any degree partake “ of its pollutions, or appear to give a fanc- “ tion to them: he then is surely a deceiver, “ and I will not listen to him, at least not “ without some sign, or convincing proof of “ his commission.” Such are the reflections which would most naturally have arisen in

* It is said by some authors that the Jewish prophets had a peculiar dress. See the commentators on Heb. xi. 37.

the mind of the prophet of Judah, had he been as firmly resolved in obedience when sitting under the oak, as he was when he stood in the presence of Jeroboam. But the face of things was altered ; he was urged by fatigue and hunger to wish for some refreshment ; and seems entirely to have wanted that steady faith which Elijah and other prophets manifested, that God would in every extremity preserve them, so long as they remained obedient. He was credulous, because he wished to be persuaded ; and listened to the grossest fallacy, because the refutation of it would have been unpleasing : so dangerous it is to let our wishes stand in opposition to our duty, and so easily are the wisest men deceived when inclination blinds their eyes.

III. When we come, therefore, to the consideration of the third difficulty, which arises from the severity of the prophet's punishment, we must not forget that his fault was greater than at first sight it appears. A man who transgresses through natural infirmity, or is over-reached by great subtlety, and circumvented by artifices which he could not possibly detect, deserves compassion: but he who, for his own indulgence, is glad to be deceived,

must be viewed in a very different light; and in proportion to the clearness of evidence in the matter of duty, the fault of transgression will be increased. Though we know not the exact manner of the revelations made in those times to the prophets; we are certain that there was nothing doubtful in them: whether the Lord had commanded or not, a prophet could not but be certain; and indeed the positive nature of this prophet's answer to Jeroboam proves that there was not any doubt existing in his mind concerning the divine prohibition.—“ If thou wilt give me half “ thine house I will not go in with thee—“ for so it was charged me by the word of “ the Lord.” Something, therefore, more than at first sight appears was involved in this proceeding; nor can the prophet properly be considered as an unassisted man, failing through infirmity, or an innocent man deceived.

The next matter that deserves our attention is the nature and notoriety of the whole transaction. On the occasion of a great and daring apostacy, of a public and royal defection from the true worship, a prophet was expressly sent to prophesy against the idol altar.

altar. In the presence of the king and all his idolatrous congregation, this prophet had made known the anger and the will of God, and his words had been confirmed by immediate signs and miracles. No sooner was this done, than, in the same assembly, he had publicly declared to the offending king, that he was expressly forbidden to stay, or take refreshment in his territories. If it was concluded, at the time, from this circumstance, as very justly it might, that the great anger of the Lord, against the pollutions and abominations of Bethel, had caused this prohibition to his prophet, how much must that lesson and that warning have been weakened by the supposition that such a command had been retracted, or the knowledge that it had been with impunity disobeyed! Very fatally must it have weakened the effect of the prophecy so solemnly delivered, had it appeared that the prophet by whom it was uttered had said one thing and done another, and by his actions had contradicted his public and most positive declaration: whereas, on the contrary, his miraculous death became a third sign in the eyes of the people, an additional proof of his veracity, since what he had pub-

licly declared himself forbidden to do, he was no less publicly chastised for doing. In the ordinary course of human life, indeed, we do not look for immediate interpositions of Providence to punish the transgressor; but under the peculiar government of the Jewish people, and in the case of a prophet, it was not unreasonable to expect it.—To all this we may add, that, even in our estimation of the severity of the prophet's chastisement, we may possibly deceive ourselves. The infliction of death, though in the hands of worldly judges the very extreme of punishment, is not so by any means in the hand of God. The man whom he removes from this world, God may reward in another state of existence; and the cutting him off at an early period of transgression, may prevent him from drawing upon himself a heavier condemnation. There is indeed every appearance that the wrath of heaven, in this case of the prophet, was fully appeased by the forfeiture of life: the lion which slew him neither devoured nor carried off the body, but became a guard upon it:—an honourable sepulture was granted, and three hundred years after, when the prophecy uttered by this man of God was accomplished

by Josiah, his bones were honourably distinguished, and preserved from violation:—the lion, therefore, took only that life which disease, or the common decay of nature, must, at no very distant period, have destroyed; but then the death thus inflicted, instead of being common and unnoticed, became a lesson, a warning, a miracle, and a sign.

But the deceitful prophet met with no punishment, and went down to his grave in peace. I know not what we can conclude from this fact, except that apparent security is no proof of divine approbation, and that under the peculiar, as well as under the general Providence of God, all things are not squared and managed according to the measure of human notions, but determined by higher motives, and upon principles at present beyond our reach.—That God should approve his deceit is impossible: but with him this was not the beginning of transgressions; in remaining at the seat of idolatry, and giving, by his residence, a kind of countenance to its pollutions, he had committed more sin than the fangs of a lion could avenge, and might be reserved therefore either to fill up the measure of his guilt, or, what is more

probable, to expiate his offences by sincere and effectual repentance. To this the dreadful punishment of the brother he had deceived appears immediately to have led: for his subsequent zeal to bring back his body, to mourn over, and to bury him, placing him in his own sepulchre, and giving a peculiar charge, that when he died, his own bones should be placed with those of the deceased; all these are evidently the acts of a man anxiously desirous to make what melancholy reparation yet remained in his power for the evil he had done: a state of mind attendant always on repentance, and likely to induce a general examination of himself, a consciousness and a dereliction of all his sins.

The lessons which we may deduce for ourselves from this remarkable history are of considerable importance.

It teaches us to be very watchfully on our guard against the deceitfulness of our own inclinations: it warns us, in matters of duty that are clear and evident, not to listen to any arguments, or be persuaded by any pretences which are designed to seduce us from obedience. In a mind well instructed, the first movement of the conscience is usually right,

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the determination that is made at once and without reflection is generally the most impartial; for it is not from any difficulty which attends the discerning of our duty, but from the facility with which we suffer ourselves to be persuaded from it, and to give up our first perceptions, that our greatest danger arises. When we take time to consider what interests will be affected, or what difficulties incurred, by the strict performance of that which is enjoined, or when these interests begin to be affected, or those dangers to press upon us, then it is that we ought to suspect our weakness; for then the work of sophistry begins, then do we frame distinctions that have no solidity, and hearken to arguments that are without weight, till, unless we are extricated by a strong and active resolution, we are entangled in a web of our own weaving, and perish by our own perverse ingenuity.

We may learn also from this history to rely on God in difficulties which the observance of our duty brings upon us: for though the time has long been past, in which such miraculous preservation as the prophet of Judah might have looked for in his distress can reasonably

sonably be expected; though no ravens will bring us food in the wilderness, nor will our nature be enabled to subsist without support; yet still there are resources in the Providence of God on which a good man should depend: if he be not snatched from danger, he will at least be supported under it; and should present destruction overwhelm him, in the steady prosecution of acknowledged duty, his hopes are yet immortal, and refer him for his recompence to a life of which no violence ever can deprive him.

We may make it also a topic of our consideration, that if persons favoured by the actual communication of divine knowledge, were yet liable, without due watchfulness over themselves, to fall into transgression, we, who are not thus gifted, ought on no account to indulge ourselves in false security: if we are willing diligently to perform our parts, the grace of God will not fail to assist and strengthen us; but if we are negligent and careless, we shall find ourselves beset with snares, and our steps hastening only to destruction.

Lastly; Having found that a serious consideration of the difficulties contained in this history

history has enabled us to satisfy our minds about them, let us learn to be very backward in suspecting any thing amiss in the writings of the sacred penmen:—an obstacle which will not give way to a slight touch, by a stronger effort may be removed; and a weight which the strength of one man cannot raise, by another may be lifted up, and put aside without much difficulty. So is it with the sacred writings; what to a flight and careless observer appears strange and inconsistent, by one more attentive or acute will easily be understood; what the understanding of one man cannot explain, that of another may interpret readily: and the things which no man can interpret, the high and hidden mysteries of our creation and redemption, even they, will perhaps be expounded to us hereafter, if we labour to attain that place and exaltation, which confers the inestimable privilege of partaking in such heavenly knowledge. We shall then look with the holy angels into the great designs of God, and study the wisdom of his dispensations.—This privilege, and the glory, and the happiness attendant on it, let us not lose for want of present trust and faith, let us not hazard

hazard by remission of vigilance, let us not reject by a mean and sordid preference of joys annexed to mortality, or of apparent advantages still more vain and perishable than ourselves.

Now to God, &c.

D I S-

DISCOURSE VIII.

ON PROVING ALL THINGS.

I THESS. V. 21.

Prove all things: hold fast that which is good.

WHATEVER may have been taught, in corrupt times, within the Church, concerning a blind and implicit faith; or whatever may have been falsely urged, in times yet more corrupt, in many points, against such churches as abhor that doctrine; it never was the spirit or intention of the Gospel to discourage sober enquiry, or rational examination. Whoever should attempt to fix this accusation upon it, must have forgotten in what manner men were first converted. It was not said to men, *you must* believe that Jesus, Paul, Peter, and others worked miracles, or *you must* admit the doctrines they inculcate; but, consider what they actually do before your eyes, and then *judge* whether

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the power of God do not bear witness for them ; consider the nature of their doctrines, and then decide for yourselves whether they be not worthy to be admitted as divine. “ Try “ the spirits, whether they be of God :”—“ prove all things :”—“ be ready to give a “ reason for your faith.”—From such beginnings did the Christian Faith originate, and by such acts alone was it built up ; if then implicit faith came in at all, it was not as a fundamental point, but as a consequence of something done before. As for instance, when the authority of the teachers, and the authenticity of their words have been determined by sound reason, then begins the implicit faith of a Christian ; admitting without reserve, however repugnant to his former prepossessions, whatever he is fully authorized to call the *Word of God*. If in any other form implicit Faith, at any time usurped a place among the Christian duties, it had been introduced for the purpose of facilitating some corrupt addition, or establishing some abuse.

Solomon, speaking indeed on another subject, but a subject analogous to this, well describes the different characters of men. “ The
“ simple

“ simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going; a wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth and is confident *.” These words, which I should have taken as my text, had their original sense entirely coincided with my purpose, may afford at least a clue to guide us in our enquiry; and teach us to discriminate the characters of men according to the nature of their faith.—Thus shall we, in considering the words of the Apostle, “ Prove all things,” perceive the whole extent of his precept, and learn what we are to avoid, as well as what to do.

“ The simple,” saith the Royal teacher, “ believeth every word.” It is evident, therefore, that he doth not *prove all things*: and that this simplicity is what the scriptures rather mark with censure, than hold up to imitation; and represent as pitiable, at least, if not criminal. Indeed, if any tribute to the wisdom of God can be given by the approbation of reasonable creatures, if any portion of that transcendent glory which flows to him from all parts ought to be derived from this source, it must come from those who ex-

* Prov. xiv. 15, 16.

amine,

amine, not from those who dream; from those who give assent or praise upon good grounds, not those who pay them as a tax, they know not why; nor can assign a cause for what they say. Such approbation, or rather adulation, even a man of any spirit has dignity sufficient to reject; it cannot therefore be an incense fit for God. In matters of faith, to assent without examination is not, in truth, to give a real assent; without a reason to determine its judgment the mind feels no conviction; and where no examination is attempted, no reason can be found. Contrasted with this simplicity, is the conduct of the prudent man, *who looketh well to his going*; he measures his steps, and is careful to know whither he proceeds, and on what ground: his assent is rational, and his conviction sincere. On the other hand, where sufficient proof is found to lead his mind to that determination, “the wise man feareth, “and departeth from evil:” he reforms his life according to those precepts which he has thus approved as holy: but the fool, another kind of fool from that before alluded to, “rageth, and is confident:” denies the truths he ought to own, rejects the authority it is
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his duty to obey, and, without the slightest cause for such presumption, is full of insolence and confidence. As it is one species of folly to admit all things without examination or proof, so is it an equal blindness, but infinitely more pernicious, to reject every thing with the same indiscriminating precipitance; and even to rage against that which is true, from a confident, though totally unfounded assumption, that it is false.

From both of these infatuations, an attention to fulfil the precept of the Apostle will effectually preserve us; “ prove all things, “ hold fast that which is good,” describing exactly the conduct of Solomon’s prudent man, who looketh well to his going, and having so looked, feareth, and departeth from evil.

With respect to such as implicitly believe whatever may be offered to them, or at least profess to believe, giving an irrational assent, which is not true belief, it is sufficient to have remarked that they are far from having any warrant of scripture, much less any invitation from it, to authorize their blind credulity: and that the Gospel demands not merely nominal, but rational faith. Thus

much may be necessary to defend Religion from imputations originating in an abuse of its name, and false pretences of its authority. As for the evil itself, of thus credulously assenting, it is not at the present day so prevalent, at least among the polished classes of society, as to demand much admonition from the Pulpit. The folly of “believing every word” is by no means an urgent or increasing evil, but may be left to find its cure in the natural progress of information; happy they who find it not, where too many have already found it, in the opposite and much worse evil of infidelity.

But when we talk of proving all things, it may be not a little important to consider what is the nature and the tendency of *their* conduct, who, in matters of Religion, venture to *pronounce* without having proved, upon a superficial examination, if any; perhaps without the formality even of one attentive hour: who venture to pronounce not for, but against its sanctions and authority; to decide that God has not afforded us a promise of immortality; that he hath not vouchsafed to speak to man, nor to be watchful for his happiness: making themselves outcasts from providence, from all its care, and all the blessed hopes

hopes of Religion, without so much meditation on a subject of such infinite importance, as they would give to the most trivial point of worldly interest. That this is *irrational* is surely evident, that it is too common, the knowledge of every one who hears me will probably bear witness: it is indeed a thing which, in the present times, one cannot live among mankind without observing, and certainly cannot behold without much horror. Indeed, of the many persons we meet, who (since unhappily there is no shame attached to the confession, but rather a false pride, and assumption of superiority) are not backward to confess, that their opinions militate against Religion, how few are there who will even pretend that they have studied on the subject. Yet it is undoubtedly a matter of study, and, what might give these hasty deciders some suspicion of their error, a study of such a tendency, that they who actually enter into it, form, almost universally, the contrary conclusion. They who studiously enquire become, in general, believers: they who give but slight and cursory attention to the subject, or not any, persist in unbelief.

Of this rash, and dreadfully precipitate decision, the most usual foundation is some

general position boldly assumed, as being, what it certainly is not, self-evident; and, with equal reason, relied on blindly, as irrefragable.—Some, for instance, think it not to be believed that God should make an actual Revelation of his will to man. Which having once assumed, they think it not material to take further thought upon the subject. Whether they suppose that the lights to which man is conducted by his natural faculties are sufficient for all purposes of regulation; that it is not consistent with divine wisdom to have formed a system which should require such interference; or not consistent with the infinite majesty of God so to condescend to visit and instruct his creatures: whether these or any other imaginable reasons form the basis of the decision, it is most evident that they all proceed, and must proceed, upon the supposition of a knowledge both of God and of ourselves greater than is in truth attainable?

It is a bold thing to decide what it is unfit for God to do, evil only excepted: for as to what appears to us unwise, if the reasons for it only lie beyond our reach they may be infinitely strong, and yet be to our minds as if they were without existence. Thus there have

have been times when presumptuous reasoners ventured to arraign the wisdom of contrivance in the visible creation, whose objections, specious at the time, and not to be refuted as the knowledge of mankind then stood, have since, by the mere progress of enquiry, been subverted totally. After all there is a question of fact, in all such matters, which well deserves to be put in competition with any previous hypothesis; namely, is it not actually so, that God has revealed himself, whatever may be our notions on the subject?

A very little experience in the examination, or acquaintance with the history of human opinions, will show how miserable a figure hypothesis continually makes, when put in competition with the actual trial of the fact.—Full many a specious theory, since the establishment of experimental enquiry, has fallen to the ground, never again to raise its head, unless it should, after any general extinction of knowledge, be called by ignorance from its obscurity; and well known, indeed, it is, that to build up theories, without a strong foundation of experiments, long tried, and patiently compared, in every possible view, is a reproach to any man of science. No

man will risk his reputation on mere theory. What then? Is salvation less, infinitely less than common reputation, that a man shall risk it, not only upon theory, but upon the most subtle and fallacious of all theories, a metaphysical theory; built on an hypothesis of which the very subject matter is involved in total darkness. Appeal, appeal to facts, ye deciders on Religion! Prove what can be proved, and then, if indeed there be nothing to hold fast, you may with a safe conscience relinquish the whole doctrine.

With respect to this great fact, whether God has actually revealed his will to men or not, you cannot continually have the proofs repeated to you, or even present to your memory; but I will venture to remind you of two strong experiments, if I may call them so, which seem directly to decide the point in the affirmative. One indeed is past, and cannot be repeated; but the other you may make for yourselves, every one in his own hours of meditation, and, from its general success, I may almost undertake to answer for the result.

The first of these was the complete trial of the question, when the evidences of it were fully before the eyes of men, when the Gospel was

was first preached by its great author and his followers. The second is the experiment which every man makes for himself, who cautiously and candidly enquires into the still subsisting evidences of the fact.

In the first case it happened, that they who had most opportunity of knowing Jesus, who observed daily how he lived, and finally how he died, who hourly viewed his actions, and heard all his words, believed him to be the Messiah, the Son of God, the Messenger of Salvation to mankind. They even believed that they beheld him living again after death, and in that state conversed with him during many days, at the end of which they saw him taken into heaven; and these things not one or two of them alone believed, but all: and so firmly were they fixed in that belief, that though no interest led them to maintain it, though they maintained it to their daily disadvantage, yet the highest worldly interests could not bring them to deny it. Nor was this all; for the fact was that these men, though low-born and illiterate persons, having nothing but their own strong faith and persuasion to plead, (unless they had, what we conceive them to have had, miraculous powers) succeeded in convincing multitudes,

and leading them to hold invincibly the same belief. Here then is the first experiment, as far as the human faculties are capable of trying it, completely successful to establish the affirmative, that God did send his blessed Son to teach mankind his will. It is something gained towards the decision of a question, to know how they decided it, who had the fullest means of forming a true judgment on it.

The second consideration I would suggest, as a sort of experiment, is this, that even at the present day, they who most carefully enquire into the evidences of these things, are they who the most steadily believe. The unbelievers are, in general, the thoughtless and the gay, the light and superficial, averse to the fatigue of weighing evidence, or naturally incapable of it. Such are the generality. Of the few whom this herd follows, those who pretend to reason and sagacity, and even to Philosophy, how few have ever been patient and studious enquirers ! Will not the classes of Wits, more studious of amusement than of truth, of debauchees seeking justification, of metaphysical adventurers, seeking fame by paradox and subtlety, almost absorb them all ? Very different

different is the description of believers. In every order of men, but principally, I am happy to observe and to declare, in that which is most versed in sifting evidence through all the intricacies of proof, and distinguishing the true from false, numbers will be found who believe because they have examined, who hold fast that which is good, because they have first proved it.

Nor shall I fear or hesitate to cite, upon this point, the belief of the Clergy. Illiberality indeed is forward to accuse us of teaching what we do not ourselves believe, of holding out a lure to draw in the unwary and the ignorant, and of being actuated solely by motives of temporal interest. Heaven knows, the interests of our order are not so intimately joined with the appearances of zeal for our Religion, as to tempt us for that reason to be hypocrites; too frequently is it seen that there is more worldly wisdom in the opposite conduct, and that they who wear their principles most loosely have most success in pleasing a corrupted world. But the pretence of cant and priestcraft is too convenient for those, on whom the strong conviction of a serious preacher must otherwise have great effect,

fect, to be relinquished easily, however little there may be of truth to warrant it. True is it, most unfortunately true, that in this class as well as others, there are some who wilfully neglect their duty, some who have neither talents nor inclination for attentive enquiry. True is it, that even the awful ministry and attendance on God's Holy Altar does not, in all cases, teach men to subdue their passions; nor do the truths that they are obliged officially to repeat, always sink down effectually into the minds of those who utter them: but among the Clergy who have knowledge, and appear also to have zeal, I should be surprised to find even one, who wanted a sound Faith. The result is, that the conviction of the learned and pious among the Clergy, which is usually the more strong as they are the more informed, affords a striking proof that our Religion bears the test of the most minute enquiry; of a whole life spent chiefly in enquiry.

Whether it be Clergy or whether it be laity that seriously enquire into the evidences of our holy Religion, the progress is naturally this. I speak from the experience of one, which I believe to have been realized in other instances beyond number. Setting out with some

some doubts and difficulties, the doubts and difficulties of ignorance,—for who in this sceptical age can totally escape them, except by actual knowledge?—they see their way clear gradually before them. Like the supposed illusions of enchantment, obstacles that seemed insuperable, vanish on approach, and mingle with the air, or sink down to the regions that produced them; and every day of new enquiry diminishes the number of difficulties, and more completely opens the foundations of the truth: till from long and frequent experience a conclusion not unreasonable is drawn upon the principles of analogy; that every doubt and difficulty in the Christian Religion subsists only by the want of due enquiry or of necessary knowledge. Some points of doctrine indeed there are, the knowledge required to elucidate which lies beyond the reach of our present faculties, and which consequently must remain difficult as long as we continue here: but these are neither greater, nor in truth so great, nor by any means so numerous, as those which the rejection of that revelation necessarily involves.

Let me exhort then all who are at any time perplexed with doubts, to suspend, at least, their

their judgment, till they can have leisure to enquire, recollecting that they who do enquire usually find satisfaction. To all, let me recommend, most strongly, the advice of the Apostle, to prove all things, and having proved, invincibly to hold fast whatever they shall have found to be the truth. So will they be able to approve their conduct to their own hearts, and in the sight of God: and so, I may very safely promise, will they obtain a firm and rational faith, incapable of wavering, and formed to lead them to salvation,

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE IX.

ON THE REGARD OF GOD FOR THE TEMPORAL WELFARE OF MEN.

DEUT. v. 29.

O that there were such an heart in them that they would fear me, and keep my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!

A CCUSTOMED to hear, though too frequently with little profit, those precepts which Religion opposes to the inordinate love of present gratification, we are apt occasionally to forget that the whole system is intended to promote and to extend our happiness. Men of gloomy minds have thought to purchase the favour of God by rendering their own lives miserable; and such as were unwilling to pay that price for obtaining it, have sometimes learnt to hate religion, as demanding

demanding sacrifices which they esteemed unreasonable.—The words of my text, which were delivered to Moses from heaven, afford sufficient proof how tender a regard the Father of mercy entertained even for the temporal welfare of his people, concerning whom it was spoken. “ O that there were such an “ heart in them !”—no wish can be more feelingly expressed.

That obedience to the divine commands, at that time revealed, would have made the Jews a happy people, as disobedience reduced them to the condition of miserable outcasts, cannot possibly be doubted, the terms having been expressly set before them from the beginning. “ Behold,” said the inspired legislator, “ I set before you this day a blessing “ and a curse ; a blessing, if ye obey the “ commandments of the Lord your God, “ which I command you this day ; and a “ curse, if ye will not obey the command- “ ments of the Lord your God, but turn “ aside out of the way which I command you “ this day, to go after other gods, which ye “ have not known *.” Of this blessing and this curse the particular circumstances are in

* Deut. xi. 26, 27, 28.

another

another place explicitly declared. The blessing consists of seasonable rains, so as to produce all the increase of the earth in the greatest abundance, insomuch that it should be a constant employment to gather in, and to dispose of the riches of the soil; “your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time *.” Added to this continual plenty, there was to be profound peace and security from enemies internal and external, and even from the ravages of wild beasts: or if at any time they were attacked, they were to be armed with such strength that “five should chase an hundred, and an hundred should put ten thousand to flight.” The increase of their numbers was to be proportioned to their wealth and security, and God promised at all times to dwell with, and to be watchful over them. These promises may be found at large in the 26th chapter of Leviticus, and again in the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy, where blessings are, in a manner, heaped upon the people of Israel, if they will but consent to be obedient. In these and many other passages contained in the books of the Mosaic law, may

* Levit. xxvi. 5, &c.

be seen, beyond all controversy, the earnest desire of the divine lawgiver to make his people happy, would they but have consented to receive his blessings on the terms proposed. That they seldom enjoyed the fruits of this benevolent disposition towards them, can be ascribed only to their invincible perverseness, and headlong obstinacy, in joining the worship of abominable idols to that of Him who brought them out of the land of Egypt. By this rebellious conduct they so completely changed their condition, that the curses previously denounced by the lawgiver against disobedience contain a kind of history of the sufferings of the Jewish people; in which their captivity, dispersion, subjection to the Romans, and even the calamities which were actually realized in the final siege of Jerusalem, are set down with an exactness, which proves beyond a doubt that He who made the threats had the power also to fulfil them. It is impossible to compare those chapters with the events which so many ages after took place, without astonishment, and, I should think, without conviction. But on this part of my subject it is not my present purpose to enlarge. The reference it has to

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our present argument is only this: That the desire of God towards his people was in all respects benevolent; that he wished to promote, to the very utmost, even their temporal felicity; and that if they fell, as certainly they did, into sufferings and miseries, it was not without being most fully and fairly warned; and was the consequence of their own transgressions; of incurable obstinacy, and repeated disobedience.

