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Evening exercises for the
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EVENING EXERCISES

FOR THE

CLOSET:

FOR

EVERY DAY IN THE YEAR.

BY WILLIAM JAY.

" Not to know at large of things remote
From use, obscure, and subtle, but to know
That which before us lies in daily life,
Is the prime wisdom. What is more is fume,
Emptiness, or fond impertinence;
And renders us, in things that most concerns
Unpractis'd, unprepar'd, and still to seek."

MILTON.

" Thy word is everlasting truth,
How pure is every page!
That Holy Book shall guide our youth,
And well support our age. "

WATTS.

" The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak
my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD. "

JEREMIAH.

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EVENING EXERCISES

FOR THE CLOSET.

JULY 1.—“By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.”—Heb. xi. 21.

“PRECIOUS in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” No wonder therefore that he graciously appoints the time, the place, and the manner of it; that he honours it with his special presence; and calls upon us to make it the subject of our contemplation: “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.” For this purpose he has often mentioned it in his word, and has sometimes recorded it with circumstances the most striking and improving. Let us convey ourselves into Egypt, find out Goshen, inquire for the house of Jacob, and enter his chamber of sickness. It will be found none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven. He is “a dying:” and observe how he dies.

First; he “leans upon the top of his staff.” Thus he looks like a pilgrim. Had he recourse to this action to aid such an impression? The Jews were to eat the passover with their staves in their hand: and we should observe every ordinance, form every connexion, enjoy every advantage, as those who have heard the voice, Arise and depart hence, for this is not your rest. Abraham wished to preserve the recollection of this, and therefore he “sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God:” and it was thus “they confessed themselves to be strangers and pilgrims upon earth.” Give me, says the dying traveller, my staff—Was this staff the same he spoke of when he was returning from Haran; “With my staff I passed over Jordan, and now I am become two bands?” If so, and the thing is very probable, how many feelings would this companion of all his journeys revive! For after a length of time even inanimate things draw from us a strange kind of regard, and affect us, if not by themselves, yet by their associations.—But it was an instance of his bodily decline and infirmity. He whose constitution had enabled him to bear such travels and fatigues is now reduced to the weakness of infancy and dependence; and leans upon the top of his staff. “The glory of young men is their strength:” but let them remember their Creator in the days of their youth; for the evil days will come when they shall say, we have no pleasure in them; when they that look out of the windows shall be darkened, and the strong men shall bow

themselves, and the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the grasshopper be a burden, because man goeth to his long home.—It was also a proof of his conscientiousness in duty. He would place himself in the best posture of devotion his infirmities would admit. We are to glorify God in our bodies as well as in our spirits; and though he does not bind us down to any corporeal forms, yet every thing in his service should be expressive of reverence and godly fear. The Seraphim veil their faces with their wings. Our Lord kneeled three times in the garden. So Jacob, aged as he was, and under the debility of approaching dissolution, when he would adore God, rose upon his knees, though he was obliged to seek support. Think of this, ye who in full health and vigour, instead of kneeling or standing, *sit* during the devotion of the sanctuary; and see how far you come short of the self-denial and godliness of this patriarch.

Secondly, He "*worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.*" He had been trained up in the nurture and admonition of "the fear of his father Isaac;" and had long walked before him; but now he was ending the worship of him on earth, to join in the worship of him in heaven that would never end. This worship doubtless included confession. Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin? some talk of looking back upon a well-spent life. A good man, if he has been distinguished from others, knows who has made him to differ; and sees in the review of his obedience a thousand imperfections which humble him, and prevent all confidence in the flesh. He feels that he is an unprofitable servant, and says in his last approach still more than in all his former ones, "I come, trusting not in my own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies." It had also in it thanksgiving. He had experienced many personal and relative troubles; but out of them all the Lord had delivered him. The angry storms of life were now blown over, and a serene evening had arrived. He had escaped the difficulties and dangers of a tiresome road, and was now in sight of the journey's end, and of his father's house. It is easy to imagine the grateful emotions of his mind when he remembered his flight from the face of his brother, the vision of Beth-el, and the promise of God that he would be with him, and keep him in all places, and never leave him nor forsake him. All this had now been accomplished. "Bless the Lord," would he say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." It contained also prayer. He would implore mercy and grace to help in this time of need; for he had yet to die. O my God, strengthen me this once. "O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help. O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not; until I have showed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come." And he prayed not only for himself, but for others, especially those of his own house. For,

Thirdly, he "*blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.*" The affair is recorded in the book of Genesis with the most touching simplicity. Understanding that his father was sick, Joseph hastens to visit him: and he takes his two sons with him. It was wise in him to show these youths, who had

been living in splendour, such a solemn scene, and to place them under the dying benediction of this man of God. Jacob was overjoyed at their arrival, and said, "Who are these? And Joseph said unto his father, They are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place. And he said, Bring them, I pray thee, unto me, and I will bless them." The feelings of men towards their grandchildren are commonly very powerful: but every thing here tended to increase affection. Manasseh and Ephraim were the offspring of Joseph; and Joseph was his favourite son, endeared by his loss and sufferings; he was also the son of his beloved Rachel. O could he have seen the image and representatives of Rachel—*her* son and—*her* grandsons! But "the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see. And Joseph brought them near unto him; and he kissed them and embraced them. And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth. And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh. And he set Ephraim before Manasseh." Let us endeavour to be useful as long as we continue here, and do good, not only living but dying. It will be well if we are able to say something that shall bless survivors. Parting words are peculiarly impressive and memorable. Children who have disregarded the living counsel of a father have followed his dying admonitions: and the commendations of religion which Christians have expressed, and the comforts of the Holy Ghost which they have experienced in the final hour, have frequently rendered their departure a blessing to many. It has encouraged the fearful. It has convinced the unbelieving. It has induced even a Balaam to say, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Finally; "*By faith* he blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." We allow there was something extraordinary in this transaction. Jacob was under a degree of divine inspiration; and this appears in the manner of his blessing these children: for he not only poured forth the tenderness of his heart toward them, but he admitted them, though born in Egypt, into his family and the congregation of Israel; and constituted them, though their mother was a Gentile, heads of tribes, like his own offspring; overruled the claims of seniority, and pronounced their future number and prosperity. Yet all his faith on this occasion was not of this extraordinary nature. The Apostle does not speak of him as a seer, so much as a saint. He would tell us that he brought forth fruit in old age: that while the outward man perished, the inward man was renewed: that while the eyes of his flesh were dim, the eyes of his understanding were enlightened: that he saw and acknowledged not only the God of providence, but the God of all grace: that he extended his views beyond the bounds of time and sense: that he recognized in Canaan a better, even a heavenly country: that he hailed in his seed the Shiloh that was to come, and in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. What would his dying faith have been, had he only proved

the organ of Divine omniscience concerning things to come? Baalam "had his eyes open, and heard of the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High:" and he said, "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh." But Jacob was an heir of promise: Jacob could say, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." And this is the grand thing—This is what we shall all want when, like him, we are "a dying." When heart and flesh fail, when we are leaving all that is dear below, and entering an eternal state, we shall require all the views, all the influences, all the appropriations of faith. We have heard more than one saying, while engaged in it, "dying is hard work." We shall all find it so, if left to the resources of nature and reason only. But faith can make dying work easy work. "I can smile on death," said Dr. Grosvenor, "because my Saviour smiles on me." Simeon, with the babe in the arms of his flesh, and the consolation of Israel in the arms of his faith, said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people."

O thou Author of all good, inspire my soul with this all-important principle, to make me meet for every season and condition. May the life that I now live in the flesh be by the faith of the Son of God. And may I finish my course with joy, and be able to say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

JULY 2.—"And he looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts."—Mark iii. 5.

EVERY thing in the temper and conduct of our Lord and Saviour is worthy attention; and the fact before us will be found very instructive and useful.

We see that the passions are not evil in themselves. They are inherent in our very nature. It is therefore impossible to divest ourselves of them; and if it were possible, we should only reduce ourselves to mere reasoning machines, and unimpressible intelligences. The passions are the springs and impulses of action. All that religion does is, to govern and regulate them, and to furnish each of them with an appropriate sphere, object, and agency.

We learn that we may be angry and sin not. This is the case when we are angry at sin. This he who was the Holy One of God felt and expressed. It is our duty and honour to resemble him; and it is a proof that we are of one Spirit, if what offended him offends us, and we cannot bear them that are evil.

Yet anger should be always attended with grief. We should grieve to see men suffering, but we should grieve more to see them sinning. We should feel more to see a man proud than poor, to see him led captive by vice than laid in irons. No character is so truly pitiable as the wretch who is destroying himself for ever. David felt this, and said, I beheld the transgressors and was grieved: and Jesus was here grieved at the hardness of their hearts. Fools only make a mock of sin. To laugh at a man who is inflicting upon his

soul the torments of hell, is far more cruel than to turn into sport and merriment the tortures of a fellow-creature on the rack. Paul, in his climax, considers our "having pleasure" in the sins of others a greater instance of depravity than "doing them" ourselves; and the reason is, because we may have powerful temptations to the one, whereas the other results from pure congeniality: nothing shows us more than that which can yield us pleasure. So, on the other hand, the purest grief is that which we feel for the sins of others. Selfish respect may have some place in concern for our own sins, because they endanger us; but we shall not be punished for the sins of others. When therefore we suffer for *them*, we sorrow after a godly sort; we are affected with sin *as* sin; and evince the truest benevolence. And so pleasing to God is such a disposition, that in times of public calamity he ordered "a mark" of preservation to be imposed "upon the foreheads of the men that sighed and cried for all the abominations that are done in the midst of the land."

In our Lord we see the finest moral harmony arising from the perfect union of diverse feelings and affections. His zeal was not without discretion; his prudence was not without fervour. His authority dignified his condescension; his kindness softened and endeared his power. His compassion was not without censure; his censure was not without pity. He distinguished between the sin and the sinner; and at once displayed his displeasure and his distress—"He looked round about on them *with anger, being grieved* for the hardness of their hearts." So should it be with us.

Let us beware that our tenderness does not degenerate into connivance at evil. Adam was too complaisant, even to a wife, when he refused not the forbidden fruit, though presented by Eve. And what judgments did Eli draw down upon himself and family, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not! The Scripture does not speak with commendation of "men in whose mouth are no reproofs." Yea, it says, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him."

Let us also take heed that our faithfulness does not deprive us of the meekness and gentleness of Jesus Christ, or annihilate our concern for the offender in our hatred of the offence. Some Christians are sadly defective here. It might be supposed that they had never read the injunction: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

July 3.—"Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim."

Exodus xvii. 8.

THOUGH God had relieved the people in their pressure when there was no water for them to drink, yet they had offended and provoked him by their rebellious murmurings. Moses therefore, to perpetuate the memory of their guilt, as well as of their deliverance, gave a new name to the place: "He called it Massah and Meribah, because of the children of the children of Israel, saying, Is the Lord among us or not?"—And may we not suppose that the present at-

tack upon them was permitted of God, to rebuke and correct them for their sin? For men are his instruments: he controls them when they act most freely; and he employs them righteously when they act against us unjustly. He can also punish *them*, even when they fulfil his pleasure; for he judges them according to their motives and designs, and not according to the effects their actions produce by his overruling interposition. "O Assyrian! the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of fire."

These Amalekites have been supposed to be the descendants of Esau; but we read of them in the days of Chedorlaomer; and Balaam calls Amalek "the first of the nations." They possessed at this time a large tract of country, extending from the confines of Idumea to the *western* shore of the Red Sea. When therefore Israel crossed over, they were obliged to approach their borders: but they offered them no injury or provocation; and instead of invading their territory, they were turning away from it. We know not what actuated Amalek to assault them; whether it was the hope of plunder, or a wish for military renown, or pure maliciousness. But from the book of Deuteronomy it appears that his conduct was as mean as it was wicked, and as dastardly as it was cruel: for not daring to engage them in front, he waited his opportunity, and smote the hindmost of them, even all that were feeble behind them; and when they were faint and weary, alike incapable of resistance or flight.

The detail of the action on the part of Israel is worthy our attention. They were not only justified in having recourse to arms, but they wisely managed the measure. Though they were a people conducted by the Almighty, who had *miraculously* saved them in Egypt, and delivered them at the Red Sea, and provided them with flesh at Zin, and water where they now were, nothing supernatural is here thought of: for miracles were never intended to be employed where ordinary means were at hand, and sufficient for the purpose. "Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to-morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill." Here we have a fine example of activity and reliance: the sword in the hand of Joshua; the rod in the hand of Moses: the host fighting in the vale, as if every thing depended on their strenuousness; the interceder pleading on the hill, as if all was to be accomplished by divine agency. To use means without neglecting trust in God, and to trust in God without omitting the use of means—This is the test of a proper state of mind in religion—This is the union recommended by our Lord and his Apostle. "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation:" "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure."

Behold Moses and Joshua on this occasion in their respective departments; and see in what various and suitable ways God qualifies and employs his servants. We should not oppose good and useful men to each other, or even improperly compare them together. We should view them all in reference to their commission, their work, and their adaptation—Then they are equally respectable. Each has his own calling and work. It would be absurd to extol the valour of Joshua at the expense of piety in Moses; or to extol the piety of Moses at the expense of valour in Joshua. It was not for want of courage that Moses prayed; or for want of devotion that Joshua fought—It was the same spirit that actuated the supplicant and the warrior. But “as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” If all were the eye, where were the hearing? and if all were the ear, where were the seeing? It is enough for the eye to see, and the ear to hear, and the foot to walk. It would not be for the beauty and welfare of society that every excellence should be found in the same individuals; and it will always be in vain to look for it.

As nothing like our artillery was then used in fight, a person might safely place himself near enough to survey the scene—Thus Moses was stationed on the brow of a rising ground just by, and within view—and how encouraging must it have been to Israel, as they advanced to battle, to look up and see him with his arms extended, and holding in his hand the signal of omnipotence! “Yonder,” would they say, “yonder is lifted up the wonder-working rod which has performed so many exploits for us. Yonder is the man who has power with God, and can prevail, imploring for us succour and success.”

“And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.” This was to show him that the excellency of the power was of God, and not of them; and that means, however good and proper in themselves, are nothing without the concurring agency of Heaven.

But where are the knees that never tremble, and the hands that never hang down? In another world we shall serve God as we ought, and as we would, but in our present state, and while we have these bodies of clay, we cannot do the things that we would. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. We are not weary of his service, but we are soon weary in it, and need relief. “Moses’ hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.” Here we learn of what use we may be to each other. Not only did Moses help Joshua, but Aaron and Hur helped Moses. Two are better than one: and a threefold cord is not quickly broken. We cannot be independent of each other. We may often feel our obligations to those who are in many respects our inferiors. Jonathan was not equal to his friend David in religious attainment and experience: yet he went to him in the wood and strengthened his hand in God.

Need we wonder at the result of the conflict? Joshua fought

under many disadvantages. His men had not seen war. They were raw, undisciplined, and ill armed. They had been living in bondage. Slavery renders its subjects mean and pusillanimous. Having been treated as brutes, it requires time to make them feel that they are men. It is freedom that nourishes magnanimity and courage—Yet “Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword”—for the Lord fought for Israel. So shall all thine enemies perish, O God; while they that love thee shall be as the sun when he goeth forth in his strength.

JULY 4.—“A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench.”—Matt. xii. 20.

THE terms of the imagery require some little explanation. What means a bruised reed? Some take it for a musical pipe made of reed, and formerly used by shepherds. Such an instrument could never be very enchanting; but when “bruised,” would sound inharmoniously and harshly, and would probably be broken to pieces and thrown aside. Others take it for a reed stalk, commonly found in marshy soils. This, in its best estate is slender and frail, but when bruised is unable to bear any weight, is unavailing for any useful purpose, and seems fit for nothing but the fire.—And what is “smoking flax?” Here, says Campbell, by a figure of speech, the cause is put for the effect: the smoking flax means the wick of the torch, or candle, made of this material: he therefore renders it “the smoking taper.” In this case the flame is extinct; but the tow retaining some particles of fire, sends forth no useful light, but only offensive effluvia. All this is obviously metaphor. But it will not be necessary to endeavour to trace the analogy in various and distinct articles of resemblance. It is enough to seize the spirit and design of the figures. This bruised reed, and this smoking flax, mean certain characters to be found, not in the world—there is no real religion there, but in the Church. They are persons of very weak and defective attainments in the divine life. They may be described as defective in knowledge, and obscurely acquainted with the things of the Spirit. Or as weak in faith, and full of doubts and fears. Or as afflicted with outward troubles and inward conflicts, while the consolations of God are small with them. Or as the subjects of moral infirmities appearing in their resolutions, temper, and conduct, and concurring to disqualify them for glorifying God, and serving their generation.

Yet low as they are in the eyes of others—and they are lower in their own, the Saviour does not overlook or despise them: “A bruised reed shall he not break, the smoking flax shall he not quench.” His regard is only held forth negatively. But will he do nothing more than not destroy, or not injure them? Much more is implied than is expressed. The assurance is that he will sustain, strengthen, and confirm the bruised reed; and rekindle the smoking flax, and cause it to burn clear and bright. And that this is the design is obvious from the delightful addition in which we are told that the work, though opposed, shall be rendered triumphant, “till he send forth judgment unto victory.” So truly was it said of him in prophecy, “He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in

his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young." So well did he say of himself, "He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, and to comfort all that mourn."

We may view the fact in four periods. First, The period before his incarnation. His "goings forth were of old from everlasting." It was he who appeared to the patriarchs; but hear the testimony of a dying Jacob, whose failings had been many: "God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day—The *Angel* which redeemed me from all Israel, bless the lads." He was with the Church in the wilderness. And how is his conduct towards them characterized? "But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again." "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old."

The second period takes in the days of his flesh. For three-and-thirty years he dwelt among men, and they beheld his glory, and saw him "full of grace and truth." He had compassion on the multitude, because they were as sheep having no shepherd, and he taught them many things. What was his language? "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He saw some faith in the nobleman who applied to him on the behalf of his son; but it was so weak, that he thought our Saviour could not raise him when dead, and that he could not even recover him while living, without his bodily presence, ignorant of the almightiness of his word. But he yields to his desire; "Sir, come down, ere my child die." What dull scholars were his disciples! But he endured their waywardness, and taught them as they were able to bear it. He tenderly apologized for the three disciples in the garden, when, though he had enjoined them, and was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, they could not watch with him one hour—"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." When he was apprehended they all forsook him and fled—Yet he loved them unto the end—and beyond it too—

Observe the third period, the season that elapsed between his resurrection and his ascension. He rose with the same heart with which he died. He instantly appeared to Mary Magdalene who was weeping, and comforted her. He sent a message to his cowardly and wavering followers, announcing that he was risen. He mentioned Peter who was inconsolable by name. He joined Cleopas and his companion as they were going to Emmaus, and revived their dying faith and hope. He entered the room where the eleven were assembled, and said to their drooping fearful hearts, "Peace be unto you." He accommodated himself with the most surprising condescension to the wish of Thomas, and set his scruples at rest. He took leave of them all, and was parted from them in the very act of blessing them.

The fourth period followed his return to heaven. Out of sight, is often out of mind, with us. The chief butler on his advancement forgot Joseph. Years elapsed after he was enthroned before David

inquired after the family of his friend Jonathan. But Jesus remembered his followers as soon as he came into his kingdom. He immediately sent them another Comforter. He was touched with the feeling of their infirmities; and appeared in the presence of God for them. He was seen of the dying Stephen in glory; and stood by and strengthened Paul when before Nero. And when he addressed the Seven Churches in Asia, and justly reproved their faults, with what readiness and kindness did he notice and commend the least degree of excellence! Let us take what he said to the church of Philadelphia, and remember that he is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. "I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."

JULY 5.—"Exceeding great and precious promises."—2 Peter i. 4.

Not only "great," but "exceeding great, and precious"—Exceeding all example—exceeding all expression—exceeding all conception.

They are exceeding *great* in their *contents*. For what do these promises contain? or rather, what do they *not* contain? They are adapted, and they are adequate to all our woes, wants, and weaknesses. They include all things pertaining to life and godliness; time and eternity; grace and glory. Let me make a selection, and judge of the whole by a part. Let me look at three of these promises—The first peculiarly the promise of the Old Testament—The second of the New—The third of both. The promised SEED. The promised SPIRIT. And the promised LAND. O my soul, let me dwell on each of these till I am filled with wonder; and constrained to exclaim, "O how great is the goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men!"

They are exceeding *precious* in their *estimation*. This does not regard all to whom these promises are addressed; for many make light of them, and neglect so great salvation. But there are others in whom it is fully exemplified. The promises are exceeding precious in the esteem of awakened and convinced sinners. A sense of our wants is necessary to render all our supplies desirable and gratifying. The full soul loathes the honeycomb: but to the hungry every bitter thing is sweet. It is owing to this that many read and hear the word of God without impression; and that the invitations of the Gospel, instead of being attractive, are rather offensive, being by implication a kind of reflection, like the offer of pardon to the innocent, or of alms to the wealthy, or of liberty to those who say, we were never in bondage. But when we see and feel that we are in the condition the dispensation is designed to relieve, the tidings will be glad tidings; they will be like cold water to a thirsty soul; they will be the break of day to one that watches for the morning. When weary and heavy laden, how precious is the voice that cries, "I will give you rest." I am lost, but here is a Saviour. I am sick and dying, but here is a Physician. I am guilty and weak, but here is One in whom I have righteousness and strength.

They are also exceeding precious in the esteem of real and confirmed believers. Let us go through the Scriptures, and we shall find how the saints always delighted in them. The patriarchs "embraced them"—kissed them, as the word is; "and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Job said, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." David said, "I have taken thy testimonies as my heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart." "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." Jeremiah said, "I found thy words and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." The noble army of Martyrs overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of his testimony, and loved not their lives unto the death. And now, in the soul of every Christian, "this is the victory that overcomes the world," "even" their "faith."