Under the second covenant the circumstances of things are indeed a good deal changed; temporal advantages are no longer inseparably annexed to obedience, because there have been obtained for us promises of a nature so superior, as to make their value as nothing in the comparison; yet still does it remain true that the Lord respects the temporal welfare of his people, and would not have them suffer present evil, for any other purpose than that of obtaining advantages greater, beyond all kind of competition, in the land to which he leads them. In a word, were it possible that men should invariably enjoy all worldly happiness, and yet be rendered worthy of all heavenly, there is in the divine nature no envious or ungenerous

disposition by which the former would be withheld. The desire of God to promote the temporal felicity of mankind, may be seen most clearly even in the nature of the Gospel precepts; wherein what are the actions forbidden as crimes?—but those whereby justice is insulted, the peace of society destroyed, and contention, with all its attendant miseries, introduced. What are the actions enjoined as duties?—but those which unite mankind to each other in brotherly love and sympathy, the strongest bonds of happiness; which produce the alleviation of wants and sufferings of every kind, and the most general diffusion of every comfort. What are the dispositions of mind forbidden?—chiefly those which render the breast wherein they are harboured a torment, and a hell to itself; malice, hatred, envy, covetousness, and a formidable list of passions, which may be called, not improperly, with respect even to this present world, the seeds of certain misery. What are the internal dispositions recommended?—Piety, benevolence, patience, contentment, resignation: habits by which those evils which cannot in this world be removed, may be in a wonderful degree alleviated; and which,

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when no particular misfortunes press, diffuse a steady glow of sunshine over the mind, which nothing but the brightness of immortal happiness can possibly surpass. On earth our Saviour went about removing, by his miraculous assistance, the bodily sufferings of men; when departing from it, he left a treasure of instructions, which, if they will not counteract those external evils, which he in person removed, for the still more dangerous and tormenting maladies of the soul, contain remedies which are infallible. Such are the precepts of this second law, that were they universally obeyed, the result would be the same as that promised to obedience under the first, namely, universal peace, prosperity, and happiness. A world of perfectly obedient Christians, would be, by the natural effect of the abolition of crimes and extravagant passions, and by the prevalence of benevolent dispositions, what the nation of the Jews would have been, had they not rebelled, by the actual interposition of God: “*Blessed in the city, and blessed in the field; blessed in the fruit of their bodies, and in the fruits of the ground; blessed in their coming in,*

" and blessed in their going out*." So that the tender wish of Him who governed them, and with no less parental affection watches over us, may still be suffered to vibrate in our ears, as the true expression of his disposition towards us: " O that there were such an heart in them that they would fear me, and keep my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!"—This is everlastingly the just representation of Him in whom there is no change or shadow of turning. God would have men happy here, but not in such a manner as to render them miserable hereafter: he regards their present well-being, but in due subordination to that which is infinitely more important; as a tender father delights at all times to gratify his children, but not by such indulgences as he knows will make them vicious, or otherwise wretched, in maturer age.

From this accurate representation of the disposition of God towards us, we may deduce for ourselves very useful considerations and rules, on the subject of temporal happiness.

* Deut. xxviii. 3, &c.

In the first place we may regard it, as that, which, by all fair and innocent means, we are permitted to pursue for ourselves. In the second, as that, which on no pretence we are authorised to take from others.

The former consideration may serve to keep us in good humour with Religion; and to assure us, that no wilful self-tormentings, no renouncing of the common comforts and conveniences of life, no gloomy austerties, no flying into deserts *, are necessary, or even acceptable in the sight of heaven. In works of charity we are told that God loveth a cheerful giver; in all other exercises of piety it is equally true that God loveth a cheerful service; to praise him, to give him thanks, to rejoice in his holy name, to love him with all the heart and soul, these are duties very frequently and very strongly enjoined, but they are duties which cannot possibly be fulfilled by him, who lives in the persuasion that God never can be satisfied till man has rendered himself miserable. To renounce the world and all its pleasures, is indeed a duty, whenever God requires it; but on the pro-

* Nor starving upon the summit of a column, like *Simeon Stylites*, and his fanatic followers.

priety or necessity of so doing, God only can decide. Were all mankind to renounce it, there would be nothing left to renounce. God desires the happiness of all men, our individual happiness therefore is not excepted; and though we have over this more right than over that of others, yet wantonly to cast it away, is to resist his purposes, and despise his gifts. When the fit occasion arises, the call will not be wanting, which even then by human frailty cannot fully be answered, without the especial interposition of divine assistance. Strong trials are situations of danger; to rush into them voluntarily, whatever reason we may have to hope for the assistance of God, is presumptuous. It was the suggestion of the devil to our Saviour, to cast himself from the pinnacle of the temple without occasion.

But though we are assured that God, in his tender love towards us, regards even our worldly happiness, and would not have us prodigally cast it from us, without obtaining more than an equivalent, yet must our pursuit of it be regulated by several restrictions. Our persuasion of his attention to it will not, on our parts, authorize an immoderate attachment, but ought only to fix within us a firm

firm assurance, that without some higher purpose he will not take it from us. He, whose wisdom is unerring, considers indeed our temporal interests, but infinitely more considers those of eternal life: we, whose best wisdom lies in imitating, whenever we are able, the perfections of his nature, should regulate our wishes by the same just estimate; working out the one with cheerful diligence and thankful hearts, whenever the other does not interfere; but relinquishing without hesitation the inferior object the moment that a competition arises. Whenever duty stands opposed to inclination, there is that competition; and happy they who, in all such circumstances, can form a right decision!—to receive with thankfulness, and to relinquish without repining, is the golden rule respecting temporal advantages, the perfection of pious discipline. Such are the considerations on this subject which chiefly regard ourselves.

With respect to others, we must consider God as the constant guardian and promoter of their welfare, and even of their temporal happiness; which if we injuriously diminish or destroy, we are accountable to him, as counteractors of his designs, and aliens from

his benevolent system. In promoting their advantages we co-operate with him ; most gloriously, indeed, when by any means we are happily enabled to lead them on to spiritual blessings ; but not unusefully, and in a manner which he will not fail to reward, when we minister to them even in worldly things. Under the former covenant such good acts were indeed enjoined, but it was with some restrictions : the good offices of the Israelites were directed chiefly towards each other : it was a brother, that is, an Israelite, that was to be assisted in all exigencies : “ Thou shalt not see thy brother’s ox “ or his sheep go astray; and hide thyself “ from them : thou shalt in any case bring “ them again unto thy brother *.” But the precept is now, by a glorious extension, made universal as the benevolence of him on whom we all depend ; for he has declared to us that we all are brethren, all equally his children, equally entitled to his care. Without distinction of persons, therefore, he hath enjoined that we should extend our kindness to all ; that we should “ do good even to them “ that hate us, bless them that curse us, and

* Deut. xxii. 1.

“ pray

" pray for them that despitefully use us, and
" persecute us *."

But why, it may be asked, if God be indeed so mercifully disposed towards mankind, that he works continually for their good, and would have all men labour with him to that end; why is it that, upon the face of the whole earth, evil so much prevails? that so many suffer and mourn under afflictive dispensations? whence the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners, and the groaning anguish of them that have no hope on earth?

These evils are occasioned, in the first place, by sin. Men do not co-operate, as they ought, with God in diffusing happiness throughout the world; but rather employ their time and their powers in tormenting, than in doing good to each other: whence it happens, since the Almighty has committed the ordinary conduct of this world, in some measure, to the management of his imperfect creatures, that dreadful evils are daily occasioned, which could not, without miraculous interposition, be prevented. It is true, that God is not an indifferent spectator of these iniquities; that he will visit for them hereafter, and bring

* Matt. v. 44.

evil then in heavy measure upon the head of those who now dispense affliction and misery to their brethren: but in the mean time the evil prevails, and the earth is full of rapine, fraud, cruelty, and every evil work, the necessary fruits of which are sorrow and destruction.

Another cause of the prevalence of suffering in the world is the necessity for discipline. He who willeth only the good of all his creatures, frequently sees it best to form their dispositions to his will by the infliction of evil. The world in which he has placed us, the enjoyments which, on every side, his bounty has lavished round us, have frequently too strong attraction: they bind us to them; they fix our minds to present objects, to the utter exclusion of future prospects; and, by confining our attention wholly to the state of things in this world, tend to disqualify us totally for any other. In this case the mercy, and not the severity, of God interposes; he takes from us those things in which we too fondly delight, that we may be constrained to think of higher objects. By salutary infliction he rouses us from our lethargic forgetfulness, and, like a wise physician, out of

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transient suffering, produces lasting activity, and sound health. There are few minds of such strength as to bear, without being corrupted, a state of unvaried felicity. Our ideas being all drawn from experience, it is very difficult for those who have not known affliction to estimate its pressure, or to feel sufficient compassion for those who suffer by it. It is an observation confirmed by daily experience, that no hearts are so perfect as those which have been early disciplined in the rugged school of adversity: whereas they who have enjoyed uninterrupted prosperity are too often unfeeling towards men, and full of stubborn arrogance towards God himself. “ Give me not riches,” said a man whose wisdom ranks with that of Solomon, “ lest “ I be full, and deny thee; and say, who is “ the Lord *?”—Lest we should repine under the discipline thus necessary to bring our souls to the perfection of which they are capable, an example is set before us which must do away every pretence for murmuring: since He, the Author and Finisher of our Faith, who was without spot or blemish of sin, consented for our sakes to be tried, even

* Prov. xxx. 9.

as we are, and to have his human nature, in like manner, rendered perfect through sufferings.

In every situation this persuasion should inseparably attend us, that God inflicts not evil but for the sake of some more important good, most clearly discerned by him, though hidden, perhaps, from our imperfect sight. To him, therefore, we may fly in every sorrow and distress, as to a father who chastens only out of love, and who will hereafter, if we be found deserving, wipe away our tears, and repay them with everlasting bliss. There is no one who suffers, that may not make this use of his affliction. Repentance and amendment will open to every sinner the gates of mercy.

Nor should this caution escape us, that the infliction of evil for the sake of producing distant good, is a sacred prerogative of the Almighty, which can very seldom, and only when the consequences are immediate and indubitable, be exercised by man. Among men, to do evil that good may come is generally the false profession of those who are glad, under any pretence, to do evil. To do good, and only good, is the office and glory

glory of a Christian; to "do good to all men," .
" but especially to those which are of the
" household of faith." This is the securest
way by which we can imitate our heavenly
Father: this conduct, if we persist in it, will
be hereafter a crown of glory upon our heads,
and our certain passport to everlasting hap-
piness.

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE X.

AGAINST CONCEALING OUR RELIGION.

2 TIM. i. 8. part of.

*Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony
of our Lord.*

THIS is the advice of an Apostle to one almost an Apostle, his adopted Son, and fellow-labourer in the Gospel.—The attendant arguments and cautions are, in some degree, peculiar to the situation of the persons then corresponding, in some also applicable to all Christians. The solemn warning “not to be ashamed of the testimony of “our Lord,” is what we all should feel as urged upon ourselves: as a call to vigilance at all events, as a reproach if we have ever been ashamed of that which ought to be our glory.

The

The whole passage stands thus. “ Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God which is in thee, by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but be partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel, according to the power of God, who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling.” 6—9.

In separating the parts of this exhortation for our use, we have first to remark the very extraordinary circumstances of the persons between whom it passed. Paul in prison and in bonds at Rome, in daily expectation of a violent death*, invites a man at large, and hitherto in security, not to any worldly advantages, not to power, wealth, honour, or any thing esteemed desirable, but to a participation of the same apparent disgraces, and the same very real afflictions. The invitation in itself is extraordinary, but it is still more so, that *it was accepted* in its fullest extent: a fact for which it is not easy to account without admitting

* See iv. 6.

some

some suppositions decisive in favour of Christianity ; and an argument, which, though not new, I think well worth recalling briefly to your mind, because of its great strength. It will hardly be supposed, that in those days men were, contrary to their nature, fond of pain, disgrace, and death, or that these things could operate as inducements ; and if this cannot be imagined, we must consider what other motives could possibly operate to produce this wonderful effect. Two, that are sufficiently adequate to that purpose, are suggested by the passage itself, which, if they are admitted, remove all difficulty, and, at the same time, confirm, beyond all controversy, the truth of this Revelation ; if they are rejected, I know not what can possibly be substituted for them.—St. Paul speaks of some divine gift attended with power ; and of being called and saved, in a manner which of necessity implies some mighty blessing. The knowledge that he had these powers, and the hope of this salvation, might surely operate with Timothy to make him do what Paul, for similar reasons, had done ; but if he knew he had received no gift, and saw no solid ground for hopes beyond the grave, he must,

in the first place, have taken great offence at the glaring falsehood thus asserted to him, and could have found no counterbalance for the evils he was called upon to bear. We may safely assert, from all we know of human nature, that to have acceded to the invitation on those terms, is not in man.

To us, however, that part of the call which supposes a miraculous power received, is not applicable; nor are we, on the other hand, invited to partake afflictions like those of the Apostles. We cannot say that God has given to us the Spirit of Power; but thus much of the passage we may perfectly adopt, “God hath not given us the spirit of fear; “but of—love, and of a sound mind.”—To you I am authorized to say, “Be not ashamed “of the testimony of the Lord.”

In different times there is a call for various gifts, and a necessity for different cautions. At former periods it has been required that men should be cautioned against Superstition; Bigotry, a persecuting Spirit, Hypocrisy, and other religious vices, now almost extinct: at present there is no more pressing danger, among those who are believers, than lest they
should

Should be ashamed of owning all the truths that they believe.

Many causes have co-operated to produce this false, and sinful shame. Causes, however, which though they may explain, cannot in the least degree excuse it. Sinful, and most shameful, it must always be to be ashamed of Christ: to put our trust in him in secret, and not confess him openly: to seek salvation by clandestine methods; and hold the best opinions as if they were the worst. Sinful must this method always be, and obnoxious to the just retaliation which our Saviour has denounced, the return of shame and disavowal on his part, when we shall have most need to be acknowledged by him. "Whosoever shall deny me before Men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven *" "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation," (titles, alas! too applicable to every age that has succeeded) "of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father †." Let guilt or folly be ashamed, but let not that

* Matt. x. 33.

† Mark xiii. 38.

be the subject of shame, which is “the Power
“of God unto Salvation *.”

How it has arisen among us, that such a shame can possibly exist, it may, perhaps, be useful to explain. We shall know the better where to find, and how to counteract it.

While the Gospel, and they who ventured to receive it, were despised and persecuted, it required, undoubtedly, a mind superior to the fear of men, and that false shame which their reproach is apt to raise, to declare a full assent to it. From the time when it began to be esteemed, protected, patronized, established by the great and powerful in the world, the causes of this shame were lessened, and at times entirely annihilated. Hypocrisy then took its turn; and wherever there was credit and respect annexed to faith in Christ, there was more fear that some should boast of that attachment they did not feel, than that any should desire to hide this merit in concealment. With a wonderful perverseness of ingenuity, men contrive, from all imaginable circumstances, to extract the means of sinning. In our own country, from Superstition men passed to Reformation;—Reformation rekindled Zeal, and, for a time, a

* Rom. i. 16.

true and rational Zeal; Religion became the boast of the wise and learned, and, of course, the pretence of those who would, at any price, gain admiration.—From this, the step was easy to Fanaticism, and pretences to a superstitious purity so extravagant and so absurd, that, when the fit was over, true zeal and real holiness unhappily partook of that redundant ridicule, and that just contempt, which fell on such hypocrisy and those who practised it.—The fear of one extreme too frequently brings on the other. From this and various conspiring causes, a period of profligacy succeeded to fanaticism: Virtue and Religion became unfashionable; Vice obtained a spurious credit; 'till, by an inverted hypocrisy, men counterfeited guilt, and claimed more sins than they committed.

Happily, this great depravity was not general, it was confined to those who affected fashionable distinction, who, though they do great harm by their example, do it, in some measure, in proportion to the number of their imitators, which is not very great. It remained for false Philosophy, and pretended accuracy of Reason, to extend a thousand-fold, what the corruption of a few could only

begin. Torrents of ridicule vented against every serious practice, were succeeded by specious, though unsound reasons against the truth of Christianity, not, however, omitting that ridicule which had been found so very powerful. It was necessary, perhaps, that these things should have proceeded in this order, to give them full effect; if the absurdity of fanaticism had not attached some ridicule even to true Religion, which the undiscerning might confound with it; if the deformity of vice had not been veiled by fashion, and the virtuous plunged in false disgrace, it would have been, at least, less practicable, to treat a sacred subject with buffoonery, and make a jest the substitute for argument, against Religion. Men would have shrunk, instead of laughing, at the scoffs of infidelity, and contempt would have been directed to its proper object; to him, who on these topics could be ludicrous.— This safeguard, however, was gone: and such is the infirmity of man, that they who would resist persecution, will often stand in awe of ridicule. The enemy felt his advantage; cavils, doubts, and sneers were multiplied against the Christian and his faith, the infidel assumed that air of superiority which ridicule so greatly favours;

favours; till the serious friend to Religion, between the fear of being or of seeming fanatical, and the dread of an unjust contempt, began to wear his faith more covertly; to laugh sometimes with those who laughed, at what he thought most solemn; and to satisfy himself with being pious in the sight of God, without obtruding his opinions on the notice of mankind.

This conduct cannot ever be entirely justified; though it may sometimes be true that, where we find men obstinately bent to scoff, it may be charitable not to give them, in that temper, new occasions to harden their own hearts in sin, and repeat the follies that confirm them in their unbelief. But if in one case this be prudence, in every other it is worldly fear, and ought by no means to prevail.

To this false shame, mingled perhaps with some doubts, amidst the number that are circulated, and an indolence almost as culpable as either, must be attributed the present decline, in appearance at least, of Christian zeal throughout this Christian country.

The time, however, hath at length arrived when it can no longer be allowable, on any

plea, to temporize in our religious conduct. The confident boldness of unbelief, the reserve and over-modesty of Christians, have brought things to that pass, that every effort is now demanded which may, by any innocent means, recall the liveliness of Christian feelings, and the activity of honest Zeal. Infidelity, encouraged by its triumphs in a neighbouring country, will probably attempt new conquests among us: and with all the advantages that we have, of a more pure form of Christianity, and certainly a much more general attachment to it, this is not a time for the friends of true Religion to be remiss in any thing. For some considerable period, from the causes above-mentioned, it has been too much the practice, whatever character men might in other points desire to establish, to throw a kind of veil over their Religion. I do not mean, heaven forbid! that they would go the length of denying it, or of neglecting the most general duties of it; but that the character *they did not wish to establish* was that of Religious Men. In this matter they wished to keep their account with God alone: the text that bids them in their chief religious duties appeal to him only who seeth in secret, they were willing most

most literally to obey: while the precept, by no means incompatible with it, and certainly of equal authority, of letting their light shine before men for their general edification and example, and for the glory of God, was passed by with little notice.

This, however, will be readily allowed by all who think upon these subjects seriously, that whatever palliation for such conduct might be found in other circumstances, it is proper in these times that we should, by all imaginable means, declare before mankind, that we are not ashamed of Christ; that we are not among the numbers fatally corrupted by the follies of the world, or favourers of infidelity. The contrast should be made as strong as possible between the man who follows the true law of Revelation, and him who has adopted in its place the weak inventions of vain men: and every selfish consideration should give way to the benevolent desire of leading many to Salvation, and the pious desire of performing the will of God, and extending his Glory.
“ God hath not given us the spirit of fear,
“ but of love, and of a sound mind.”

The remainder of this discourse may, perhaps, be best employed upon two principal
con-

considerations. 1st. What are the usual causes that prevent believers in this age from giving such an open example of Religion as they ought; and, 2dly, What would be the happy consequences of relinquishing this timid conduct?—In considering the causes, I shall of course enquire what weight they ought to have.

I. The first cause that occurs to me, is the fear of falling under the imputation or the suspicion of hypocrisy: a vice so justly odious, and so exposed among us formerly, by the excess to which the practice of it went, that to be reputed guilty of it, is with justice deemed a serious evil. To this apprehension, however, may fairly be opposed the consideration that, in important matters, to conceal the truth for fear of groundless imputations, is neither manly nor entirely honest. Nor is the accusation of Hypocrisy such a one as can long maintain its ground against a steady perseverance in well doing; because, between the man who uniformly regulates his life by conscientious and religious motives, and him who only takes Religion for a mask, the world must soon be able to distinguish. It is sufficient, for this purpose, to compare their professions with their conduct. We may observe

serve also that, in some respects, the caution must be vain, since unbelievers censure all as hypocrites or fools who do not join with them in openly rejecting Revelation; and besides this general reproach, from which certainly they cannot mean to fly, there can be little of this imputation to fear: for when no credit nor advantage among men can be obtained by the appearance of Religion, the temptation to assume it falsely is not strong enough to raise a probable suspicion. On all accounts, therefore, we may conclude that a dread of the false suspicion, or imputation of hypocrisy, is by no means an admissible excuse for any kind of concealments, and that to be actuated by it is mean, weak, and contemptible.

Some, however, fear not merely a groundless imputation, but lest they should in fact fall into ostentation. They dread lest they should have a Pharisaical and outward piety, and thus fall under those just censures which our Saviour has pronounced against such persons. This fear is doubtless founded in good principle, but accompanied by strange unmanly weakness. The question whether he professes his attachment to Religion with a view

view to his own glory, or to that of God; for his own advantage, or for the edification of others, is one which every man may settle perfectly within himself. To his own conscience let him appeal. Let him, with caution and sincerity, in the sight of God descend into his heart, and if he there find no accuser, he may confide that he will meet with none in heaven. In this, as in many other matters, we can act only according to our best knowledge, and most pure intention, and for the rest must leave it to the justice of that heavenly Judge who knows and loves us most.

Some, perhaps, stand in fear of that strict responsibility which they would bring upon themselves by strong professions of religious principles. Their conduct would undoubtedly be scrutinized by men, with more severity than that of others. Every instance of guilt would not only involve themselves in deep disgrace, but also would, in some degree, affect the cause of piety. But to avoid all this, what is it, but to favour your own frailty, and contrive conveniences for sinning?—and, after all, a responsibility remains which cannot be so easily removed. If they profess to God that they believe his holy word, and love his holy Religion,

Religion, however secretly they may declare it, will not he require it openly? Will not he compare, more accurately still than men, their conduct with their professions, secret or avowed? and will not he, which is much worse than any worldly censure, punish them for insincerity and falsehood? These things require no argument: to suggest them is sufficient. Want of thought, not want of comprehension, must prevent men from perceiving them.

Lastly, there are some who fear the scoffs of impious men, and the imputation of credulity. The absurdity of this fear may very easily be shown. They who believe not, must certainly suppose us credulous, or they would also believe; we, on the other hand, consider them as prejudiced against the truth: and thus far the account is balanced. That the one imputation is more generally dreaded than the other, is owing to the false estimates of men, who had rather be thought impious than weak. But, be this as it may, in matters that depend on evidence we must believe according to our powers of judging. To that which seems irrefragable we must yield assent, if we are honest: to do so, is a matter not of choice,
but

but conscience; and if we fear what men may say of our belief, we have more cause to dread what our own hearts would testify against us, or a just God decree, if we rejected that which seemed to our best judgment to demand attention and assent. If on these just grounds we have assented, should the arrogant assumption of superior judgment used by unbelievers, be suffered to abash us? Shall we be ashamed of Christ, because the empty pride of man with insolence rejects him? It will not bear a doubt; and, to have put these questions to ourselves with seriousness, is to have decided.

If we go further, and examine the substance of that accusation of Credulity, to what does it amount? Let us recollect the groundwork of our faith, and see how far it can give weight to such a charge. "We believe
" that men without a motive would not be
" deceivers: that, particularly, they would
" not plot together to bring themselves to
" misery: or that, if they found that fruit
" spring unexpectedly from their designs,
" they would relinquish them. All, it is pro-
" bable, would do so; or, if not all, yet surely
" some among a multitude. We believe
" that

“ that the same men could not be gross im-
“ postors, and the framers of the most per-
“ fect moral system that ever was contrived ;
“ ignorant, and the teachers of the highest
“ wisdom ; authors of discoveries original,
“ yet perfect. We believe that books sup-
“ ported by collateral testimony, and frequent
“ citation from the very time of their appear-
“ ance cannot fail to be authentic : and having
“ first believed these points, which we know
“ not how to controvert, we give to the evi-
“ dence of the men, and to the doctrines of
“ the books, that assent which these consi-
“ derations, and such others of internal evi-
“ dence as are extremely obvious, must de-
“ mand.” Such are the foundations of our
faith, the sources from which all that we be-
lieve of Revelation is derived.—And if such
they be, why should we be moved by the vain
word credulity ? The Mathematician, when
from proof he has assented to such things as
seem to ignorance impossible, laughs at those
who call him credulous. The Christian may
laugh also ; at least he has a similar right to
do so, proportioned to the force of moral proof
compared with demonstration, could he laugh

at that infatuation which, he fears, must end in misery.

II. Such, and so futile, being the causes which lead believers to withhold that brightness of example they are bound to give, the advantage of dismissing that timidity may easily be traced. There are many admirable practices disused, through fear of what the world might say or think concerning them. Some injunctions of the Church, and some domestic duties are, for this very cause, neglected. I might instance in the general inattention to the present season *, and the solemn week that closes it, as a period of religious recollection and humiliation. It is impossible that many should not feel how right and wise it is at such stated times to abstain from some indulgences, and give some hours to seriousness, to penitence, and prayer. Yet because they fear the world, because they would not be, or seem, what few have any chance of being, righteous over-much, they yield not to these warnings of the conscience. The authority of the Church to enjoin, they do not venture to deny; but the authority of the world to abrogate, is yet more sacred with them.

* Lent.

Among the private duties neglected from the same cause, that of family prayer is most to be regretted. The authority of situation, the influence of example, the empire of attachment, and the weight of superior knowledge, can by no means be employed so advantageously by the master of a family, as by thus displaying to his children and domestics his own attachment to Religion, his dutiful obedience to his God. Exhortation without example does little. A tone, a gesture, that, in the act of worship, marks involuntary fervour, and sincere religious feeling, may sometimes sink more deeply, and leave impressions of more force, and durable effect, than volumes of morality. It is true, that before a man can thus do good to others, he must be fixed and steady in himself: he must have risen above false shame, and have learnt to be as willing to appear religious as to be so: he must be in the habit of admitting serious thought, and putting some constraint upon himself, for the sake of serious duties: he must be willing to be tried by these appearances, and to make his life consistent with them. But is not this the very character that a wise and virtuous man should seek?—Would to heaven

that all they who think thus seriously, would reason thus consistently, and contribute all that aid they might, and ought, to spread true Piety among us !

The state of Religion in this country, though not what we might wish it, is, I trust, very far from being desperate. There are not wanting men of serious piety and steady faith : a little more decision of conduct for the sake of example; a little more firmness in despising idle cavil and ridicule, would, I think, produce an evident change, which would no less surprise than abash the enemies of truth. That this supposition may be just, and this expectation realized, is my wish and prayer. Nor will I now detain you longer than to hope that you will all revolve these things as seriously as I have stated them.

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE XI.

ON LETTER AND SPIRIT.

2 COR. iii. part of ver. 6.

For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

THIS is one of those texts of St. Paul which is liable to misconstruction, because, when removed from its place in his epistle, and from the reasoning with which it is connected, it seems to convey an assertion very different from that which was intended. When it is said generally, and without limitation, on apostolical authority, that “the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life,” the hearer may perhaps too hastily conclude that it is so said of all scripture, and has reference to the interpretation of it; in which we are thereby taught to seek always for some higher and more spiritual sense than the letter, or literal acceptation of it, will present.

Such a conception of this text, as it leads directly to the fantastic reveries, and dangerous follies of mystical divinity, ought very carefully to be avoided ; and though the right interpretation be neither new, nor lies very deep, being easily discovered by inspection of the chapter to which the text belongs, it may be useful to take notice of it. We may thus prevent some persons from being misled by the unexpected allegation of so specious an authority ; may guard against any offence which might be taken at the apostle, on the supposition that he encouraged such imaginations ; and, finally, may afford an example of the circumspect and cautious manner, in which it is necessary to interpret the scriptures, and especially the epistles of St. Paul, “ in which “ there are,” as the church was long ago warned by his fellow-labourer, St. Peter, “ things hard to be understood, which they “ that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as “ they do also the other scriptures, unto “ their own destruction *.”

A very moderate attention to this passage, as it stands in the epistle, will enable any intelligent reader to give it the proper inter-

* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

pretation; for it is sufficiently evident, that no method whatever of interpreting scripture is there spoken of; but that in vindicating his own dignity, as a preacher of the new covenant, St. Paul distinguishes the Law by the name of the Letter, the Gospel by that of the Spirit. The *Law* he calls the *Letter*, because its precepts were preternaturally engraved in visible letters; the *Gospel* he names the *Spirit*, because the peculiar characteristic of it was, that it was to be engraven spiritually on the hearts and in the souls of men, by an interposition of divine power altogether as preternatural as that which wrote the decalogue on tables of stone. This distinction the prophet Jeremiah had long before been taught by inspiration to declare:

“Behold the days come, saith the Lord,
“that I will make a new covenant with
“the house of Israel, and with the house
“of Judah; not according to the covenant
“that I made with their fathers”—that is,
the covenant delivered on mount Sinai, writ-
ten and engraved on stones—“but,” (con-
tinues the prophet) “I will put my law
“in their inward parts, and write it in
“their

“ their hearts *.” Of this prediction the apostle’s mind appears to have been full when he wrote this chapter to the Corinthians, for he speaks expressly of the Gospel, as being written within them by means of his preaching; “ not with ink, but with the Spirit of “ the living God; not in tables of stone, but “ in fleshy tables of the heart †:” and then, pursuing his object of vindicating his own ministry, “ Our suffering,” says he, “ is of “ God; who also hath made us ministers of “ the New Testament, (that is) not of the “ letter, but of the *Spirit* (not of the old “ law, but of the new); for the *letter* (the “ Mosaic covenant) killeth; but the *Spirit* “ (the Grace of the Gospel) giveth life.”— He proceeds, still preserving the same idea, “ But if the *ministration of death*, written “ and engraven in stones (namely, that letter “ which killeth), was glorious—how shall “ not the ministry of the *Spirit* (that is, “ the ministration of the Gospel) be rather “ glorious?”—And again, in other words, “ For if the *ministration of condemnation* “ (the law) be glory, much more doth the

* Jer. xxxi. 31, &c.

† Ver. 3.

“ mini-

"ministration of righteousness," or justification, (namely, the Gospel) "exceed in glory * :"—with yet more; exactly to the same effect. All this is perfectly consistent; it agrees precisely with the doctrine which the apostle uniformly inculcates, and the just preference he always gives, to the second over the first dispensation; maintaining that the one concluded all men under guilt and condemnation, there being no adequate satisfaction for sin under the Law; while the other removed the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, and opened to all men the treasures of free Grace and Redemption.

The names of *Letter* and *Spirit* were more particularly applicable to the Law and the Gospel respectively, as the one contained the exalted and spiritual meaning of the other: whatever was laid down in the Mosaic ordinances, of a worldly and imperfect nature, was a type only, and a sensible representation, of that which, in a higher and more perfect sense, was to take place under the dispensation of Christ.

Thus does common sense, guided by the evident design of the apostle, direct us to in-

* Ver. 6—10.

terpret that passage, which, separately taken, seems to have a general reference to the interpretation of scripture; and is but too likely to be applied, in justification of their dangerous errors, by those who delight in discovering spiritual and hidden senses in the plainest passages of the sacred books.—“*The Letter*,” they tell us, “*killeth*;”—true, the Letter of the first Law; but, in the Gospel, the Letter as well as the Spirit giveth Life, Redemption, and Mercy; and to apply to this covenant what was properly said of the other, is to deny and to despise the Grace of God; who, in this his better covenant, has suffered nothing to appear that illustrates not the riches and abundance of his mercy; not a letter to be written, that tends not to the purposes of the whole benevolent system. Ingratitude or weakness cannot well more grossly betray themselves, than by asserting that *the Letter killeth*, in a dispensation, the whole of which is spiritual, and was given expressly to lead us, notwithstanding our manifest unworthiness, to immortal life and blessedness.

To the many similar passages that occur in the writings of the same apostle, we must apply a like interpretation, and beware of suffering

suffering ourselves to imagine that he anywhere exhorts us to overlook the literal meaning of the Gospel, and wander in pursuit of some recondite, mystical sense.

When he says, in his epistle to the Romans, “that we should serve in *newness* of *Spirit*, “and not in the *oldness* of the *Letter*,” it is certain he means, conformably to what has now been explained, that we should serve according to the *Gospel dispensation*, and not according to that given to the Jews. This is evident, indeed, even from that passage itself, as well as from the comparison of it with my text, for the reason there given why we should so serve, is, because “we are delivered “from the *law*—that being dead (abrogated, “or done away), to which before we were “held.*.” When he says, in an earlier passage of the same epistle, that “he is a “Jew, who is one inwardly; and circumci-“sion is of the heart, in the *Spirit*, and not “in the *Letter* †;” his intention is to de-clare, that the ceremonial circumcision, ac-cording to the letter of the ancient law, had given place to that which was the spirit of the institution, namely, that circumcision of

* Rom. vii. 6.

† Rom. ii. 29.

the heart, or inward purity, which, under the Gospel, was required instead of outward ablution; and that therefore he only was a Jew, according to the improved spirit of Judaism, who, forsaking the letter of his law, attached himself to the evangelical interpretation, now delivered by Christ and his apostles. The Gospel is the spirit of the Law; and in this sense it was that our Saviour, though his revelation was designed to put an end to the institutions of the former, declared himself come “not to destroy the law and the prophets, “but to fulfil them *.”

These distinctions between the old and new covenants are so essential to the understanding of our religion, that we find St. Paul, throughout his epistles, continually asserting, enforcing, and explaining them; replying to the objections of Jews and others; and, by various means of illustration, setting forth the superior advantages of the Christian dispensation.

The questions that arise out of this subject are such as we could not possibly have solved without the aid of the apostle, and therefore we must be careful to attend to his explana-

* Matt. v. 17.

tions,

tions, lest we reason amiss, and pervert the knowledge that is given us.

It is very natural to enquire to what end a dispensation should have been given which led only to condemnation? This question the apostle takes up in the third chapter to the Galatians: “*Wherfore then serveth the law?*” The reply is, “It was added because of transgressions:”—that is, it was added to show the heinousness of transgressions, and their destructive, deadly nature. Had no revelation ever been promulgated, but that which was a system of mere mercy, it might have been supposed that sin was not so highly abominable in the sight of God, as it truly is; and as it ought by all means to be shown to every moral agent: Had our Supreme Judge appeared to us only as seeking to forgive offences, his enmity against them could not have been discovered; and it would rather have been concluded that he thought lightly of sin, than that there was danger of incurring by it his severest indignation and judgments. The Law was therefore made a system of severity, that it might be seen what sin deserves; death and curses were denounced for every transgression: and the expiations

expiations appointed under it referred only to the temporal state of the offender, and prevented him from being cut off from the congregation, but could not purify the soul, it being impossible, as the same teacher declares, “that the blood of bulls and goats ‘should wash away sin.’” In the mean time two most important points received a full illustration; the strong hatred of God against sin, exemplified in the severe and dreadful temporal chastisements which fell upon the Jews for their disobedience; and the unhappy tendency of our corrupt nature to fall into transgression; both together fully evincing the great necessity of a Redeemer, who should be able to purify our souls, as the bodies of men were purified by the imperfect expiations of the law, and avert from us those much more dreadful punishments in another world, which the present inflictions upon the Jews must have taught us to apprehend. From teaching this great lesson the Law is called by St. Paul “a schoolmaster, to bring ‘us to Christ *;’” for without it we surely could not have known so fully the necessity we had for Christ, nor have been so willing

* Gal. iii. 24.

to approach him. To the Jew then who enquires, “Was that which was good (namely, the law) made death unto me?” the answer is, “God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful*;” which, though obscurely expressed, we may now understand to signify, “But it was appointed to show sin in its true colours, which, since by means of an instrument so good in itself as the commandments of God, it could work death, must of necessity be considered as very highly atrocious.”

Besides this, if the Law had not been given, it might have appeared that man went astray only for want of some positive rule by which to guide him. He is left, it might have been said, to discover his own duties under many difficulties and disadvantages; would God but graciously condescend to inform him what services he expects, he doubtless would most zealously perform a will to which he owes so absolute obedience.

* Rom. vii. 13.

On trial it turns out otherwise:—with every possible conviction that God has spoken to him; with the traces of the divine handwriting visible before him; with miracles occasional and perpetual, evincing the actual superintendence of God in the polity of a whole nation, and the concerns of every individual; with prophets to instruct and warn; with blessings to encourage, and judgments to deter; Man, tried fully in the person of a stiff-necked Jew, continued obstinately to disobey; nor ceased till he had drawn upon himself the fullest measure of divine indignation.

From all this it appears that something more than mere instruction, something beyond the letter of a law, was necessary to man. Had the Gospel contained no more than an additional collection of precepts, it would have occasioned, probably, only an additional number of transgressions; for such is the corruption of man's nature, that a command, instead of preventing any offence, sometimes produces only a stronger inclination to offend.

Here then we arrive at the truest and sublimest distinction between the two covenants: the former is called *the Letter*, because it delivered

livered only the letter of precept, and left man by his natural strength to perform what was enjoined; the latter is fitly and pre-eminently called *Spirit*, because, besides the commandments it delivers, there is also communicated in it a divine co-operation and assistance, to enable us to obey them. The law of Christ is not only written spiritually in the hearts of true believers, but it is written there by the Spirit of God himself. On this ground St. Paul was able to appeal to the actual knowledge of the first converts, who had sensibly experienced the effects of that communication which pre-eminently distinguishes the Gospel from the Law: finding, for instance, the Galatians inclined to relapse into the Mosaic ordinance, he boldly asks, “ This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by the hearing of Faith?” and then, knowing what reply they must of necessity give, he urges them further, “ Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect in the flesh*?”—To this system, therefore, this Holy Gift is peculiarly granted, and inseparably attached, insomuch

* Gal. iii. 2, 3.

that

that they who diligently seek it may surely be directed by it in the path that leads to salvation. By this, and by this only, the inability to fulfil obedience, which was made manifest by the giving of the Law, is totally removed; and Man is enabled to perform that acceptable service, which by Nature he could not complete.—This is the Spirit which most truly *giveth life*, being the very Spirit of truth and immortality, which makes us “the children of God, and beareth witness to him that we are so *.”

This declaration of the difference between the first and second covenant, and this preference of the latter, were very necessary in the time of St. Paul; because there were at that period many converts who maintained that the observances of the Jewish Law were still indispensable, and that Christ could only be approached through the gate which Moses had opened. In combating these opinions, the apostle was obliged to deprecate the Law in comparison with the freer grace of the Gospel; and for that purpose employed many expressions, which, since the extinction of those errors, have been variously misappre-

* Rom. viii. 14, 16.

hended,

hended, and very falsely applied. He called the Law a carnal ordinance, in opposition to the spiritual grace then revealed; a law of works—instead of faith; and even the *flesh*, as opposed to the *spirit*: and at other times, as in the text I have been examining, *the Letter which killeth*, in contradistinction to *the Spirit, which giveth life*: its precepts he termed *beggarly elements*, and the obedience to them *servitude* and *bondage*. These, and many similar expressions, being no longer necessary to counteract any extravagant attachment to the Mosaic institutions, have received several other applications, in no small degree dangerous, and destructive of the purity of Religion: and there are not wanting teachers, who from such words of St. Paul will argue against the law of *works*, as if by that expression the apostle had meant the law of Christ himself, which commands us to perform good works. Others mysticize these passages, as was observed in the beginning of this discourse, and extract from them an authority not to understand any thing according to its proper meaning. But in all such passages it is necessary to consider the times and circumstances by which the admonitions were occasioned, which are in

the epistles themselves sufficiently explained, if we read them with tolerable attention. We should compare the writings of the apostle with themselves; consider the tendency of his argument; and stand especially upon our guard in these respects whenever any extravagant and enthusiastic doctrine is attempted to be supported by a passage of St. Paul's epistles, torn from its context. It is possible, as we see in this instance, for words to have a clear and undoubted meaning, very different from that which they appear to have upon a slight and partial consideration.

Nor are we to imagine, from any thing now stated, that St. Paul undervalued the first covenant. He considered it as an important gift of God; in its due time, as a necessary instruction to prepare the way for the Gospel; but removed, of course, as that which is imperfect must be, on the appearance of that more perfect plan to which it tended: and though there was under that Law no deliverance from condemnation, no remission of offences, yet, according to his doctrine, they who lived under it were not without a remedy; for when at length the Redeemer appeared, he died not only for the remission of present

present and future sins, but, as we are told in the epistle to the Hebrews, for “the Redemption also of the transgressions that were under the first covenant *;” and, in fact, for the salvation of all ages, Christ being virtually sacrificed from the foundation of the world.

The chief use that can now be made of these distinctions between the Law and the Gospel, is to warn us, that every form of Christianity must be corrupt and imperfect, which inculcates too strong a regard for ceremonies and external observances: for this, if it does not bring us back exactly to the Mosaic elements, and the bondage from which Christ delivered his people, has an effect so similar, as necessarily to be included under the same censure. Religion according to Gospel is purely spiritual; nor can any service be rendered acceptable under it, which is substituted in the place of purity of heart, or sincere repentance for transgression.

Nor must we forget, that, by the example of the Mosaic covenant, man was proved to be unable to secure himself from transgres-

* Heb. ix. 15.

sion ; and that there is therefore, under the more perfect covenant, an assisting grace to which we must look, for which we must pray, and of which we must endeavour to make ourselves deserving. The Holy Spirit will not dwell in temples of corruption ; but if we purify ourselves by repentance and subsequent obedience, he will not disdain that habitation, and then, as we are expressly assured, “ if the Spirit of him that raised up “ Jesus from the dead dwell in us, he that “ raised up Christ from the dead, will also “ quicken our mortal bodies by his Spirit “ that dwelleth in us *.”

Observing these things, we ought to feel a true and zealous gratitude to Almighty God, for having placed us under this covenant of inexhaustible mercy : had we been otherwise situated, we might, indeed, have enjoyed the benefits of our Saviour’s merits and intercession, which extend to all times and countries ; but we could not have known our happiness, nor have looked forward, as now we may, unless prevented by our sins, with strong confidence and lively expectation

* Rom. viii. 11.

towards those high and glorious blessings which the blood of Christ has purchased.

The renewal and confirmation of those hopes is now offered, in almost the only positive rite which Christ has ordained * : let us not neglect the opportunity, but unite with lively zeal in the sublime devotions of that holy institution.

Now to God, &c.

* The Holy Sacrament.

DISCOURSE XII.

ON HOLDING FAST THE FAITH.

HEB. x. 23.

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promised.

THE faith of Christians has been tried in various ways, and has itself borne different aspects, according to the circumstances of the times. That which was tried in the Apostles was, in the main, rather Constancy than Faith, according to the present acceptation of the word. That their faith, taken in the sense of belief, should have wavered, after having been once fixed, was almost impossible. They had seen and conversed with the Lord of Life; they had beheld his miracles, they had heard him speak, as never Man spake, they had received him restored to them alive again from the dead;

and finally, they had been present when he was taken from them into heaven ; had heard the voice of the Angel declaring that he should come again, in due time, from that place ; and had received the confirmation of all their hopes, and the renewal of all their recollections, in the promised Gift of the Holy Ghost.

In men so circumstanced, the chief trial was, not whether they believed, what they could not but believe *, but, whether they could have sufficient resolution to abide the shame and the sufferings of the present time, to give up the hopes and comforts of this life entirely, for the sake of the promises of God, on which they were instructed to rely. Not very different was the state of the first Converts, who, though they had not the actual testimony of their senses for the discourses, actions, and miracles of Jesus, could not easily feel doubtful concerning the testimony

* It is not meant that the Apostles had no merit in believing. To have given up those violent prejudices, which kept many of their countrymen in unbelief, and to have used a candid judgment on what they saw or heard, these were the merits of faith in the Apostles, which were not equal in them all, and of which Thomas appears to have possessed the smallest share.

of those holy men, who confirmed what they said of his miracles, by miracles of their own; whose acts were regulated in conformity to his holy life, and whose discourses were, like his, (though in an inferior degree) full of piety, of goodness, and of the Holy Ghost. To doubts, therefore, concerning the substance of their faith, these persons could be little more liable than even the Apostles themselves; they had, at least, a degree of evidence the next in strength to that, and sufficient very abundantly, to establish in their minds the indubitable certainty of that which they had heard. The faith of these men was also, in great measure, constancy; a mind above the fears and the temptations of the present life, and a full reliance on the performance of God's promises. To these, therefore, the apostolic writer in my text addresses this particular suggestion, that "he is faithful that promised;" uniting himself with them as resting on the same reliance. "Let us hold fast the profession of our Faith without wavering."

Thus far the Faith of men depended on an evidence which amounted almost to certainty; and their trials were such as nothing less

less than a most strong and lively persuasion could have enabled them to encounter.

Beyond that period the Faith of men became *historical*: that is, it ceased to rest upon actual knowledge, or the testimony of eye-witnesses, but was derived, of necessity, into remoter channels of tradition, or conveyed in written narratives: and from that time to the present, excluding the collateral evidence of prophecy, such has been the principal foundation of Christian Faith.