And no wonder they are in such estimation with them. They do not judge of them by report, but from experience. To a sense of want they have added the relish of enjoyment: and therefore as new-born babes, they desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby, having tasted that the Lord is gracious. They have tried these promises, and can trust them. They repair to them as to wells of salvation from which they have derived refreshment in many a fainting hour. They have had proofs, blessed proofs of their influence and efficacy—First, in preserving them from despair, in bringing peace into their troubled consciences, and enabling them to joy in God under a sense of their guilt, unworthiness, and imperfections. Secondly, in supporting them amidst all the trials of life. For where is the Christian who cannot say, with David, "This is my comfort in mine affliction; thy word hath quickened me." Thirdly, in animating them in all the duties of religion. How often have they found "the joy of the Lord" which they have derived from their "strength;" freeing them from fear, depression, and formality; and enlarging their heart to run in the way of his commandments! Fourthly, in promoting their mortification and sanctification. This is their ultimate design: "That by them we may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the pollutions of the world through lust." For they are not only intended to afford us consolation, but to draw us from earth to heaven, from the creature to God, from the life of sense to the life of faith, and from the life of sin to the life of holiness. And Christians feel this effect from them far more than from the dread of wrath, or the authority of command, according to the language of the Apostle: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Are you an heir of promise? "O that I was! I know that these promises are exceeding great and precious; but they often make me shudder, lest I should come short of them. Oh that I knew whether I might claim them as my own!" Wait on the Lord, and keep his way. Pray for the testimony of his Spirit as he imparts it by his work in the heart and by his rule in the word. Observe the characters he has given of the subjects of his grace. "To this

man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God."—

But if I am an heir, what is my duty with regard to these "exceeding great and precious promises?" It is to believe them. They are nonentities without faith. It is only by faith they can live and operate in the soul. It is to remember them. You should not have your resources to seek when you want them to use; but be of a ready mind to apply those divine encouragements as your various exigences may require. It is to plead them before God. They are good bills, payable at sight. Present them, and say, Fulfil thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. It is to publish and recommend them. It is a good day with you; and if you hold your peace, some evil will befall you. Go therefore and tell the king's household. Say to your relations, friends, and neighbours; O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him. Yea, to all you find, say, with Moses to Hobab; "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do the good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

JULY 6.—"Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the Angel of the Lord appeared unto him."—Exodus iii. 1, 2.

In the history of Moses we find three distinct periods. Each of them consisted of forty years. The first he passed at the court of Pharaoh. The second as a shepherd in Midian. The third as the leader and ruler of Israel in the wilderness—So changeable often is human life—So little do we know at the commencement of our course what direction it will take, or what design the Lord has to accomplish, either for us or by us. He giveth none account of any of his matters: but he says, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

Who can conjecture, when a child is born, however disadvantageous the circumstances in which he is placed, what are the destinations of Providence that await him? What a character was here! What wonders did he perform! What a space does he fill in the records of antiquity, as a deliverer, a commander, a lawgiver, an historian, and a prophet of the Lord! What a tax of admiration and gratitude has he levied upon all ages! Yet all this importance was once hid for three months in successive concealments, launched in an ark of bulrushes on the Nile, and by a concurrence of circumstances, apparently the most casual, discovered, saved and advanced to glory, honour, and immortality!

God works like himself. He does indeed employ means: but while men depend upon their instruments, his instruments depend upon him; and he so uses them as to show that the excellency of the power is not of them, but from himself. When, without hire or reward, a whole nation was to be released from the iron grasp of the most powerful tyrant of the day, Who appeared before him with this sublime demand, "Let my people go, that they may serve me?" Not a trained soldier, not an experienced and renowned officer; but a shepherd, with no sword by his side, but only a crook in his hand, and no less than eighty years old, when, according to the language of his own beautiful psalm, our "strength is labour and sorrow."

The place where he received this surprising commission was the neighbourhood of Horeb, a place rendered afterward so famous and memorable. What a contrast between his condition at the foot of the same mountain *then*, and his state *now*! *Now* a solitary keeper of a few sheep; *then* king in Jeshurun, ascending up to meet the Most High face to face; receiving the mandates of infinite purity and rectitude written with the finger of God; and subsisting forty days and forty nights by the divine power! This must have been a most interesting spot to Moses.

It is worthy of observation that God in this manifestation found him usefully employed. The occupation indeed was lowly; but though a very learned man, and delicately brought up in a palace, he did not deem the keeping of sheep beneath him, when called to it by the providence of God. Humility is a lovely and blessed endowment. It enables a man to accommodate himself to events, and teaches him how to be abased, as well as how to abound; it leads him to exercise the graces, and perform the duties of the condition. For many who know what it *is* to be abased, do not know *how* to be abased. Their minds do not come down and harmonize with their circumstances. They are humbled, but not humble; and would rather break than bend. Yet is there any thing dishonourable in any kind of honest labour? How much more respectable is a profession, or a calling, however common, than what Bishop Sanderson said were the plague and disgrace of the country in his day, (what would he have said had he lived in ours!) beggary and shabby gentility? Hands were given us not to be folded, but used. Adam was placed in Eden to dress and to keep the garden. Seneca says, "I would much rather be sick than idle." As the employment of Moses was not degrading, neither, we are persuaded, was it found uncomfortable. Lord Kaimes says, "there is no drudgery upon earth but admits of more enjoyment than the ennui resulting from indolence and inaction." We have much reason to believe that Moses felt these to be the most privileged years of his life. How much more free and happy was the shepherd of Midian than the courtier in Egypt, and the leader and commander in the wilderness! Here by the side of his innocent charge he held communion with his God, was inspired to write the book of Genesis, and to tell how "the earth sprang out of chaos"—And here some have concluded he composed the delightful drama of Job, to encourage and comfort his suffering brethren in Egypt. However this may be, the subject adds another instance to the numerous cases

mentioned in the Scriptures, in which, when the Lord appeared to communicate a discovery, or confer a distinction, the recipients were engaged in discharging the duties of their stations in life—Indeed where can we find an exception from the rule? Satan loves to meet men idle. God delights to honour diligence and fidelity. He is with us while we are with him. “To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that he hath.”

JULY 7.—“And the Angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.”—Exodus iii. 2.

THIS exhibition was not only miraculous, but very significant. It was intended to strike the mind through the senses, and as an emblem to be instructive in at least four circumstances. Observe the *substance* of the figure. Not a fine tall tree, not a cedar or cypress, but “a bush,” a mere bush—perhaps a bramble bush. Such is the image of the Church. If numbers, and riches, and splendour, and power be the marks of the true Church, as popery has often professed, where in many ages of the world could it be found? Seldom under the Old Testament dispensation; never under the New. At one time it was in the ark, and there was a wicked Ham. At another in the family of Abraham, and there was a mocking Ishmael. It was now in Egypt, consisting of slaves and brickmakers. If we go forward, our Saviour had not where to lay his head. His followers were the common people. His Apostles were fishermen. They could say, years after they had been endued with power from on high, “Even to this very hour, we hunger, and thirst, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; we are accounted the filth and offscouring of all things.” Paul could make this appeal to the Corinthians: “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.” And when James addresses the admirers of the golden ring and the goodly apparel, he shows them that if they would follow God *he* would lead them in another direction: “Hearken, my beloved brethren; hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” The church is indeed glorious, but she is all glorious within. Her excellences, like the weapons of her warfare, are not carnal, but spiritual. Natural men therefore do not discern her worth and dignity—“The world knoweth us not.”

Observe the *condition* of the bush. It “burned with fire.” Fire is one of the most common things in the Scripture to denote severe suffering. Hence it is said, “Glorify ye the Lord in the fires.” “I will bring the third part through the fire.” What was the state of the Jews now in Egypt? They were enduring every kind and degree of degradation and anguish, and their lives were bitter by cruel bondage. “The Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my

people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows." Yet what were their sufferings compared with those of many of their brethren in later ages? It is to the Jews the Apostle refers when he says; "Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." And when addressing the Hebrews who were converted and christianized, the same writer says; "Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions." We also should do well to reflect on the condition of our ancestors, and be grateful for the exemptions with which we are favoured. Yet there is a sense in which if any man will live godly in Christ Jesus he shall suffer persecution. With us indeed the hand is tied; but the tongue can no man tame, and the carnal mind is enmity against God. And no toleration-act can prevent our having tribulation in the world; or preclude personal and relative afflictions: and these may subserve the purposes of persecution properly so called. We have known individuals who have suffered in private life more than many martyrs; some of them enduring the pressure of grief week after week, and month after month, without notice; and others unable to divulge the source of their distress—a heart's bitterness known only to themselves. Christians are never to consider "fiery trials" as strange things. Of how many can God say, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction!"

Mark its *preservation*. Though burning, "the bush was not consumed." What a commentary on this part of the subject are the words of the apostle: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus's sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." And what an exemplification of this language is the history of the Church! Though always exposed and assailed, it has continued to this day. Other cities have perished, and their memorials with them. Empires have disappeared. The four universal monarchies have mouldered away, and their dust has been scattered to the four winds. But the Church is not only in being, but flourishing, and advancing, and going to fill the whole earth. The oppositions it has met with have been overruled for good, and have turned out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel. As it was with the natural Israel, so it has been with the spiritual; the more oppressed, the more they multiplied and grew: and the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church. Our hearts never tremble for the ark of God. It is in safe keeping. He whose cause it is, is the Almighty; and he loves it infinitely better than we do. We never sympathize with the cry,

"The Church is in danger." We know it is not in danger—It cannot be in danger while his word is true; "On this rock will I build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." And this is as true of every individual believer as of the whole Church collectively. Not one child from the family, not one sheep, not one lamb from the fold, ever has been or ever shall be lost. "They shall never perish." Though the righteous fall, they shall not be utterly cast down. They may be chastened of the Lord, but they cannot be condemned with the wicked—There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

Mark the *cause* of its security. Fire devours, and the bush was combustible, Why then was it not burnt? The "angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a bush;" or, as it is subsequently expressed, "The LORD saw that Moses turned aside to see, and God called unto him out of the midst of the bush." While this leaves no doubt as to the divinity of the Being who displayed himself, so it explains the mystery of the continuance of the bush, and of the perpetuation of the Church typified by it—"God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early." "Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee." God's presence with his people is a delightful reflection; and it is founded in the most perfect certainty. He is with them always; with them in their lowest estate; with them in all their dangers and afflictions; with them to pity them, to assist them, to support them, to preserve them, to deliver them. "For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee." To change the metaphor of our text, but keep the meaning; when the storm arose in the lake of Galilee, the disciples were thrown into a needless alarm—"Carest thou not," said they, "that we perish?" Perish! How could they perish? Was not He on board? And if so, his safety ensured theirs. He could not sink, and therefore they could not. And see how they derived from his presence not only security, but immediate and full deliverance—"He arose and rebuked the wind; and there was a great calm."

We cannot conclude without adverting to the notice Moses takes of this event in the dying benediction which he pronounced on the tribes of Israel. When he came to Joseph he said, "Blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, and for the precious things of the earth, and the fulness thereof, and FOR THE GOOD WILL OF HIM THAT DWELT IN THE BUSH." The scene, though it had passed forty years before, vividly rushed upon his imagination, and he derives from it the greatest good he could implore, whether for a nation or a man only. What pains we take, and what sacrifices we make, to gain "the good will" of a fellow-creature, which, if attained, can do nothing for us in our greatest exigences and interests. But the "good-will" of him that

dwelt in the bush—a tried God, a covenant God, a God who there said, “I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob”—this can sweeten every comfort, soften every sorrow, take the sting out of death. This can accomplish every hope. This satisfy every desire. “Think upon me, O my God, for good.”

JULY 8.—“I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly.”
Zeph. iii. 18.

THIS “solemn assembly” was the convocation of the people for worship, especially in the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of weeks, and the feast of tabernacles. In these, thrice a year, all the males were to appear before God in the place which he should choose. This was Jerusalem. It was therefore named “the city of their solemnities.” Here, at such seasons, they were always to “rejoice before the Lord.” The services indeed were all of the festive kind; and “joy becomes a feast”—

“But we have no such lengths to go,
Nor wander far abroad;
Where'er the saints assemble now
There is a house for God.”

Yes, we have our solemn assemblies as well as they; and surely we have not less reason than they had to be joyful, and to say, “Let us serve the Lord with gladness, and come before his presence with singing.” Yea, if we are habitually strangers to pleasure in religious services; if we cannot call the Sabbath a delight; if we are not glad when they say to us, Let us go into the house of the Lord; if we do not rejoice at his word as one that findeth great spoil; if spiritual duties are not in some good degree spiritual privileges, there is surely enough to awaken apprehension of our state before God.

We never apply the term “solemn” to any common, or merely secular assembly; but only to one that has something in it sacred, and capable of inspiring awe. And what can be more venerable, grand, and impressive, than the assembling together of a number of immortal beings, in the presence of the Lord of angels, to engage not in any of the affairs of this world, but in those which concern the soul and eternity, and the consequences of which will affect us for ever! Well, therefore, may we exclaim with Jacob; “How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.” Let us impress ourselves with the thought when we are repairing to the sanctuary. Nothing will tend more to preserve us from a roving eye, and a wandering heart; and nothing will conduce more to our profiting by the means of grace, than our engaging with a serious and thoughtful frame of mind. David therefore said, “In thy fear will I worship toward thy Holy Temple.” It is the more necessary, because of the frequent return of these solemnities: if familiarity does not always breed contempt, it must always tend to reduce veneration.

But what caused these pious Jews to be “sorrowful?” See how they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. Their metro-

polis was destroyed, their palaces were demolished, strangers possessed their fields and vineyards: but though their calamities were great and numberless, nothing distressed them in comparison with the destruction of the temple, and the loss of their sacred institutions. They were "sorrowful because of the solemn assembly." This was now broken up and dispersed. Ah! said their aching hearts, "thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations. We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long." "Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers worshipped, is burned with fire, and all our pleasant things are laid waste."

Blessed be God, *we* cannot be thus sorrowful for the solemn assembly. Our temples are standing, our Sabbaths are continued, our eyes see our teachers, our ears hear the joyful sound; we sit under our own vine and fig-tree, and none makes us afraid. Yet we ought, and if we are spiritually minded, we shall on many accounts be sorrowful for the solemn assembly. Sorrowful when deprived of opportunities of being found in it. This may be the case owing to the calls of urgent business, or accident, or sickness, or relative affliction. When indeed we are thus providentially detained, the Lord will not leave us comfortless: yet when we remember these things, we shall pour out our souls in us; for we had gone with the multitude, we went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day. Sorrowful that it is so little attended. Many so undervalue the privilege as to suffer the most trifling expense or impediment to keep them from the courts of the Lord. Sorrowful that it is so little improved. How many attend frequently and regularly who receive the grace of God in vain, and are no wiser and better for all their advantages. Sorrowful that it is so impoverished and declining—That there is less spirituality and fervour; that we do not see the children instead of the fathers; that while the old are removed so few in early life are coming forward to fill their places; that so few are led to inquire what must I do to be saved; that so few increase with all the increase of God. Sorrowful that it is dishonoured and degraded—By apostacies, backslidings, inconsistencies, and falls in the members of it; so that the enemies of the Lord blaspheme, and the way of truth is evil spoken of, and the Redeemer wounded in the house of his friends. Hence it is here added, "to whom the reproach of it is a burden." All this "is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation."

Yet if we feel the distress, it is a token for good. It is godly sorrow. And blessed are they that thus sorrow—For, says God, "I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly." This means, with regard to these Israelites, that they should be united again from their dispersion, and led back to enjoy their former privileges, and again see his power and glory in the sanctuary. With regard to other sorrowers the Lord will gather them in two ways; gather them for safety, and gather them for glory. Moses said to Pharaoh, upon his announcing the plague of hail, "Send now, and gather thy cattle, and all that is in the field;" that is, house them from the storm. Thus the hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and affords them a safe and comfort-

able retreat from the weather and the birds of prey. Our Lord uses this image; and David had also said, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust; his truth shall be thy shield and buckler." What an encouragement is this in times of public and general calamity! Indeed without it we should not be able to live a day in quiet from the fear of evil. The husbandman, when the grain is ripe, gathers the wheat into the barn. The bridegroom is said to go "down into the garden to gather lilies." It is thus the Lord, when they are made meet, removes his saints from the Church below to the Church above, and from earth to heaven, by the hand of death. Thus they are continually gathering one by one to their own people. At length he will send forth his angels, and will gather together his elect from the four winds; and the aggregate will be perfect. To this the Apostle refers, when he says, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him."

Two things result from hence. First—That sensibility attends genuine religion. The Lord takes away the heart of stone out of our flesh, and gives us a heart of flesh. Secondly—Nothing is more pleasing to God than a feeling, lively, public spirit, that will not allow of our looking on our own things, but also on the things of others, and especially the things that are Jesus Christ's. If we have no concern for the welfare of Zion, we are not living members of the mystical body. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. They shall prosper that love thee."

JULY 9.—"Are the consolations of God small with thee?"—Job xv. 11.

THEY are not so in themselves, nor have they been so in the experience of many. Many have found them sufficient to wean their affections from the vanities and dissipations of the world, to set their hearts at rest, and to sustain them under every loss: when they have walked in the midst of trouble these have been able to revive them; and in the multitude of their thoughts within them *his* comforts have delighted their souls. Nor can they be small in the estimation of any who have tasted that the Lord is gracious. But some know their fuller value from the want, rather than from the possession. They have had indeed relishes of them; but as to habitual enjoyment, the consolations of God *are* small with *them*.

But is there not a cause? And should not serious inquiry be made after it? The cause cannot be found in the God of all comfort. We are not straitened in him. All the fulness of God is before us. "Have I been a wilderness to Israel? a land of darkness?" Sometimes the reason is the indulgence of something incompatible with the will of God. This injures our peace and joy, as the worm affected Jonah's gourd: the cause was not so visible, but it was real, and while the refreshing shade was withering over his head, a worm was working at the root. The boughs and leaves were some way off from the mischief, but they felt the influence in every pore, and for want of vital communication could no longer resist the scorching sun. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord

will not hear me. There was an Achan in the camp that troubled Israel; therefore they could not stand before their enemies. Our obedience will be imperfect as long as we remain here, but it must be impartial. We shall rue for any reserve we make: and can only be preserved from shame if we have respect unto all his commandments. When Joab was assaulting Abel, he said to the wise woman, I do not wish to destroy this mother city in Israel; but a man, Sheba by name, hath lifted up his hand against the king—Throw his head over the wall, and the siege shall be instantly raised: and so it was. Let us therefore search, and try our ways, and resolve to act faithfully by the discovery.

“The dearest idol I have known,
 Whate'er that idol be;
 Help me to tear it from thy Throne,
 And worship only thee.
 So shall my walk be close with God,
 Calm and serene my frame;
 So purer light shall mark the road,
 That leads me to the Lamb.”

And be it remembered that the evil we are speaking of may regard not only some sin committed, but some duty neglected. One complainer perhaps holds back that which restitution requires. Another perhaps forgives not his brother his trespasses. A third does not reprove his neighbour, though he sees sin upon him.

Neglect in attending divine ordinances will furnish a reason. When by the Providence of God we are deprived of these, or of the ability to repair to them, we shall find that there is not an essential connection between grace and what we call the means of grace. He will be with us in this trouble, and we shall see his power and glory, so as we have seen him in the sanctuary. But it is otherwise when having the opportunity in our hands we are found absent. We then transgress the command which forbids us to forsake the assembling of ourselves together; we put a slight upon the Lord's own appointment; and show a disregard to his presence and blessing. The hand of the diligent maketh rich: and they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. How much did Thomas lose in being absent from the Apostles when the risen Saviour appeared in the midst of them! How often have we heard persons remark, that when they have been absent from their places, the text or the sermon has touched the very subject they wished to hear; and it is not improbable that something was then lost which might have confirmed or comforted them through life.

Ignorance of their privileges has also its influence. Many labour under great difficulties for want of evangelical instruction; and some who have many advantages are yet very obscure and perplexed in their views of the grounds of their acceptance before God, and of the certainty of their persevering in the divine life; and also of the nature and design of afflictive dispensations. Persons may be safe, and feel little of the glorious liberty of the sons of God; for this depends on knowledge: “ye shall *know* the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” “Blessed are the people who *know* the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance, in thy name shall they rejoice all the day, and in thy righteousness they shall be exalted.”

To this we may add, separation from godly intercourse. Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart, so doth a man his friend by hearty counsel. Paul was sad; but when he saw the brethren, he thanked God and took courage. "Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God." Thus two are better than one. A Christian will often be tempted to imagine something singular in his views and feelings, especially those of a sorrowful kind; but a fellow believer will be able, by opening his experience, to turn the stumblingblock into a way-mark, and convince him that all the subjects of divine grace have passed through the same exercises. Having seen the treachery of his own heart, a Christian is afraid of any encouragement offered from that quarter, till he has consulted with a wiser than himself in the things of God. His own prayers seem not to deserve the name of grace or of supplication, but he is cheered by learning that he has an interest in the petitions of those who have power with God, and can prevail.

But finally, what says James? "Ye have not, because ye ask not; ye ask and have not, because ye ask amiss." And what said the Saviour to his disciples? "Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive; that your joy may be full." Therefore open your mouth wide. Therefore pray not according to the sense you have of your unworthiness—this would strike you dumb; but according to the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards you by Christ Jesus. Think of the unspeakable gift; and having boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him, say, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us *all things?*"

JULY 10.—"And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise."
 Heb. vi. 15

THE person spoken of is Abraham. The promise is contained in the preceding verses, and was delivered in the form of an oath. "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, saying, Surely, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." He had obtained the promise itself long before; but the meaning is, that he at length obtained also the fulfilment.

Now they that are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. He was called the friend of God; and they are all precious in his sight, and honourable, and he has loved them: and of each of the sons it will be said in due time as it was of the father of the faithful; "And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise."

The believer's dependence and expectation are placed upon the promise of God. He would have nothing to sustain his hope, but for some divine intimation and assurance. God therefore from the beginning spoke in a way of promise; and in a way of promise he always deals with his people. He could have done for them all that he purposed to do without announcing it previously, but then they could have derived no advantage from it beforehand; and as they

could not have known it, they could not have trusted in it, and acted upon it, and pleaded it in prayer, saying, "Do as thou hast said." A promise is more than a simple declaration: it is an express engagement by which a man lays himself under an obligation, and does not leave himself at liberty to act indifferently. And this, with reverence, applies to the conduct of the Supreme Being. But it is obvious that God's promising must have originated in his own undeserved goodness: for not only are his promises exceeding great and precious, but we were not worthy of the least of all his mercies and of *all the truth* which he has showed unto his servants. Yea, while we had no claims upon him, he had claims *against* us; and could righteously have punished us as transgressors. Let us only imagine that God had not as yet spoken concerning us at all, but was about to do it; conscious of our guilt, we could have expected nothing but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment; and, like Adam and Eve, hearing the voice of God, we should have endeavoured to hide ourselves for fear. But be astonished, O heaven, at this, and wonder, O earth; he is good and ready to forgive! and comes forward and assures us that the thoughts he thinks towards us are thoughts of peace, and not of evil! and that all things are provided and ready for our relief!