Now the nature of Historical Faith is this. In its beginnings, when it is only by a single step removed from the testimony of eye-witnesses, or the voice of immediate tradition, it is as firm as Knowledge itself. Facts of public notoriety, well authenticated by the first relators, or of a nature to be generally known at the time of their transaction, are no more the subject of doubt in the period immediately succeeding their occurrence, than at that moment itself. The remarkable events which took place in any country, one or two generations immediately preceding the actual period, are never called in question. It would be reckoned madness in any one to doubt who reigned in this island within the present century,

or who were the leading personages of the times, and what their acts and characters. It is true, that in matters of intricacy, where various arts are practised, and the passions of mankind are violently engaged, time is generally necessary to separate truth from false assertion, to detect concealed motives, and trace out the artifices by which men had either dissembled their own acts, or misrepresented those of others. But after such deductions and alterations, when they happen to be necessary, or in other cases, without them, the truth remains uncontroverted; and it must be some strong interest, or some strange perversion of mind, by which any one is induced to doubt that which, under all such circumstances, had passed without suspicion.—The facts of the Gospel History delivered originally by eye-witnesses, and authenticated by some modes of testimony which facts can very seldom have, were long received implicitly, by all who had the candour to listen to the narrative, and to weigh the testimonies. But there were also persons who, for various reasons, were set against the truth; by these, from the very beginning, every possible doubt was raised, every discussion provoked and entered

tered into ; and the result was, that, by the constant defeat of its antagonists, the truth remained established. In this state the Gospel has come down to us ; as a history testified, in a manner most unparalleled, by those who could not fail to know the truth ; received most perfectly by multitudes, upon the testimony of the first witnesses ; and canvassed to the utmost by adversaries, while all means of discovery must have been as yet accessible ; and so canvassed, that the deepest intrigues must have been detected, and the closest falsehoods developed, had there been at the first any art employed to embellish, or to disguise the truth. Such then is the nature of that history on which our faith is placed, that if there be a possibility for human testimony to establish any thing on a footing equal to demonstration, this is so established ; or whatever narrow line of separation be supposed to form the boundary between certainty and irresistible evidence, this at least is carried to a perfect contact with that line, and reaches to the very extent of moral certitude.

Under these circumstances, let us consider to what kind of danger our Faith is now exposed ; and by what means we can best fulfil
the

the precepts of the Apostle, and hold it fast without wavering.

The present is an awful period for the Christian world. Whether God, offended at the coldness of mens minds towards his religion, or at their warmth respecting the interests of this world, at their want of Christian Virtues, or their abundance of unchristian Vices, hath determined to sift the nations in his wrath, and to try to the very utmost every particle of faith remaining in them; or whether for any other wise but, as yet, inscrutable purpose, he sends forth his judgments into the earth; certain it is that he has sounded an alarm, as with the trumpet of his exterminating Angel, at the blast of which every Christian breast must thrill, and should begin to collect its forces for a contest severer, perhaps, than this theatre of human actions has produced for centuries. Infidelity, after long preluding with writings of all pernicious kinds, after labouring also to poison the sources of history, philosophy, and almost every human science, has been permitted to go forth in arms, and sovereign power, taking as her ally Persecution, whom while she feared she had the art to decry; and

and those yet more irresistible auxiliaries, insolence and contempt, to whose inflictions she devotes all those who dare abide by that which they have learned of divine knowledge, and that faith on which their best and noblest hopes are founded. The country is not far distant, in which, as you all know, every kind of insult and profanation has been offered to the very name of Religion; the places of worship shut, or opened only to receive the orgies of an heathenish fanaticism; where *human Reason*, or Licentiousness under the false name of Liberty, and personified by some being as base as the occasion, are the objects of an impious adoration: the very form and civil divisions of time changed, for the purpose of obliterating that which carries with it a memorial of Creation and Redemption; for the sake of leaving the Jews without a Sabbath, and the Christians without a Lord's-Day. That sevenfold division of time, which all ages have known, and which true Religion has always established, is therefore done away, to make room for a decimal computation, the periods of which are intended to commemorate crimes, and to be illustrated by blasphemies and idolatries.

Beholding

Beholding these strange scenes so near us, it is impossible not to ask ourselves, to what can all this tend? and among the various conjectures to which anxious enquiry, un-knowing where to rest, gives rise, this must infallibly be one, that it may be intended for the trial of the faithful.—How far the evil may be permitted to spread, or to what excesses it may proceed, it is beyond the power of sagacity to guess; but a prudent Christian will collect his strength before the hour of danger, and call to mind the grounds of his reliance, before he is compelled to act for the decision of his fate, in this world and the next.

From what we cannot fail to know of human nature, we may be very fully assured, that Infidelity, armed with authority, will soon gain many proselytes: and the contemptuous air of superior Wisdom she assumes will, in no small degree, facilitate the work. Men who could have borne persecution, cannot always bear to be despised; and though it be the grossest mark of ignorance to deny at large that which in detail is capable of the soundest proofs, yet he who insolently says that it is foolish to believe, will find too many

so

so unwise as to suppose that he is more enlightened than themselves. Nor is it by any means a trifling evil that the assertion by which Religion is denied is brief, and easily pronounced; while the proofs by which it is established are various, intricate, and only to be fully known by long investigation.

With respect to the proofs of Religion mankind are variously situated. Some have leisure, knowledge, and abilities to pursue them to the utmost. Others again, without being equal to so much, are capable at least of knowing what others have performed, and of understanding what they are told as the result of such enquiries. While a third class have little more on which they can depend than the evidence of prevalent opinion, and the authority of their appointed teachers.

To the believers in each of these classes what can we say? but, *whether infidelity prevail not, or whether it prevail;* whether it proceed by secret machinations or by open and authoritative attack, “ Hold fast the profession of your faith, without wavering.”

The first of these classes, they who have leisure and abilities to examine the evidences of faith, have either made this examination already,

already, or they have not. In the former case, if they be found to waver, they are without excuse. In giving up their own sure knowledge to the ignorance and insolence of others, they could be actuated only by fear or interest, or the basest worldly passions, and would resemble those who, in the early periods of Christianity, apostatized against their own conviction, or the testimony of their senses.—If they have not yet examined, now is the time for the adviser to say to them, make your examination; prepare yourselves before the day of trial; for if it should come on, and at that period you should fail, from the want of such knowledge as your own neglect alone occasioned you to want, you will have betrayed yourselves, you will have gone into the battle without an armour, which yet lay ready for your use, and, if you perish, may be numbered with the self-destroyers.—At this period, indeed, when besides the peril which seems to threaten from without, every species of attack is carried on by every artifice of wit, it seems little pardonable in those who can examine and investigate, to leave so great a matter as the truth of Revelation undecided in their minds: a point on which depends what-

ever they can hope beyond this life, and indeed the whole form and tendency even of their moral conduct in it. For that which it is base for him to do, who has another life before him, may be very pardonable in a man who thinks that in this world alone he has a hope of being happy.

To the second class, whom we supposed qualified only to appreciate the talents of others, and take advantage of their researches and discoveries, we may now say, that they should be more than ever careful to what instructors they attend. Let them judge, too, since they must be allowed to judge of persons and probabilities, how far it is likely that what the wisest and most enquiring men of former ages could not discover, should now be plain to the most superficial pretenders. Of the wise men who were the ornaments of ages past, they may, at least, judge impartially; while the heroes of the present hour are set off by a false glare of recent reputation, which makes them more regarded than their worth can warrant.—Whence can proceed this blaze of illumination which the pretended Philosophers of the present day enjoy, according to their own account, and lavishly dispense?

dispense? Not, undoubtedly, from more profound or more laborious researches, than were made by learned men of former times; not from any advantage of situation either in time or place; for those who were nearer both to the place and period of the publication of the Gospel, were surely better qualified to succeed in such enquiries. Whence then does it proceed?—If we may decide upon it by its fruits, from no good source; for it produces, as we see, the contempt of all morality, the destruction of all relative feelings, not only social, but human; injustice and cruelty towards men; insolence and impiety towards God. It is much more reasonable to rely on those, who to their wisdom added the practice of the brightest virtues, than on those, the wretchedness of whose principles is exceeded only by the depravity of their conduct. “By their ‘‘ fruits ye shall know them.”

The third class of those, who can neither make researches for themselves, nor rightly venture to appreciate the characters and discoveries of others, may be warned how they presume to make a desperate decision in such a point as that of faith: humble and religious within their present sphere of knowledge,

they have little to apprehend even in case of error. Whatever be the truth, humility and piety can never be, in any system, liable to punishment: whereas to relinquish this wise plan, and adopt an infidelity, of which they neither comprehend the reasons, nor discern the end; and to become all that they now abhor; is to gain at best but little ease of conscience whenever the traces of their first persuasion shall return; and the certainty of punishment, too well deserved, from that God, if indeed he be the Lord, whom they, without a reasonable cause, shall have thus forsaken.—To have walked in the path in which they were instructed, and to have walked in it conscientiously, must be to have led a meritorious life; but to follow the fashion of impiety, and obey those who exhort them to forsake Religion, can only be secure upon such suppositions as a Christian hears with horror, and they who daringly assert, can never prove.

In this country we hope (and God grant it may be with reason!) that there exists a very prevalent spirit of attachment to Religion, which will be able strongly to oppose the innovations of impiety. Here, if anywhere,

where, will be made, should the occasion require it, a glorious stand in defence of virtue, principle, and true Religion. Attached to such a Faith as has been examined to the utmost, proved by every possible care, and purified from all corrupt additions, the Believers of this Nation, it is strongly to be confided, will perish man by man in defence of sacred Truth, rather than give way to the incursions of impiety, and renounce what they have learned of the Word of Life, and what they have expected of mercy from the Almighty. To encourage them to this, let them bear in mind, that no recent discoveries have been made in favour of infidelity, and that the cry, however loud, which ascends from a neighbouring state against Religion, has no more reason in it than the voice of any single individual, who, at the suggestion of his worst passions, has had the audacity to cast off his Faith. Bold assertions and the voice of multitudes with some men supply the place of reason; but the declaration even of infinite numbers against that which is capable of proof, is devoid of all validity: and though in the hour of tumult and of strife the evidences of Religion, cannot, perhaps, be distinctly called to mind; yet it may be

remembered at all periods, and in all situations; that such evidences do exist, as cannot be invalidated by any audacity of denial, but on the surest grounds of reason demand our perfect and unalterable Faith. If we think any thing of multitudes, let it be of those who, in early times, when all the proofs of Faith were recent, sealed their constancy with their blood, and perished rather than renounce the name of Christ.—These also were multitudes, and far more worthy of attention than any who, at this late day, may ignorantly clamour against Truth.

At this period the prayer of every individual for himself should be, that he may be enabled to withstand all varieties of temptation, and, in every moment and every situation, have constancy and courage to hold fast the Faith he has received without wavering:—for his country he should pray, that after many glorious acts by which she has distinguished herself among the nations, she may still add this praise, superior to whatever she has yet atchieved, that in an age of much impiety she was found to be the parent of “a faithful people, zealous of good works.”

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE XIII.

THAT WE CANNOT TRULY LOVE GOD, UN-
LESS WE FIRST LOVE OUR BRETHREN.

I JOHN iv. 20.

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?

IT is observable, that this great question is put by the Apostle with as much simplicity as if the answer to it depended upon the belief of an axiom, or self-evident proposition; as if, in short, it were directly contrary to reason to assert, that a man could love a being of whom he had no direct knowledge, and yet be deficient in affection towards one of whom his knowledge was intimate.

The connection and force of this argument are certainly not so clearly perceived by the

mind of every reader as they must have been by that of the writer, otherwise the passage would never have been clouded by misinterpretation. Of this, however, we may rest assured, that, whether we can trace it or not, the proposition on which the whole depends is something very simple and self-evident; for that alone can justify the question of the Apostle, “ he that loveth not his brother, “ whom he hath seen, how can he love God, “ whom he hath not seen?”—No man of common sense, much less of sound and accurate reasoning powers, would put a question in this form, unless it seemed to him, that it, in a manner, answered itself; that is, that the answer would be readily conceived by every just and rightly tutored understanding, and that it would be favourable to the tenor of the preceding assertion. If therefore we find any difficulty in tracing this connection, it will not be because the subject has any inherent obscurity, but because we have not perfectly acquired or adopted the principles by which the Apostle’s mind was then conducted.

For this reason it seems impossible to receive, as entirely satisfactory, the illustration of this text formerly offered (in this place) by one whose

whose active mind as often went beyond the truth, by diving too profoundly for it, as those of inferior energy stop short of it, by enquiring too superficially*. This celebrated writer imagined he saw in this short sentence of the Apostle the seeds of all that system of morality which had been delivered by a contemporary poet, and was illustrated by his own commentaries; namely, the progress of the human mind from self-love, gradually refined into private and social affection, extended to general benevolence, and terminating in the contemplation and love of the *Supreme Good*. Without controverting the soundness of these principles, in point of abstract consideration, this may undoubtedly be asserted, that if St. John had written what could not be comprehended till these refinements were discovered, nor in any place where they were not introduced and received, he wrote to very little purpose. His reasoning, to be worthy of himself and his ministry, must be such as might have been understood at that very time; and such as was, in fact, deducible, by some very easy process, from his own words. His

* Warburton, Serm. iii. Vol. I. p. 77—83.

intention evidently was to inculcate universal charity and good will, in which if he could not succeed till he had persuaded his disciples that their affections proceeded by that metaphysical gradation, and that they must love in every degree between self and the universe before they could love God, his task would not only have been difficult, but desperate. We might, at least, have expected to find some of those principles laid down as a groundwork; for which, however, we shall look in vain in his epistle.

If, instead of consulting our own imaginations, we turn to that part of scripture, we shall find, much more to our satisfaction, and in conformity to our rational expectations, the key to the whole difficulty in the very verse immediately preceding that of my text.

“We love God,” it is there said, “because he first loved us:” that is to say, it is the love of God towards mankind, on which alone our proper love for him is founded.—The only obscurity is, that *us* is there put for men in general, and not referred to each individual: that being once understood, the argument follows most closely thus: consequently, if we have no general benevolence towards men,

men, whom we know, and among whom we are placed, we can have no real love for Him, of whom we know nothing that can excite such affection, except his general goodness towards his creatures; or, in the words of the Apostle, “He that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?”—The same reasoning is tacitly implied in a former passage of the same chapter: “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. *No man hath seen God at any time.* If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us*.”—That is, no man is sufficiently acquainted with God to feel the affection for him that he deserves; but if we have a true benevolence towards one another, we cannot fail sincerely to love God for the infinite love he has exerted towards us all.

I believe this explanation is correct; at least it seems to me to accord exactly with the nature of the Apostle’s argument; and to form that connection between the subdivisions of these passages which we always expect to find in the compositions of a reason-

* Ver. 11, 12.

able writer. The proposition itself appears to be strictly true, and of very great importance; and consequently such as well deserved to be inculcated by a writer divinely inspired. In these two points of view I will now proceed to give it a further examination.

It must not, in the first place, be imagined that the Apostle is here treating of any thing but general benevolence, or, more properly, Christian love and charity: for, though the expression is singular, “loveth not *his brother*,” it is evident from the whole context, that there is no allusion made to an accidental failure of affection towards one individual: the whole instruction is generally directed; all men are exhorted to love all men, and to this every part of the reasoning tends: “Beloved,” it is said, “let us love one another: for love is of God *.” In some passages the two modes of expression are so united as to exclude all pretence of ambiguity: “Whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God, *neither he that loveth not his brother*: for this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another †.” The intention

* Ver. 7.

† Chap. iii. 11.

of the writer is therefore, throughout, to enforce this Christian principle, for which purpose he could not take a method more direct than that of showing, that it is vain to make pretences to piety, vain and false to talk of loving God, if we have not good will towards men, which is so truly the root of all real affection to God, that without the one the other cannot be produced.

And here we may be allowed cursorily to observe, how much internal evidence of authenticity these precepts carry with them. St. John was the evangelist who most distinctly recorded the declarations of our Saviour on this subject; and he it is who, in these epistles, refers more than once to those words, as to the commandment which *they had heard from the beginning*; that is, which he had taught his church, as we must suppose he would, when he first began to instruct it. In the 13th chapter of his Gospel he relates that Jesus said, “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye

" have love one to another *." Well might that disciple deserve a peculiar share of the attachment of his blessed Master, whose candid and affectionate mind so readily received, and so perfectly retained, the most benevolent of all his benevolent precepts.

With respect to the connection of the Apostle's assertions in this place, perhaps it may be more perfectly displayed by the following mode of consideration. His words are these: " We love him (that is, God), " because he first loved us : If a man faith, " I love God, and hateth his brother, he is " a liar," and so forth ; which, according to the doctrine here laid down, may thus be paraphrased: " We love God, because he first loved us : if a man pretend to love God, who is not influenced by that prior consideration, he speaks falsely ; for man, whom he hath seen, he hath many reasons to love ; but God, whom he hath not seen, he can only love through the medium of that feeling." If any man can suggest a mode of connection by which the two assertions of the writer can be more closely united

* Ver. 34, 35.

than

than they appear in this relation, I give up my interpretation; till then, reason, and a respect for the reasoning faculties of the Apostle, will compel me to maintain it; unless, indeed, it can be proved that the assertion is not true, in which case there could be no pretence for attributing it to such an author.

That it is conformable to truth, may, I conceive, be proved in the following manner. When we contemplate the idea we are able to form of God, whether it be collected from the speculations of our own reason, or drawn from the more perfect sources of his revealed word, our notions of his nature and attributes, sublime as we may feel them on many accounts, are such as, in general, must excite astonishment and admiration, rather than affection. Eternity and immensity are wonderful things, and our minds appear to labour in endeavouring to conceive them; but there is no kind of love attached to these high properties. Matter and space have been by some imagined to be eternal and immense; yet no one ever yet pretended an affection for matter and space. It would indeed be absurd to affect such feelings, which nature does not authorize.

authorize. Wisdom and Knowledge, possessed in infinite perfection, will naturally command our admiration; but our affection tends not of itself towards any being, merely because he so greatly excels us in those qualities: and Power unlimited is rather an object of terror than of love, till we are assured of the benevolent disposition of him in whom it resides.—The same, or much the same, may be said of Justice, Truth, Purity, Holiness, and whatever else we can conceive or know of God, so long as we do not know that it is kindly exerted towards us and our fellow-creatures.—Infinite Benevolence alone is the attribute that endears to us the idea of a God; and even this we cannot feel with proper energy, unless we see it exercised among ourselves. Benevolence in the abstract will be very coldly approved, and very languidly admired. But when it is exerted towards those we love, then a real interest is excited, which itself deserves the title of affection. Love rests not upon barren speculations, but tends towards real objects.

Our brother we have seen, and Nature prompts us to love him. Our common qualities, our common feelings, our common lot, and

and even our common wants, infirmities, and sufferings, are all so many ties by which we are, or ought to be, most tenderly united. Our mutual intercourse, and habits of association, further endear us, and the services which are necessarily interchanged among us complete the attachment. All this is nature, and so truly human nature, that the mutual hatred which jarring passions sometimes occasion, is commonly and rightly denominated unnatural. But to God we are not thus naturally attracted. He is unlike us; he is in all things infinitely above us; he is so far removed from our perceptions, that in this world we cannot see, or have any intercourse with him. How then should we love him? It is altogether a vain pretence, unless we acquire our affection for him in the way that the Apostle prescribes.

His benevolence towards each individual might, indeed, afford sufficient cause for strong attachment to God, were it in every instance distinguished and particular: but the blessings we receive from this great Benefactor are, in general, common to all, or to a very considerable part of mankind; and it is not by any means natural to us to feel strong gra-

titude for favours that we receive, only in common with those, whom we regard within difference, or perhaps with dislike.—The light of the sun, and the freshness of the air, are blessings of infinite importance to us; but we feel them not as favours, when we perceive how universally they are dispensed, until we learn to take an interest in the welfare of all those by whom they are enjoyed. Besides this, a love of God founded on the mere consideration of self, if it could exist, would be a narrow and unworthy passion, incapable of subsisting under sufferings and chastisements: and were it possible to suppose that God was good to one, and not to any other of mankind, it would be little less than criminal in that one, to love him for the sake of himself, to the neglect and contempt of all others.

But when, by cultivating the good propensities of our nature, and correcting such as are evil, we have learned to regard our brethren in this world with strong and brotherly affection; when we have made it a ruling object in our minds to do them good and to promote their happiness; then do we begin to feel a real interest in the general dispensations
of

of Providence, and to know that we love God because he first loved us: and if we are touched with the inferior instances of divine benevolence, the creation and preservation of mankind, and the ordinary satisfactions and blessings provided for them by our heavenly Father in this world, how must we be moved by that stupendous instance of affection which the Apostle had chiefly in his contemplation, the Redemption of man, and the wonderful efforts made to secure to him the hopes of everlasting happiness! “ In this, says St. John, 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. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another *.”

Here the principle, in a manner, reacts upon us, and, having gained a firm foundation for a real love of God, in the consideration of his goodness towards thole whom we are naturally capable of loving, with a strong and lively affection, we find an additional cause of love

* Ch. iv. 9, 10, 11.

towards them, in reflecting that they have been thought worthy of such regard by the most pure and perfect of Beings.

Another advantage gained by founding our love of God on the love of our fellow-creatures is this, implied also in the words of my text, and in the corresponding passage, “ No man hath seen God at any time;”—the one is a speculative, the other a practical affection. If we could love God in the first instance, it would be by abstraction of mind; by considering his perfections, and dwelling upon them in contemplation; and, consequently, our affection could never rise beyond the measure of the imperfect conceptions we are able to form within ourselves, on this stupendous subject. But benevolence towards our fellow-creatures is perpetually increased by the very exercise of it: we love those to whom we do good, even more, in many instances, than those from whom we receive it: and, consequently, if the Apostle’s reasoning be just, as our benevolence towards man becomes more perfect and more exalted by the habit of exerting it, our love to God will at the same time, and by the same means, be growing more real and more intense.

The whole chain of our duties is connected by these principal ties. If we truly love God, we shall readily obey him: this is in nature also, and on this principle, taken from the mere knowledge of ourselves, the Apostle John pursues his argument: “this is the “love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments (he adds) “are not grievous.” v. 3. Certainly not, if love to our fellow-creatures have been previously established within us: for to these points they principally tend; to abstain from injuring one another, and to do whatever good our faculties and circumstances shall place within our power.—The only obstacle is *the world*; that is, those worldly passions, and desires of present gratification, which violently call us back from the consideration of others, to ourselves. But, says the Apostle, “Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”—Thus faith enables us to command ourselves, and benevolence enables us to love and to obey our heavenly Father. The connection of the whole is intimate.

I have endeavoured in this discourse, to give a plain and simple account of the reasoning of the Apostle in my text; such as might at any time have been drawn from the examination of the context: and to state some of the most obvious points in the knowledge of human nature, which he appears, when he wrote, to have had in contemplation: convinced that it was in this way, and not by subtlety and refinement, that the Apostle endeavoured to instruct mankind. The conclusion established by these arguments is clear, and, as it seems, undeniably; namely, that when we think of God, we think of a Being of whom our conceptions are so very imperfect, that if we pretend to love him with such ardour as we ought, abstractedly, we deceive ourselves or others. But that if we exercise the benevolent affections which he has implanted in us, towards those objects to which they are naturally directed, we shall find a lively and an active love of God springing up spontaneously, from the source of those good feelings.—The experiment is a safe, an easy one. Let us give it a fair trial, and labour daily to increase our love towards our brethren, that we may rise in time to a strong
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and real love of God, productive of all obedience towards him, and to ourselves, of everlasting blessedness.

Now to God, who has given these hopes to us and all mankind, to God the Father,
&c.

DISCOURSE XIV.

ON THE LOVE OF GOD; HOW IT ARISES.—
A Sequel to that on 1 John iv. 20.

MATTH. xxii. 37, 38.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

THIS commandment, most emphatically delivered to Israel by Moses, in his solemn recapitulation of the divine law, is here completely adopted and renewed, by the second, and greater Lawgiver.

These words, as addressed to the Israelites, undoubtedly were pointed in part against idolatry, the prevailing evil of that time, and implied that their religious attachment was not to be divided among various objects of worship, but concentrated in the Lord alone. As addressed

addressed to Christians, whose danger of apostacy was to arise not from material but spiritual idols, the corrupt affections and passions of humanity, they certainly imply that the love of God is to be cherished within us to a degree of fervour and strength, which may render it at all times the governing principle of our minds.