As soon as we are born of God we are his children, and if children, then heirs; and as such we have a title which no enemy can invalidate to all the promises. But the promises are not always immediately accomplished, and hence a period of "patient enduring" is necessary. God indeed is not slack concerning his promise: he is never a moment beyond the appointed season. Yet, according to our wishes and apprehensions, he seems to delay: for ignorant of *his* time, we often fix one ourselves, and thereby not only show our folly and presumption, but expose ourselves to disappointment. When God promised Abraham a son, for many years he went childless. And how long did things grow more dark and discouraging before Joseph could see any probability of the fulfilment of his dream. It is often the same now in the history and experience of believers. Their prayers may seem disregarded. Their iniquities may prevail against them in the sense of their guilt, and in the stirring of their power. The battle may wax hotter and fiercer, and victory apparently decline. The land that is to be given them, measured by their feelings and fears, seems very far off: and they are frequently ready to say, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Doth his promise fail for evermore?"

This season of waiting is very trying, especially when the blessing is earnestly desired, and we are pressed down by outward trials. When it cometh, it is a tree of life; but hope deferred maketh the heart sick. During the suspense the enemy is busy to produce distrust and despair, and to lead us to say, Why should I wait for the Lord any longer? But, in opposition to this, faith will whisper, "Wait on the Lord," and, "Be of good courage." It is good for a man not only to hope, but "quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." It will keep him from entertaining those hard thoughts of God which always furnish bitter reflections after he has appeared to our joy; and also prevents our using unhallowed means to help out our eagerness—like Rebecca, who though she knew the elder was

to serve the younger, in her impatience had recourse to injustice and lies to accelerate the event. He that believeth maketh not haste. He remembers how long he kept God waiting for him. He knows that the Lord's time is the best time; that every thing is beautiful in its season; that fruit is most wholesome and rich when it is fully ripe. He is also sure that he cannot wait in vain—for they shall not be ashamed that wait for him. For

No uncertainty attends the final accomplishment of his word. This Abraham found: "And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." This the Jews found. At the end of four hundred and thirty years they were to leave the house of bondage: "And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt." He also engaged to give them Canaan for an inheritance. And therefore whatever difficulties opposed their passage and their entrance, it was at last acknowledged, "Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation." "Behold," says Joshua, "this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." Solomon also at the dedication of the temple bore the same testimony to the veracity of God: "Thou spakest with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day."

Let us then be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Let us remember that all his promises are yea and amen in Christ Jesus; and that every thing in his nature and in his character is a pledge for the execution. "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry"—And bring with it the triumph and the song; "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."

JULY 11.—"When THOU WAST UNDER THE FIG TREE, I saw thee."—John i. 48.

BEBOLD here THE RETIRED ISRAELITE—"Thou wast under the fig tree."

It is spoken of Nathanael. Some have contended that he was the same with Bartholomew. Others, with less plausibility, have supposed that he was the bridegroom of the marriage at Cana in Galilee. He is once mentioned, along with some of the disciples, at the sea of Tyberias, in the close of this Gospel. With this exception, all we know of him is from the chapter before us. Philip had the honour of introducing him to the Son of God: "Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael in reply said unto him, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see." His objection shows that his knowledge was small, and his prejudices vulgar. But his compliance proved that he was open

to conviction, and willing to examine. And this accords with the character given of him by our Lord. "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" By calling him an *Israelite* he distinguished him from other nations, and by calling him an Israelite *indeed* he distinguished him from his own nation: for all were not Israel who were of Israel. He was a Jew inwardly, whose circumcision was that of the heart in the spirit. He was not free from infirmity, but devoid of hypocrisy, and upright before God and man. Conscious that he had never been with Jesus, he asks with surprise, "Whence knowest thou me?" And Jesus answered, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree."

The fig tree was the place of his retreat. It was probably in a garden, forming by its foliage a kind of natural alcove. It was chosen by Nathanael, not only because its large leaves would screen him from the rays of the sun, but conceal him from human inspection. For he wished to be alone. We may be alone in company. Who has not endured the solitariness of being with persons of no congeniality with their own views and feelings, who have checked and chilled every favourite sentiment, and rendered every attempt to introduce pious discourse like putting a tender exotic plant out into the frost and snow? But through desire, a man having separated himself seeketh and intermeddled with all wisdom. The place is not always optional. The poor are to be pitied who have no conveniency for retirement; and they are still more to be pitied who, by reductions in life, have been deprived of the accommodations they once enjoyed—If they are Christians, there is nothing they will so much feel themselves. But where it is optional, the place is indifferent, any farther than it may usefully or injuriously affect us as to the object of our withdrawal. Many therefore prefer the apartment of a room. But others, instead of being distracted and diverted when abroad, are aided and impressed; their thoughts are quickened, their fancy is enlivened by the displays of wisdom, power, and goodness all around them; and they can easily rise from things seen and temporal to those which are unseen and eternal—They love the fig tree; and the wood, the corn-field, the meadow, and the garden will bear witness to their devotion. Isaac was in the field at evening tide to meditate; and Peter was praying on the house-top.

But what was Nathanael doing under the fig tree? It was something significant, and which was instantly recalled. There are facts in the lives of all which are easily susceptible of remembrance. Some of them may be awful; and only a hint given, or a circumstance mentioned, will call up the colour in the cheek, or excite a pang in the conscience. Such to the seduced must be any reference to the place of allurements and ruin; and to the murderer the place stained with blood. But to pious minds there are spots delightfully and sacredly interesting, because they have been no other than the house of God and the gate of heaven. Such was Beth-el to Jacob, and the hill Mizar to David, and the river of Chebar to Ezekiel, and Patmos to John, and the fig tree to Nathanael. Though we know not in particular what was Nathanael's engagement, it was obviously something of a religious nature. He was probably reading

the law and the prophets ; or reflecting on some divine subject ; or praying to the God of heaven : or more probably he was indulging in all these successively, or intermingling them together ; for this is the business of retirement.

Nathanael we may be assured would not turn his back on the temple of God, or forsake the assembling of himself together, with those who keep holy day, as the manner of some is ; and public worship has its own undeniable claims. But he found in secluded devotion four advantages and recommendations. The first regarded frequency. Public services are comparatively few, and they should be few ; and they require much time ; and the seasons must be fixed, and invariable, and known, for general accommodation. But opportunities for private devotion continually occur, and ask only the momentary convenience of the individual himself. The second regarded freedom. All company is a degree of restraint upon intimate associates. Friendship longs always to resign up itself more fully to its own object. It therefore deals much in secrecy : and this is peculiarly the case with the friendship between God and the soul. There are confessions proper only for his presence ; petitions to be only poured into his ear ; griefs to be lodged only in his bosom. "The heart knoweth his own bitterness ; and a stranger intermeddeth not with his joy." The third was self-acquaintance. Self-knowledge is the most important and difficult. Persons may live to be old, and yet be ignorant of themselves ; and they may be much alone, and never meet with their own hearts, or morally converse with them. Yet surely retirement affords the best opportunity to try our state, to examine our character, to detect our mistakes, to learn our dangers, and to provide against them. The fourth was the greater evidence of religious principle. Motives of less purity may induce us to repair to places where there is much besides God to attract and to entertain, especially in the goodness of the singing or the eloquence of the preacher. It is no unusual thing in our day for the service of the sanctuary to be turned into an amusement. But it does look like conviction, like a regard for the duty itself, like real love to God, when we can readily go where God only is to be found, and we have only to transact business with him. If we were in company with a disliked individual, his presence would be tolerable if they were to continue ; but if they were all to depart, and leave us alone with him, nothing would be so desirable as the door. O my soul, in similar circumstances would this be my case with regard to God and thee !

JULY 12.—"When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee."—John i. 48.

BEHOLD here THE OBSERVING SAVIOUR—"I saw thee."

Here was a *Divine* observer. For how did he see Nathanael in this concealment ? Not by an eye of sense ; or from the testimony of others ; but by the attribute of omniscience. Accordingly it produced this belief in the mind of Nathanael, who was forced to exclaim, "Thou art the Son of God ; thou art the king of Israel." This perfection Peter ascribed to him when he said, "Lord, thou knowest all things." Nearness and distance, darkness and light, publicity and secrecy are the same to him. How many proofs did he

give in the days of his flesh that he "needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." He assured John, "All the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts." And he evinced his entire acquaintance with all their state, and the recesses of their experience. And in his times he will show that he has been about our path and our lying down, and acquainted with all our ways, words, and thoughts; for he will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.

Here was an *approving* observer. His eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth: but much of what he sees he abhors. He sees many alone, but God is not in all their thoughts. They abstract themselves from the world, but are still in it; and employ their leisure in trifling or mischief, or, as Isaiah expresses it, in "weaving spider's webs, or in hatching cockatrice' eggs." But his heart was with Nathanael. Had his fellow-creatures peeped through the leaves of the fig tree, and seen him now reading, now musing, now kneeling, and praying with strong cryings and tears, they would have pitied or despised him. But the Lord looked on with approbation: for "the Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy." Nathanael himself thought meanly enough of his performances, and perhaps feared they would be rejected. But "the Lord is nigh unto all them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." "I have seen his ways, and I will heal him; I will restore comforts unto him and to his mourners."

Here was an *acknowledging* observer. He not only saw and approved, but avowed his regard. He avowed it to Nathanael *himself*. How must he have been affected when he heard the sentence, "I saw thee." Surely a blush spread over his face—But how would he be cheered and encouraged by such an assurance! "Ah!" you say, "he could hear his voice—But does he speak now?" Not with audible sounds in the air, or in visions and dreams—There only enthusiasm is hearkening after him. But he has access to the mind, and bears witness with our spirits. Many now living, like Enoch, have the testimony that they please God—He has said to their soul, "I am thy salvation"—"I have loved thee."

And he not only avowed his regard to Nathanael, but he avowed it *before others*. He might have taken him aside, or have whispered it to himself: but no; he owns and commends him in the presence of the whole party. It was a testimony to a private transaction, but it was publicly expressed; and the attention of the company was turned towards him previously for this very purpose, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee"—What an illustration was here of the truth of his own words. "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy

door, pray to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Nathanael thus privately sought ; and was thus publicly acknowledged—

And by whom ? Not he who commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth. Seek the honour that cometh from him ; and remember the way in which it is to be obtained : " Them that honour me, I will honour." He can make others take knowledge of them. He can make the Spirit of glory and of God to rest upon them. He can distinguish them by the care of his providence in common calamities. He can own them in their dying moments. And he will, he must confess them before his Father and the holy angels. The concealments of Christians are only partial and temporary. Their day is coming ; it is the manifestation of the sons of God. Yet a little while and every cloud will be dispersed, and they shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Then the tears they have shed over their sins and infirmities, while they were deemed licentious in their principles ; the prayers they offered for those who hated and persecuted them ; the alms in which they suffered not the left hand to know what the right hand did ; and all the sublime and the beautiful of religion that passed under the fig tree, shall be not meritoriously, but graciously proclaimed before an assembled world. " Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the councils of the hearts : and then shall every man have praise of God."

JULY 13.—"And round about the throne were four and twenty seats : and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment ; and they had on their heads crowns of gold."—Rev. iv. 4.

A THRONE is for royalty, and reminds us of a king. The King here is the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. He "hath established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all." He has indeed two thrones. The first we approach on earth. It is the throne of grace. This is the place of our sanctuary, and the source of all our relief. The way to it we know ; and "we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him." The second we approach in heaven. It is the throne of glory. This is too bright and dazzling for us to behold in this weak state of flesh and blood—for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." But there is a relation between these two thrones : and if we visit and value the one, and can now say, "It is good for me to draw near to God ;" we shall soon be introduced to the other, and "be for ever with the Lord."

These four and twenty elders were representatives, not of the ministers, but of the whole Church : the number being made up of the twelve Patriarchs and the twelve Apostles ; the former the emblems of the Jewish, and the latter of the Christian part of it.

We may observe the position of these favoured beings—Their seats "were round about the throne." God is the supreme good. With him is the fountain of life. He is therefore the centre of their attraction ; and their happiness arises from their nearness to him.

We see their posture—They were "sitting." John also saw them

“standing before the throne,” and “falling down before the throne.” All is necessary to do justice to the subject. Their standing is a posture of readiness for service; and they serve him day and night in his temple. Their falling down is a posture of self-abasement, reverence, and adoration. But sitting shows distinction and privilege. Sitting in the presence of the king, especially when upon his throne, was limited to great favourites or near relations. “When therefore Bath-sheba went unto king Solomon, to speak unto him for Adonijah, the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king’s mother.” And the Lord Jesus not only calls his people his friends, but his kindred—“The same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” Sitting is refreshment and rest—we sit when we come in from travelling or from toil. And they who die in the Lord “rest from their labours.” It is also the posture of festive enjoyment—in allusion to which it is said, “Many shall come from the East and from the West, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.”

We have also their apparel—They were “clothed in white raiment.” They had complied with the Saviour’s invitation, who had counselled them to buy of him white raiment, that they might be clothed: and we are informed what this was; “the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” This is two-fold. It is their *justifying* righteousness, of which Paul speaks when he says, “that I may be found in him; not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of faith.” In this righteousness believers are not only absolved, but “exalted.” They have more to appear in than Adam in Paradise: his righteousness was finite, theirs is infinite; his was the righteousness of a creature, theirs is “the righteousness of God.”—And it is their *sanctifying* righteousness. We are required to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” by a participation of his qualities, and an imitation of his example. The Scripture speaks of “the garment of praise;” and of being “clothed with humility.” When we read of “keeping our garments,” and “not defiling our garments,” the reference is to our religious principles, and actions, and habits, which cover, and defend, and distinguish, and adorn the mind, as vestures do the body. And to these John refers when he says, “They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb:” for the righteousness of Christ needs no cleansing. But *their* obedience is defective and polluted, and needs a sacrifice to render it acceptable, and grace to render it rewardable.

Finally; we are informed not only of their dress, but of their dignity. Persons may be clothed and not crowned; and they may be crowned, but not with gold!—But these “had on their heads crowns of gold.” The glory to which they are advanced is of the highest degree, and of the most durable and valuable quality—“Such honour have all his saints.” It shows the amazing goodness of God towards them; for originally they were nothing, and viler than the earth. They were guilty and depraved. But he not only spares them, but forgives them; not only relieves them, but enriches and dignifies them. What a contrast between their lapsed and their restored condition! How low the one, how elevated the other! “He raiseth

up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dung-hill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people."

Here is scope and food for ambition—true ambition—commendable ambition. Let us despise the groveling projects and pursuits of men of the world, who have their portion in this life, and, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality.

Oh! says the Christian, the attainment seems incredible—But, unworthy as I am, it is not too great for me to expect—

"There shall I wear a starry crown,
And triumph in almighty grace;
While all the armies of the skies
Join in my glorious Leader's praise."

JULY 14.—"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary."
Psalm lxxiii. 1, 2.

"As the man is, so is his strength:" and as the man is, so are his desires. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; and they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." Let persons therefore judge of themselves religiously, by their desires; and if the stream does not rise so high as they could wish, let them observe the direction in which it flows. Let them ascertain that their desire is to the Lord, and the remembrance of him; and the promise assures them, "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

Natural men live without God in the world. God is not in all their thoughts. If he attempts to enter their alienated mind, he is resisted as an intruder, and they say unto God, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. But the spiritual delight themselves in the Lord. Their language is, "Where is God my Maker that giveth songs in the night?" "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." "It is good for me to draw near to God."

We here see the *strength* of David's desire after communion with God in the discoveries and operations of his glory and power in his house and ordinances. Stronger terms could not be employed to express it. But two things served to excite and enhance it.

First, his *present condition*—"My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land where no water is." He was now driven out of his country, exiled from his inheritance, and deprived of the songs and services of Zion. And in this condition what does he only or chiefly mourn over? Not the loss of his domestic and civil advantages, but of his religious. "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that keep holy day." How, says he, I envy the Priests and Levites—"Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee." How I envy the companies that journey to Salim, whatever be the weather or the road—"Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them: who passing through the valley of

Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." How I envy the little birds that flee, and feed, and build near the sacred place—"Yea, the sparrow hath found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God." There would my nest be—the home of my heart—"My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."

It has grown into a proverb, that we never know the worth of blessings till we know the want of them: and the poet sings—

"How mercies brighten as they take their flight!"

Thus sickness endears health. The Jews who had always been murmuring against Moses, mourned for him when dead many days; and no doubt sincerely, and even the more because of their former conduct. A minister may not be neglected: but it is when his hearers look up, and see his figure no more in the pulpit, and when they can no more hang upon his lips—it is then they begin to think how they have improved his labours, and are prepared for the next interview; it is then they recall his sermons, and borrow, and transcribe the notes which others have taken down. Children may not have undervalued a mother: but the full estimation of her importance is not felt till her ears are closed to all their complaints, and their cares find no longer an asylum in her loved bosom—upon this principle the Lord acts, and it will account for many of his dispensations. If we do not esteem and are not thankful for his benefits, he suspends or withdraws them. He can easily deprive you of any of those religious opportunities and advantages, from which you now suffer the most trifling excuses frequently to keep you. By the loss of hearing he can render you deaf to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. Accident or sickness may confine you from the place where his honour dwelleth. Or a change of business or residence may fix you in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is—

Secondly, his *former experience*: "To see thy power and thy glory so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." God is not confined to temples made with hands. His presence fills heaven and earth; and David had seen his power and his glory in all his works; but he knew the special grace of the promise, "In all places where I record my Name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." And they who wait upon the Lord, and love the habitation of his house, have always had proof of this, and can say with David—"I have seen him in the sanctuary. I am not to be disputed out of the reality of my experience. I have found him there, and communed with him as a man talketh with his friend. The influence and effect of the intercourse have vouched for the nature of it. It was not delusion, or enthusiasm. It has rendered sin odious; it has weaned me from the world; it has drawn me heavenward; it has taught me to rejoice in Christ Jesus, and to have no confidence in the flesh."

Others are strangers to this experience. It is what mere formalists and false apostates never knew. But it is an incomparable advantage to the possessor. It confirms his confidence in divine

truth: he has the witness in himself. It tends to preserve him in the way everlasting; and serves to recall him when he backslides. For he may be allured and drawn away for a time by other lovers; but he can never lose the relish he has had in the enjoyment of his God and Saviour: and the remembrance will excite him and reproach him, and make him long for it to be with him as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shined upon his head, and when by his light he walked through darkness; when as yet the Almighty was with him—"Then shall she say, I will go, and return to my first husband, for then it was better with me than now." Yea, this will always serve as a stimulus to urge him on in following hard after God. A person might have been ready to say, If David had seen God, why was he not satisfied? But he was not satisfied *because* he had seen him. He did not indeed want more *than* God, but he wanted more *of* him. His enjoyment only increased his appetite, and his experience only provoked his desire—"To see thy power, and thy glory, *so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.*"

But what brings others to the temple? What brings you? Is it custom? or curiosity? Do you come to please your connections? or to appease conscience? It is surprising that some of you attend the service of the sanctuary so regularly and constantly as you do. You never saw his power and glory there. You never prayed to see them before you went. You never inquired whether you had seen them after you returned. This has been the case with some of you twenty, forty years. Will such an attendance do for a dying hour? Where now are all the ordinances you have been favoured with? all the sermons you have heard? In the record of your guilt and condemnation, ready to be produced at the last day.

But a real Christian needs not threatening and authority to constrain him to attend the means of grace. He feels them attractive; he has found it good to be there—There he has found the house of God, and the gate of heaven, and can say—

"I've seen thy glory and thy power,
Through all thy temple shine;
My God, repeat that heavenly hour,
That vision so divine!

"Not all the blessings of a feast
Can please my soul so well,
As when thy richer grace I taste,
And in thy presence dwell."

JULY 15.—"The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid."—Zeph. iii. 13.

Of the subjects of divine grace here spoken of we may remark—Their number: "a remnant." A remnant is a small part compared with the whole. We should be liberal in our opinions of men, but we are not to sacrifice truth upon the altar of candour: and we should always speak, not from our feelings, but from our convictions; and always make our appeal to the law and to the testimony. Some think few are wicked enough to be turned into hell, and that very little is required to constitute a claim to eternal life. But the sentiment is very injurious. It allows them to be satisfied with the state they are in themselves, and keeps them from endeavouring to

save their fellow-creatures, whom they view as safe already. Nor is it less false. Take the characters of real Christians as they are found in the faithful word, and compare them with those who are living around you, and how few will come up to the representations? And does not the Scripture tell us that they are "jewels," for their rareness as well as worth; that they are "a little flock" in a large field; that they are "a garden" in a vast wilderness; that they are "as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uttermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof?" Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Yet God has never left himself without witness: he has always had a people for his Name; and this has been our case as a nation; "for except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah." But though the remnant has been small relatively, it has been considerable in the aggregate; and is now increasing; and will increase. We have seen great things; and our children will see yet greater; for "he shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit."

Of their sanctity: "they shall not do iniquity." This must be taken with some restriction. We would not plead for sin; but we must not oppose the testimony of God, which assures us that "there is not on earth a just man that doeth good and sinneth not." "If we say we have no sin," says John, "the truth is not in us." And James says, "In many things we offend all. But they are not "workers of iniquity," and "evil doers." Sin does not reign in them; they do not obey it in the lusts thereof. There is no sin in which they knowingly live. They hate every false way; and esteem all his commandments concerning all things to be right. He that has "true holiness" cannot be satisfied without perfect holiness. He therefore prays to be sanctified throughout, body, soul, and spirit: and whatever falls short of this is matter of grief and humiliation to him.

Of their sincerity: "they shall not speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth." A part is put for the whole; and the quality of their speech is designed to express the inward temper of their minds. They shall be Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile. Every thing is lies with God that does not accord with the state of the heart; and only an upright spirit can maintain a deceitless tongue. The fruit partakes of the nature of the tree. What is in the well will be in the bucket: what is in the warehouse will be in the shop. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Infirmity is not hypocrisy. They are not mere pretenders. They do not draw on a fine white glove over a filthy leper's hand. They are not like a painted sepulchre, fair without, and rottenness within. They are not mere actors on a stage; but are really what they appear to be. Their integrity is peculiarly known by this—there is nothing of which they are more afraid than self-deception. They therefore come to the light. They examine themselves by the rule of the word. They implore the inspection of God himself: "Search me, O God, and know my

heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Of their privileges: "they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid." Thus their blessedness is expressed pastorally, and includes three things. First, pasture; they shall "feed." As his sheep are men, their food must be something intellectual and spiritual; and as they are new creatures it must be something congenial with their new appetites. And we read of the provision of God's house, and of his people being satisfied with his goodness. The ordinances of religion are the places in which they are fed, but they are not the food itself. What says the Saviour? "I am the bread of life." "He that eateth me even he shall live by me." Secondly, repose; and shall "lie down." In an eastern climate, and in a warm day, how desirable would the refreshment of rest be? and therefore the Church says, Tell me, not only where thou feedest, but "where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon?" And this David enjoyed and acknowledged; he not only feedeth me beside the still waters, but he "maketh me to lie down in green pastures." I cannot explain this to you if your own experience does not. I cannot enable you to comprehend what that peace with God is which they feel who are justified by faith; what that contentment is that springs from communion with an infinite good; what that dwelling at ease is which the soul realizes that casts its burden upon the Lord, and is careful for nothing. Thirdly, security: and "none shall make them afraid." Sheep are the most timid of all animals; every appearance and movement alarms them. And this is too much the case with those they represent. But things are spoken of in the Scripture according to their proper tendency and effect. The righteous are bold as a lion—that is, they ought to be so; their duty requires it: their principles justify it. Nothing should make them afraid; because nothing shall, nothing can injure them. God has amply provided for their confidence; and when they can apprehend it by faith, they can be in quiet from the fear of evil—they can "dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods." Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O people saved of the Lord! Visit me, O Lord, with thy salvation; and let me glory with thine inheritance.

JULY 16.—"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast."—Heb. vi. 19.

Among the advantages by which a Christian is distinguished he is peculiarly characterized by the possession of hope. This hope is called "a good hope through grace:" and the goodness of it is to be seen in its utility and certainty.

The *usefulness* of it is here expressed by a metaphor. We have this hope as "an anchor of the soul." It will be easy to show the simple force of the comparison. The ship is anchored even in the harbour or port to keep it from being driven while lading or unloading: and to this we liken the use of hope in the common concerns and engagements of the Christian life: without it we could not be fixed trusting in the Lord, but should be all fluctuation and unsteadiness; and instability is incompatible with excellency—"Unstable

as water, thou shalt not excel." But the main use of the anchor is to hold the vessel in rough and tempestuous weather, when the mariner is unable to steer without danger of running on rocks or quicksands. This world which we have to cross is a sea; and we shall be piteously mistaken if we reckon upon nothing but calms or breezes. Does the word of God encourage such an expectation? Does it not forbid us to consider storms as strange things? In all ages have not the afflictions of the righteous been many? And what is to secure them in persecutions, losses, troubles personal and relative, conflicts without and fears within?

"Amidst temptations sharp and long,
My soul to this dear refuge flies;
Hope is my anchor firm and strong,
When tempests roar and billows rise."

He that walketh in darkness and hath no light is to "trust in the Lord, and to stay upon his God." This David recommended to others: "Let Israel hope in the Lord." This he enjoined upon his own soul: "Hope thou in God." This he approved from his own experience, for he had found it available: "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

We also read of the "patience of hope," because hope is necessary to cheer and sustain it. In nature there are wintry months between the sowing and the reaping. And in the Christian there is the prayer of faith, the work of faith, the fight of faith, the life of faith, the walk of faith, before he receives "the end of his faith, the salvation of his soul." Though all the promises of God are faithful, many of them are not immediately fulfilled. Here then patience is necessary, and sometimes "long patience." But we are naturally full of impatience; and therefore we should be in danger of giving up the case as lost, and saying, with the unbelieving nobleman, "What should I wait for the Lord any longer?" Did not this hope whisper, "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart?" Wait I say on the Lord. Though he delays, he cannot refuse. The delay also is founded in kindness and in wisdom. The Lord is a God of judgment; and blessed are all they that wait on him. All *will* be well—all *is* well—"All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth."

But, says Cowper—

"Dangers of every shape and name
Attend the followers of the Lamb,
Who leave the world's deceitful shore,
And leave it to return no more."

Many of them therefore do not regard suffering only—There are the perils of indulgence, of ease, of agreeable connexions, of success in business, of wealth, of fame: and we know who hath said, "the prosperity of fools shall destroy them." Here again "we are saved by hope." What is the smile of a man to the honour that cometh from God only? What is earth to a better country, "even a heavenly?" How came Moses to refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter? "He had respect unto the recompense of the reward." How came Abraham to "sojourn in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise?" "He looked for a

city which had foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Thus the Hebrews took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had a better and an enduring substance. Thus it is that we are preserved from the power of worldly temptations. Narrow and barren commons may urge the sheep to wander; but it is otherwise with the green pastures and still waters. Fill a Christian with all joy and peace in believing, and he has no room to "covet after evil things"—His exposure is when "the consolations of God are small with him."

But this hope, as an anchor of the soul, is "sure and steadfast:" and as to *certainty*, the truth far exceeds the figure. In other cases the anchor does not always save the ship, but the ship is driven from its holdings and dashed to pieces. But this hope always secures the Christian; there never was an instance in which it was known to fail. This is an incomparable recommendation. Nothing is so wretched as the disappointment of hope. And yet what is more common than the wreck of human expectation, with regard to all earthly things? But nothing can equal the disappointment of *that* hope which regards the soul and eternity! How dreadful for a man to live in expectation of all that God has promised, and come short at last: to go with confidence to the very door, and knock, Lord, Lord, open to us; and then hear from within, I never knew you—Depart! Yet such will be the issue of every *religious* hope but *this*. It is *this*, and *this alone*, that "maketh not ashamed;" and is as "sure and steadfast" as God himself can make it.

And therefore the thing is, whether we can say "*which* hope we have." It is not only desirable, but possible to know this. Only, in deciding, there is nothing concerning which we should be more careful. What reason can we show for having *this* hope in us? Have we any better evidence than "a form of knowledge," or "a form of godliness," while we "deny the power thereof." How is this hope founded? Is the Lord our righteousness and strength its only basis? How does it operate? For a dead hope is no better than a dead faith. The hope of Christians is a living and a lively hope: it will induce us to value; to seek after; and long to enjoy and resemble the glorious object of it. "He that hath *this* hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure."

JULY 17.—"And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus; which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."—Acts xiii. 6—12.

WHEN in their ministerial tour from Antioch Paul and Barnabas reached Paphos, they not only found there the celebrated temple of

Venus, with all the sensualities attached to it; but had to encounter another and a peculiar adversary. There is no going on in the cause of God without opposition—for

"Satan rages at his loss,
And hates the doctrines of the cross."

And he never succeeds better than when he throws himself into worldly professors and false teachers; and employs fraud rather than force, and address rather than open persecution. When therefore Sergius Paulus, a prudent man, called for the Apostles, being desirous of hearing the word of God; Elymas the sorcerer withstood them, and sought to turn away the deputy from the faith, that is, from the hearing of it. A willingness to hear is often a token for good, even if for the time it does not arise from the best motive. It brings people to the pool where they are in readiness for the troubling of the water. They are in the way of the means; and faith cometh by hearing. We should therefore endeavour to bring people under the sound of the Gospel. We may learn our duty from the enemy of our souls. He does all in his power to keep people from hearing, especially the great. And with them he is often successful. They think it is proper for others, but excuse themselves, not considering that none need it so much because of their dangers, and because of the influence of their example.

—But what did Paul? Observe, First, his reproof. "Full of the Holy Ghost, he set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" We are not fond of hard names and harsh language; and there is nothing we should more guard against than mingling our passions in the cause of truth: "for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." The same actions require not only the same circumstances, but the same warrant. When therefore the Samaritans would not receive our Saviour when he was going up to Jerusalem, and James and John seeing this said, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" he turned, and rebuked them, and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Paul not only knew the depravity of this wretch, how he misrepresented their doctrine, and calumniated their designs; but he was "filled" with the Spirit as 'a spirit of judgment and of burning;' he spoke in the name of the Lord, and as a prophet, whose appeal was sanctioned by the event. Observe, secondly, his denunciation. "And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand." The doom had five characters. It *corresponded with the crime*—Here was blindness for blindness; judicial blindness for criminal blindness. It was *suddenly* inflicted—"Immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness." It was comparatively *mild*—It was only the loss of sight: but Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead. It was *temporary*—He was not to "see the sun for a season." It was *useful*—Like other judgments at the beginning of the Gos-

pel, it was to guard Christianity from abuse, and to awaken attention, that others might hear and fear, and turn unto the Lord. And as this was the design, so this was the effect of it—

—And we see that the word of the Lord is not bound. Men may show their malignity to it, but they cannot hinder its spread or its efficacy. Yea, their oppositions will be more than harmless, and turn out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel. Thus we here find the wrath of man praising God, by giving rise to a miracle which produced a growing effect on the mind of Sergius Paulus. What was this effect? “Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.”

First, “he believed.” We know that there is a faith which is not saving and influential. It is the effect not of principle, but impression; evidence for the time overpowering doubt, but leaving the heart unchanged. James speaks much of this belief. And our Saviour often met with it. Thus “when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.” How many are there now living who admit every truth their ministers teach into their judgments; but there they lie like bodies in coffins, dead being alone. We hope, however, this was not the case here; but that the deputy believed to the saving of the soul; not only assenting, but acquiescing, trusting in the Lord Jesus, and becoming his follower.

Secondly, he was also “astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.” Every thing was adapted to produce this feeling in *him*. The doctrine was perfectly *novel*. We who are familiar with it from our youth up, cannot well imagine how it must strike the mind of those to whom it is introduced for the first time! They may well be said to be called out of darkness into marvellous light. Yet there is a degree of this in every converted soul. Experience is very different from theory: and when we are taught of God we have other views of those very things of which we have read and heard before. The *nature* of it surprised him. It contained the deep things of God. Great is the mystery of godliness—God manifest in the flesh—One dying for all—He who knew no sin, made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him—Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith! How mysterious the scheme! And yet as pure as it is deep, requiring us to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to avoid the very appearance of evil. The *efficiency* also would strike him. He now viewed the Apostles as the oracles of God, and considered what they said as his word—and so it was—and he saw it was. For no sooner had Paul spoken than it was supernaturally accomplished. And this could be justly extended to every thing else: for “the word of God is quick and powerful.” How much more of this can we see than he saw. Since then how mightily has it grown and prevailed. How has it banished idolatry—tamed the savageness of the multitude—comforted the desponding—changed the disposition of the ungodly—and enabled those who have every thing to enslave them to earth, to live with their conversation in heaven. What other doctrine has ever been so “glorified?”

And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto us. Many despise it and turn from it. How do we regard it? Do we believe it? And does our life vouch for our faith? Can we say with David, "Thy testimonies are wonderful, therefore thy servant loveth them." Some would consider a regard that rose to admiration and astonishment as weakness of mind. But it is more than justified by prophets, by angels, by God himself, who has magnified his word above all his name. How little and mean are other things at which we wonder! Here is enough to fix, and fill, and employ the mind for ever! But let us not be found in the number of those who "wonder and perish." Let us pray that the Holy Spirit may lead us into all truth, that we may know the excellency of it from its influence in ourselves, and recommending it to others, be able to say with John, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

JULY 18.—"And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do."—Acts xv. 36.

NOTHING can be more pleasing to a Christian than to study the life of our Saviour; to follow him from place to place; to hear him preaching the Gospel of the kingdom; to see him feeding the hungry, opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead, and going about doing good. We may feel a considerable degree of the same pleasure in reading the acts of the Apostles. The Apostles in the Church of God were next to him in order of time, and next to him in dignity, and next to him in supernatural endowments, suffering, and usefulness. But in all things he must have the pre-eminence. He is fairer than the children of men. In following him we find nothing to scandalize or to distress. No censure ever attaches to his temper or conduct; he is always in character with himself as the Holy One of God; and we exclaim with the multitude, "*He hath done all things well.*" But it is otherwise when we follow men, good men, great men, inspired men—"The best of men are but men at the best."

An instance of which comes before us this evening in the dispute between Paul and Barnabas. It will yield us several instructive meditations.

We begin with Paul's proposal to Barnabas—"Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do." The manner in which he speaks of the persons regarded is observable: he calls them "our brethren." Our Lord had said to his disciples, Call no man master, and be not ye called masters, for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren. And they strictly adhered to the command. Paul does not avail himself of his office, talents, or success, to lord it over God's heritage. He exercised no dominion over their faith, but was a helper of their joy. The fraternal relation results from our very nature; for God has made of one blood all the nations of men, and they are all derived from one father, the first man, Adam—so that wherever I see a human being I see a brother. But the

Apostle here refers to the subjects of divine grace. They are new creatures; they are born again; but they are born of the same Spirit, they are redeemed by the same blood, justified by the same righteousness, heirs of the same glory: and while partaking of "the common salvation," a communion subsists between them, unaffected by any difference of opinion, or distinction of circumstances.

These were universally esteemed by Paul; and he could say, "Grace be with *all* them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." But the persons he now wished to see were known to him and Barnabas. They had been blessed under their former ministry; for they had preached to them the word of the Lord before. It is natural for those who are spiritual fathers to feel a peculiar affection for their own offspring. If we have planted a tree we feel interested in its life and growth. What wonder then that Paul should wish to water what they had planted; or that having sown the seed, he wished to see the blade, the ear, and full corn in the ear. And the state of things required their inspection. The first Churches were exposed to a thousand discouragements and dangers. How soon were the Galatians "bewitched" from the truth, and lost the blessedness they had spoken of. There were deceitful workers at Corinth, and one wretch, as specious as he was injurious, who transformed himself into an angel of light. At Ephesus from among themselves arose men, speaking perverse things, and drawing away disciples after them. Wherever the good seed was sown the enemy was sure to sow tares. It was natural therefore that Paul should be concerned to visit "every city" where they had laboured, to know their estate, to refute any error in doctrine, to oppose any corruption in practice, to warn the unruly, to comfort the feeble-minded, to uphold the weak; and to help them much who had believed through grace—How well could he say, "That which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the Churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?"

See the zeal of this man of God—"Let us go *again* and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do"—He was never weary in well-doing. He made the end of one good work the beginning of another; and considered nothing done while any thing remained to *be* done. What he said of himself as a Christian applied equally to his character as a preacher and an apostle: "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." To those who were ignorant of the principle that actuated him in these "labours more abundant, and deaths oft," he appeared like a man deranged; and he was so, when judged by the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness with God. But, says he, "Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." Hence too when he mentions his losses and persecutions he adds, "For the which cause I also suffer

these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

But Paul's zeal was always according to knowledge. Like the healthful heat of the body, it made him glow, but did not like a fever burn up his brain. No person of so much natural sanguineness of temper, and so much spiritual fervour, ever had so much prudence, or was so authorized from his own example to say to others, "Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the fear of the Lord is"—Hence his wish here not to go alone, but to take Barnabas with him as before. He knew that two were better than one. If one fell, the other would lift him up again. If one was tempted, the other could warn him. If one was distressed, the other could comfort him. If one was perplexed, the other could counsel him. He remembered that his Lord and Master, in the mission of the Seventy, had "sent them forth two by two, into every city and place whither he himself would come." He also had said, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

JULY 19.—"And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work."—Acts xv. 37, 38.

WE have heard Paul's proposal to Barnabas to revisit together the scenes of their former travels and labour. Here we see the difficulty that occurred in the execution of it. The occasion of it was Mark, not Mark the evangelist, but John Mark. He was the son of the sister of Barnabas. When Barnabas and Paul carried alms from Antioch to Jerusalem, they brought this young man back with them: and when they were sent forth from Antioch to spread the Gospel, they also took him along with them. But when they came to Perga in Pamphylia, he left Paul and his uncle to pursue their journey, and returned to Jerusalem.

On the present occasion Barnabas wished to take him again: but Paul was unwilling. Both had their reasons. Barnabas hoped he had been humbled for his fault, and that in this second excursion he would wipe off the disgrace of the first. Besides he was his nephew; and relative affection will often plead very hard. Paul reflected on our Lord's words; "No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God." He felt a very different spirit in himself; and deemed it right to notice a misconduct which, if tolerated in a public character, might be injurious by example. Perhaps both these good men erred a little; the one being too partial, and the other too severe. But with regard to the young man himself, we may observe two things. First, though we know not the particular reason for his delinquency, whether it was the attraction of home, (for he had a mother living in Jerusalem,) or the dread of difficulties and dangers in such a missionary life; he had done wrong in going back; and his declension not only affected his own reputation, but laid the ground of this disagreement

and discord. How much depends often upon one mistake. We can never calculate the evils that may arise from it as to ourselves or others. Let us therefore walk circumspectly; and ponder the path of our feet, that our goings may be established.

Secondly, the severity of Paul and the kindness of Barnabas were probably blessed to him. It is certain that he acted a part afterwards; for Paul had subsequently a good opinion of him; and was not backward to express it. Hence he says to Timothy, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry." "And Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments,) if he come unto you receive him." Hence we infer, That we should be moderate in our censures. We may have cause to blame an individual; but we know not what he may become. He that is now like a bruised reed may prove like a cedar in Lebanon; and he that is now only like smoking flax may flame for God, and kindle many others. We also learn—That those we have censured for their faults we should be forward to encourage and recommend upon their improvement. Many when they have reflected upon a character, are delighted to find their reflections justified. This shows a littleness of mind and a vileness of heart. A man in proportion as he is truly good and great, will be glad to learn that he was mistaken in his moral forebodings. "Charity rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth."

JULY 20.—"And the contention was sharp between them."—Acts xv. 39.

THIS was sad. Persons may differ, but agree to differ, leaving each other to be fully persuaded in their own mind. Abraham and Lot differed: but "Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren." And the one nobly gave up; and peace was the reward. But here neither would yield; and "the contention was *sharp* between them." Good men are often less persuadable and manageable in disputes than others; and it is to be accounted for from their conscientiousness, and the greater importance they attach to their opinions. In these cases they may be, and very often are mistaken; but while they think the cause of truth, the advancement of religion, and the honour of God are involved in the side they take, we need not wonder that they feel a kind of martyr-firmness as well as zeal. None of our passions assume so much the pretence of rectitude as our anger: but when we are jealous for the Lord of hosts, what fervour and faithfulness should we not display! Even the advocates of the religion of the Lamb of God have pleaded with pens dipped in gall, and tongues which seemed set on fire of hell. But the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. "The wisdom that is from above is not pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

Good men, and men eminently pious have their infirmities and imperfections. Even Moses spake unadvisedly with his lips. Elias

also was a man subject to like passions as we are. When Paul and Barnabas had healed the cripple at Lystra, and were in danger of being worshipped, they rent their clothes, and said, "Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you." And had these intentional idolaters been now present, and witnessed this angry contention, they would have had proof of it; and have no longer said, "The gods are come down in the likeness of men." Many a sacrifice of praise and confidence that we are ready to offer to a fellow-creature would be spoiled by a little more intimacy with them—"He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

Here we see, what we have many occasions to remark, the impartiality and fairness of the sacred writers. They give us no "faultless monsters;" but describe the failings as well as the excellences of the dearest servants of God. They are never afraid of the honour of religion on this account; neither should we—

But let us remember for what purpose such faults are recorded in the Scriptures. It is not to render us careless in our walk, or to palliate our miscarriages; but to warn and admonish us. I am not to say, when irritated into asperity, "Why, Paul and Barnabas were hot and fierce too;" but to reflect on the weakness of human nature, and to learn my own danger—"If such men erred, let me beware." "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. Happy is the man that feareth always.

JULY 21.—"They departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches."—Acts xv. 39—41.

NOTHING could have been more unlikely or painful than this separation. Barnabas was of a most affectionate and tender disposition, and was called "the son of consolation." It was he that introduced Paul to the Christians at Jerusalem, and convinced them of his conversion when they were all afraid of him. They were peculiarly attached to each other. They had always been companions in travelling and preaching. How often had they taken sweet counsel together, and gone to the house of God in company. How frequently had they united in holy exercises. Like David and Jonathan, they were knit together in love, and seemed to have but one heart and one soul—Yet they differ, contend sharply, and part! Who has not said in his haste, All men are liars! What can equal the pain that results from the disruption of friendship!

Yet the Lord can make the wrath of man to praise him. The separation of Paul and Barnabas was overruled for good, and "turned out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel." Two missions now issued forth instead of one.

For the breach between them did not take them off from their work, or relax their zeal in the noble cause to which they were pledged. Only it is observable, not only that they moved widely from each other, but that each repaired to his native country; Barnabas sailing for Cyprus, and Paul travelling through Syria and Cilicia. Were they, in taking these directions, guided by the Holy Ghost, or

did they follow their own prudence and inclination? The latter might not have been inconsistent with the former. The Spirit of inspiration often availed itself of common occurrences, and fell in with the natural views and feelings of the individuals favoured with it. Partial affections are not incompatible with general benevolence; but may be the very means of aiding it. A peculiar regard for a land in which we were born and trained up, among all the endearments of life, is natural and unavoidable, and deserving of encouragement: and it is certain that we cannot show our love to it in any way so nobly and importantly, as by endeavouring to promote the spread and success of the Gospel in it.

The manner in which they were dismissed to their new scenes of labour, reminds us of the practice and principles of the first Christians. They were men of prayer. They knew that our sufficiency for every trial and for every work was of God; yea, that even an Apostle could only be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might—and therefore “the brethren recommended them unto the grace of God.”