St. Matthew has contented himself with giving the substance and meaning of the precept in Deuteronomy *; expressing the strong possession which this affection ought to have of our spiritual powers. St. Mark, in the parallel passage, has cited the exact words of Moses, and more at length, retaining the solemn address to Israel which makes the passage so striking, and that assertion of the divine unity, which referred particularly to the circumstances of that people. The words are these: “Hear, O Israel—The Lord our “God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the “Lord thy God with all thy heart and with “all thy soul, (and with all thy mind, *not* “*in Deut.*) and with all thy strength †.”— Such was the great commandment to Israel, and such is the great commandment still.

* Chap vi. 5.

† Mark xii. 29, 30.

The fundamentals of the Law are not changed, though the particulars have been graciously modified, according to the change of circumstances.

But though this be in truth the first commandment, in point of dignity and excellence, we are not to suppose that it is, or can be, the first in the order of our acquirement. We are formed to rise progressively from low to higher things; and as our ideas are all originally derived from our corporeal senses, and the reflex operations of our minds upon the notices thus collected, so also are our virtues first acquired by the exercise of their principles upon worldly objects, and afterwards refined by reason, to the higher degrees of excellence which they are capable of attaining. We cannot, in any of our energies or habits, begin with that which is best; but towards that point must make our progress by frequent exertion, and gradual improvement.

In my last discourse I took occasion to state this principle, in illustration of the important question of the Apostle John, “ He that loveth not his Brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”—In pursuing which enquiry within

within myself, I have found remarkably exemplified a circumstance peculiar to the sacred writings, and highly illustrative of that pure and simple truth by which it is occasioned. It is this: that, though the precepts of Revelation are not systematically arranged, but either arise out of the facts related, or are adapted to the particular wants of the persons originally addressed; and though, from this detached mode of delivery, they appear, sometimes, on a very superficial view, to be in some degree repugnant to each other; yet any one of them, fairly traced to its fundamental principle, will be found not only altogether consistent with the rest, but explanatory even of those to which it seemed at first to stand in opposition; and further, fruitful in explanations of several passages not apparently connected with it. Such is the intimate connection of truth with itself, and so thoroughly calculated are the precepts of divine wisdom to coalesce into a consistent system, though the task of reducing them to that form has not been performed for us; being wisely left as a most useful exercise for the diligence and piety of men. In the present instance, the object was to understand the

the question of the Apostle, and to discern its connection with the context of his Epistle. To this end it appeared indispensably necessary to allow, that the *love of God* within our minds is so far derived from the love of man, and founded on it, that where the one feeling is wanting the other cannot possibly exist. On examining this subject, arguments of some weight spontaneously offered themselves in confirmation of the above assertion ; but how was it to be reconciled to the well known declaration of our Saviour, repeated in my present text, that the love of God is our *first Duty*? This we are apt too hastily to understand, as if it were not only the most excellent, but also the *first* in order of time, and the foundation on which the other should be raised.—You have perceived already, how easily this difficulty is removed, and how consonant it is to our most correct ideas of our own state, that we should in all things proceed from imperfect to more excellent. The commandment, therefore, which is in excellence the first, must be, of natural necessity, in the course of our acquirement, last ; and consequently, if we so understand our Saviour's words as reason and sound criticism require, instead

of disagreement and opposition, there will appear a perfect coincidence and mutual accord between the two assertions, of the all-wise Teacher, and his inspired Apostle.

At the same time, by means of the fecundity of Truth before remarked, we obtain an illustration of certain subsequent expressions of our blessed Saviour, which, except in this mode of consideration, it is not so easy to understand. Proceeding to deliver the second great and fundamental commandment, Christ says, “ And the second *is like unto it*, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”—It does not, I believe, suggest itself to any reader, on the first view of that passage, wherein consists the similarity alledged.—In the dignity and importance of the precept, say the interpreters: a solution which undoubtedly is right in part, but leaves untouched the most material circumstance of their resemblance. That they were in those qualities nearly alike, might have been gathered sufficiently from the manner in which they were there united, and from the subsequent declaration that “on these two (jointly) hang all the Law and the Prophets.” But if, as we perceive by the light received from St. John, the love of our neighbour

neighbour and of God are so exactly the same in principle, that the one is only an improvement and refinement of the other, it may well be said that the commandments which enjoin the two are very strongly similar: and it is further obvious, that this coincidence cannot fully be understood by any who have not duly weighed and comprehended the doctrine of the Apostle. Thus is wisdom justified by her children.

Having thus far pursued the truth, it cannot fail to be of great importance more fully to develope the nature of that love of God which it is our highest duty to cultivate within us: that we may know in what manner we may best acquire it ourselves, and assist, when opportunities arise, the growth of it in others.

The first affection that discovers itself within us, after our birth, is an attachment purely animal, and instinctive, to those with whom we have an immediate intercourse. I call it purely animal, because it does not appear to proceed from reflection, or any combination of distinct ideas, nor to be in any way distinguishable from that which brutes also very strongly display, towards those to whose appearance,

pearance, voice, and manner they are most accustomed. It seems that in every animal the first sensation is fear, which, being gradually removed by habitude, is succeeded as naturally by love. Children, under the influence of this feeling, acquire a natural and strong attachment to their nurses, attendants, and nearest relatives, in whose society they live, giving invariably the preference to those with whom they pass the largest proportion of their time.

As soon as Reason dawns at all, this first indiscriminate affection, derived from habitude alone, is corrected by information: their parents are pointed out as the proper objects of their primary regard, and, by wishing to give them the preference, they very quickly learn to love them best. This is what we call natural affection, and natural it certainly is, since it will arise in this manner invariably, unless prevented by improper conduct; and will continue to maintain its vigour, and to augment it, unless bad passions be suffered to gain sufficient strength to produce a contrary effect. At this early period it is evident there can be no love of God, since there is no discernment of him; nor is it

it possible that a creature which has hardly learned to distinguish the parents that it sees, should have elevated its thoughts to him that is invisible in heaven. Yet even now may the seeds be sown, which subsequent attention must make fruitful. The knowledge of God may be instilled. It ought to be imparted, and it will, by all who are not weak enough to leave the most important of all ideas to casual instruction ; or to the exertions of a reason which, perhaps, may never be strong, and must for a very long time continue inexperienced. It is not pretended that children can be taught to have correct or refined notions on this exalted subject; but thus much they may learn, that there is a Being, whom we worship by the name of God, beyond all comparison wiser and better than their parents ; to whom their parents and themselves are indebted even for their lives, and for every blessing they enjoy; whom, therefore, it is their duty to love, for every reason which makes them love their relations, and for the sake of those relations themselves, to whom he is so good.

Even in this first step towards pious affection, appears the truth of the Apostle's im-

plied assertion, that we cannot love God whom we have not seen, if we love not those whom we have seen; since it would be impossible to teach children the very rudiments of the love of God, if they had not natural affection for their inmates here.

As life proceeds, two other principles disclose themselves, the origin of which it is unnecessary to enquire. Their existence is undeniable. These are the love of present, personal gratification, and the love of rectitude: the sources of evil and of good within us. Both these principles are strong, but particularly that which leads to evil; a circumstance which strongly marks and ascertains the depraved condition of our nature. Nevertheless, the love of rectitude is also strong, as is proved by the earnest zeal for justice, displayed always among the earliest efforts of reason; and by the natural desire of commendation. If the love of personal gratification be suffered to increase, as luxuriantly as naturally it will, without strong opposition, there cannot be a hope that the love, either of mankind or of God, will ever grow up in such a mind: a mean unsocial selfishness will soon be found to predominate, excluding every kind

kind of benevolent affection, and eradicating very speedily even those shoots of natural attachment, which the first propensities of nature had occasioned.

To produce the contrary effect, the good principle must be cultivated with care, and strengthened by constant exercise.—With respect to the knowledge of God, it will be long before a young person can be taught it much more perfectly than in the manner already suggested; but the love of him having been at first excited, by means of the natural love of friends, will increase of course as that increases: the original connection of ideas will be preserved, and God will always be seen as the unknown, but excellent, benefactor of those who are well known and well beloved. The practice of the social virtues will lead insensibly to the practice of piety, and the habits formed for the one purpose, will be alike favourable to the other. In learning cheerfully and willingly, for affection's sake, to obey those whose right to govern us here is undoubted, we learn to yield the same obedience to him, whose right is similar in kind, though infinitely stronger. In learning to conquer our desires, for the sake of pleasing them,

them, we obtain the power of making the like efforts in serving him. As social affection expands, and is extended to a greater number of objects, the heart is constantly meliorated, and the love of goodness rendered more intense and active. Ere long it will become capable of that best exertion of benevolence, the voluntary sacrifice of self-gratification, for the advantage of others, to whom we are held by no tie but that of good will, or tender regard.

On the whole, the mind first exercised in goodness within its natural sphere of action, will be fully prepared to elevate itself, in due time, to the contemplation and to the love of him, in whom all-perfect goodness resides ; but he who has not goodness in himself, never can be taught to esteem it rightly in another. How can he love God for his benevolence, who neither feels nor knows benevolence ? How can he appreciate, or even believe, the sacrifice of Christ, who thinks it folly to give up his own most trifling gratification, for the sake of serving others ?

But, through the regular and natural gradations of human improvement, the point to which we tend, as the utmost desirable perfection,

perfection, is that of loving God “ with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength.” This we then only can be said to have attained, when having, by the practice of all goodness in our power, acquired a just estimation and ardent affection for it, we are able to contemplate God as the perfect source and treasure of all that we consider as most truly amiable. A few propositions may be thus connected, so as to convey at once a distinct view of the whole subject. He who loves not goodness cannot love God: but it is impossible to love goodness without having practised it; nor can it, in most cases, be practised by man, except within the natural sphere of human action, that is towards man.

Here then is a new test, but one most truly Christian, of our love towards God; to examine whether we are ready, on all occasions, to do good to our brethren. We have fully seen, in the course of our present reasonings, that the one feeling can only be acquired by means of the other; and therefore cannot doubt that where the primary habit is defective, the ultimate accomplishment must be still more imperfect. Hence also we are enabled to account for that gracious substi-

tution which our Saviour announced in one of his parables; wherein he represents the good at the last day, as astonished to find themselves commended for acts of mercy and kindness towards their Lord, which they were wholly unconscious of having performed. “Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?”—To which our Lord replies, by showing the utmost intimacy of connection between their love of their brethren, and their love of him.—“Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” To the wicked the contrary declaration is made, on the very same principles: a lesson most closely connected with the speculations we have been now pursuing, and by them strongly illustrated.

It is, by every possible evidence, most manifestly the intention of God, that men should be the ministers of good to one another.

* Matt. xxv. 37, &c.

What then can we think of that depravity, which makes them mutually the ministers of so abundant evil?—and what particularly of that false zeal for God, which has so often been destructive of benevolence, charity, and peace? By what we have now argued, we may be fully assured that these effects are perfectly contradictory to the genuine love of God. Nor shall we in future expect that any man can love the Lord with all his heart, and all his soul, and all his mind, and all his strength, till he shall have first learned to love his neighbour as himself.

Now to God, &c,

DISCOURSE XV.

ON THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.

MATT. xxii. part of ver. 39.

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

THIS being the foundation of the whole moral law, according to the doctrine of him to whom all hearts are open, may be expected to afford abundant matter of instruction to those who will reflect upon it carefully. Of its obligation upon us as a precept so delivered, and enforced by similar injunctions, from every evangelical authority, it is not my present purpose to discourse: I shall consider this, so often explained by Christian teachers, so obvious in itself to all who look into the Word of Life, as known sufficiently to all. Nor shall I make it my object to display its practical utility; nor to show, what often has been shown, how all the duties and forbearances of social life spring naturally from this root,

root, since he who truly loves his neighbour as himself, will, of course, forbear to do him injury, and joyfully embrace all opportunities of doing him good. These parts of the subject, not as unimportant, but as in this place perhaps unnecessary, I may be allowed to wave, and confine myself to the less obvious, but, to some minds, not less useful consideration, how deep an insight into the whole nature of man is discoverable in this injunction !

That such a knowledge of human nature is here implied, will be most fully illustrated, if it can be shown, that the precept, which is thus delivered as the whole foundation of the moral law, conducts us directly to discover the grand source of moral feeling in our hearts.

The most enlightened of the ancient philosophers talked much of living according to nature, as a general rule of moral virtue. Modern enquirers have supposed a moral sense, by which we are enabled instinctively to distinguish between right and wrong ; and at the same time are inclined to approve the one, and to abhor the other. The truth is, I believe, that both these systems are contained within

within the more comprehensive view of our divine Instructor. I am persuaded that to live according to nature, is to be guided by that natural affection for our species, which is undoubtedly instinctive in us; and that the moral sense itself is derived from, and totally dependent on, these natural feelings.

Man is a social animal, not by his own choice, nor by accident, but by the necessity of his nature. Solitude is in itself painful to him; he cannot live in total separation from his fellow-creatures, or at least he cannot live happily; not only because he is in want of their assistance, but also because he has a natural want of their affection, and feels an urgent necessity to interchange his own with them. Paradise itself could not be a place of bliss for him, without a partner in it; and had he continued in it, the further increase of numbers, in a state of innocence, would constantly have augmented his felicity.

We may divide our natural affections into two great branches; love for ourselves, and love for our species. The former, natural, as we cannot but suppose, to all living creatures; the latter, certainly natural to us as human creatures: both, in us, equally original, equally

equally implanted by the hand of the Creator. They ought also, as my text declares, to be maintained equal in degree; “Thou shalt ‘love thy neighbour *as thyself*.”—Nor is it, undoubtedly, contrary to nature that these affections should be thus equally divided. A powerful instinct leads us to associate with our fellow-creatures; the habit of living in strict union constantly increases the instinctive affection, till we become necessary to each other. By such progression we not only arrive at the point of loving others as ourselves, but we even go beyond it; and the enthusiasm of regard which makes us more anxious for those others than even for ourselves, more provident of their good and more apprehensive of their suffering than of our own, is among the most natural movements of the uncorrupted heart. It is by depravity of heart only that we learn to love ourselves too much, and others too little; and hence arises the necessity of the precept.

The great increase of attachment above stated, though not to be expected in every case, is at least a proof what nature will admit. In a more general way, a certain interchange of feelings, called Sympathy, is natural

natural to us. We participate in the joys and sufferings of others, even involuntarily, and we expect the same return of sympathy from them. Our joy is not perfect joy, unless there be some one to partake it, and our sorrow almost ceases to be sorrow when others manifest a lively interest in it. These natural sympathies are the general bond of affection among human creatures; we love those who feel them strongly, we disapprove and dislike those in whom we find them less or more deficient. But they are found almost in all, because they are an original part of our nature, and consequently our affection is naturally united to all, by this common bond of interest.

Here then, methinks, we find our *moral sense*, or natural love of virtue and abhorrence of vice. Our feelings concerning them are not general at first; we learn to love and hate them from specific instances: we see or feel them in their consequences upon ourselves and others; and they raise in us affection or abhorrence, as proofs of the perfection or the deficiency of the social sympathy. If another do evil to us, we consider it as a demonstration that he wants that kind feeling towards

us, which nature teaches us to expect from all. The general bond of sympathy appears to be broken between us ; we are disunited ; but the separation is unnatural, and it is painful. Dwelling with abhorrence upon what we feel to be an offence against nature, we applaud our own hearts for having expected different treatment, and exclaim, though with bitterness, yet with internal exultation, “ I could not have dealt so by him ! ” Thus it is true that we abhor the evil, but the reason is also evident. We abhor it as a proof that Social Sympathy and the natural affections of humanity have been contemned and violated. Thus also if we hear of evil done to another, our feelings are of the same kind. It is Sympathy that speaks. We put ourselves in the place of the injured person, we feel for him, we represent to our imaginations his distress and sufferings, and exclaim, “ How cruel ! how unnatural ! ” and we consider both the fact and the perpetrator of it as odious, on account of this notorious disregard of natural feelings. In the same manner are we affected concerning good. Instances of it exhibited towards ourselves produce regard directly : they act in the same tendency with nature,

nature, and rapidly assist the original disposition towards affection. Instances of good conferred on others interest us by Sympathy. In good done to others we rejoice as naturally, as in good done to ourselves ; and our approbation of it originates in the instinctive benevolence of our nature. When we have ourselves done good or evil to others, and reflect upon it, conscience informs us, that, by those actions, we have deserved the love or hatred of those persons, and we feel satisfaction or uneasiness accordingly. All moral considerations recal us to our natural union with our fellow-creatures ; nor could we, as it seems, be otherwise than indifferent to whatever by any means promoted their happiness, or occasioned their misery, were it possible that we should totally divest ourselves of all affection for them, of all sympathy in their feelings, of all desire for their regard, or good opinion*. From all which it appears to be extremely evident that the chief, if not the only source of moral feelings, or that which has been called the *moral sense*, is the natural attachment of human beings to each other : that principle of social union, which

* This subject, which is here but briefly touched, might easily be expanded into a complete moral system.

is gratified and delighted naturally with all that tends to general good, hurt and wounded by every thing that tends to general evil. And thus also it appears that *living according to nature*, so far as morality is concerned in it, is living according to the impulses of natural and social feelings.

We seem then to have proved the point from which we first set out, that in delivering the precept in my text, of loving our neighbours as ourselves, our Saviour gave us a complete key not only to the practice, but also to the very source of all morality, and has therein evinced his perfect knowledge of our nature. Certain it is, that when we lose the natural benevolence of human creatures, we almost lose our right to bear the name. When selfishness, or the violence of any uncorrected passion urges us to a disregard of every evil we may bring on others, and destroys the sympathy that should excite the conscience to regret and to redress them, we become unfit for the society of men; and against this depravity, manifested by overt acts of violence, the laws of every country are directed. Nothing good is to be expected from him on whom the distresses of his fellow-creatures, and, above all, those immediately occasioned by himself,

have

have no effect, and in whose sight even their lives are of no value ; and such corrupted beings perish unregretted by the severity of public justice. Such are the extreme cases ; but the same principle extends, in due proportions, to all inferior violations of morality, and the precept of our Saviour, “ Thou shalt ‘‘ love thy neighbour as thyself,” stands as the general antagonist to every social offence.

Its influence extends even further : for, if we recollect our former reasonings on these topics, we shall confess, that even our obedience to the first and great commandment in point of dignity, that of “ love to God,” is itself also derivable, according to the progress of nature, from the same source. In rising to the perfection of obedience, we first learn to fulfil the lower precept, then the higher ; we rise from less to greater, nor can we possibly proceed by any other manner of progression ; whence it is that St. John, divinely enlightened concerning the nature of our hearts, has told us expressly, that the man who pretends to love God, not having a natural affection towards mankind, is not to be believed ; he cannot have attained the higher step, but by passing through the lower. “ If,” says the Apostle,

“ a man say, I love God, and hateth his
 “ brother, he is a liar ;” and he immediately
 assigns the reason ; “ for he that loveth not
 “ his brother, whom he hath seen, how can
 “ he love God, whom he hath not seen * ?”
 You will recollect, from the explanation I
 have already given of that text †, that the
 course of nature is this :—We see our brethren
 here on earth, and we are led instinctively to
 love them, long before we can acquire any
 knowledge or distinct apprehension that there
 is a God. When we learn any thing of God,
 we contemplate him as the common Father
 of all those we love, as the Almighty Bene-
 factor and Preserver of us and them : and we
 begin to love him for his goodness to us all.
 To love him for his single goodness towards
 ourselves is not enough. We are in general
 too sensible of our own disadvantages, and too
 thoughtless of our blessings, to feel, on that
 account, the love and gratitude we ought. If
 our affection to God attain any sufficient
 energy, it must be caused by more extensive
 views of his benevolence, and a more general
 interest in its wonderful effects. If we have
 not benevolence in ourselves, how can we be

* 1 John iv. 20.

† See Discourse XIII. on

that text.

fensible of its excellence in him? Besides, we have innumerable reasons to attach us to our fellow-creatures, with whom we live in constant intercourse: if we resist all these, as well as the strong impulse of nature which directs us to that union of affection with them, it is not to be expected that the single motive of gratitude, which alone, in such a case, could lead us to God, and of which the more immediate calls must have been disregarded, should teach us how to love an unseen Being.

Thus does our Saviour's command of loving one another, most fully open to us the origin of our whole duty: and, as I have noticed before, it is observable that when he delivers the two precepts, of loving God and our neighbour, he plainly intimates that their natural connection is very close. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God—this is the first and great commandment; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour." They are like, because both are founded on the principle of love; and the power of paying due obedience to them both originates from one common cause, the benevolent feelings of our nature. Thus can we perfectly understand why, in other parts of

the Gospel, the law of general affection is made the fundamental and distinctive doctrine of our Saviour's revelation. He himself so points it out: "By this shall all men know "that ye are my disciples, if ye have love "one to another * :" and his Apostles extol it as the fulfilling of the whole law, and as the law of highest dignity, *the royal law*. Thus St. Paul says, "For all the law is "fulfilled in one word, even in this; *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself* † :" and St. James, "If ye fulfil *the royal law*, according to the scripture, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, ye do well ‡ ." Hence also we may clearly perceive why they who cast off all feeling for their fellow-creatures, cast off also all reverence and regard towards God. The great source of duty is then corrupted in them, and all that flows from it is poisoned; or rather the source is totally dried up, and no good works of any kind can be produced.

For this reason, that is, because the affections are so intimately concerned in the due regulation of our lives, *the heart*, the supposed

* John xiii. 5. † Gal. v. 13, 14. ‡ James ii. 8.

seat of affection, is uniformly considered in scripture as the well-spring of all duty. It is not to the reason or to the mind that our well or ill-doing is referred, but to the *heart*, to the natural feeling or disposition, either purified or corrupted. To do good from the cold conviction of reason, or a certain abstracted persuasion of general fitness and propriety, is scarcely to perform it at all: it must be done with feeling, and *from the heart*, before it can be amiable in the sight of God or man, before it can do honour to humanity. A good Christian, therefore, is not a tame, speculative well-doer, but a lively and active being, thrilling with affectionate dispositions; living, as it were, an expanded life, by sharing in the interests of innumerable persons: loving his fellow-creatures, not nominally, or lukewarmly, but as himself; loving God, not with a dull metaphysical esteem, but *with the heart*; with a heart overflowing with gratitude for countless instances of goodness; in a word, with all his heart, with all his soul, and all his strength.

Having thus illustrated what was at first proposed, that the precept of our Saviour in the text conducts us directly to the whole

source of moral feeling in our hearts ; and having shown even more than that, namely, that it leads us also to the source of religious duty ; there is one remark of another kind, which I cannot repress my inclination to suggest, as it seems to arise immediately out of this general view of things.

It has appeared, from a careful examination, that the truest knowledge of human nature is conveyed to us, by this fundamental precept of the Gospel, on which I have discoursed ; that, by pursuing the light it gives, we gain an insight into ourselves, which no other instructions can bestow. Let us then ask ourselves, what rank of wisdom and ability among men it is, that can disclose a perfect moral system. From the first dawnings of human knowledge to the present day the ablest men have been employed upon this subject, and every system they have offered has appeared, in some degree, deficient. Many of them have indeed contradicted each other, and consequently have left no probability of truth to more than one out of their number : and if this evangelical system, which we are now considering, be, in fact, the right, all the rest must be imperfect, or erroneous. On the

the one side, then, will stand all the learning and abilities of the world, and they, in error; on the other side, the Gospel, and that, perfect. If the latter, as we conceive, proceeded from God, this is easily accounted for; the work of men is incomplete, the work of God is such as we expect from him. But what say the adversaries of our faith?—that the Gospel is altogether a human work, the work of imposture. Admit this, and we have a very different statement of things, and one entirely unaccountable. On the one side stands the wisdom of the whole world; on the other, Matthew, Mark, and their associates; a few obscure and low-bred men of Judea; who yet perform what all the wisdom of mankind had failed to do. It would be a matter of some surprise if four or five men from the ordinary and labouring classes of life, in the most enlightened country, could be found capable of comprehending the speculative systems of morality contrived by others: but to invent, to lay the whole foundation for themselves; to afford an exercise for the most sagacious men for ever, to trace out and to discover the full extent of their vast wisdom;—what is this? it is surely something preternatural.