But because this is spoken of Paul and Silas at their departure, and not also of Barnabas and John, some have inferred that the church at Antioch sided with Paul, thinking him in the right in this dispute, and blaming Barnabas for opposing him. But we are persuaded the sacred historian intended no such inference. Luke mentions only the dismissal and recommendation of Paul, because it was *his* history he was engaged to write. But we have every reason to believe that they did the same for Barnabas when he left them, as they did for Paul. They would know that in every difference there is mutual, though there may not be equal blame. They would be alive to the excellences of both these men of God: they would be tender towards both; they would pray for both. They had perhaps endeavoured to be mediators, but they took care not to be partisans. There are cases in which neutrality is a virtue; and a man's greatest wisdom and excellency is to do nothing. And it is a very unreasonable thing when persons disagree, to think that others must be drawn into their quarrel; instead of retaining a regard for both, as far as each appears estimable. Let this remark be applied not only to religious dissensions, but to quarrels among neighbours. Let us remember the words of the wise man, “He that passing by, meddled with strife not belonging to him, is like a man that taketh a dog by the ears”—He will soon grow weary of holding him back, and if he lets him go, he will be snapped at.

—Did Paul and Barnabas part at Antioch to meet no more? We are not able to determine this. It appears, however, that if they did not meet again, they were reconciled; for some years after Paul thus speaks of him; “or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?” Yea, we are persuaded they were reconciled before they parted. Anger may enter the mind of a wise man, but it “resteth only in the bosom of fools.” Paul, who said to others, “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath,” would not separate from Barnabas, perhaps for ever as to this life, without expressions of renewed attachment. And who, that ever tasted the pleasures of reconciliation, but wondered that he ever lived a day or an hour in the gall of bitterness and resentment?—Wherefore let us as much

as possible live peaceably with all men. And if, as offences will come, a breach at any time is made, let us hasten to heal it, remembering that he who soonest yields is the conqueror, and that it is the glory of a man to pass by a transgression. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

JULY 22.—"Sanctify them through thy truth."—John xvii. 17.

As the Saviour intercedes for this sanctification, it shows us the importance of it. As he asks it for his own disciples, who were already called by his grace, and had continued in his word, we learn that it is a progressive work, and that we should not be satisfied with any present advancements we have made in it. Hence the admonition of the Apostle: "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." God is the source and author of this sanctification; and therefore *his* agency is implored. But we are here reminded of the instrumentality he employs: "Sanctify them through *thy* truth." There is an emphasis in the appropriation—*thy* truth: for it is not every kind of truth that sanctifies; but the truth of God; "the truth as it is in Jesus." This is the means of our conversion, and therefore it is said, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." And this also is the means of our progress in the divine life; and hence we read, "As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." The Gospel conduces to our sanctification several ways:

First, by replenishing the soul with holy objects of contemplation. These, by filling the mind, keep out other things, and by their residing in it, produce assimilation. For we are always affected with subjects with which we are constantly familiar. When we are among little children, and fields, and meadows, and lambs, we acquire feelings of simplicity and innocency, to which we are strangers in our intercourse with the world. A man that dwells much upon gloomy images is soon tinged with depression and despondency. The miser by poring always on "sordid dust" becomes contracted, and mean, and base. Who does not feel his levities checked, and a soft sympathy seizing his frame, when he enters the house of mourning, and, for the time at least, know, that "by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better?" Ideas of grandeur tend to elevate, and of purity to refine our sentiments. Hence one of the secrets of sanctification is to be very conversant with "the things of God," by reading, hearing, and reflection.

Secondly, by presenting powerful motives. And what motives does it not employ? It addresses our fear, and lays all hell before the conscience. It appeals to our hope, and tells us of the things which God has prepared for them that love him. It speaks to our ingenuousness and gratitude. If we sin, it is against our best Benefactor and Friend. If we offend and grieve him, it is in sight of his dying anguish. Can I hear him saying, All this I freely endure for

thee, and not cry, "Lord, I am thine, save me?" "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

Thirdly, by the Spirit of holiness that attends it. His influence is necessary to the success even of his own word. Without it the suitableness and excellency of the means will be unavailing. The best objective representations and rational arguments will be counteracted by the depravity of the human heart, unless the Lord works with them. When the Apostles came to Antioch, "preaching the Lord Jesus," it was not the goodness of the subject that produced their success—"The hand of the Lord was with them;" and hence "a great number believed and turned unto the Lord." And Paul acknowledges the same in his epistle to the Thessalonians: "Our Gospel came to you, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." Now this influence is confined to God's truth. This testimony he only gives to the word of his grace. And therefore the Apostle asks the Galatians: "This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" So we may ask any believer who is a new creature in Christ; What is it that proved the power of God to your salvation? What was it that humbled you in the dust, and yet enabled you to rejoice in Christ? That at once relieved you under a sense of guilt, and yet rendered you the enemy of sin? That raised you above the world, and yet made you content and useful in it? Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound.

Let us hourly praise the Father of lights, that to us is the word of this salvation sent. There is no true sanctification separate from it. Men may be amiable, and civil, and moral, and superstitious without it, but not holy. The truth and the life of God go together. We do not like a religion that rests in the word; and we suspect a religion that can dispense with it—"Sanctify them through thy truth."

JULY 23.—"In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day."—Isaiah xxvii. 2, 3.

God has both enemies and friends in the world. Hence his word abounds with threatenings and with promises: for he will deal with the one according to their desert, and they will have no reason to complain; and with the other according to the riches of his mercy and grace, and they will have much reason to be thankful. "In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea." But the dooming of the wicked need not alarm the Church: yea, destruction to the one is deliverance to the other—

Therefore it is added; "In *that* day sing ye unto *her*." Thus we see that the Lord is concerned for the welfare and encouragement of his people: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people." But knowledge must precede comfort. How can they rejoice in privileges or prospects of which they are ignorant? Hence "it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace;" that is, with the doctrine of the Gospel. They that *know* his name will put their *trust* in him.

Therefore it is said, "*Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem.*" And here, "*Sing ye unto her.* She is sometimes unable in a strange land to sing the Lord's song herself—Let others sing unto her—and as a babe is sung to sleep, let her fears, and cares, and griefs be soothed away—Let ministers—Let her fellow-members cheer her—Let the public songs of Zion make her joyful in my house of prayer, that she may be filled with all joy and peace in believing."

Believing what? What she is—and what she may expect. First, what she is: "*Sing ye unto her, a vineyard of red wine.*" A vineyard is one of the most common figures by which the Church is held forth in the Scriptures; and it is easy, just, and striking. It is to intimate that they are severed from the world, and formed a peculiar people. They are made to differ from others as wheat differs from tares, as flowers from noxious weeds, as a vineyard from a rude barren wilderness. A vineyard is private property; in which the owner delights, and from which he derives profit. And the Lord's portion is his people. He has chosen them for his own inheritance. He has set them apart as godly for himself. He takes pleasure in them; and derives his praise from them. He is glorified when they bear much fruit.

But they are a vineyard of "*red wine.*" That is, a vineyard whose vines yield the best fruit, and from which is extracted the richest juice, called in another place "*the pure blood of the grape.*" The people of God are always spoken of in language which marks their value. Every thing is not only peculiar, but superior. They are more excellent than their neighbours. Have they peace? It is a peace which passeth all understanding. Have they joy? It is joy unspeakable and full of glory. The religion of others is only the produce of nature; and that which is of the flesh is flesh. But the Lord's people are spiritual. They are partakers of God's holiness. They follow the Lord fully. Their conversation is in heaven. Their speech drops as a honeycomb.

Secondly, what she may expect: "*I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.*" As the word feed, when applied to the Lord as a shepherd, intends not only his furnishing his sheep with food, but performing all the pastoral office; so *keeping* the vineyard here denotes all the work of the husbandman. Vines are very dependent growths; they require much attention. They must sometimes be pruned. The useless and injurious suckers which would draw off the sap from the bearing boughs must be lopped off. I one day saw the gardener at this work—he seemed to be very free with the knife—and rather fearing for the vine, I inconsiderately said, "Are you not taking away too much?" "Sir," said he, "I know what I am doing." And recovering my confidence in him, I left the execution to his own skill; and I had no reason to complain: the clusters justified him. Why do we not trust in the God of all grace? He does not afflict willingly, but for our profit. His work is perfect, his ways are judgment. But observe what he *here* engages to do. His vineyard needs refreshing, reviving, and increase. And he will "*water it;*" water it by his word, his ordinances, and his Spirit—and water it "*every moment.*" No other vineyard needs this—but what would be the consequence if God was *ever* to withhold the influence of his

grace from us? His vineyard is exposed; and to what purpose would the culture of it be, if the fences were broken down, and wild beasts of the desert could enter and devastate? But they have a vigilant and Almighty protector, who, "lest any hurt it, will keep it night and day." Keep it *constantly*—*night and day*. Keep it *completely*—lest any *hurt* it—not only lest any *destroy* it, but *injure* it! How well are they kept who are kept by the power of God!

What condescension and kindness are here!—That the *Lord* will do all this! Lord, what is man that *thou* shouldest magnify him—that *thou* shouldest set thine heart upon him!

Remember me, O Lord, with the favour thou bearest to thy people. "If I am a vine in thy vineyard, no one seems so low, so weak, so unflourishing, so unpromising as I am. Return, I beseech thee, O God—Look down from heaven—and behold and—Visit this vine."

JULY 24.—"The Father loveth the Son."—John iii. 35.

THIS is obviously spoken in a way of emphasis and distinction. "God is love." We find in him a love of common bounty—This leads him to provide for us as creatures that he has made; for the eyes of all wait on him; and he satisfieth the desires of every living thing. We find in him a love of benevolence, called in the Scripture mercy and grace—This regards us as fallen creatures, and appears in the provision he has made to relieve our guilt, misery, and helplessness. We see in him also a love of complacency—In this he respects us as renewed creatures. For complacency takes in approbation, and esteem, and delight: and this God can only feel towards the regenerate; for what fellowship hath righteousness, with unrighteousness, and what communion has light with darkness? But the Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy. And *they* stand in the same bond, and will share in the same condition with the Saviour himself—They are "joint-heirs with Christ"—they "shall be glorified together." And therefore in his prayer for his followers, he says, "I have declared unto them thy Name, and will declare it, that the love which thou hast towards *me* may be in *them*."

Yet though the love of the Father to his people be the same with the love he bears to his Son, it is the same in kind only, not in degree—He is "the first-born among many brethren," and "in all things he must have the pre-eminence." There is therefore a peculiar significance in the assertion; "The Father loveth the Son." This love is founded in three things. First, likeness. A measure of this resemblance is found in all Christians. Hence they are said to be "renewed after the image of him that created us in righteousness and true holiness." But the likeness is not complete. There are remains of depravity in all of them while they are here; and they acknowledge and mourn over their deficiencies. But he was the image of the invisible God: the express image of his person. "In him was no sin." The prince of this world came, but found nothing in him to work upon. The stirring up of the water brought up no mire and dirt, because there was nothing but purity at the bottom.

Secondly, obedience. He was the ten commandments imbodied, and alive, walking up and down the earth for three-and-thirty years—"I delight," said he, "to do thy will, yea, thy law is within my heart." "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." And as his obedience was cheerful, so it was unvarying. "He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." He relaxed not when the divine pleasure required him to agonize in the garden, and die upon the cross. And therefore he said as he was closely moving towards them: "That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence." He was sensible to the suffering, but he turned not away his back: he said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me:" but he prayed, "nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." Well therefore could he say at last, "I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

Thirdly, the devoting himself to die for the recovery of sinners. "As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again." It was an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. God has no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked. He delighteth in mercy. He loves to see *us* relieving the needy, and visiting the fatherless and the widows in their affliction. He is still more pleased to see us reclaiming the vicious, and saving souls from death: and he tells us that they who turn many to righteousness shall shine like stars for ever and ever. How then did the Father of mercies, the God of all grace, regard *him* who, self-moved, without our desert or desire, interposed to redeem a guilty world from the curse of the law; and gave himself a ransom for all! "The Father loveth the Son"—

—And can we want *proof* of this? What may we not bring forward as an evidence of it? Witness his expressions. At his transfiguration a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him." At his baptism a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Yea, ages before he said, by his holy prophet, "Behold my servant whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth." Witness all the arrangements he made previously to his birth. All had a designed reference to him. If a succession of prophets was raised up, it was for his sake. "To him gave all the prophets witness;" and "the testimony of Jesus was the spirit of prophecy." If an economy of numberless sacrifices and ceremonies was established, it was for his sake—every thing prefigured him: "the law was a shadow of good things to come, of which the body was Christ." If revolutions convulsed the world or the Church it was for his sake—"I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord." All the dispensations of providence and grace, like so many streams flowed into this confluence, and made his appearance the fulness of time. Witness the supernatural attestations by which he was honoured. In his birth, in his life, in his death, in his resurrection, he "was approved

of God by miracles, and wonders, and signs." Witness the intimate revelations made him, and by which, though he never learned letters, he surpassed all the human race, and had in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. "For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel." Witness God's appointment that all blessings should come to us through him, and that we should always implore them for his sake and in his name. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." In your applications remind him of me, and he will never deny you. "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Witness the exaltations to which he has advanced him, and the treasures he has conferred upon him. He has "crowned him with glory and honour;" and "set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, 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. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him." "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given *all* things into his hand."

Let us then love him, and be followers of God as dear children. *He* cannot lead us astray; and we must walk in the light as *he* is in the light. How blind must we be to see no comeliness or beauty in One whom *he* values infinitely more than the universe! How depraved must we be to feel indifferent to a Being possessed of such greatness and goodness, and who has done and suffered so much for us! What wonder the Apostle should say, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha." But if I loved him, should I not think of him? should I not speak of him? should I not love to hold communion with him? should I not love to please and serve him?

JULY 25.—"He exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord."—Acts xi. 23.

THOUGH Barnabas was the son of consolation, he not only aimed to comfort his hearers, but could say, "I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation." He had seen the grace of God in the Christians at Antioch, and was glad. But he knew that it was not enough to begin well. The end proves and crowns all: he only that endureth to the end the same shall be saved. But if any draw back, God's love shall have no pleasure in him. He believed in the stability of the everlasting covenant, and was confident that he who had begun a good work in them would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ; but he knew how to apply his own principles. He knew that the appointment of the end ensured the use of the means, and as much precluded a diversion from the one as the failure of the other. He knew also that those who cannot apostatize may backslide. On every ground he knew warnings and admonitions to be proper, useful, and necessary; and therefore he exhorted them—

Observe the aim of the exhortation—He exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would *cleave unto the Lord*. With the first preachers of the Gospel he was all in all: and the subject of all their practical addresses therefore was, “As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so continue to walk in him.” “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith.” They knew that he alone was equal to all their exigencies, and that their religion prospered only as they maintained an habitual and supreme regard to him. Had we heard Barnabas explaining his admonition, we should have found him urging the brethren to adhere to him—as their teacher, who should lead them into all truth; as their Saviour, whose blood cleansed them from all sin, and whose righteousness justified them before God, and gave them access with confidence; as their helper in every duty and conflict, without whom they could do nothing, and through whose strength they could do all things; as their comforter, the consolation of Israel, the man who is the peace when the Assyrian cometh into the land; as their example, whose life was to be made manifest in their mortal bodies; and as their master, who had every claim upon them, having bought them with a price, and rescued them from their enemies, and to whom, as their rightful owner, they had given themselves, body, soul, and spirit.

Observe the nature of the exhortation—He exhorted them all that *with purpose of heart* they would cleave unto the Lord. Religion is a poor business unless the heart be in it. God therefore demands it: My son, give me thine heart. If this be not given, nothing else will be given, unless reluctantly, and therefore unacceptably. But every thing will follow the heart; and where there is first a willing mind, and a concern to please, imperfections in manner will be overlooked in the motive; and if the deed be hindered, it will be accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not. Yet there is much truth in the proverb, Where there is a will there is a way. Nothing often is wanting as to efficiency but resolution; and a fulness of resolution is most likely to arise from a fulness of inclination. Love gives ardour and boldness; love is strong as death; many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it. While the slothful sees thorns; and the coward cries, There is a lion in the way, I shall be slain in the streets; purpose of heart, founded not in our own strength, but in the strength of the Lord (and in a Christian it is always so founded), clears away difficulties, or is roused by them into greater vigour and strenuousness.

Observe also the extent of the exhortation—He exhorted them *all*, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord—Not only the young, but the old: not only those who were just entering a religious course, but those who had been walking in it: not only the weak and the wavering in the faith, but the strong and established. Who is secure from temptation? Who is entitled to live without caution? None must put off his armour till he has quitted the field. If *any* one thinks the admonition unnecessary with regard to him, *he* is the individual who wants it most. A haughty spirit goes before a fall. Be not high-minded, but fear.

JULY 26.—“God is glorified in him.”—John xiii. 31.

To glorify is taken two ways in the Scripture. It sometimes signifies to confer glory on a being destitute of it before—In this sense God glorifies us. At other times it intends acknowledging or displaying the glory of one already possessed of it—and thus God is said to be glorified. And there is no other way in which he can be glorified. As to his essential excellency, it admits of no addition, being infinite: but it allows of manifestation.

And thus the heavens declare the glory of God; and all his works praise him. But he has magnified his word above all his name; and of the work of creation compared with the work of redemption we may say, “even that which was made glorious hath no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth.” In every Christian God is glorified, both passively and actively. He even calls his people his glory: “I have placed salvation in Zion for Israel my glory.” But the light of the knowledge of his glory is chiefly seen in the face of Jesus Christ. There we behold the brightness of his glory—the express image of his person. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” And how has he declared him? Not only by his character, and life, and teaching, and doctrine, but especially in his sufferings and death; and in them not only by the graces which they displayed, but the principles they implied, and the purposes they accomplished.

To these he here refers; and therefore in his last prayer he said, “I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do;” thus intimating the connexion there was between these, and showing that the one resulted from the other—he glorified God by the work he accomplished when he expired on the cross. And truly never was the glory of God so displayed as in this event: and therefore it was typified from the foundation of the world; and therefore the whole Gospel is called the preaching of the cross; and therefore an ordinance is established to show it forth; and therefore the praises of the heavenly state regard the Lamb as worthy, because he was slain; and therefore the angels desire to look into these things, as discovering more of the perfections of deity than is to be seen in nature or providence. The law of God was more magnified and made honourable in the precept and penalty by his obedience and sacrifice, than it would have been by the obedience of all mankind, had they never sinned; and by their sufferings had they all perished. What a display of his wisdom was here! Think of the difficulties to be overcome! The oppositions to be harmonized! The immense interests to be secured! Well does the Apostle speak of the manifold wisdom of God: and of His abounding towards us in all wisdom and prudence. What a display have we here of His holiness and justice! Without shedding of blood there could be no remission. Rather than that sin should go unpunished, he required a surety, and was pleased to bruise him, and put him to grief, and make his soul an offering for sin; thus declaring his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of the ungodly that believeth in Jesus. What a display have we here of his power, in preparing a body for him in raising him up from the grave, and

giving him glory; and in the renovation and resurrection of all his followers! Paul therefore prays that we may know "what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, 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 hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church." What a display have we here of his truth and faithfulness, in fulfilling the assurance given in Paradise four thousand years before, and bringing forth the seed of the woman according to the time, the place, the nation, the tribe, the family, the individual, foretold! This is the theme of Zechariah's song; "He hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he sware to our father Abraham." But above all, "herein is love." Here "God hath commended his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Every view of this dispensation shows the exceeding riches of his grace, and justifies the all-encouraging conclusion; "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Here I see that love is not only his attribute—but his character—his nature. "God is love."

What wonder the Christian should say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." He not only derives relief from it, but delight. He is sometimes carried away in his contemplations, till he is enraptured and inspired with the subject, even in this vale of tears, and in this body of death! What will be his views of it, when that which is perfect shall come, and that which is in part shall be done away!

"For ever his dear sacred name
Thall dwell upon our tongue;
And Jesus and salvation be
The close of every song."

JULY 27.—"Thou shalt have treasure in heaven."—Mark x. 21.

WE shall not enlarge on the excellency and security of such treasure; but only inquire what is our relation to it, and whether this assurance can be claimed by us. Now there are four classes of persons, under which every individual before God may be comprehended.

There are some who have no treasure either in heaven or earth. They are spiritually and corporeally poor: poor for eternity, and poor for time: in this world they have only a vale of tears; and in another, "lamentation, and mourning, and wo." You cannot suppose, unless you imagine the preacher a barbarian, that he can say this without feeling. But he may feel, and yet be faithful; and how indeed could he express his concern for your welfare if he were to allow you to remain under a delusion the most dangerous?

You think perhaps that your hardships and trials will recommend you to God; and you are often heard to say, "It is better to suffer here than hereafter." But you will suffer in both if you reject the council of God against yourselves, and adjudge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life. Christianity has indeed a most tender and a peculiar aspect towards the sons and daughters of want and woe—"The poor have the Gospel preached unto them." But you must receive it in order to be benefited by it. Then indeed your privations will be sanctified; the Lord will bless your bread and your water; and your humble dwelling will become one of the palaces of Zion.

There are some who have treasure on earth, but not in heaven. We inquire not how you obtained it. We will presume that the acquisition has left no stain upon your character, or sting in your conscience; and that you remember the Lord your God, that he it is that giveth you power to get wealth. Neither do we wish to depreciate the common bounties of his hand, as if they were not good in themselves, though so often abused. Some purposes they can answer; but it is not true without restriction that "money procureth all things." It cannot purchase health, or bribe off disease. Riches profit not in the day of wrath. They cannot purify the passions, or heal a wounded spirit. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Yea it renders him more responsible; excites envy and opposition; exposes him to temptations and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. "The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." I pity the man of the world who has his portion in this life, and no interest in a better. He is daily and hourly leaving behind him all he loves and idolizes, while he has nothing before him to excite hope or desire; what wonder therefore that his death is the effect of reluctance and compulsion? "He shall be driven from light into darkness, and chased out of this world." The rabbinical Jews say that some of the words of Scripture, with which the angels receive the soul at death, and sing it down to hell, are these: "Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness." We have no notion that these benevolent beings derive pleasure from the misery of any one, or that they would insult even a lost spirit. But every one at death will be clothed with shame who has preferred the mammon of unrighteousness to the true riches.