May we not, without exaggeration, say, that it is full as miraculous as any thing attributed to any person in the history they have left. To speak the tongues of all nations, without having learnt them, is not more wonderful than to speak the language of wisdom, the most difficult of all languages, without preparatory instruction.

We have therefore gained by our enquiry, not only what we sought directly, an illustration of our Saviour's doctrine, but incidentally, a strong argument in confirmation of our faith: let us take advantage of both; and, cultivating that Christian benevolence which we have perceived to be the common source of every human excellence, let us hold fast, without wavering, that profession, which alone can give us such divine instructions; which alone is truly worthy of God, and superior to all contrivance of mankind.

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE XVI.

WHY IT WAS NECESSARY FOR CHRIST
TO SUFFER,

For GOOD-FRIDAY.

LUKE xxiv. 25, 26.

Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

IT can proceed, surely, from no very good propensity, when, in a subject replete with high instruction, men will be attentive only to difficulties.. That the humiliation and sufferings of a divine personage should have been necessary to repair the lapse of fallen man, and renew his title to salvation, is a matter which, though we have abundant reason to believe, we are destitute of principles

ciples to explain. The cause of that necessity, whatever it may be, must have been originally interwoven with the general plan of Providential Government: and as a primary and indispensable part of that plan, may possibly lie open only to the knowledge of that Eternal Wisdom by which the whole design was formed.

Here then that man takes his stand, who, for any secret cause whatever, is unwilling to admit the truth of Revelation. Show him how it can, in any case, be necessary for the eternal Son of God to suffer; show him how the salvation of mankind can be an object of importance sufficient to demand that suffering; and show him, lastly, how that suffering operates, and why no other cause could operate to the production of the desired effect; explain to him these things, or he will not be persuaded to believe. He is here, indeed, in his strong hold: and if he obstinately maintain his resolution of not believing, 'till these points shall have been fully cleared, we must despair of effecting his conversion. For these are just the points we neither know, nor *yet* pretend to know, nor have a hope of finding out.—For they are not

not revealed.—We may sometimes indulge conjectures, but then we know them for conjectures only, and advance them with humility and doubt. It does not, indeed, seem necessary that to any created being whatever, God should have disclosed the reason of those dispensations in which he hath purposely made it requisite for himself to interfere. Creatures more wise, and consequently less arrogant, than man, will behold, in the mere appointment of God, a sufficient evidence of wisdom: will feel that he who is the fountain of intelligence, may have counsels that his creatures cannot reach; and, thankful for the knowledge that he does impart, will adore in silence where he spreads the veil of mystery.

There is not the smallest reason to suppose, that this unfolding of what may be called the *primary principles* of Redemption, formed any part of the divine discourse recorded in my text. The rebuke of our blessed Saviour to his disciples, was not occasioned by their defect in metaphysical knowledge concerning the nature of *sin, punishment, and redemption*, nor were his instructions calculated to remove a deficiency of that nature. He rebuked

buked them for not making application of the Scriptures, which they knew, to those events towards which they were so evidently pointed; and at which, for want of that illustration, they were, at the time of his reproof, so unreasonably astonished: and he expounded to them, not the reason by which his heavenly Father was induced to appoint these wonderful events, but the simple and more useful fact, that he had certainly appointed them; and that this appointment was fully evidenced throughout the ancient books of Scripture. “Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, he expounded unto them, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself.” “Ought not Christ, said he, to have suffered all these things, and to enter into his glory?—That is, “Is it not manifest from the Prophets, that the Christ, whenever he should appear, was appointed to suffer these things, and that unless he had so suffered, there would have been no prophetic evidences of his mission?”

Those who are desirous of religious instruction, will naturally feel inclined to regret the loss of this divine discourse: a sermon on

* Ver. 27.

the prophecies by our blessed Saviour himself, would, we may imagine, have prevented all disputes on that part of the subject. As it is not preserved by any of the Evangelists we must content ourselves with the satisfaction that the substance of it at least remains in the Scriptures of the Old Testament; in searching which with diligence for the materials of which it must have been composed, we may conclude that we shall best obey the will, and fulfil the design, of Providence.

Dismissing then from our minds, with the humility of reasonable creatures, informed of the real extent of their own faculties, all that in this important subject is above the reach of our understandings; let us confine ourselves strictly to the pursuit of such knowledge concerning it, as either Revelation has imparted, or the proper exercise of reason can supply.

I.—In the first place, to take up the subject where the divine instructor of the disciples took it, this is undeniably plain, that whatever necessity there might or might not have been originally, for the sufferings of Christ on earth, since the delivery of the prophecies they had become altogether necessary.

cessary. Either the word of prophecy must have failed, and suffered direct contradiction from the event, or the Redeemer of mankind must have appeared, as he actually did, “ despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief *.” “ A man oppressed and afflicted, yet opening not his mouth in complaint, but as a sheep before her shearers is dumb †,” so silent and so patient; it was necessary that he should be “ cut off from the land of the living, and stricken for the transgression of the people;” “ betrayed by one whom he had admitted to his presence as a friend;” “ sold for thirty pieces of silver;” accused by suborned witnesses; contumeliously used and spit upon; scourged, stripped, and ignominiously destroyed. Unless these circumstances, and many more minute particulars, had taken place concerning him, it would have been impossible to defend Isaiah, and the other prophets, from the charge of ignorant imposture, or the whole body of the Jewish Scriptures from confutation, and its attendant contempt. Could a person in whom these prefixed marks were not found have been

* Isai. liii. 3.

† Ib. 8.

proved

proved to be the Messiah, he could not have confirmed the law and the prophets, he must have contradicted and annulled them. This then was the species of necessity explained by our Saviour, after his resurrection, to the disciples: the necessity of preserving the several parts of Revelation consistent with each other, and of fulfilling all that the inspired teachers under the law had declared to be ordained by heaven.

II. To the strong, and apparently insurmountable objection arising from the discordance of the two Revelations, would have been added, had the Redeemer undergone no sufferings, a very increased difficulty in establishing the proof of his mission. For though, on the first hasty view of such a subject, we are inclined to expect from divine interference that it should remove all obstacles; and from a teacher commissioned by heaven we look that he should bear down all resistance, and baffle every attack; yet, if we consider the matter more attentively, we shall perceive that the arguments arising from Christ's sufferings have infinitely greater strength than any that could have been deduced from the most unbounded course of prosperity. To

convert mankind to a new faith by the ministry of a poor, despised, and persecuted mortal, is a work which more demands the aid of divine co-operation, than either to persuade them by popular and unresisted eloquence, or to subdue them by the force of armies: nay stronger even, except to the actual spectators of the fact, than to remove the greatest obstacles by the visible exertion of preternatural power.—Mahomet, conscious that he was unable to satisfy any such expectations, pretended to no power of working miracles. The only preternatural efforts to which he attempted to appeal for testimony of his mission, were the wisdom of the Koran, and the successes of his arms. The former argument appears to have prevailed only because addressed to those who were altogether inadequate judges of its validity: and the latter is completely refuted by the equal or superior conquests of other men, who pretended to no better resources than were supplied by their own active genius and high courage: so weak is necessarily the argument from successful conquest. The progress of Moses was in every step miraculous; and consonant, in great measure, to the common

mon notions of the nature of such a mission. He divided the sea, brought water from the solid rock, and at his prayer gained daily bread from heaven: in a word, in all things he evinced himself the servant of God endued with heavenly power. But it was plainly perceived by Providence that the evidence of these miracles, when left to tradition or history, would grow too weak to sustain the fabric of steady faith, and it was kept in force, therefore, by the establishment and continuance for ages of a government altogether miraculous, and by the preaching and ministry of prophets. The perseverance of Jesus Christ in his design, in spite of foreknown sufferings, and the success of his ministry notwithstanding every human opposition, are such proofs of his sincerity, and of the divine authority by which he acted, as no other condition or termination of life could possibly have furnished. Had he been born, and had he lived in the midst of human splendor, we could not have distinguished the testimony of truth concerning him, from the artful fictions of adulation. Had he risen from low beginnings to high eminence, it might have been supposed that the successful progress of his design encou-

raged him to persist in it. But being from his birth a child of poverty, and a man of sorrow; living meanly; and dying, in the eyes of the world, ignominiously; it is not probable that he should have conceived, without reason, so vast an undertaking; it is hardly possible that he should have persisted in it; and it is morally impossible that, without divine assistance, the final success should have been such as the world at this day bears witness that it was.

Shall we then continue so slow of heart to believe all that the Prophets have spoken concerning him?—Enough, one should imagine, has been said already to prevent it; but there are other arguments remaining. For,

III. If we consider the mission of Christ Jesus, apart from the original causes of its appointment, in the secret counsels of Omnipotence, into which I have thought it improper to enquire, it is manifest, that one very principal design in the descent of the Son of God to earth, was to afford a perfect example, from which mankind might learn the certain way to holiness. In Adam all had died, in Christ all were to be made alive: and the sins which by the transgression of

Adam

Adam had overspread the world, by the pure example of Christ were to be checked and counteracted.

If we consider the sons of Adam as retaining the whole corruption of their origin, and unreformed by the example of the Redeemer, we shall find that against the very sins most prevalent among them in such a state, the particular circumstances of that example were directed; and that if Jesus had not been a *man of sorrows*, whether he might in other respects have been fit for his commission or not, yet certainly he could not have been the proper teacher to wean men altogether from the evil and corruption of their ways, or to remove the depravity of their fallen nature.

The catalogue is rather formidable to repeat, but it will be found, I presume, that the following vices are the least that can be laid to the charge of human nature in its depraved and unconverted state. *Pride, Avarice, Ambition, Contentiousness, Cruelty, inordinate Love of Pleasure, impatience of Suffering, and a general preference of the concerns of this present world to every other consideration.* I do not say that all these vices were to be found in every man before the publi-

cation of the Gospel, far otherwise: but I assert, that, both before and since, the depravity of nature has inclined men to be guilty of them; that, at the time of our Saviour's coming, they were very dreadfully prevalent; and that more or less they will prevail, while man is man, except so far as they are counteracted by the precepts, and yet more by the example, of the Redeemer.

Example, we well know, is the only complete confirmation of the practicability of any precepts. It may be very desirable that such virtues should be possessed by man as are diametrically opposite to all his natural faults, but if no man ever realized the possession of them, how can it be known that they are not of an excellence above the reach of humanity? For this cause did the Messiah of God appear in the form, and in the complete nature of a man; he was made *of like passions with ourselves*, that being tempted in all things as we are, his victory might be complete, and his example perfect.—Suppose then that his station among men had been illustrious, his possessions ample, and his power above resistance, for such was the Messiah whom the Jews expected; and such is the picture

of

of a messenger from heaven which the common prejudices of men delineate to them; where should *Pride*, and *Avarice*, and *Ambition*, have found their restraint? Might not men irrefragably have argued, that those possessions must essentially be good, which the Son of God had sanctified by his acceptance? or might they not have concluded, with an equal appearance of certainty, that if a mind of perfect purity did not decline the gratification arising from these objects, it must be perfectly excuseable in common mortals to pursue them with all the ardour of desire. The first conquest of the Redeemer was over these destructive passions. *Power*, *wealth*, and *pre-eminence*, in the most unbounded degree, were expressly offered to him by the enemy and seducer of mankind, and rejected with contempt. The evil quarter from which they were thus offered, and the steady rejection of them by him who was all purity, sufficiently mark their place in the proper estimate of things. They may, indeed, be made the means of doing good, and then are sanctified by the employment; but it was not consistent with the plan of Redemption that Jesus Christ should condescend to do good by

instruments so frequently disgraced by mis-employment.

To go about daily in the constant and laborious exercise of every exalted species of benevolence; to be seduced by no allurements of pleasure; to refuse no sufferings, however exquisite, for the sake of performing the task he had undertaken; to despise contempt, and every thing esteemed most dreadful in this present life; to welcome even the most disgraceful and abhorred mode of losing life; remaining steady to the end in every virtue most opposite to the general failings of mankind; these were the methods ordained by the eternal wisdom of God, and observed by the man Christ Jesus. Thus did he, to show that it was possible for a human creature to live devoid of cruelty, contentiousness, the love of pleasure, the impatience of suffering, and the mistaken preference of this life to the next. If any more perfect plan can be imagined for counteracting these corrupt propensities, I confess it is far beyond the reach of my mind to conceive it.

As it is, the rule that "the disciple is not better than his Lord," is ready and applicable to every difficult situation in which a Christian can be tried. Are we poor, lowly, and

and despised among mankind? so was the Son of God on earth.—Are we deprived of the accommodations of life? he had not where to lay his head.—Are we oppressed with sorrow, and bent down with the burden of affliction? we may hope to rise from that estate to everlasting glory and happiness; for never was any sorrow like unto *his* sorrow, who from the lowest abyfs of misery in this world, arose at once to sit for ever in the kingdom, and at the right hand of God. Can we despise our brethren for their low estate, when we recollect, that for the very same reason, had we lived at that day, we might have despised the Lord Christ Jesus? Can we grow weary in doing good as far as our abilities extend, when we remember, that the Son of God made it his sole occupation, and the only cause for calling into action his miraculous powers?

For all these reasons then, namely, 1. for the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies, 2. for the full and lasting proof of his mission, and, 3. for rendering his example perfect to mankind, we clearly can perceive and know that it was necessary for Christ to suffer, before he entered into his glory.—Those sufferings

the church this day calls upon us to commemorate: can we not then at such a time, and indeed at all times, rest satisfied with so many evident reasons that are within our reach, without attempting, with presumptuous vanity, to dive into the hidden sources of the *primary* determination of Omnipotence?

When such infinite benefits have been bestowed, at such a price, it becomes us rather to adore in humble acquiescence, than seek to understand what, most probably, was never meant for our examination. And if through a false humility we should be inclined, which is the last resource of the Tempter, to fancy ourselves unworthy of such interference, or this world unworthy to be the theatre of it, let us recollect, that there is probably, though undistinguished by us, a complete and perfect connection throughout all the works of Omnipotence.

We may rest assured that the glorious dispensation of Redemption, in which the Deity himself vouchsafed to take a part, was not a sudden expedient, nor a scene transacted in obscurity; but planned originally in the eternal counsels of God, and designed not only for

for the salvation of men, but for the encouragement, instruction, and example of all beings whose faculties should enable them to study divine wisdom in the expanded volume of the universe. This assurance Reason suggests, and Revelation sufficiently confirms.—With this persuasion, therefore, and with that heart-felt gratitude which the occasion so eminently demands, let us now unite to commemorate the passion of Christ in the manner he himself appointed.

Now to God, &c.

DISCOURSE XVII.

ON THE EVIDENCE OF ONE FROM
THE DEAD.

AN EASTER SERMON.

LUKE xvi. 31.

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

MANY have been surprised at this assertion. It seems to them a hard saying; and they know not how to assent to it. Yet the proof is this day before us: for, as on this day, arose One from the dead: One mightier than Moses or the Prophets, to finish what by them was left undone, and to persuade men to repentance.—And are they yet persuaded?—alas! too many are not.—Unmoved even by this awful and conclusive fact, they

they prove but too fully the assertion of this Gospel: for as they hearken not to Moses and the Prophets, so neither are they persuaded though one hath actually arisen from the dead.

Perhaps, to describe prophetically this state of obstinate impenitence, and this contempt of accumulated testimony, might be one of the original purposes of the parable. Against the Jews, it has been supposed to be particularly directed, who having the instructions of Moses and the Prophets, did not yet forsake their evil ways, and were finally prepared to resist even him who was to rise from the dead. Be this as it may, the application is at least allowable; and though our Saviour should not have intended to allude to such offenders, his words may fairly be employed to show them on what ground they stand.

Behold then yourselves, ye Christians, whosoever ye are, who remain in sin, in the very state of the impenitent men described in the sacred parable! Moses has preached to you in vain; the warnings of the Prophets have been vain:—nay worse; the teaching of the Apostles and Evangelists has been superadded, and still it is in vain; finally, the Son of God incarnate

nate has descended to the grave, and has arisen from the dead for your conviction;—and you are unconverted! Cease then to wonder at supposed hardness of heart attributed to the brethren of the rich man in the Gospel; consider rather your own hearts, deplore their obduracy, and apply, before it be too late, such remedies as may render them more tractable.

“ Neither *will they be persuaded*, though “ one rose from the dead.”—An important consideration, concerning these words, and one on which much of the right interpretation of the parable depends, is this; *to what they are to be persuaded?*—The answer to this question must be drawn from the preceding verse: “ Nay, father Abraham, but “ if one went unto them from the dead, *they will repent.*” It was to repentance that their brother hoped they might have been persuaded; and it was precisely *their repentance* of which the Patriarch despaired. Of the existence of human creatures after death, of the rewards of the just, and the punishment of the wicked, they would undoubtedly have been persuaded, by the testimony of one whom they knew to be a messenger from the world

in which those things are realized : but that they would therefore have been *persuaded* to sincere *repentance*, and to the final dereliction of their evil ways, is by no means so indubitable.

The truth is, and a melancholy truth for us, that the strongest conviction imaginable of the leading truths of religion, is not always sufficient to subdue our passions ; to produce effectual repentance ; and to keep us from the paths of sin : and the recollection of this truth, explaining that assertion of the Patriarch which at first appears so contrary to reason, may serve, among other purposes, to remind us that he who taught these doctrines, and delivered this parable, was one who knew us better than we know ourselves.

If we consult the records of mankind, or the experience of our own lives, we shall find this assertion too abundantly confirmed. Our first parents, from the scriptural account of their situation, must have had undoubted knowledge and conviction that their state was a state of trial. They had stood before their Creator, and had heard from himself the sentence of death denounced as the appointed punishment of disobedience. Yet they forgot their

their duty, and fell. Again; the interposition of God could never be more manifest upon earth than in the visitations of Egypt before the departure of the Israelites. It was impossible that Pharaoh could have failed to know that, by detaining that people, he provoked the wrath, and exposed himself to the vengeance of an almighty adversary: and so long as the terrors of the miraculous plagues were actually before his eyes, he knew his duty, and determined to perform it. Yet when the circumstances changed, his heart changed also, and he returned, with an increased depravity, to his obdurate refusal.—The children of Israel, in the wilderness, lived in the midst of miracles; they saw the mercies of God; they saw his terrors; yet they transgressed repeatedly, and brought upon themselves that vengeance, from which, by their experience and their knowledge, they should have been preserved.

If ever one man existed, more fully persuaded than any other of the great truths of religion, it was king David; yet, even in him, do the faithful historians of his acts display some melancholy instances of the frailty and inconsistency of human nature. At one time

time we find him inspired by the Spirit of God, uniting the great offices of teacher and of prophet; at another the victim of passion, and hurried by it into such excesses as he afterwards deplored in sackcloth and ashes, with tears and bitterness of soul.

Whoever considers these facts, will readily perceive that it would be easy to multiply, almost to any extent, these proofs of our position, *that the strongest conviction imaginable of the leading truths of religion is not always sufficient to subdue our passions, or to persuade us to effectual repentance.* Passing over, therefore, historical matter, let us appeal to our own knowledge and experience, whether all they who do amiss, and transgress the commandments of the Gospel, do it from want of faith in that Gospel, or from the want of any knowledge which they would acquire by the mission of one from the dead. Let us bring the matter yet more home, and enquire of our own hearts whether a monitor from the world of spirits be required to add to our internal conviction of the certainty of a future life, and of the judgments to come in it. If not;—if we are as truly persuaded of these facts, as we could be by the appearance

ance of such a messenger,—and if we yet transgress, and yet refuse to repent,—why doubt we of the parable? or why esteem it a hard saying, that the return even of one from the dead might be insufficient for persuading sinners to repentance.

That a man roused from his dream of sin by such a visitation, would, while his horror and affright continued, detest his crimes, and determine to forsake them, will readily be granted. The effect is natural, and analogous to what takes place in many other circumstances of warning, which are brought home to every man in various other ways. But, is it not equally natural, and equally analogous to general experience; that, as the traces of these strong impressions fade, and die away, his resolutions should proportionably relax; and that sin should insensibly regain that empire, from which she had been for a time expelled by adventitious and overpowering force?

The sudden deaths of those connected with us, or the apparent approaches of our own dissolution, will sometimes strike our minds as forcibly, to evince the necessity of repentance, as it is possible for them to be struck

by the appearance of a person from the dead. How strongly, at these moments, do we feel the obligations of Religion, and the nothingness of all considerations which respect the present world alone ! Yet we know, beyond a doubt, that the traces of these feelings, strong as they may be at first, grow faint and disappear ; and that the very persons who have experienced such sensations, even in their utmost force, do yet return to their evil ways ; and to a conduct altogether incompatible with those just and pious feelings. Knowing this in one case to be possible, why should we doubt it in another ?

If such be the frailty of our nature, and the unsteadiness of our hearts, it must be, above all things, important, that we should seek out means to counteract these evil tendencies.—Will the return of one from the dead, and the report of such a witness, more effectually persuade us than any other testimony ?—Let us remember that one has actually returned from the dead: One, who, before he died, declared he would return ; one, who, after his return, went not back to the place of departed spirits, but ascended into heaven. What more would we require ? The united testimony

testimony of the grave, of earth, and heaven, are here comprised. To ask for further witness is only to betray the hardness of our hearts, and their unwillingness to receive the truth on any terms.

Nor should it be forgotten, that for the resurrection of Christ we have an evidence superior, even in certainty, to that which we could have of a private miracle, of this nature, happening to ourselves. This may seem at first a strange assertion; yet there is great reason to believe it true. After the horror and tumult of mind naturally produced by an event so terrifying to human nature, as the appearance of a departed spirit, no man could, perhaps, be so confident of his own perceptions as not to entertain some little doubt whether that which he imagined himself to have seen or heard, had not been the effect of some temporary distraction, or some unaccountable deception. He would feel, as in extraordinary cases men often feel, the want of some person whose perceptions he might compare with his own, in order to certify himself that he had correctly remembered what he saw, or was not still under the dominion of a disordered fancy. Doubts of this kind might

easily arise within himself, and the suggestions of others, unwilling to believe, or to allow him to believe, a fact carrying such conclusions with it, would certainly increase such doubts.

But, in the case of our Saviour's resurrection, we are not referred for testimony to the doubtful perceptions of any single person. Multitudes saw him after he arose from the dead, conversed with him, took refreshment with him, touched him. Of these facts, the persons concerned in them were convinced, not only while the novelty of the appearance impressed them with terror, and might be supposed to disorder the judgment, but when repetition had rendered it familiar, and restored to them the calm and customary exercise of all their faculties. At distant periods afterwards, their recollection of these things continued to agree, and they mutually confirmed each other's testimony.

Of these witnesses, undoubtedly competent, some have left the fact, of Christ's resurrection from the dead, asserted in a plain and simple style of history; and all of them, so far as we can learn, continued throughout their lives, calmly, steadily, and uniformly to main-

tain the truth of that assertion. The utmost rage of persecution could not move them to purchase ease, immunity, or life itself, by retracting, what they had so solemnly declared.

A more complete evidence of any event cannot, then, exist. Nor can it be denied that the united testimony of so many men surpasses, in point of certainty, that which can be afforded by the senses, or recollection, of a single person. They could compare what they had seen and heard, and thus confirm each other. It surpasses it also in another point of view. The return of a departed spirit could only prove to us, at most, that the soul continues to exist, and that it is accountable for the things done in the body : points of which few men, however they may wish it, can persuade themselves to doubt.—It might fail even in proving these. For, as we know not the power of spirits, we know not how far it may be possible for an evil spirit to assume a certain shape for the purpose of deceiving us. But the return of a person from the dead, in the body; his bodily appearance, not at one transient moment, but throughout the considerable period of forty days, proves much more. It proves the re-union of the soul and body.