There are some who have treasure in heaven, but not on earth. This is the case with not a few of our Lord's followers: "I will leave in the midst of thee a poor and an afflicted people." Silver and gold they have none. And they need not despair, or murmur, as if all importance, excellency, usefulness, and enjoyment were denied them with wealth. The Apostles themselves could say; "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place." Even Jesus the Lord of all had not where to lay his head; and received the ministrations of widows. You have the honour of resembling the Saviour in condition, and the advantage of living more immediately by faith upon his providence, while he gives you day by day

your daily bread. He also says to you, as he did to the Church of Ephesus, "I know thy poverty; but thou art rich." Rich in faith and hope: rich in the exceeding great and precious promises: rich in the earnest and foretastes of life eternal. Angels are your attendants; you feed on the hidden manna; he has covered you with the robe of righteousness as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. And as far as they can subserve your welfare, all things are yours: "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

But there are some who have treasure in heaven and on earth too. The lines have fallen to them in pleasant places: they have a goodly heritage. The streams of the upper and of the nether springs flow within their borders. Is it nothing that you have not only the necessities, but the conveniences, comforts, and indulgences of life? Is it nothing that you can largely enjoy the pleasures of benevolence? That you can draw down upon you the blessing of him that is ready to perish? That you can make the widow's heart to sing for joy? That you can aid in diffusing the Scriptures? in sending abroad the Gospel? and in every good work? Fall upon your knees, and thank the Giver of all good for the blessings of the life that now is. And then thank him far more that he has not put you off with these; or suffered you to be satisfied in them—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

JULY 28.—"For now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth."—Micah v. 4.

THIS certainly refers to the Messiah, the Lord of glory, the Lord of all. He is always great in himself: and therefore is not aggrandized by accession, but by discovery. He must be known, and he only needs to be known, in order to be great. A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and among his own kindred. Upon the same principle it has been said that domestic greatness is unattainable. All feel a decrease of veneration, if not of love, from acquaintance and intimacy. But the more *he* is known the more will he be admired and adored. The reason is, because he is *perfect*, and *divine*. His excellences therefore are unbounded and infinite, and will admit of endless attention and praise.

This subject deeply concerns his people. They know the importance of the revelation of the Lord Jesus to their perishing fellow-creatures. It is by his knowledge that he is to justify many. They are justified indeed by faith: but how can they believe on him of whom they have not heard? Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Their benevolence therefore leads them to pray that his way may be known on earth, his saving health among all nations. His people also love him supremely; and love delights in the glory of its object. When they consider what he is, and what he has done and suffered, every impulse of their heart cries, "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory."

What affects them is not that *they* are so little known or noticed

—for what are they? but that *He* is so unknown, and neglected, and despised. He is great indeed already in the views and esteem of some, and they hope the number is increasing; but his admirers have been always few, compared with the multitude, and they are so still. Thousands and millions have never yet heard of him. Down to this hour, even where his religion is professed, the majority in no one county or village has been actuated by the true spirit of Christianity. At the thought of this two things comfort them. First, that it is not so in another world *now*. There he attracts every eye, and employs every tongue. A multitude which no man can number of glorified saints, and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of angels, are continually 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, and blessing.”

Secondly, that it will not be so in this world *always*. For it is written, and the Scripture cannot be broken, that “from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, his name shall be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense shall be offered unto him, and a pure offering.” Then the *nations* of them that are saved shall walk in the light of the Lamb—He shall sprinkle *many* nations—Yea, *all* nations shall fall down before him, and all kings shall serve him. O blessed day, when there shall be a godly prince on every throne, a godly judge on every bench, a godly pastor in every pulpit, a godly master in every family—when every author will write, and every merchant trade for Him—when the melody of his praise shall soften the labourer’s toil, and the poor of the people shall trust in him. O glorious hour when it shall be said, without a figure, “Behold, the world is gone away after him!”

But who shall live when God doeth this! We often now exclaim, “Why are his chariot wheels so long in coming? Why does the whole creation groan and travail in pain together until now? How many are there waiting for an event that will loosen the last cord of life, and lead them to exult. Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people.” Yet the morning is spread upon the mountains. The day has dawned. Numberless agencies are in action, which, by the ordinary blessing of God upon them, must produce mighty results.

But who shall live when God doeth this? It is probable, even if he cut short his work in righteousness, that the clods of the valley will be sweet about many of us. Yet we shall die in faith, fully assured that he who died on the cross shall see his seed, and prolong his days, and that the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. Perhaps we shall be permitted to look down, and see his spreading greatness. If not, we shall be acquainted with the beautifying fact. We shall be where the acclamation will commence which will be re-echoed back from earth: “Hallelujah, for the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

JULY 29.—“Receive with meekness the ingrafted word.”—James i. 21.

NOTHING is spoken of in the Scripture more commonly or with more commendation than meekness. It is often made the subject of promise. We read, “The meek will he guide in judgment: The meek will he teach his way:” “He will beautify the meek with salvation:” “The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” It is also frequently enjoined in a way of duty. Indeed it would seem that no part of our Christian calling can be perfectly or properly discharged without it. If we would heal the backslider, we are to do it “in the spirit of meekness.” If we would teach gainsayers, “in meekness we are to instruct those that oppose themselves.” And if we would receive the ingrafted word, we must receive it “with meekness.” This regards the understanding, the heart, and the life.

It requires the acquiescence of the understanding, with regard to the mysteries of the Gospel—This will keep us from proud cavils and reasonings; and cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. After God has spoken we shall not ask, “How can these things be?” All our concern with the Scripture will be to inquire, *Is* this the word of God? and *what* does it really contain? For nothing should then remain but the most implicit assent. We make God a liar if we do not believe what *he* affirms; and *because* he affirms it. Our faith does not honour his testimony if it must be founded on knowledge. If on your reporting any thing, concerning, for instance, a place, a person should say, I will believe it as soon as I have been there and seen for myself; would you not deem this an insult, either to your knowledge or veracity? Yet if we believe the testimony of man, the testimony of God is greater. Men may delude us; but it is impossible for God to lie. We must therefore “receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child;” who never sets up himself against the judgment of his father, or questions the truth of his decisions: or, as the Apostle says, we must “become fools that we may be wise.” Is this degrading my understanding? It is improving, perfecting it; it adds God’s intelligence to my own—“In his light we see light.”

It requires also the submission of the heart, as to the provisions of the Gospel. Speaking of the Jews, the Apostle says, “They did not submit themselves to the righteousness which is of God; for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” The word seems strange. Should we say, a subject did not *submit* himself to accept of an invitation to the king’s table? Was there ever an instance in which, when a rebel taken in arms, and condemned to die, was presented with a pardon, accompanied with a promise of more than restoration to all his former estate, he refused the mercy? and his sovereign was constrained to send his servants and his son to beseech him to submit? Yet God beseeches sinners by us; and we pray them in Christ’s stead to be reconciled unto God. And herein appears not only the insensibility of man, but the pride of his yet self-righteous heart. He wishes to be saved in his own way, and to be his own Saviour. He revolts at the

thought of being received on the same terms with the chief of sinners; to have nothing to glory in before God; to have no hand meritoriously in the work, and no share of the glory; to declare, when he has done all that is commanded, I am an unprofitable servant; and to cry to the last, God be merciful to me a sinner—He stumbles at this stumbling-stone. Did Naaman receive with meekness the order to wash seven times in Jordan and be clean? Did not the homely simplicity of the remedy fill him with resentment; so that he was turning away in a rage, and would have missed the cure had not his servants prevailed upon him to *submit*—And he washed and was healed. It is no easy thing to induce men to bow to the sovereign and abasing method which God has appointed for our relief: but when we are pressed with a deep sense of the absolute necessity of the plan, and we are enabled to see a little of its infinite excellency, we willingly and gratefully accept of the grace—approve of it—glory in it—and resolve to glory in nothing else.

It no less requires the obedience of the life, as to the authority of the Gospel. For the Gospel not only assails self, but sin: it has not only the relief of a remedy, but the force of a law; and “whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” We naturally affect independence; and our language is, “Who is the Lord that we should obey his voice?” “With our tongues will we prevail, our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?” But this disposition must be subdued. We must deny ourselves, and choose the Lord for our master. We must resign ourselves entirely to his pleasure, asking, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And without dictation, without murmuring or repining, without choice or preference as to the way in which we are to serve him, we shall implicitly refer ourselves to his will, and say, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.”

To us is the word of this salvation sent. We have it; we read it; we hear it. Do we thus meekly receive it? Do we honour it with our confidence? Do we bend to its designs? Do we yield to its demands? Do we obey from the heart the form of doctrine delivered us? Or do we receive the grace of God in vain?

JULY 30.—“I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life.”—Rev. xxi. 6.

AND what can this fountain be, but himself? He is not a vessel or a reservoir, which, however capacious, is yet limited, and would soon be drained dry by continual drawing. But he is a fountain always full, always flowing, always fresh. For the streams poured forth from a fountain are very distinguishable from the stagnant contents of a pool: the latter are dead; the former, living water. And what is this water of life which springs from himself, but the blessings of the Gospel, the influences of his Holy Spirit, or, as the Scripture calls it, “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ?” Between this and living water there is an obvious and striking analogy. Each is of unspeakable importance: the one is as essential in the moral as the other in the material world. Yea, the one is more necessary to the soul than the other is to the body. There have been instances

in which physical life has been maintained for a long time (as in the case of Moses and Elias) without drinking, as well as without eating: but for the spiritual life to exist for a moment without the grace that is in Christ Jesus, is a miracle which never has been, and never will be accomplished. Does water soften? His grace makes the heart soft; and turns the very stone to flesh. Does water purify? "I will sprinkle," says he, "clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you." Does water fertilize? The man whose hope the Lord is, is likened to a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." In what a condition would the earth be if the springs were exhausted, and the rivers dried up, or if rain was withholden for a few months only! Nothing can equal the barrenness of a soul devoid of divine grace—But this water of life quickens what was dead before, and produces all the fruits of righteousness. The comparison could be pursued—But the particular allusion in our text remains. How welcome is cold water to a thirsty soul! How comfortable to the Jews, who had been three days and without water to drink, were the gushings from the rock! Moses therefore says, "He brought them honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock"—He speaks in reference to their feelings—It was not oil or honey; but it was as sweet as the one, and as rich as the other, to persons dying with thirst. "I opened my mouth and panted," says David, "for I longed for thy salvation." "As the hart panteth for the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." Such desires as these grace is necessary to satisfy: and grace *can* satisfy them. "He that believeth on me shall never thirst." He will never thirst in vain for the blessings he desires; while his thirst after other things, for which he raged before, is quenched, and he learns, in whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content.

Even the image is encouraging. By employing water to hold forth the blessings of salvation, our Lord intimates that they are plenteous, and open to approach without money and without price. Surely a nobleman would not forbid a poor traveller, in his weary journey, to kneel down and drink of the ample river that meandered through his estate. But Jesus says, I will "give" of the fountain of the water of life—yea, he goes further, and says, I will give "freely." Surely this is enough—Yet it is not too much for the purpose. He knows the disposition there is in man, who, ever since the Fall, is as proud as he is poor; and always thinks of deserving; and would rather buy than beg. He also knows what strong consolation is necessary to relieve the conscience of an awakened sinner, pressed down by a sense of depravity and guilt. He feels that he has nothing to pay or to promise—And he is assured that he needs nothing. "As your penury is such that you have no price to offer, my greatness, my goodness is such that I disdain to require any. You are as welcome as you are unworthy. My blessings are too valuable to be purchased—I give them freely."

Hence too we may observe the only requisite in the receiver. It is not the performance of any hard condition, nor the possession of any meritorious qualification—It is only want and desire; to him

that "is athirst" I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely. This *is* indeed specified; but not in a way of desert or recommendation. It is not mentioned as the cause of the relief, but the character of the relieved. And it is wisely specified. Such persons as these are the very persons who are likely to exclude themselves, fearing, as they feel their unworthiness, the blessing cannot be designed for them. He therefore mentions them, so to speak, even by name; and in addressing them, seizes the very thing from which they despond, to minister to their hope. To which we may add, that without this thirst the promise would be no promise; the blessing no blessing—For such only can value it. The full soul loatheth the honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet. What is a physician to them that are whole? or a refuge to them that are safe? Water is every thing to the thirsty; but to others the stream runs by uninvitingly and in vain. And how many are there who have no sense of their wants, and no desire after the Saviour!

But the cry of others is, Remember me, O Lord, with the favour thou bearest unto thy people, and visit me with thy salvation. No voice but his can relieve your fears. No joy but his can satisfy your souls. You long for him as the Sanctifier as well as the Redeemer; and you wait for him more than they that watch for the morning. This is a proof of something good, and a pledge of something better. Refuse not to be comforted. Go immediately and drink. And drink largely. There is enough and to spare. And while you partake, invite others, and bring them to drink of the rivers of his pleasures. And look forward to the hour when you shall ascend to the spring-head itself. There you shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on you, or any heat—For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed you, and shall lead you unto fountains of waters—And God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes.

JULY 31.—"And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."—Exod. xvii. 14.

THIS is the first time any mention is made in the Sacred History of writing. It was not known in the earlier ages. It does not appear that the Patriarchs were acquainted with it. And simple and familiar as the art now seems, it is difficult, if not impossible to account for it without a divine origin. Wakefield, a fine scholar, though an erroneous divine and a radical politician, and far from any leaning to enthusiasm, yet after much reflection has contended that it must have been derived at first from a divine communication. However this may be, it was a most wonderful invention. What pleasures and advantages have been derived from it! How has the lover blessed the use of letters! How thankful has friendship been for news from a far country, which has been like cold water to a thirsty soul! By alphabetical characters improvements have been perserved from age to age, and additions been constantly making to the general stock of knowledge. But how much do we owe to it as Christians! What is the "Scripture" but the *writing*?

All that relieves our spiritual wants and supports our eternal hope has reached us, and continues to delight us by means of what holy men wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost—

“ Our nation reads his written word,
That book of life, that sure record :
The bright inheritance of heaven
Is by the sweet conveyance given.”

It is probable that from this time Moses began to keep a journal of striking and useful occurrences. Great men have frequently done the same for intellectual; and good men for religious purposes. Diaries were formerly much more common among pious people than they now are. This is to be lamented; for though their frequent publication was unnecessary, and their minuteness often rendered them exceptionable, they served to promote self-attention and acquaintance; and recorded events and circumstances with the impressions they produced at the time, which could not be reviewed without some utility. Whatever may be said of the particular mode, the thing itself is of importance. If we are to be affected with past transactions, and views, and feelings, they must be in some way secured and retained: when buried in forgetfulness they can have no influence to reprove or encourage, to excite gratitude or to increase confidence. And as, like the Jews, we are liable, and alas! prone to forget the works of the Lord and the wonders which he has shown us, we should write them, if not as Moses was enjoined to do, in a book, yet in the fleshly tables of our hearts. “O my people,” says God, “remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord.” And when his disciples seemed ready to despond because they had only one loaf on board, our Lord said to them, “Remember ye not the miracle the five barley loaves and the two small fishes, and how many of baskets full of fragments ye took up?” “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

A reason is assigned for the recording and rehearsing of this transaction in a dreadful menace: “For I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.” So highly did God resent the injury intended against his people. So dear are they to him, and so truly are they one with him, that he who toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye. Let those who oppose them tremble—“I will curse him that curseth thee.”

The threatening was executed partially by Saul; but fully by David, after whose time we read no more of the Amalekites as a *people*. For some stragglers of course escaped and survived, and were to be met with in various countries. Haman, whose mortified ambition led him to contrive the destruction of the Jews, was one of this detested and exterminated nation.

The Scripture cannot be broken. Whatever improbabilities appear, whatever difficulties stand in the way, whatever delays intervene, God’s counsels of old are faithfulness and truth; and heaven and earth shall pass away sooner than one jot or tittle of his word shall fail. This applies to the destruction of the wicked, as well as to the salvation of the righteous. And it applies not only to nations, but to individuals. Behold a signal instance. “And

Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it." And what says History more than four hundred years after, in the reign of Ahab? "In his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun."

Lord, increase our faith.

AUGUST.

AUGUST 1.—"For the inhabitant of Maroth waited carefully for good: but evil came down from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem."—Micah i. 12.

THIS refers to the invasion of the Assyrian, the rod of God's anger. He had subdued and ravaged Israel, and now entered the kingdom of Judah. The prophet laments the horrors and miseries of the scene; and describes the effects of them upon the places lying in the line of his march. The village of Maroth was one of these. It was very interior, and was situated nigh Jerusalem; for which reason probably the inhabitants themselves thought that they were safer than those who lived on the borders of the country: "For the inhabitant of Maroth waited carefully for good: but evil came down from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem." This may serve to remind us—of the disappointments of life—of the source of calamity—and the season of deliverance.

They "waited," waited "carefully for good;" but in vain: "evil came"—Is such a disappointment a strange or an unusual thing? What is there in life that is not uncertain, and does not expose the hope that is resting upon it? Is it substance? Is it health? Is it children? Is it friends?—Does the Scripture only cry, "All is vanity;" and, "Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils? Does not all history, observation, and experience tell us the same? Let therefore the young, let those who are entering into new connexions and conditions, let all be sober in their expectations from every thing earthly. It is the way to escape the *surprise* and the *anguish* of disappointment. And let us make the Lord our *hope*. He will not deceive us: he cannot fail us. If creatures are broken reeds, he is the rock of ages—"Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

See also the source of calamity—"Evil came down from the Lord." This at first seems strange: we should have been ready to say, "evil came up from another being." We are assured that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." But "let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for he cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." And this is true of moral evil, or the evil of sinning. But Micah speaks of natural evil, or the evil of suffering. And what calamity is there that the Scripture has not ascribed to God? Is it a storm at sea? "He breaketh the ships of Tarshish with an east wind." Is it barrenness of soil? "He turneth a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." Is it the loss of connexions? "Lover

and friend hast thou put far from me." "Is there an evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it?"—War is the evil here peculiarly intended. We often connect this more with the follies and passions of men than other evils; but the hand of God is no less really in it. He has "created the waster to destroy." "Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail, out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor together." Let us never view our sufferings, public or private, personal or relative, abstractedly from God. Especially let us beware that instruments do not lead us to overlook his agency. They could have no power at all against us, except it was given them from above. The Chaldeans and the Sabeans spoiled Job: but, says he, "the Lord hath taken away."

The question is, how this evil comes from him? Much injury is done by our separating what the Scripture has joined together. Some view God's mercy as separate from his justice; and some his justice as separate from his mercy: the one of these partial views genders presumption, the other despair. These extremes would be avoided by our considering God as at once the righteous governor and the tender father. Every thing in his present administrations is adapted to show the union of his holiness and goodness, and to awaken both our fear and our hope. The evils he sends are the *effects* of sin; yet they are the *fruits* to take away sin. *We deserve* them, and we *need* them; the one shows that we have no *right* to complain, the other that we have no *reason* to complain. What is required of a Christian is a ready and cheerful submission; but this can only be produced by our seeing the reference our affliction has not only to our desert, but to our improvement. The thought of God as a sovereign may repress murmuring; but it is the belief not only that his judgments are right, but that in faithfulness he afflicts, and in love corrects us, that enables us to acquiesce, and say, "Here I am, let him do what seemeth him good."

Mark also the time of deliverance. Though God saves his people, he may permit the destruction to draw very nigh. This was the case here. He could have hindered the calamity at the frontier, but evil came down from the Lord "unto the gate of Jerusalem." So far the overflowing did come; and the insulting foe encamped in the fuller's field adjoining the city; but no further. Here were his proud waves stayed. Here ended his power and triumph. Hezekiah conquered him upon his knees. The Lord put his hook into his nose, and his bridle into his jaws, and drew him back. Yea, the angel of the Lord slew in his camp in one night upwards of one hundred and eighty-four thousand of his troops—Showing us not only that God can deliver, in the greatest straits, but that he frequently does not interpose till the evil has reached its extremity. Thus Peter was not released from prison till a few hours before his appointed execution: and Abraham had bound Isaac, and seized the knife, and stretched out his hand, before the voice cried, Forbear. Whenever therefore he seems indifferent to our welfare, and does not immediately, or even for a length of time interpose on our behalf, let us not accuse him of unfaithfulness and inattention. Let us distinguish between appearance and reality. His kindness, wisdom, and power, are secretly at work for our good. The delay is not abandonment. He is only waiting to be gracious; and the sea-

son in which he will appear to our joy will display his glory, and draw forth our praise. In the mean time let our minds be kept in perfect peace, being stayed upon God; and let us remember, if things are gloomy and discouraging, that the lower the ebb of the tide, the nearer the flow. It is often darkest just before the break of day. "IN THE MOUNT IT SHALL BE SEEN."

AUGUST 2.—"I will consider in my dwelling-place like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest."—Isaiah xviii. 4.

PREACHERS should be very sparing of their animadversions on the translation of the Scriptures in common use; not only because they tend to shake confidence and awaken suspicions in their hearers, but because they are generally needless. It is not illiteracy that commends the present version; the ablest scholars are the most satisfied with it upon the whole. Yet while the original is divine, the rendering is human; and therefore we need not wonder if an occasional alteration is necessary. This is peculiarly the case where the sense is very obscure or even imperceptible without it.

If the words as they now stand in the text remain, his "dwelling-place" is heaven, and the meaning is, that he would *there* consider how to succour and bless his people, for he *careth* for them: but a word must be supplied to show the import—"I will consider in my dwelling-place" how I can prove "like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest." But the margin, and Lowth, and every modern expositor make his "dwelling-place" not the *place* of his consideration, but the *object*; and read, "*I will regard my dwelling-place like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.*" Now what his dwelling-place was we can easily determine. It was Zion—"Whose dwelling is in Zion." "This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it." And Watts has well added—

"The God of Jacob chose the hill
Of Zion for his ancient rest;
And Zion is his dwelling still,
His Church is with his presence blest."

And his concern for the welfare of the one is far surpassed by his regard for the other. And how is this *regard* exercised? Here are two images.

First, "like a clear heat upon herbs." The margin again says, "Like a clear heat *after rain*;" and I wish, says the excellent translator of Isaiah, who has adopted it, that there was better evidence in support of it. The reason is, that he probably feared, as others in reading it may fear, that "a clear heat upon herbs" would be rather unfavourable, and cause them to droop if not to die. And this would be the case in some instances; but not in all; and it is enough for a metaphor to have one just and strong resemblance. Read the dying words of David; "And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain." Now after rain, "the clear shining," or "a clear heat upon herbs" would produce immediately fresh vigour and shootings. Even in our own climate the effect upon the grass and plants is soon visible; but in

the east the influence is much more sudden and surprising, and the beholders can almost see the herbage thrive and flourish. Thus the Lord can quicken his people in his ways, and strengthen in them the things that remain and are ready to die. And when after the softening comes the sunshine, they grow in grace and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour. Their faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of them towards each other aboundeth. They bear much fruit. Thus we read of "increasing with all the increase of God"—This figure therefore expresses growth and fertility.