It confirms the whole system of the Evangelic Revelation, and renders the idea of a deception inconceivable. The Apostles could not but believe what they had “seen, and “heard, and handled of the Word of Life*.”

On this then let us rest: and by frequently revolving in our minds the fact, let us render the belief of it strong and lively, and the deduction of its important consequences habitual.

The consequences are these, according to the word of truth delivered in the scriptures. If Christ be risen, and be the one that hath come to us from the dead, then ought we to be persuaded to repent: then have we also an earnest of our own resurrection, and a proof of his victory over the powers of darkness. “If Christ be not risen,” says St. Paul, “then is our preaching vain, and your faith “also is vain: ye are yet in your sins. But “now is Christ risen from the dead, and be “come the first fruits of them who slept †.” Thus also do we learn that our Saviour truly was that HOLY ONE, who, according to the Prophet, was not to see corruption, and by whom, at the appointed day, all men shall be

* 1 John i. 1.

† 1 Cor. xv. 14, 20, &c.

judged,

judged. “ He hath appointed,” faith the same Apostle, “ a day, in which he will judge “ the world—by that man whom he hath “ ordained, whereof he hath given assurance “ unto all men, in that he hath raised him “ from the dead *.”

Nothing further ought to be required, to persuade us to repentance, or to convince us of the necessity of a holy life. Nothing further would be required, were we diligent enough in impressing these truths upon our minds, and in soliciting the assistance of the Holy Spirit to support and perfect our endeavours.

Our hopes of salvation depend upon two things: that we be diligent to know our duty, and steady to perform it. For as zeal without knowledge is dangerous, so is knowledge, without practical zeal, destructive. “ If we “ know these things, happy are we if we do “ them.” Then shall not only every anniversary of this high festival on earth, but also the distant day of our own resurrection, be to us a day of joy and triumph. But if, knowing that Christ died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, we suffer that knowledge, by the cares of this world, or

* Acts xvii. 31.

the seductions of iniquity, to be weakened or obliterated, then are we, as was said before, in that very dangerous state of hard-heartedness at which some are inclined to wonder in the parable; we are not persuaded, to any useful effort of repentance, either by the written revelations of God, the former or the latter, nor even by the admonitions of him whom we know to have arisen for that purpose from the dead.

From a condition so deplorable, may what has now been said contribute, by the blessing of God, to preserve us all.

Now to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, from whose unbounded goodness we have received the means of escaping all spiritual evils, be ascribed, &c. &c.

DISCOURSE XVIII.

ON THE LAST INJUNCTIONS OF CHRIST.

WHIT-SUNDAY SERMON.

MATT. xxviii. 18, 19, 20.

And Jesus came, and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

IT is a melancholy necessity which God has, doubtless for the wisest purposes, imposed upon us, that at this late day we should be obliged to contend for the fundamentals of our faith, as if they were of new invention; and to combat with calumnious accusa-

accusations, as if we had received corruptions of the Christian Doctrine, instead of its true articles; and believed what Christ and his Apostles did not teach.

I trust there is not one among us, who, however firmly, or however zealously, he may think it incumbent upon him to defend his Christian Principles, so long as he is well persuaded they are right, would not with joy embrace the truth, if clearly truth, by whomsoever discovered; and reject what could be proved to be an error, how long soever he might have cherished it, or with whatever veneration he might have been accustomed to regard it. Such, at least, ought to be our disposition; not given to wavering, but open to conviction; attached, not bigotted; faithful, but not blindly obstinate. But when, instead of light and argument, men bring us doubt and darkness; when, instead of pointing out to us the clear meaning of the scriptures, they disfigure them by such interpolations as ingenuity is puzzled to invent, and judgment, not perverted by prejudices, cannot receive; such as the words themselves contradict, and the whole context cries out against; and all this, only because they

they cannot bring themselves to think that God may tell us something of himself which we cannot fully comprehend ; when these are the methods taken to seduce us from our faith, what real Christian does not feel that he is called upon to hold the faster to the *form of sound words* which he has received ? and when many fall away through vanity or want of steadiness, rather to be found among those on whom the weak may lean, than those that yield to such an idle blast of vanity ?

By many solid arguments can we repel the efforts of the assailants. We can appeal, not only to such separate passages of scripture as employ the painful subterfuges of our adversaries to elude, and frequently in vain, their obvious and most necessary sense, but to the general tenor of those sacred writings ; the tendency of their whole plan ; and the uniform current of their expressions from the beginning even to the end. We can appeal, not only to the early judgment of the Christian church, which, in order to turn against us, our opponents have been absolutely obliged to falsify, but even to that of the enemies of Christianity, the Jews, whose ancient belief in the very doctrines objected to us, that of a Trinity

nity in the Divine Nature, is as demonstrable as any fact so circumstanced can be.

For the present day I have chosen to confine our considerations to a single passage, but that, among the most remarkable. The departing words of eminent persons have ever been regarded with particular attention: these are, according to St. Matthew's narrative, *the final words of Christ*; at least they are the last he has recorded *, and are left upon the reader to make that solemn species of impression which such words must naturally make. They contain the authoritative commission of our Saviour to his disciples, to spread his doctrine through the world, and the terms on which men were to be admitted to the benefits of that profession, the initiation into which was *Baptism*.

This is what, if it were wanting; we should lament with the utmost regret. Amidst cavils and contentions raised on other passages, we should very naturally say, “ How happy would it be, for the removal of all doubts,

* They are not the last in fact. This appears from the place mentioned in the context, which is a mountain in Galilée; whereas the place of our Saviour's Ascension, according to St. Luke, was Bethany.

“ if

“ if we had still the words of Christ, according to which he commanded his disciples to baptize their converts: the general form of that profession to which they were expected to assent. The humility of Christ certainly would not assume too much, and if he introduced himself at all, upon that solemn occasion, it would be undoubtedly in such terms as would be applicable to him to the end of time, in their fair and genuine sense, without difficulty, and without ambiguity.”—Such things we should suppose, if we had not these words, and the supposition would be exactly just, except as to the hope of terminating controversies; which cannot be concluded by any form of words, so long as men continue to affix interpretations according to the wishes of their prejudice, not the plain deduction of their understanding.

There cannot be a stronger proof of this than is even now before us. These solemn words of Christ are extant. They are not only extant, but they are undisputed. Not like some other passages, on which there have arisen violent controversies, whether they existed in the original copies, or existed as they are

are now read, or with such variations as conveniently destroy their meaning: these words are acknowledged on all hands to have remained (all but the deductive particle *εν* therefore, and *Αμην Amen*, of which there is some doubt) unaltered from the time of the Evangelist.—And yet there are persons who deny the Trinity!

An eminent teacher of that strange doctrine of denial has said, “ it is quite an arbitrary supposition that, because the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, are mentioned together upon that occasion, they must likewise be equal in all other respects *.” But with what justice can that conclusion be called arbitrary which rushes involuntarily, and as it were by force, into the mind, on the mere recital of the words. “ Go, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” As far as my own conviction goes, I should not hesitate to affirm that no man ever heard those words, not having Socinian prejudices in his mind, or a Socinian comment in his eye, without concluding from them, as we conclude, that the three thus solemnly united, were meant to be marked out as standing

* Priestley's Passages of Scripture Illustrated, p. 36.

properly together, in dignity as well as order, just as they are placed. No manner of distinction appears: of the name of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, just as much is said as of the name of the Father, and in the same way; and if the Son be, as these teachers would persuade us, merely a mortal glorified, how comes it that he stands between God, and the Spirit of God, which Spirit, whatever they may make of it, (as seems to be a matter of no little doubt) certainly existed before him, according to their system, and belongs peculiarly to God, so as to take place of all created beings.

But waving this position, and asserting only, what cannot surely be denied, that the words are capable of such interpretation, and may happen to suggest it, let us ask of these bold speculators, who would reduce their Redeemer to a man, whether they will not allow him to have been a good man, a wise man, or a humble man? under any of which suppositions, if he were no more than man, I know not how we can defend him for interposing himself, at such a time, in such a mode of classification, between the God of heaven, and the Holy Spirit of that God.

Could

Could he not foresee that such interpretations must be made of words, in that case, so ambiguous? And would he not have abhorred the dreadful sin, for so it would have been, of being instrumental to such errors, by arrogating to himself a place so perfectly unfit for any human creature?

It is painful to dwell upon such questions, and, even for argument's sake, to make suppositions so repugnant to our feelings, concerning him who is our heavenly Mediator and Redeemer. The conclusion that most naturally arises is much more worthy both of him and us; that where Christ put *himself*, in this most solemn charge, there is his true place: and that if he "thought it not robbery to be equal with God," it certainly was not robbery, but his eternal privilege.

Let us advert to the narrative of the Evangelist. He says that "the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him they worshipped him, but some doubted." Of what they doubted we are not told: it might be whether they ought to worship him, in which case, his immediate declaration applies directly to the subject

subject of those doubts, as if he had said,
“ be assured that you may worship me, *for*
“ all power is given unto me in heaven and
“ earth.”—It seems, however, from the con-
text, to be rather that they doubted at his
first appearance, which perhaps was distant,
whether it were he indeed; which doubt his
coming near, and speaking to them, must
have removed effectually. His words were
remarkable: “ All power is given unto me
“ in heaven and earth.” This, therefore,
must have been very near the time of his as-
cension, when he was actually received into
that glory which was thus ordained for him.
But from this expression it has been attempt-
ed to deduce an argument against the pre-ex-
istent power and glory of Christ *, by in-
ferring that if the power was *given* him now,
it was something he did not possess before.
True it is, that Christ, as man, had not been
glorified before, or vested with this power.
But how did Christ himself consider that
glory when he prayed for it, immediately
before his passion? Did he contemplate it as
what henever yet possessed, or as what was his
before the beginning of time? Judge ye for

* See Whitby.

yourselves : his prayer was this :—“ I have
 “ glorified thee on earth : I have finished the
 “ work which thou gavest me to do : and
 “ now, O Father, glorify thou me, *with*
 “ *thine own self, with the glory which I had*
 “ *with thee before the world was **.” So is
 it in St. John’s Gospel ; and doubtless Christ
 may be believed concerning himself, rather
 than those who, commenting upon one part
 of his words, overlook or forget what he has
 declared so fully in another. It requires, in-
 deed, a very little knowledge of the custo-
 mary language of the Gospel to recollect,
 that, as a man, Christ is considered there
 as purchasing his exaltation by obedience ;
 though, as God, he laid down his glory vo-
 luntarily, and chose to take upon him the
 form and duties of a servant : he stripped
 himself of power, and purchased it again in
 his new character of man. And what power
 was it that was given to him ? Nothing tri-
 fling ; or very suitable to the faculties of a
 mere man to receive : nothing less than *om-
 nipotence* : “ *all power both in heaven and*
 “ *earth.*”—We cannot easily conceive that
 mere humanity could be made, by any means,

* John xvii. 4, 5.

a fit recipient for such a charge. The Son of God, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, might well sustain the infinite weight of this authority, a power extending, as the expressions denote, not only over men but angels; it is suited to his nature, it is fitted to his dignity. But a created Being, of whatever excellence, must sink beneath it. One attribute of the Godhead without the rest, Omnipotence, without infinity of Wisdom, Justice, Goodness, would be pernicious both to him who had it, and to all that were made subject to it: and if all these were given, the Being gifted thus would be made a God, and would be all by exaltation, that Christ was by eternal right. The question then returns to this dilemma. If *all power* was given to Christ, either he was formed originally to receive it, a Being by dignity of nature fitted for it; or he was made fit to hold it, by the addition of those attributes he had not in himself: and it is surely easier to conceive that what he possessed he laid aside, for temporary reasons of benevolence, than that having nothing, but what is common to humanity, he should be exalted to partake the attributes and power of God.

It is true that this conclusion depends upon the interpretation of the words *all power*; if they mean not omnipotence the argument is not valid; but for that interpretation let us go to the other scriptural passages wherein that power is described. St. Paul says that it “ was far above all principality, and power, and “ might, and dominion, and every name that “ is named, not only in this world, but also “ in that which is to come *.” And St. Peter says of Christ, that he “ is gone into heaven, “ and is on the right-hand of God, *Angels*, “ and *Authorities*, and *Powers* being made “ subject to him †;” and in the book of Revelation he is styled “ King of kings, and “ Lord of lords ‡,” &c.—This is very like *omnipotence*. A degree of exaltation little suited to any created Being, but exactly appropriated to him of whom the Apostle says, that “ 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 are created by him, and for him.”

* Eph. i. 21.

† 1 Pet. iii. 22.

xvii. 14.

‡ Chap.

Having thus announced his power, our Saviour proceeds to issue his commands. “ Go therefore, says he, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”—This follows now consistently and well. All power being given him, it was very just and right that he should share the honour, whom the Father had admitted to a share of his authority: and the names of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are connected in apparent equality; not as agents infinitely different in the common work of Redemption, (which would be absurd,) but as three co-operating powers of the same transcendent dignity; united to do that, which no inferior beings could effect.—This is what the words suggest; what the preceding words explain; and those that follow finally confirm.

Our Saviour adds. “ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” This proof of authority favours, like all the rest, of that high power we justly attribute to the speaker of it. His commands were to be the Religion of the world. The commands of God may well be

so: the commands of a man could hardly claim such weight. But, not to lay more stress on this than it requires, let us come to his concluding words. "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." —Here is another attribute of the Deity asserted, *Omnipresence*: according to what our Saviour at another time declared, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in the midst of them *."

The visible presence of our blessed Saviour was now nearly at an end: he was about to depart from his disciples, that the Comforter might be sent, to complete the holy system, by enlightening their minds, and leading them into all truth:—but he tells them, ere he goes, that he is such a master as, though absent, will be present with them: neither restricted by place or time; and that under his protection they, and all his church, will continue, to the end of the world. With this declaration, so very important to every believer in Christ, St. Matthew suddenly and abruptly concludes his Gospel: meaning, evidently, to leave it impressed upon the minds of his readers, in a manner the most forcible,

* Matt. xviii. 20.

What Christ said, or what he did on earth, after uttering this divine promise, he hath not recorded; because, that Christ would be an everlasting protector to his church, though absent in the body, present in spirit and in power, was most material to be known, and to be remembered. To other historians he left the care of delivering the particulars of their blessed Master's ascension; his object seems to have been to fix attention to these, the most important of his parting words, by thus concluding with them: so as to inspire, towards Christ, hope, confidence, gratitude, and adoration. The single word, *Amen*, subjoined in all the best copies of this Gospel *, throws a still greater solemnity over the whole passage. It has the force and meaning of a prayer for the confirmation of those good tidings. “*So be it, Lord, as thou hast said: “ be thou with us to the end of the world, “ our everlasting and almighty protector !”*”

What the Apostles, and from them the primitive church, thought of the final injunctions

* Griesbach marks it as probably to be omitted, but the best authority he cites for it is the Beza M.S. at Cambridge; and I think the reasons for retaining it are stronger than any proof that can be drawn from that accidental deficiency.

of our Saviour, thus solemnly delivered, is manifest from the use made of them. His words “ Go, and teach all nations, baptizing “ them in the name of the Father, and of “ the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” became not only the established form of baptism, but the substance of the creed, or profession of faith, required of converts who were to be admitted to that rite ; and the foundation of all subsequent creeds which arose out of that form. As far as we can collect from the best authorities, the earliest form of profession, was simply this, “ *I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ his only Son, and in the Holy Ghost* *.” As heresies sprung up, and multiplied in the church, other articles were separately inserted from time to time, in order to counteract this or that error : and these additions may be more properly considered as explanations of the sense in which the church received the original articles, than any independent matter. Thus whatever might have been the intention of our Saviour in giving this command, the immediate consequence of it was the imposition of a double bond upon his church ;

* King's Crit. Hist. of Apost. Creed, p. 38.

a solemn

a solemn form of words used in the most indispensable rite of his Religion ; and a solemn profession of faith to be declared by all who should desire to be admitted into it. Knowing his consummate wisdom, we cannot but conclude that he foresaw this consequence, and intended that it should arise. With respect to the form of baptism his words, indeed, convey an actual institution of it, and accordingly, in very early times, we find it asserted by Christian writers, that baptism administered in any other form would not be valid : as in the name of the Father and Holy Ghost without the Son, or any other partial method * : and that the catechumens should profess their faith in those very names in which they were to be admitted Christians, was natural, and almost unavoidable.

By what means any men persuade themselves that at this late day we can have better knowledge on these points than was enjoyed in the time of the Apostles, it is not easy to conceive. The profession of faith, if faith it can be called, of many at this day who still

* There have been, however, disputes on this. See Bingham, Vol. I. Eccl. Antiq.

retain the name of Christians, should be :
“ I believe in God the Father ; I deny the
“ Son ; and I explain away the Holy Ghost.”
Whether this is such a creed as would have
obtained baptism from an Apostle, and the
imposition of those holy hands which at that
time conveyed miraculous gifts, we cannot
judge more properly than after this consider-
ation of our Saviour’s words.

It is a contemplation full of melancholy to reflect that at this day, such is the infatuation arising from the pride of human knowledge, even wise and good men have, in many instances, fallen into this most strange apostacy. The words of Scripture, the traditions of the Church, the long established forms and practices of Christians in every quarter of the world, all must yield to that inflexible reason, as they think it, presumption as it rather seems to be, which refuses to receive a mystery, even at the hand of God. How long it may please the almighty wisdom to suffer this great evil to subsist, this great apostacy to be supported, we cannot possibly foresee. While it remains, it certainly is intended for the trial of that faith and steadiness, which ought to be in those who hold the uncor-
rupted

rupted doctrines of the Gospel, immoveable. It probably will happen in this, as in many other cases, that when ingenious men have made full trial of every art and subtilty they can devise, to maintain a faith adapted to their private wishes, rather than to the truth of Revelation, and it shall have been shown, by successive steps, that every ground they can assume for such a purpose is perfectly untenable, their opinions will die away, and fall into oblivion. In the mean time, as long as any thing new, of fair appearance, specious in contrivance, and flattering to the vanity of man, can be produced, they will, they must, continue to deceive themselves, and to seduce unstable minds into the snare. Let us, whom God has blest, as we confide, with better knowledge, be watchful therefore and stand firm ; praying most earnestly to him, for ourselves, that he will preserve us from those dangers ; and for those who are unhappily entangled with them, that their minds may be enlightened, or their errors pardoned.

Now to this ever-blessed Trinity, to God the Father, &c.

DISCOURSE XIX.

ON MYSTERIES IN RELIGION.

TRINITY SERMON.

I COR. ii. 6, 7.

Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect; yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world that come to nought, but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery.

THAT the wisdom of man can perform great things, when exerted in its proper sphere, it would be absurd and useless to deny; but it seems not to be any derogation from the powers of that wisdom, whatever they may be, to assert, that beyond its natural limits it cannot act at all; and, consequently, that it never could by any efforts or any investigation have discovered, without divine

divine assistance, the nature, or any of the hidden counsels of God. The being and the wisdom of the Deity are indeed to be discovered by their perceptible effects in the creation; but where such effects are wanting, man's power of investigation must altogether cease. Whatever therefore, respecting God, and his designs, is not made known to us by any such effect as our faculties are able to discern, must lie for ever hidden from us, unless imparted by actual revelation from above. Nor does it appear to be any thing different from what we might naturally expect, that, when those truths have been revealed, which our reason could not ever have investigated, we should still remain as unable to comprehend their nature, as we were before to discover their existence. This we find to happen in other cases. A man by defect of nature blind, may be convinced by testimony that there is a substance called light; but whatever may be the strength of his conviction, from a reliance on the veracity of those who assert it, he must, we know, for ever remain ignorant of the true nature of that substance, the existence of which he was from his birth incapable of discerning.

discerning. Whatever he can learn respecting it, he must take implicitly upon trust, and can neither reason nor decide for himself, on a matter of which his own faculties afford him no experience or information. It must seem to him impossible that any substance should convey to us the knowledge of things very distant, or to his apprehension absent, except so far as he may be able to collect from the analogy of sound. Yet if he refuse to believe what they whose faculties are perfect solemnly assert concerning light, we should justly accuse him of an obstinacy in no small degree perverse and reprehensible.

Much of the same kind, but with additional aggravations, must appear to superior beings the resistance made by the pride and corruption of man to the mysterious truths imparted by the Christian Revelation. It must be a sight disgraceful in the highest degree to humanity: for what can be more contemptible than ignorance which refuses to be taught, and folly which imagines itself wise?

As a slight difference in the mode of considering a question sometimes greatly facilitates our conception of it, let us endeavour

to

to put ourselves in the place of those higher orders of creatures, which we suppose able to contemplate our conduct.—Let us imagine that there are offered to our consideration two Beings, which, setting aside all other distinctions in their nature, have this remarkable difference, that the one is pre-eminent and consummate in knowledge, incapable of falsehood or error: the other grossly ignorant even of many things which it most concerns him to know; perplexed in the search of truth by darkness which he cannot dissipate, and liable, through various infirmities, to wander even in the fullest and the clearest light. Should the superior of those beings at any time condescend to enlighten and instruct the inferior, with what temper should we expect such valuable admonitions to be received? with gratitude, joy, and reliance? or, with pride, petulance, and discontent? with a disposition to cavil, or a disposition to trust? with docile attention, or with pertinacious adherence to ignorance and error?—Could we, unconcerned in it ourselves, be made spectators of such a scene, with what admiration and love should we behold on the one hand displayed a patient and persevering goodness,

unwearied

unwearied even by ingratitude, for ever ready to instruct, to assist, and to pardon ; and on the other, with what indignation and strong contempt should we regard an obstinacy which no persuasion could remove ; and a sullen, stupid pride, which, though unable to direct itself, refused to be conducted ; choosing rather to remain untaught, than to confess an ignorance at the same time undeniable.

If this latter picture strike us as unamiable, as even detestable, can we wonder that it is a part of the great design of Providence to bring us to a better disposition ? There are few things, as we are taught by the scriptures, more offensive to God than the pride and self-sufficiency of man. Indeed when we consider what man is, how limited in his faculties, how confined in his knowledge, how fallible in the best exertions of his reason, that he should have any pride towards God is an absurdity, which, if it were not so highly criminal, would be no less eminently ridiculous. The best and wisest of mankind have felt this truth, and have therefore been generally of all men, the least opinionated, the most humble, diffident, and teachable.

St. Paul declares expressly, in my text, that the wisdom he taught was not the wisdom of men ; not such as could be acquired by their experience, or deduced by their reasonings ; but a very different thing ; the wisdom of God, and that enveloped in mystery.

Now a mystery has been properly defined to be a truth revealed, which our natural reason could not have discovered, nor when declared is able to comprehend.

That such truths should be found among the divine declarations concerning Religion cannot be esteemed surprising, when we consider that the whole of Religion is conversant in topics very disproportionate to the strength and comprehension of the human mind. Even our own speculations upon this sublime subject, presently lead to particulars which we are not able to comprehend. Almost all the expressions by which we convey to each other our imperfect conceptions of the divine nature, are of a negative kind, and consequently are so many manifest confessions of our ignorance ; for to describe any object merely by saying what it is not, is to show, most evidently, that we are far from being able to impart a real knowledge of it. We say of the Deity that

that he is *uncreated*, *infinite*, *immense*, *unchangeable*, and these things we constantly, and indeed truly, assert: but what are these assertions? they mean only that the Being to whom they are applied did not derive his origin from any other; was not created; is not, as we are, confined by certain limits; capable of being estimated by certain measures; or liable to become at one time any thing essentially different from what he is at another. But we do not by these descriptions comprehend any better than before what he is at any time; nor do we acquire, by their assistance, any kind of idea what it is, or how it can be possible, to have existed at all times without a prior cause, or to be present at all times in every place.