But the second holds forth refreshment, seasonable refreshment; "like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest." How cooling, useful, welcome, delightful such an appearance is, ask the labourer in the field, in the eastern field, bearing the burden and heat of the day. God, as the God of all comfort, realizes the truth and force of this image in the experience of his tried followers—First, in their spiritual exercises and depressions arising from the assaults of temptation, a sense of their unworthiness and imperfections, and fears concerning their safety and perseverance. And, secondly, in their outward afflictions. These may be many; and if our strength is small, we shall faint in the day of adversity. But when we cry, he answers us, and strengthens us with strength in our souls. He gives us a little reviving in our bondage; and in the multitude of our thoughts within us his comforts delight our souls. He is able and engaged to comfort us in all our tribulation. By the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ; by his word; by his ordinances; by the preaching of a minister; by the conversation of a friend; by a letter, a book, a particular occurrence of Providence, a time of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord—and a cloud of dew be furnished in the heat of harvest.

Such is the God of love to his people. Are his consolations small with us? O that we were better acquainted with his perfections, his covenant, his promises, and the joy of his salvation!—Let creatures help out our meditations of him. We lose much in not using nature as a handmaid to grace. Let us aid our faith even by our senses. What a state will that be where God will be all in all!

AUGUST 3.—"I said, Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee."—Psalm xli. 4.

THIS is an excellent prayer. The man that utters it *confesses that he is a sinner*: "I have sinned against thee." "If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and his word is not in us;" and the reason is, because his word declares that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Sin is the transgression of the law; and to judge of the one we must understand the other. By the law therefore is the knowledge of sin: and when the commandment comes in its purity and spirituality, and we see that it extends to the heart as well as to the life, to the motive as well as to the action; when we see that desire is adultery, and anger murder; sin revives; forgotten offences are remembered; and a thousand transgressions and aggravations are discovered of which we had no apprehension before. The conviction of our sinfulness may commence

with some one gross sin first striking the conscience: but we are soon led on from one iniquity to another. From the more gross we pass to the more refined; and from the streams we ascend to the fountain—till we find the heart, and see that this is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. But the greatest sin of which we are convinced is unbelief—"He shall convince the world of sin, because they believe not on me." "He is despised and rejected of men—and of *me*! I have trampled under foot the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. O let me look upon him whom I have pierced, and mourn for him"—

He also considers *sin as the disease of the soul*. "*Heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee.*" Sin affects the soul as disease affects the body. In bodily disease the parts of the system do not properly and freely perform their office; there is always some obstruction or derangement; and therefore the man is said to be *disordered*. It is the same in the sinner; the powers and functions of the soul are injured and interrupted. Does disease deprive the body of beauty, and appetite, and freedom, and strength? So does sin the soul. Does disease tend to the death of the body? Sin issues in the death of the soul. But the death of the one is temporal; while the death of the other is eternal. Who can tell the import of eternal death? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Yet the result is no more dreadful than it is certain—The soul that sinneth it shall die. The end of those things is death.

He also views *God as the only physician*—Therefore to him he applies: "*Lord—heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee.*" This disease, like the leprosy under the law, is inaccessible to human remedies. We cannot heal our own soul. Creatures cannot heal us. The sooner we have this persuasion the better. All other physicians to whom we may apply, though they may cost us much, will be found physicians of no value. But he comes forward and says, "I am the Lord that healeth thee." How? How does he heal the soul meritoriously? By the sufferings and death of his own Son: "by whose stripes we are healed." How does he heal it efficiently? By the influence of his Spirit: "we are saved by the washing of regeneration, and by the renewing of the Holy Ghost." He does not cure like an empiric who only strikes in the disorder, checking the effects and retaining the cause, soothing the pain and undermining the patient—if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. His very dispositions are changed. He is not only restrained from sin, but mortified to it. And how can he who is dead to sin live any longer therein? How does he heal the soul instrumentally? By his word; by preaching; by the ordinances of religion; by the dispensations of his providence. Afflictions, though the effects of sin, are the fruits to take away sin. The sufferings of the Christian are not penal inflictions, but fatherly chastisements—or, to keep to the metaphor, they are medicinal applications, and, like other medicines, we are to judge of them not by the unpalatableness of the taste, but the sanativeness of the operation.

He is also persuaded that *nothing but mercy in God will induce him to undertake the cure*: "I said, Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee." Here is the only source of our hope. We have no claims upon him, even for his pity. We

are not only miserable, but criminal; and as children of disobedience, we *lie entirely at his mercy*. It is for *this* to determine whether we shall die or live. To *this* therefore our recovery must be ascribed, and to this the Scripture always ascribes it—"according to his mercy he saved us." And in this case we read of his abundant mercy; and of his being rich in mercy.

Indeed the mercy he displays in our recovery is not only real, but pre-eminent. In nature and providence his mercies are new every morning. It is mercy that feeds us and clothes us; it is mercy that refreshes us in our sleep, and comforts us in our friends. But the salvation of the soul is the mercy of mercies!

AUGUST 4.—"I will remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar."—Psalm xlii. 6.

THERE are two ways of understanding this; each of them instructive and profitable; and both of them perhaps included in the full import of the words—For what, says Bishop Horne, we call the different senses of a Scripture are often but the different parts of the complete sense, which, being unable to take in at one view, we are compelled to survey successively and separately.

It may be considered as an expression of determined remembrance of God should he ever be found in such places and conditions. Believers can suppose the worst, and yet hope for the best; for they have a resource which can meet even every possible exigency. Hence the prophet could say: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." The Church did the same, in the words to which Luther was so attached: for when the less courageous Melancthon was ready to sink at any unfavourable appearances or reports, "Come," would he say, "Come, brother, let us sing the forty-sixth psalm, and let Rome and hell do their worst:" "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." So David imagined scenes which would have appalled others, and yet could maintain his faith and hope in God—"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." "From the ends of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed." "I will remember thee from the land of Jordan, and from the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar"—as if he should say, "If I am exiled from my palace, and the sanctuary; if my enemies drive me eastward, or southward, or in any other direction, no distance can exclude me from access to thee: wherever I am I will think of thee, and be encouraged." It is then a resolution to exercise confidence in God, in present difficulties, distresses, and dangers, whatever they may be.

But the language may be considered as an expression of encouragement derived from reflection. He had been in these situations and circumstances; and had experienced in them displays of divine

providence and grace. What these were he does not mention; but they would always in review strengthen his trust in God. It is therefore much the same as he resolves in another psalm: "This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old."

This shows the advantage of years. The old Christian has not a better God than the younger one; but he has had better opportunities of knowing him; and they that know his Name will put their trust in him. And we see what is our duty and privilege with regard to God's dealings with us; it is, to observe them and treasure them up in our minds: for they are designed not only for present relief, but for future improvement; that when we meet with new trials our confidence may spring forth afresh at the recollection of former mercies. "Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."

We know a good deal of the geography of the land of Judea. We can find the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites; but what or where was this hill Mizar? The word, as you see in the margin, signifies "the little hill:" and it would have been better so to have translated it. It seems to have been a spot rendered very dear to David, by the occurrence of something very interesting and encouraging there. I have been always led to conjecture that it was the place in which he had been so wonderfully saved from the lion and the bear. He was then a shepherd. Suppose him some clear starry night watching over his flock. While leaning on the edge of the fold, he looks and sees a bear creeping round the base of the hill: suppose him on another evening attending late his fleecy charge; and as soon as he had laid down his harp he heard a lion growling as he issued from a neighbouring wood: and in each instance he had thrown himself upon the foe, and slain him, and rescued the lamb that he had seized! what an impression would this have made upon his imagination; and how could he ever have recurred to it without gratitude and confidence! If there be probability in this conjecture, his language will be much the same as his avowal to Saul when going to engage Goliath.

All places are the same to God, but they are different to us. If we were going over the land of Judea, and imagined that one spot of the ground was intrinsically holier than another, it would be superstitious: but what could be thought of us if we did not peculiarly feel as we stood in Bethlehem where Jesus was born, or on Calvary where he died? What an interest must individuals feel in particular places! How awful to a murderer must be the spot where his brother's blood is still crying unto God from the ground! How affecting to a soldier must be the field of battle where he was exercised with the intensest anxieties that were ever felt! We have read of an Irishman who, when oppressed with a sense of his guilt and danger, entered a wood, and earnestly prayed under a tree, till he obtained a hope of deliverance. Some time after, meeting with a poor creature distressed in the same way, he pressed him to go with him to the same spot. It was not the place but the exercise that had procured for him the relief; but the force of the association could be easily accounted for, especially on a rude and ignorant mind.

Happy they who not only love to walk in woods, and fields, and by running streams, but can refer to spots made sacred by meditation, and in which they have exclaimed, "This is none other but the house of God; and this is the gate of heaven."

Who has not places to which he can advert, in which God has turned the shadow of death into the morning, broken the snare of temptation, commanded for him deliverance, or afforded him some support and consolation which have enabled him to go on his way rejoicing? O! these "little hills;" they are worth their weight in gold! Let them never be forgotten.

"Here to these hills my soul will come,
'Till my beloved lead me home."

AUGUST 5.—"I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

John xvii. 5.

THIS *work* was the redemption of the Church. It was no secular purpose that brought him into the world. He came not to act the merchant, the philosopher, the statesman, much less the warrior; but to be the Redeemer of sinners. And "in him we have redemption through his blood."

For to him was the *execution* of this work intrusted—It was "given him to do." Great undertakings require great qualifications and abilities. And here was an enterprise to which all the angels in heaven, though they excel in strength, would have been found inadequate. But help was laid on One that is mighty. He had every thing that could fit him for the work. It was necessary that he should be human, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; and "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." It was necessary that he should be innocent; and "he did no sin;" "he was manifested to take away our sin, and in him was no sin." It was necessary that he should be voluntary, for there is no value in undesigned or constrained mercies; and he made himself of no reputation, he laid down his life of himself, he loved us and gave himself for us. It was necessary that he should be divine, his divinity was required to sustain his humanity, and to add value to his doings and sufferings; and "in him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

He therefore fully accomplished this work, and could say—"I have *finished* the work which thou gavest me to do." Yet how was this true? For though his active as well as passive obedience was included in his engagement, and though he lived the man of sorrows for us, yet without shedding of blood there was no remission; and it was by the sacrifice of himself that he made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness: but as yet he had not agonized in the garden, nor died on the cross. We answer; the thing was as good as done—It was near at hand—It was absolutely certain. Purpose and fulfilment are the same with God. Hence the language of prophecy and promise announces things future as present, and even as past. "Unto us," said Isaiah, "a child is born," ages before the incarnation of the Messiah; and earlier still, David represented him as saying, "They pierced my hands and my feet: they parted my garments among them, and cast lots for my ves-

ture." Let us, therefore, distinguish between redemption and salvation. Salvation was not accomplished on earth, but in heaven. We are reconciled unto God by the death of his Son; but we are saved by his life. He is exalted at God's own right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour. This work he has not finished, but is still carrying on, and will be carrying on, till all his people are called and glorified. Accordingly it is said, "They shall be saved;" and, "he will appear the second time without sin unto salvation." But redemption was his work on earth: and he said when he expired, "It is finished:" and he "entered into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

The Apostle infers the inefficacy of the legal sacrifices from their repetition, justly arguing that if they could have put away sin they would have ceased to be offered, and the worshippers once purged would have had no more conscience of sins: but Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and once was sufficient. By the one offering up of himself he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. His resurrection was an undeniable proof of the completeness of his satisfaction; it was, so to speak, a receipt in full, given to our Surety to prove that he had paid our debt, and set us free for ever.

What an indignity is put upon him by any attempt to add to his work! Yet some talk of "filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ." But the Apostle, in these misapplied words, refers to the sufferings of his servants in his cause and for his sake, and not to the sufferings he personally endured, when atoning for our sins he bore our grief, and carried our sorrows. What can be "lacking" here? What can be added to that which is not only perfect, but infinite?

"The death of Christ shall still remain,
Sufficient and alone."

We want no penance, no purgatory—His blood cleanseth from all sin. We want no mediator, no patron—but our Advocate with the Father, who is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world—We make mention of his righteousness only.

Let his finished work relieve and encourage us under all our imperfections. We complete nothing; in every thing we come far short of the glory of God; and even our duties would condemn us, as well as our sins, if God should deal with us according to our desert. We ought to be humbled for our deficiencies, and we shall deeply bewail them before God if our hearts are right with him. But the foundation of our hope lies not here. We glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. He redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. We live through him. We are accepted in the Beloved. We are complete in him. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

AUG. 6.—"Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me."—Psalm cxxx. 1.

THIS address was a proof of David's sincerity. His aim was not to be heard of men, but of God, "the Judge of all." He therefore

does not speak *of* him, but *to* him. Rash and daring appeals to God are the last refuge of impudent falsehood, and never make an impression in favour of a man's truth on any reflecting mind. But if in your retirement, when you are alone with the Supreme Being, you can look up to Omniscience, and say, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee;" if you can kneel before him, and pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me:"—this is coming to the light; this yields one of the best evidences of our uprightness.

There are various cases in which such an appeal to God is more than allowable. Let us notice one only. It is when we lie under the misconception of friends, the censure of neighbours, and the reproach of enemies, and we have not the opportunity or power of removing them. How pleasing and satisfying is it then to turn from ignorance, prejudice, and cruelty, to the God of our righteousness! Thus Job, when condemned as a hypocrite, whose sins had now found him out, said, "Behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high;" and made no scruple to say, "Thou knowest that I am not wicked." There are instances in which we may act with the greatest conscientiousness, and yet be unable to induce another into our views, or make him feel the pressure of those circumstances, the aggregate of which decides our own minds. Herein appears the advantage of reputation; for when a man's character is well established, he ought to have, and he commonly will have credit given him for a doubtful or unexplained occurrence: for though a tree is known by its fruit, where the fruit cannot be seen, it may be judged of by the tree, which *is* known.—David was accused by Saul, and his courtiers, and followers, as a restless and proud young man, who wished to work himself out of privacy into notice and power. But his rejoicing was this, the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he had had his conversation in the world; and more abundantly to them-ward. For the best witnesses in our favour are those who are most about us, and know us best. Can we appeal to our wives?—Can we appeal to our children?—To our servants?—Can we appeal to our own hearts?—Can we appeal to God, who is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things? "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me."

"Yet did he not rise from a cottage into a palace?" This was not from himself, but from the appointment of Him who putteth down one and setteth up another, and giveth no account of any of his matters. The elevation was not his planning, his seeking, his choice. He gained nothing from it as to enjoyment. He was never so happy as when a shepherd in Bethlehem. It was not till he had left that peaceful retreat, he exclaimed, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." But it was the will of God that made him what he was, leading him, as blind, by a way that he knew not, and in paths that he had not known. The Lord also who raised him qualified him for his sta-

tion and his work : and no one could have conducted himself, after such an amazing change, with more humility and modesty.

Let his language be remarked and improved by us. Let us learn from it not to soar, unless in spiritual concerns. We may set our affection on things above ; and ought to have our conversation even in heaven ; but as to temporal things, let us learn, in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content ; and abide in the callings in which we have been called of God. "Seekest thou great things unto thyself? Seek them not." Aspire not to fill places and offices above your capacity. Some render it obvious enough to others that they *do* exercise themselves in great matters, and in things too high for them. And when persons have not sense enough to discern their inadequacy themselves, is it not desirable that some of their friends should have faithfulness enough to tell them ; and thus save them from exposure and ridicule? At public meetings, chairmen and speakers commonly begin by avowing their insufficiency and unfitness—But if they believe what they say, why do they engage? Such apologies *in general* (for there are exceptions) go for nothing, or are considered only as anglings for praise, with the bait of humility.

Paul tells every man that is among us, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think ; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. There are mysteries and difficulties in religion. Is it not much more consistent with lowliness of mind to keep near what is plain and useful, than to roam after things beyond our reach? What have we to do with the fate of idiots and heathens? We know our own danger—"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" What have we to do with the decrees of God? But his commands and invitations meet our duties and our wants. Secret things belong unto God ; but things that are revealed are for us and for our children. Yet how fond are we of attempting what is incomprehensible or abstruse! Where other parts of Scripture have had one interpreter, the Canticles and the Apocalypse have had twenty. "Where angels tremble, fools break through and gaze." Our Saviour said, even to his apostles, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." Yet what a rage has there often been for prophetic discussions! And though no one useful truth has been discovered, or practical advantage gained by all the stirs which have been made in these troubled waters : though all the schemes, which occasioned such a noise for a time, have proved after awhile visionary, and left their founders and advocates ashamed of their confidence ; others rise up with equal zeal and equal assurance in support of new theories. But they also will have their day. The ferment soon subsides. These speculations and conjectures cannot operate as principles, for want of certainty. Yet though they do no good they may do evil, by occupying the attention, and drawing off the mind from the main thing ; by injuring the temper ; and by producing self-conceit and a contempt of others—for people are never more confident than when they are uncertain ; or more eager to make converts than when they need an accession of suffrage, to support their hypothesis and recommend it.

We should be able also to make David's appeal as to the dispensations of Providence. His way is in the sea. The reasons of his conduct are inscrutable. Let us not attempt to correct what cannot be imperfect; or to criticise what we do not understand. Let us be still, and know that he is God. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"

· AUG. 7.—"Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child."—Psalms cxxxii. 2.

WEANED from what? Self-sufficiency, self-will, self-seeking. From creatures and the things of the world.—Not indeed as to their use, but as to any dependance upon them for his happiness and portion. The desire of his soul was to the Lord, and the remembrance of his Name; and his language was, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I desire beside thee"—"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness"—"There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased."—No wonder he could say, "My soul is even as a weaned child."

Yet this experience is no easy attainment. The very form of expression—"I have behaved and *quieted* myself" reminds us of some risings which were with difficulty subdued. There is a difference here between Christ and Christians. In him the exercise of grace encountered no adverse principles; but in them it meets with constant opposition. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit; and when we would do good, evil is present with us—Hence the warfare within. So it is with "the child that is weaned." The task to the mother is trying and troublesome. The infant cries and seems to sob out his heart—He thinks it very hard in her, and knows not what she means by her seeming cruelty; and the mother's fondness renders all her firmness necessary to keep her to the process—and sometimes she also weeps at the importunity of his dear looks, and big tears, and stretched out hands. But it must be done—And therefore, though she pities, she perseveres—and after awhile he is soothed and satisfied; forgets the breast; and no longer feels even a hankering after his former pleasure.

But how is the weaning of the child accomplished? By embittering the member to his lips—By the removal of the object in the absence and concealment of the mother—By the substitution of other food—By the influence of time. So it is with us. We love the world, and it deceives us. We depend on creatures, and they fail us and pierce us through with many sorrows. We enter forbidden paths, and follow after our lovers: and our way is hedged up with thorns—and we then say, Return unto thy rest, O my soul—and now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in thee. And what says the Saviour? He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth in me shall never thirst: meaning, not only that they

shall not hunger and thirst after spiritual blessings in vain; but also that they shall not hunger and thirst after other things, as they once did, before they tasted that the Lord is gracious. The enjoyment of a greater good subdues the relish of a less. What are the indulgences of sin, or the dissipations of the world, to one who is abundantly satisfied with the fatness of God's house, and is made to drink of the rivers of his pleasure?

This is the blessed state we should seek after. The want of this weanedness is the source of apostacy and backsliding. It was because her heart was left in Sodom that Lot's wife looked back. It was because he loved the present world that Demas forsook the apostles. Owing to the want of this we have so many inconsistencies in professors of religion. They are yet attached to things from which they are restrained; and in the sight of God they are considered as still pursuing them. Give me a Christian that is *weaned* from them, having found something infinitely superior. He who lives most in the enjoyment of his heavenly privileges will be the most secure from the evil of temptation, and walk most worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called.

We should also be concerned to exemplify this disposition with regard to our state and circumstances in life. The secret of happiness is not the enlargement of our means, but the limitation of our desires. Let us consider ourselves as only strangers and pilgrims on earth. Let us say with the Shunamite, "I dwell among my own people." Let us learn in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content. Let us say, "The Lord shall choose our inheritance for us"—leaving all to his wisdom and goodness—and desiring nothing that he withholds—

"Pleas'd with all the Lord provides;
Wean'd from all the world besides."

AUGUST 8.—"There shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek."—Isaiah xi. 10.

THESE words lead us to observe three things with regard to the Messiah. First, his coming in the flesh. "There shall be a root of Jesse." Some contend that the expression establishes the divine nature of our Lord, and refer to his own authority when he said, "I am the root and the offspring of David." As a root bears the stem, and not the stem the root, so, say they, our prophet would signify that he is the source of Jesse's being, and not that he derives his being from him. If we do not yield to this reasoning it is not from a disbelief of our Saviour's divinity, or because we think it of little importance in the Christian scheme; but because we are persuaded every passage of Scripture should have its own proper meaning, and no more stress should be laid upon it than it was designed to bear; for a bad argument always injures a good cause. If we wished to prove what we fully believe, that he had a divine nature, according to which he made Jesse and all other creatures, we would go at once to the testimony of John—"All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made;" or to the decision of Paul—"By him were all things crea-

ted, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him." But "a root of Jesse" means a scion, a shoot springing out of one of his roots; or as it is expressed in the beginning of the chapter, "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." The phrase marks the family from which he should arise. This was not known for a long time, and was the effect of a gradual discovery of him. First, he was revealed as the seed of the woman or a partaker of human nature, then as of the seed of Abraham, then as of the tribe of Judah, and, lastly, as of the house of David; and this was so familiarly known when he was on earth, that beggars addressed him as the son of David. It also shows his humble estate. The Scripture often sets forth the various degrees of human condition by trees and plants. We find Nebuchadnezzar's greatness represented by a tree, whose height reached to heaven, and whose shadow covered the earth: while his abasement was expressed by the cutting it down to the ground, and leaving only the stump in the ground. Jesus is not described as a fine tall tree, full of boughs and leaves, but as a sucker from an unpromising, and seemingly dead root. He was poor and mean in the estimation of the world; for though he had real and unspeakable worth, though in him were found all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and in him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, all this is less than nothing and vanity by the side of guineas and ribbons, in the eyes of the multitude. Therefore says our Prophet, "He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." Hence it is not said, "a root of" David who had been a mighty monarch, but of "Jesse" whose name was unrenowned; implying that at the time of his appearing the house of his lineage would be reduced to its original obscurity. And so it was. Joseph, that son of David his reputed father, was a carpenter, and his mother a poor virgin, probably working with her hands when her honours were announced to her by the angel. Thus the King of kings and Lord of lords was born—not in the city of Jerusalem, but in a village in the north of Galilee, little among the thousands of Judah—not in a palace, but in a stable. Thus, as he advanced in life, he had not where to lay his head; his hearers were the common people; and the ministers of his kingdom, fishermen from the lake of Galilee. This has always scandalized the pride of reason: but "Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."