Nor do we make any further advance towards the acquisition of exact ideas when we discover and declare that God is a Spirit.—There is not indeed in the origin of the word *Spirit* any thing of a negative kind, but in our usage it is wholly so. In its primary signification in most languages (and many have wonderfully consented to use it alike) it means only *air* or *wind*; but this we know we do not mean; for air we know to be a substance

as truly corporeal as earth, or any thing more solid, though differently modified as to its sensible properties; or, in other words, so formed and constituted as to make a different impression on our organs. The word *Spirit* therefore in this application is only figuratively used, and is of force merely to deny the presence of the corporeal nature. Whatever is not body or matter we call *Spirit*; and should have exactly as definite ideas concerning it if we used the words *not Body*, as we have by substituting the equivalent term *Spirit*. Thus completely are we lost in speculations of a refined nature, not only before we come to divine Revelation, but even before we quit the contemplation of ourselves; for our own spirit, by which our body is animated, is quite as incomprehensible to us, as any other spirit in the universe, and the term as negative in that usage as in any other; for when we say there is a spirit within us, we mean only that there is something within us which is not body, or not of corporeal substance.

Such is man's wisdom, with respect to truths which he is able to discover for himself. Beyond these must lie much knowledge, of

of which if it please God, for wise ends of his government, to impart certain particulars, is it likely that man should be able to trace or to discover one tittle beyond what is disclosed? He who knows not what a spirit is, not even that spirit which lives within him, or how it is connected with his body, can he expect to find out in what manner, or by what ineffable species of communication, the divine spirits of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are joined in everlasting Unity?

Had this question been seriously considered, it might, in different ages of the world, have prevented much of useless, and much of very dangerous speculation.—This, however, did not happen.

At the very entrance, as it were, of Christianity, that is, even in the form of admission prescribed by its Founder, was clearly seen the revelation of a triple nature in the Deity. Converts were ordered to be baptized in the name of the *Father*, and of the *Son*, and of the *Holy Ghost*; names so arranged, without the slightest mark of difference or inequality, as to make it impossible that plain reason should fail to conclude that they all bore in some respect the same relation to the Chris-

tian, and were equally entitled to his adoration.—In perusing the Gospels and apostolical Epistles, the convert could not fail to meet with a great abundance of passages, all tending to confirm the same fact: quite enough to regulate his faith concerning it, and to ascertain the nature of the worship he was required to pay.

But he might at the same time have observed, what is little less remarkable, that of all the inspired writers, not one attempts to reveal, or even to enquire into the nature and manner of what is thus discovered concerning the Almighty; and therefore he might reasonably have concluded, that no indulgence was intended to be given to a curiosity of this kind. This conclusion, however, was not drawn; and a constant employment of Christians, for a long continuance of time, was the attempting to define and to explain in what manner the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, were united and related to each other. Every man had a theory, and every one a distinction of his own, producing an endless variety of new and fanciful terms, many of which were drawn from considerations so subtle as hardly could be said to be understood

stood even by the inventors of them: and what was worse, producing a great decay of Christian charity; and multiplying the reproaches and the punishments of heresy on a thousand frivolous occasions. Yet thus the pride of man was gratified: for to that pride the invention of terms to conceal his ignorance, proves often little less satisfactory than an actual advancement in knowledge; the one being, for the most part, mistaken for the other.

As soon as the memory and evidence of what the Apostles themselves had taught on this subject were sufficiently weakened to admit of such an attempt, the pride and fancied wisdom of man sought out another expedient. That there might not be any occasion for confessions of ignorance, some men were found who boldly denied all those obscure doctrines which they could not succeed in explaining. This was cutting the knot; but it was cutting away at the same time the roots of much real knowledge, and reducing language, the instrument by which all knowledge is communicated, to such a state of uncertainty as makes it difficult to say in what case we can have dependence on it. If the texts

so often alledged to prove the Divinity of our Saviour and of the Holy Ghost are not decisive, words can surely have no power to convey a clear proposition. If we are to suffer ourselves to be persuaded that “the Word “which was in the beginning was with “God, and *was* God,” was, nevertheless, *not* in the beginning, and was *not* God; how shall we invent an assertion which may not be explained away?—Or if the interpretation of his name Immanuel—*God with us*—signify not, that he who was with us was God,—how shall we define the signification of any expressions we can use?—The same may be said in a great variety of instances, of which that already alluded to, the solemn formula of baptism, may be noticed as most comprehensive: for if baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, can be interpreted, consistently with reason, so that the three persons therein mentioned shall have no kind of equality or connection; nay, so that one of them shall be no person at all, but only a term descriptive of some quality or qualities of the first; I know not to what good purpose any form could serve, when
the

the meaning even of the plainest may be so different from what it seems.

For avoiding all these errors what is the most secure direction?—to remember the words of St. Paul; that the wisdom preached by the Apostles was not the wisdom of this world, but a very different wisdom, the wisdom of God, and that professedly mysterious: consequently such as cannot be laid open and explained by human intellect, further than it has pleased him to reveal it; nor can ever be so properly expressed, as in the very words of scripture: to attempt to remove the mystery from it, by new terms or explanations, is either to waste our labour in fruitless endeavours, or to reject what is revealed: which while it remains unaltered must for ever continue mysterious.

Concerning these sublime doctrines, a distinction has been made well calculated to reconcile the mind to their difficulties, and undoubtedly just in its principle; namely, that though *superior* to human reason, they are not *contradictory* to it. The grounds of this distinction some indeed have disputed, but with more zeal for opposition than solidity of argument: for no two things can surely

surely be more truly separate and distinguishable than *not to comprehend how a thing may be*, and clearly to comprehend that it cannot be*; the former of which is the case of things above reason; the latter, of those which are contradictory to it. In the one instance we want knowledge, and reason remains inactive; in the other we have a positive knowledge, and can see a contradiction, and repugnance, which reason is authorised to reject, and indeed unable to admit.

So far is it from being impossible that divine wisdom should communicate truths, the nature of which we cannot comprehend, that human investigation itself leads occasionally to truths thus circumstanced. It is solidly proved by mathematical reasoning, that lines and spaces are infinitely divisible, and that certain lines are of such a nature as for ever to approach, yet never to meet each other. These things cannot be denied without making Reason contradictory to herself, for they are founded on correct demonstrations, to which she cannot but assent; yet how they can be true we may for ever vainly enquire.—Thus that there should be in the

* See Norris on Reason and Faith.

Divine Nature three persons, or differences, is what our reason cannot contradict, because concerning the mode of existence of the Supreme Being, our reason has no knowledge, nor can form any kind of decision: it is a matter altogether above our comprehension; whereas, could we deny it, it must be in some degree level to our knowledge, for so much, at least, we must know, that what was asserted of it could not be true. In the terms there is no contradiction, for it is never said that *three Persons* are one Person, or that *three Gods* are one God; but that the three Persons distinguished by the names of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are so united everlastinglly, as to be properly and truly *One God*. Which, as we cannot comprehend, till it shall please God to reveal himself more fully to us, so let us never have the presumption to doubt, as long as it stands expressed so very clearly in what he has already revealed. If Revelation can only be explained by subtleties and refinements which destroy all the common effect of words, it cannot be well adapted to the general use of mankind. But if no more is required than to believe that God may have revealed some things which, from their

their sublime nature, it is vain and presumptuous to attempt explaining, we may surely continue to pray as we have been taught, and particularly on this day, to the adorable and incomprehensible Trinity, rejoicing, in the words of St. Paul, that “through Christ, “we have access by the Spirit, to the Father.”

* Eph. ii. 18.

DISCOURSE XX.

ON THE TITLE OF *The LORD*, AS A
PROOF OF CHRIST'S DIVINITY.

CHRISTMAS-DAY.

LUKE ii. 11.

For unto you is born, this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

THE dignity and high pre-eminence of Jesus, above all that ever bore the form of man, is marked in various periods of his history, but in none more strikingly than in the commencement and conclusion of his earthly course. On these occasions angels became visible to men, and, by their interference, showed that the inhabitants of heaven delighted to attend him, and to do him honour. He came from heaven, and he returned to it again;

again ; and their appearance at these periods proves that what to man was so important, was not indifferent to the perfect spirits that reside in bliss : that his descent to earth was worthy of their joy, his reascent to heaven of their approach and ministration. They waited on him as inferiors; as the scriptures testify in various ways. “ When God bring-
“ eth in the first-begotten into the world,” according to the Apostle, “ he saith, Let all
“ the angels of God worship him *.”

The angels worshipped Christ. By what presumption some men think themselves more wise than angels, or more exalted, and refuse to worship him, 'tis hard to say. They tell us it is idolatry. Gracious God ! from such idolatry as is performed by those immortal spirits that surround thy throne, may we be never free !—The hosts of heaven fall down, not only before “ him that sitteth on the
“ throne,” but “ before the Lamb.”—This worship then is pure enough for them ; and is it not for man ? Presumptuous, vain refinement !—But the book that tells us this is spurious. So say the objectors : for all is spurious that accords not with the notions

* Heb. i. 6.

men resolve to hold. Let us then wave its authenticity, at least for the present, and recur to St. Luke, whose words are not disputed.

The testimony of angels concerning our Saviour, and their ministration at the time of his nativity, are by that Evangelist recorded. The words of my text are, as you know, a part of that declaration which the first angel that appeared, delivered to the shepherds. Besides announcing to those favoured men the fact, the glorious fact, that he was born, according to the prophecies, *in the city of David*, they also tell his dignity, in words that were not then obscure, whatever they may now be made, by those who will not own their obvious acceptation.

The holy child is there described by three such titles as a Jew at that day must have instantly referred to their right sense: they were all appropriate terms, connected with ideas ascertained and known; they could not be mistaken. *A Saviour, Christ, the Lord.*

Of these three titles the last interprets the two former, at least explains their dignity; for could a doubt arise what person should be Christ and Saviour, *the Lord* is such a name

as

as points it out at once. For though “there be gods many, and lords many,” as the Apostle says, that are so called improperly, yet to him who knows the scripture there is one Lord only, the Lord of heaven and earth.—This term is plain to all of us, at least it should be so; and that I may do my part to clear the point to those who hear me, I have chosen this for the chief topic of the present day’s discourse; endeavouring so to illustrate and explain the word, that I may leave on other minds as little doubt as rests upon my own. If plain and direct reason can effect it, which I dare not question, the task will not be difficult.

What, let me ask you; would have been your notion of our Saviour’s dignity, had this been the conclusion of the angelic message, “a Saviour, which is Christ, *Jehovah?*” Yet so in fact it is, if words established as equivalent may be substituted for each other. In Greek, the language of the second covenant, and, by adoption, of the first, (since Christ and his Apostles often quote the Septuagint) the sacred name *Jehovah* does not occur. For it, in that language, are always substituted, the Greek words that mean *the*

Lord

Lord (*o KupiQ*), which thereby gain a force that otherwise they might not have had, but one as definite and fixed as use can render any thing. The sacred language employed in that translation being current among the Jews when the Apostles wrote, it was adopted by them ; and the *Lord* in the New Testament is as direct a substitute for that great name that was revealed to Moses, as it is in the Greek translation of the Bible. A superstition of the Jews concerning the pronouncing of the name *Jehovah*, first occasioned the substitution of *the Lord* in its place ; but that being once established, the substituted name was equally intelligible, and conveyed the same idea : and if the language of the angel corresponded exactly with that of the Evangelist, as we may be assured it did, the shepherds doubtless understood it so.

I maintain then that no more direct intimation of our Saviour's divinity could have been given, than was furnished by the application of this title to him : a name by which the God of Israel had long been known, in distinction from all other gods ; a name repeated, times innumerable, in the ancient scriptures, as belonging to the true God, and

to him exclusively. “ I am *the Lord*, that
 “ is my name, and my glory will I not give
 “ to another *.” So says he by the mouth
 of Isaiah ; and again by that of Jeremiah ;
 “ I will cause them to know my hand, and
 “ my might, and they shall know that my
 “ name is *the Lord* †.” Pharaoh, who was
 an alien, might say, “ Who is *the Lord*,
 “ that I should obey his voice ‡ ?” But the
 people of Israel, to a man, knew what was
 intended when Elijah proposed to them the
 alternative, “ If *the Lord* be God follow him,
 “ but if Baal, then follow him ;” and ac-
 cordingly when conviction was forced at length
 upon them, by the miraculous consumption
 of the sacrifice, their universal exclamation
 was, “ *the Lord* he is the God, *the Lord* he
 “ is the God ||.”—In these passages, and
 very many others, the original Hebrew has
Jehovah; but *the Lord* (first substituted for
 it in reading, through respect,) was preserved
 also in translations, and was known as fully
 to imply the same as if the name *Jehovah* had
 been pronounced:

* Isaj. xlvi. 8. † Jer. xvi. 21. ‡ Exod. v. 2.

|| 1 Kings xviii. 21 & 39.

Indeed, without being apprized of this usage, the import of the term itself appears insufficiently decisive. *The Lord* is not a title applicable to a mortal. Whatever be the number of those to whom the name of lord may be applicable, *the Lord*, by way of eminence, can have but one signification. It implies supreme dominion, in a degree which can belong to him alone to whom all other powers are subject; and is the same whether employed alone, or, what is no less frequent, in union with *God*. *The Lord God*, or *the Lord our God*.

We may then be perfectly assured that Jesus Christ, the humble and the meek, veiled in the weakness of mortality, and patient in the lowest state of mortal humiliation, would neither have assumed this title, nor have suffered it to be applied to him, had it not belonged to him of right. His own argument with the Pharisees concerning the dignity of Christ turned upon the force of this expression. “He is called *Lord*, said he, by David in the spirit, ‘how then is he the son of David?’” The Lord of David thus inspired must have been a person far above him, and not in strict propriety his son, though called so in a partial view, with

reference to that worldly lineage from which he should proceed as man.—But more directly yet, does Christ assert his claim to be addressed as Lord, and even that exclusive claim, which the unity of the Godhead authorizes. Thus he said to his disciples, “ Be ye not called Rabbi, for one is your Master, *even Christ*.”—And again, “ Neither be ye called Masters, for *one* is your Master, *even Christ**.”—Master is here equivalent to *Lord*, and is applied by Christ to himself exclusively, though in an intermediate clause of his discourse he speaks of the “ *one Father* which is in heaven,” who doubtless must be *Master* also, were not the union of the two so perfect that they are both, with the Holy Spirit, but one *Lord*, and one Master.—In another scripture he says, “ Ye call me *Master and Lord*: and ye say well; for so I am †.” More than once he declared, “ not every one that calleth me *Lord, Lord*, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;” allowing, however, that as far as that might go, the respect of giving him his proper title would in some degree be meritorious. As if he had said, “ It is very well and right to call me *Lord*, for so I

* Matt. xxviii. 8.

† John xiii. 13.

“ am,

“ am, but that is not sufficient. Respect in
 “ words will not obtain salvation, unless in
 “ actions also ye express submission.” On
 this very principle he asks with an implied
 reproach, “ Why call ye me Lord, Lord,
 “ and do not the things I say * ?” exactly as
 the prophetic spirit had enquired by Malachi,
 “ If I be a Master, where is my fear, faith
 “ the Lord of Hosts † ?”

Thus authorized, the disciples and apostles
 of our Saviour, inspired also, and led into all
 truth by the influence of the Holy Spirit,
 uniformly called him *the Lord*. The Lord’s-
 day, so early adopted as the title of the Chris-
 tian Sabbath, signified the day of Christ; the
 day in which he rose from the grave trium-
 phant over sin and death. The apostolic
 writers even assert that he is the only Lord.
 “ To us,” says St. Paul, “ there is but one
 “ God the Father, of whom are all things, and
 “ we in him ; and *one Lord* Jesus Christ, by
 “ whom are all things, and we by him ‡ .”
 Again, “ There is *one Lord*, one faith, one
 “ baptism || .” In another place the same
 Apostle declares it to be the purpose of God,

* Luke vi. 46. † Mal. i. 6. ‡ 1 Cor.
 viii. 6. || Eph. iv. 5.

“ That at the name of Jesus, every knee
 “ should bow, of things in heaven, and things
 “ in earth, and things under the earth, and
 “ that every tongue should confess that Jesus
 “ Christ is *Lord*, to the glory of God the
 “ Father *.”—So truly just and right is this
 expression, that in another place St. Paul de-
 clares the use of it to prove some portion at
 least of the divine Spirit: and “ that no man
 “ can say,” (that is, sincerely say, and in the
 sense of adoration) “ that Jesus is *the Lord*,
 “ but by the Holy Ghost.”—Soon after which
 he informs us, that though there be differ-
 ences of ministries, “ there is only one and
 “ the same Lord †.” In another passage he
 says, “ the second man is *the Lord* from
 “ heaven ‡.”

Yet though the sacred writers thus declare
 that Christ alone is Lord, yet do they often
 use the same expression to speak of God the
 Father: an apparent inconsistency, which
 could not be accounted for, did we not know,
 what they have taught in various ways, that
 in the threefold separation of the Godhead
 there is a perfect union. That though the

* Philip. ii. 10, 11.

† 1 Cor. xii. 3, 5.

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 47.

Father

Father is not the Son, nor the Son Father, nor the Holy Ghost to be confounded with either, yet they all form but *one God, and one Lord.*

The truth appears to be, as indeed the Church hath always acknowledged, that Christ being, as St. Paul expresses it, “the image of the *invisible God* *,” hath been alone made manifest to man †. “No man,” saith St. John, “hath seen God at any time; “the only-begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father he hath declared him †.” He it was that appeared to Adam, to Jacob, to Moses, and to others; who led the Israelites through the wilderness, and was the *Lord of Hosts*; who dwelt between the cherubim, and was the visible *Shekinah*, whose presence filled the Holy Place with glory. This coincidence is strongly illustrated by comparing different parts of scripture. The Lord says “I am *Jehovah*, I change not ||.” The same is attributed by St. Paul to Jesus Christ.

* Col. i. 15.

† This is the doctrine of Allix, in his *Judgment of the Jewish Church*, and of many of our most sound divines.

|| Col. i. 15.

|| Mal. iii. 6.

" Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day,
" and for ever *." Moses says that the
children of Israel tempted the Lord Jehovah:
the Psalmist says they tempted the Most High
God. But the Apostle tells us in his Epistle
to the Corinthians that " they tempted
" Christ †." How could they have tempted
him if he did not then exist? if he were not
the same Jehovah, the Most High God whom
in the other passages they are said to have
tempted? The Psalmist saith that it was the
Lord God who ascended up on high, and led
captivity captive. But St. Paul says it was
Christ who so ascended and so triumphed.
The Lord Jehovah saith, by the prophet
Zechariah, " they shall look on *me* whom
" they have pierced ‡:" but we know who
actually was pierced, and to whom that pro-
phecy is applied expressly in the Gospel of
St. John. In the Epistle to the Hebrews
we find that Moses suffered reproach for
Christ's sake, that Christ was the spiritual
Rock by which the camp of Israel was sup-
plied, and many other things are we thus
told, denoting plainly that the God of Israel

* Heb. xiii. 8.

† 1 Cor. x. 9.

‡ Zech. xii. 4, 10.

was the same who in the latter days came down to visit his people.

It is also certain, that the expectation of the Jews before our Saviour came pointed to the manifestation of the *Lord Jehovah* himself. This expectation had been expressly authorized by the Prophet Malachi, who, speaking in the name of the Lord, had said, “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me;” and immediately after, “*The Lord*, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple*.” Accordingly the devout persons, at the time of our Saviour’s advent, who had carefully studied the prophecies, waited for *the coming of the Lord* †, or for the kingdom of God, or for the consolation of Israel; thus variously expressing the same hope that the God of Israel would then reveal himself, and come down to visit his people.

There cannot then, it seems, remain a doubt, that when the angel gave the Holy Child the title of *the Lord*, it was his purpose to inform the people that their expectation was fulfilled; that he who always was *the Lord* had now performed his promise,

* Mal. iii. 1.

† 1 Cor. i. 7,

and

and had come down among them. A name so long appropriated could not, in so solemn and miraculous a declaration, have been given improperly. The angel called him *the Lord*, his own apostles called him so, and he himself, even in the time of his humiliation, assumed the title. Therefore as *the Lord* we worship, and adore him: we pray to him; and through his merits, mercy, and intercession, hope for our salvation.

On this part I have dwelt the more, as being most decisive, as being indeed, when rightly considered, so convincing, that it appears to leave no subterfuge for error; but my text gives other intimations of the same great truth.

The title of *Saviour* is almost as strictly appropriated, as that of *Lord*. It is the title of the God of Israel; and though applied so universally to Jesus Christ, as to be at present perfectly equivalent to his name, is claimed exclusively for *Him*, by whose authority the Prophets spoke. “I am the Lord thy God, “ the Holy One of Israel, *thy Saviour**:” and yet more strongly, uniting both the titles in one sentence, “I am *the Lord*, besides me

* Isa. xlivi. 3.

“ there

“ there is no *Saviour** :” thus speaks Isaiah. Hosea in like manner, “ Thou shalt know no God but me, for there is no *Saviour* besides me † .”

Christ, the only remaining title in the proclamation of the Angel, is synonymous exactly with *Messiah*; its meaning is the same, *Anointed*; and though the kings of Israel had that title by concession, (as temporary and inferior representatives of the great King who was to be revealed) it belonged always, by way of eminence, to the Holy One of Israel, whose unction was the unlimited effusion of the Holy Spirit. Thus at a time when there was yet no king in Israel, nor any probability of one, the prophetess Hannah, looking to the distant glory of the Saviour, said, “ The Lord shall give strength to his King, and exalt the horn of his *Anointed* † :” in which place the original term *Messiah* might perhaps as well have been retained. To him, therefore, is the following prophecy applied most justly, in which the splendor of his Deity is announced without reserve: “ Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, the sceptre of

* Isa. xlivi. 11.

† Hos. xiii. 4.

‡ 1 Sam. ii. 10.

" thy kingdom is a sceptre of righteousness:
 " thou lovest righteousness and hatest ini-
 " quity; wherefore, *O God*, thy God hath
 " anointed thee with the oil of gladness above
 " thy fellows*." Whoever was anointed for
 any holy purpose, the Messiah was so more
 especially, and sanctified in a superior man-
 ner.

You see how clearly all these things con-
 spire to one great purpose: to declare the
 true Divinity of Christ: and, which way so-
 ever the argument be taken up, such proofs
 are found on every side as have made very
 many of the wisest men, and the most learned
 in the holy scriptures, assent to it, and hold
 it as their faith. That some few of this de-
 scription have thought otherwise ought not
 to weaken our reliance. The most untenable
 opinions have had their advocates; and who-
 ever sees to what weak shifts even the wisest
 men have recourse when they deny the dig-
 nity of their Redeemer, will be inclined to
 look upon that doctrine of denial as among
 the most untenable.

Were it otherwise, the question must not
 be decided by the mere weight of human au-

* Psal, xlv. 7, 9, &c.

thority.

thority. To the judgment of every Christian it is submitted to satisfy himself what notions he conceives the inspired Apostles to have had concerning it. They call Christ uniformly *the Lord*, the import of which title has been now examined. Sometimes *the Lord of Glory*, which admits still less of doubtful interpretation. They tell us that “Christ “came to *his own*, and his own received “*him not*.” How then were the people of Israel *his own*, unless he was the God of Israel, as our enquiries have suggested? Shall we then be wiser than the Apostles, whose wisdom was not of themselves, but of divine communication? Forbid it Heaven! The very attempt is destructive, and its own appropriate punishment attends it,—the blindness of infatuated Pride.

We know then whose appearance among men we celebrate this day: it was that of the Eternal Son, by whom God made the world, by whom he governs, and by whom he finally will judge it. To deny this is, in fact, to deny the faith; and the name of Christians is assumed in vain by those who call this clear and certain doctrine a corruption.

At this time in particular, when we are about to approach the Table of the Lord, let us recollect his dignity before whom we shall then appear; and, humbling ourselves before him, let us intreat his pardon if ever in thought, word, or deed, we may have doubted or denied it.

Now to God, &c.

F I N I S.