Secondly, his destination—"Which shall stand for an ensign of the people." Here is a new metaphor, for no single image will do him justice; yea, all that we can employ must fall short of his glory. But each figure aids our conception of some particular part of his character and office. Of old it was customary in time of war for the prince or commander to erect an ensign on a mountain or hill, there to summon the inhabitants of the province to place

them in military condition, by furnishing them with arms, training them, assigning them their rank and place, and giving them their orders. Thus Jesus was lifted up on the cross that he might draw all men unto him; and thus he is lifted up in the preaching of the Gospel, that he might gather together in one, the children of God that are scattered abroad. Therefore it was said, "to him shall men come;" "to him shall the gathering of the people be,"—as the inhabitants of a town gather together at the only well that supplies them—as pupils assemble around the only master that can teach them—as soldiers repair to the oriflamb suspended over the chief's tent. The allusion is just and suitable. The religious life is a warfare. Christians are good soldiers of Jesus Christ. He is the Captain of their salvation, the Leader and Commander of the people. He conducts them not to carnage and infamy, but to glory, honour, and immortality. His warfare is not carnal, but spiritual; and it is a good warfare; and they need not be afraid to follow his movements; he cannot err. With him they are always safe. He will teach their hands to war and their fingers to fight; he will renew their strength; he will make their way prosperous—Yea, in all these things they are more than conquerors through him that loved them.

Thirdly, his successful influence—"To it shall the Gentiles seek." In his quotation of the words, the Apostle varies the language, and says, "In his Name shall the Gentiles trust." But there is no inconsistency between this seeking and this trusting; the one is the cause, the other the effect; or rather, each is alternately both cause and effect too. Because we trust in him we seek him; and when we seek him we find how worthy he is of our trust, for they that know his name will put their trust in him. The trusting is the seeking in the principle; and the seeking is the trusting in the exercise.

But who were to be the subjects attracted? "The Gentiles." Nothing could have been more unlikely when this assurance was given. The whole world was lying in wickedness, and abandoned to the most abominable idolatries, "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." What probability was there that *these* should believe in one who was crucified, and become followers of the meek and holy Jesus? But it had been announced, and it was to a surprising extent accomplished. We may see the change in our own country. We were heathens, led away of dumb idols, and enslaved by comfortless and cruel superstitions. But what a prevalence, and what triumphs, for ages, has the Gospel attained here! And yet without miracles; and by the blessing of God upon means far inferior to those we possess, and upon exertions made under far greater disadvantages than we have to contend with. How groundless is missionary discouragement! What has been done—may be done. Is any thing too hard for the Lord.

And we here see not only the power of God, but we see the nature of the Gospel dispensation. It forbids none, however unfavourable their condition and character. It cries, Peace, Peace, to him that is far off, as well as to them that are nigh. The Gentiles

were called dogs by the Jews; and our Saviour himself speaks of them as inhabiting the highways and hedges, and as the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. Yet for these there was room. These were to be compelled to come in. The Saviour excludes none but those who exclude themselves; and he even complains of their conduct—"Ye will not come to me that ye might have life." Let the vilest of the vile, let the chief of sinners seek to him, and try the graciousness and truth of the promise that has been the sheet-anchor of thousands—"HIM THAT COMETH UNTO ME I WILL IN NO WISE CAST OUT."

AUGUST 9.—"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."—Psalm xvi. 6.

WE may put this acknowledgment into the mouth of an INDULGED CHILD OF PROVIDENCE.

David seems to refer to the division of the land of promise by lot. What fell to the share of his tribe had some special advantages, for which he expresses himself with gratitude and joy. He had also been raised up from an obscure and contracted station to the possession of honours and resources, which filled him with wonder and praise, and led him to exclaim, "Lord, what am I, and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" There are many who are similarly favoured, though not in an equal degree. They have independence; or if they have not abundance, they have competency, which Agar deems far preferable. They have an agreeable calling. Business prospers, and exceeds their wants. They have a peaceful dwelling and affectionate connections. They have health, and power to relish the beauties of nature, the bounties of earth, and the endearments of social life—

"Not more than others they deserve,
Yet God has given them more"—

And far more—Their cup runneth over.

Only let them remember that these indulgences are not "the one thing needful;" and that it becomes them to say with Watts,

"Without thy graces and thyself,
I were a wretch undone."

Or, with Cowper,

"Give what thou canst, without thee we are poor,
And with thee rich, take what thou wilt away."

Whatever these outward blessings may do for them, they cannot reach their principal exigences. They profit not in the day of wrath, nor deliver from death, nor evince the friendship of God, nor relieve the burdened conscience, nor heal the wounded spirit, nor content the cravings of an immortal mind. Yea, they should also remember, that they are in peculiar danger from these enjoyments. The peril is, that they trust in uncertain riches, and not in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy—That they make the creature a substitute for the Creator—That they lose the heart

of a stranger—That they forget their resting-place—That their thoughts are drawn off from home by the agreeableness and delights of the way—That their table becomes a snare; and their prosperity destroys them. The writer, some years ago, in a neighbouring city, received in the pulpit the following note: “The prayers of this congregation are earnestly desired for a man who is prospering in his worldly concerns.” And if he did this sincerely, and there is no reason to question it, the man showed an acquaintance with the weakness and depravity of human nature. He had studied himself; he had observed others. He had also read his Bible to purpose, which informed him how Joseph, in the court of Pharaoh, swore “by the life of Pharaoh;” how David in his prosperity said, “I shall not be moved;” how Hezekiah delivered, recovered, honoured, “rendered not according to the benefit done him, for his heart was lifted up;” how Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked—“*then* he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.”

Yet these things are good in themselves, and display the bounty and kindness of God; and yield us a thousand comforts and advantages. And who could imagine they were bestowed upon those who are not worthy of the least of all his mercies; yea, upon rebels who deserve his wrath? Surely it becomes the possessors to be thankful, and to say, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.” Surely they must be the vilest of all beings, whose feelings do not often produce the acknowledgment, “The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.”

“But all are not thus indulged: all cannot use this language.” Yet more *might* use it: and more *would* use it if they were more sensible of their desert, more humble, more disposed to compare conditions not with those above them, but with those below them. For while they are injured in their circumstances, others are ruined. While they have lost one child, others have been bereaved of all their offspring. While they have occasional infirmities and ailments, others are bedridden, made to possess months of vanity, and have none assurance of their life. We do not wonder that persons are dissatisfied with their portion, who send out pride and fancy to explore it; who dwell on the dark side of their condition only, and never look at the bright one; and suffer the impression of a single trial to render them insensible to the claims of a thousand comforts.

And we leave those whom Jude calls “murmurers and complainers;” or, as the word is, blasphemers of their lot. Haman goes home to his wife, and states all his greatness, but adds, “Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as Mordecai the Jew sitteth at the king’s gate.” Ahab, in a palace, cannot eat and drink; and turns sick; and takes to his bed; because one of his subjects will not sell him a few yards of garden ground. One is mopish and melancholy because he cannot get a particular place or office. Another is sour or spiteful because all the neighbourhood will not bend to his humour, or think him so great a man as he imagines himself to be—we do not wish the cravings of such groaners to be indulged; it would only carry them the further still from contentment. But we pray that they may exchange “the sorrow of the

world which worketh death," for that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto life, and needeth not to be repented of."

AUGUST 10.—"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."—Psalm xvi. 6.

WE may put this acknowledgment into the mouth of AN INHABITANT OF THIS FAVOURED COUNTRY.

People are naturally attached to a land in which they were born and brought up, and with which all their earliest recollections and feelings are associated. It has pleasures and charms for them that others know not of. And who would be cruel enough to deprive them of their preference? and make them miserable by comparison? Rather, who would not rejoice that there is no region so absolutely dreary and barren as to have no flowers and attractions scattered over it by the kindness of Providence, to bind them to their native soil, and to make it painful to leave their own country and their father's house?

Yet we need not confound things that differ; and it would be the strangest inconsideration and ingratitude, were we, as Englishmen, to be unaffected with the advantages we enjoy in this highly distinguished and indulged country. We refer not to our extensive dominion, far surpassing the Roman world, having more than sixty millions under our sway, in one part of our dominion only. Neither do we admire the manner in which our dominion has sometimes been acquired and enlarged; though we are persuaded the conquerors will prove blessings to the conquered. In a thousand instances we are far from faultless. But,

"England, with all thy faults I love thee still!"

And how much is there, whatever view I take, to induce the acknowledgment, "The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." Let me think of our insular situation, in consequence of which we are open to commerce; guarded from invasion; and even in war itself know so little of its ravages, never hearing the confused noise of warriors, or seeing garments dipped in blood. Let me think of the temperature of our atmosphere, in which we are not frozen to statues, or dissolved in heat. Let me think of our freedom from tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, pestilences. Let me think of a country where the seasons regularly return and melt into each other—where are the sweet interchanges of hill and vale, and wood and lawn—where the pastures are clothed with flocks and herds—where the fields and valleys stand thick with corn—where we are fed with the finest of the wheat. Let me think of a country whose merchants are princes, and whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth—a country ennobled by the zeal of patriots, enriched by the blood of martyrs, endeared and sacred by the dust of a pious multitude without number—a country illustrious by every kind of genius, and by every improvement in science and in art—a country in whose well-balanced constitution are blended the advantages of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, without their defects—a country whose government is equally averse to tyranny and anarchy; where none

are above law and none below it; where liberty has so long fixed her abode; where religious opinions produce no civil disabilities; where all persecution is excluded; and where every man sits under his own vine and vineyard, and none can make him afraid. Let me think of a country where charity and compassion reign not only in numberless personal acts, but in a thousand institutions to meet every kind of distress, and lessen the sum of human woe. Let me think of a country possessing not only so many natural, intellectual, civil, and social advantages, but so many moral and religious privileges; where not only the darkness of paganism, but of superstition is past, and the true light shineth; where the Scriptures are found in our own language, and all are allowed to read them, and able to procure them; where the word of life is preached, and we can hear the joyful sound of the truth as it is in Jesus; where the Gospel of Christ is not only spreading widely among ourselves, but zealous and persevering efforts are making by individuals and communities to convey it to others—Where shall I end? And can I glance at all this, and not say, “It is a good land which the Lord our God hath given us?” Ought I not to be thankful to him who determines the bounds of my habitation, and performeth all things for me? Ought I not to bear with patience and cheerfulness a few difficulties and trials inseparable from a condition so favoured and indulged? Ought I not to be concerned to improve my privileges, and to fear the danger arising from so great a responsibility? Where much is given, will not much be required? Was not Capernaum that was exalted unto heaven thrust down to hell? Did not God say to the Jews, You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore you will I punish? And ought I not to *dwell* in the land, and to do all in my power to promote the righteousness which exalteth a nation? And should not I pray for its safety, and peace, and prosperity? “Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.”

AUGUST 11.—“The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.”—Psalm xvi. 6.

WE may put this acknowledgment into the mouth of A CHRISTIAN WITH REGARD TO HIS SPIRITUAL CONDITION.

Read the preceding verse: “The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.” What wonder then that the possessor should exclaim, “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.” He uses but one word in describing his estate, but it is the most comprehensive. Had he written volumes, and enumerated all the treasures of heaven, and earth, and sea, he would have said less, and to far less purpose, than in saying, “The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance.” The greater includes the less. If *He* be *mine*, what is the substance of my portion but his fulness? and the measure of my portion but his immensity? and the duration of my portion but his eternity? Yet this is the truth of the case; in the

everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, he has been pleased to make over himself to his people, with all he is, and all he has. "I will be thy God. I will pardon thy sins. I will sanctify thy nature. I will supply all thy need. I will be light to thy darkness. I will be strength to thy weakness. I will bless thy bread and thy water. All my ways towards thee shall be mercy and truth. All things shall work together for thy good. I will guide thee with my counsel, and afterward receive thee to glory."

This is no more than the meanest Christian may claim and exult in. *Meanest* did we say? We retract the term. A Christian may be afflicted and poor; but he cannot be mean—He is one of the excellent of the earth, of whom the world is not worthy. Let the rich and the great bring together all their claims, and make their boast, the *poorest* Christian beggars them all; for he can say, "God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." And he ought to preserve a sense of this in his mind. He ought to live nobly. He ought to feel contentedly in whatsoever state he is. He ought not to envy others their good things; nor sink like others under losses and trials. When their lamps are put out they are in utter darkness; but the Sun of righteousness arises upon him. When their vessels are broken all their comforts are gone; but he has the fountain of living waters—They have no God; but "the Lord is the portion of his inheritance."

If from viewing his state essentially he examines it comparatively, he will have fresh reason to exclaim, "The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." For what should we value a heritage? We should commend it for *healthfulness*. No heritage would be deemed pleasant and goodly that was injurious to health, without which we can relish nothing. The apprehension of losing this all-important blessing would alone induce us to resign any situation, unless we were compelled to remain in it. But such is the Christian's heritage, that all those who have lived upon it, however disordered before, have been restored to a miracle, and each of them could say, I am a wonder unto many. We should commend it for *fertility*. Hence Moses extols Canaan as a land flowing with milk and honey, and in which there was no scarceness. In like manner he says of Joseph; "Blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, and for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills." No earthly inheritance can yield the possessor every thing he wants; but God's riches in glory by Christ Jesus can supply all the Christian's need. We should commend it for *safety*. The best heritage would fetch little that had no defence, but was open to invasion and injury. There is nothing that adds so much to the enjoyment of a possession as a sense of security: sitting under our own vine and fig tree, and none making us afraid. Upon all the Christian's glory there is a defence. His soul dwells at ease: and he is in quiet from the fear of evil. An heritage would not be deemed pleasant or goodly if cut off from *the privilege of intercourse*. Christians have the communion of saints. There is an open and constant communication between

them and heaven. Their fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Blessed are the people that are in such a case: yea, happy is the people whose God is the Lord.

AUGUST 12.—“They shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one.”—Isaiah xix. 20.

LET us consider these words in the noblest exemplification of which they are susceptible; and let us remark what they say of the *saved* and what they say of the *Saviour*.

What they say of the *saved*: “They shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors.” The representation includes their *state*—They are oppressed, and their oppressors are worse enemies than any of the conquerors who have enslaved nations. They are more base, and vile, and cruel, and reduce their vassals to far greater wretchedness and ruin. And we cannot mistake who these tyrants are, when we know that “the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the Devil,” that he “might deliver us from this present evil world,” that he might “turn every one of us away from our iniquities,” that he might “save his people from their sins.” It includes their *sensibility*. Many are unwilling to own their condition; and resemble the Jews, who, when our Lord spoke of making them free, exclaimed, “We were never in bondage to any man,” though they had been captives to every neighbouring power, and were then a Roman province. But these are awakened to consider, and enlightened to see their deplorable estate. This is what divines call conviction of sin; and which commonly operates in the following order. The man first feels the effects of his sin. The prodigal began to be in want: I here perish with hunger: I will arise. Then he feels the guilt of sin, and learns that whatever miseries he has brought upon himself here, they are only the beginnings of sorrow, and a small part of his desert. The soul that sinneth it shall die. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God. Who can dwell with everlasting burnings? At last he becomes sensible of the pollution of sin, as the defilement of the soul, and as rendering him unfit for communion with a holy God—“Behold, I am vile: wherefore I abhor myself, repenting in dust and ashes.” It includes also their *disposition*—“They cry unto the Lord” for relief and deliverance. Conviction of sin always issues in earnest prayer: and such prayer cannot be in vain.

“He shall send them a Saviour”—And what is said of *him*? A single distinction is given him: but how much does it contain! and how suitable, how necessary is it to meet our wants! Our case is beyond expression difficult; yea, it is desperate in itself, and also with regard to “the help of men and angels joined.” Every kind of saviour therefore will not do for us; he must be mighty to save: and our help is laid on one that is mighty—He shall send them a Saviour; “and a great one.” He is so in four respects. A great one if we consider the dignity of his person. The grandest titles are not withholden from him in the Scriptures of truth. There he is not only the child born, and the son given, but the mighty God.

There he is not only the man and the sufferer, but the maker of all things: "all things were created by him and for him." Can we think too highly of such a Saviour? Can we confide in him too confidently? Can our interests ever fail in such hands? "I know," says Paul, "whom I have believed, and am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."

A great one if we consider the immensity of the number he saves. These have been commonly few compared with their cotemporaries; yet the aggregate of them from the beginning is a countless multitude. But when we look to the future, we read of the nations of them that are saved. It is said, he shall sprinkle many nations. Yea, all nations shall be blessed in him: all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

A great one if we consider the vastness of the deliverance he achieves. It is called "so great salvation:" inexpressibly, inconceivably great. What are all other salvations compared with this? They free us from some evils, this saves us from all evil. They confer some advantages, this secures every advantage. They are temporal, this is eternal: "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; they shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end."

A great one if we consider that his sufficiency reaches beyond every extremity. Hence, says the Apostle, "He is able to save unto the uttermost." His blood cleanses from the greatest guilt. His grace can enlighten the darkest understanding, and soften the hardest heart, and subdue the most rebellious will—Nothing is too hard for the Lord.

But some may be ready to say, you need not enlarge here: We do not question his ability—but his readiness to save. Is he a *willing* Saviour? In answer to this, we observe, First, That the assurance of his ability is an implication of his willingness: for it would be useless, it would be worse than useless, it would tantalize and torment us, were we informed that our perishing condition was within the compass of his power, but not within the reach of his pity. And, Secondly, the sacred writers would think his compassion was taken for granted, and that no one *could* possibly doubt the inclination of his heart. Who, without our solicitation, remembered us in our low estate, and said, Deliver from going down into the pit, I have found a ransom? Who took upon him flesh and blood, and came into the world to save sinners? Who, when rich, for our sakes became poor? Who died for the ungodly? Who has said, and confirmed it by his oath, by his blood, and by every instance of his conduct, "him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out?"—"Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

AUGUST 13.—"And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it JEHOVAH-NISSI."—Exod. xvii. 15.

It was upon the defeat of Amalek and his people that Moses built this altar for sacrifice and thanksgiving. But what is the import of the name he gave it; JEHOVAH-NISSI? The Lord my banner. A banner is a military flag, standard, or ensign, commonly coloured and figured, carried in war, and displayed to collect, re-

gulate, and encourage the troops. It would be needless and absurd to run a parallel between a banner and God. It is enough to observe, that it is not only applied to him metaphorically, but by a figure of speech, which puts a part for the whole: and intends that he is every thing to his people in the character of warriors.

It therefore reminds us that the Christian life is a warfare. There is no image by which, in the Scriptures, it is more frequently expressed. And though it be called "a good warfare," it is the most serious and trying in which we can ever be engaged; and every partaker of Divine grace can say, with Paul, "So fight I not as one that beateth the air." The person and things of the present evil world, the armies of aliens in his own heart, and the principalities, and powers, and spiritual wickednesses in high places constrain him often to exclaim, "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! Many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, there is no help for him in God." But the Lord is his banner! How full and significant is the language of Revelation. Not only, says David, does he enlighten and save me, but "the Lord is my light and my salvation." Not only, says the Church, does he aid and inspire me, but "the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song." A true Israelite not only says, "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth;" but my banner is Divine—is Deity itself: JEHOVAH-NISSI! We acknowledge and honour him as such four ways.

First, by voluntarily and inflexibly adhering to him as our Leader and Commander. "The Lord is my banner." I disclaim every other chief. I bring all my resources into his service. I am ready to stand or fall with him—His cause is my cause; and his enemies my enemies. If others *desert*, I will cleave to him with purpose of heart. I will follow him in all changes, and whithersoever he goeth. He shall choose my station, and show me where I shall contend; whether in private or in public life; whether with the evils of prosperity or adversity—I am not at my own disposal—Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?

Secondly, by confessing him the Author of every success with which we have been crowned. It is no easy thing when we succeed to beat off all arrogance and self-glorying. We love to sacrifice to our own wisdom and our own strength. How much has God to do to hide pride from us! The army of Gideon must be reduced from more than thirty thousand to four hundred men; and these be armed only with lamps and pitchers, "lest Israel vaunt themselves;" and to compel them to exclaim, "*His* right hand and his holy arm have gotten *him* the victory." The most becoming state of mind we can be in is to feel that we are nothing, and that God is all in all. And to this the Christian will be brought, and be ready to lay down all his honours at his feet. "I look back, and see many who have become a prey to their enemies, who once promised fairer than I have ever done. How is it that I have stood in the evil day; and yet stand? Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me. By thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall. Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great. Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my

feet did not slip. For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle : thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me. Bless the Lord, O my soul."

Thirdly, by our courageously trusting in him to enable us to overcome in every future conflict. Knowing the vast, the infinite consequences depending on the issue of the war, it would be awfully discouraging and depressing to the Christian to fight uncertainly. But he does not, at least he should not, need not. There is a holy kind of confidence and triumph, more than allowed him, which nothing should shake. It is founded not in his own skill and resources, but in the perfections and engagements of his covenant God. "Has he not said, No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper? Has he not said, Thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places? My soul shall make her boast in the Lord. In myself I am very unequal to the work; but I am not alone. The Lord is on my side. I am nothing, compared with my foes; but they are nothing, compared with the Lord of hosts. Infinitely greater is he that is for me than all that are against me. He will furnish me with supplies. He will well arm me for the field. He will teach my hands to war, and my fingers to fight. He will renew my strength, and make my way prosperous. Though a worm, I shall thresh the mountains. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

Fourthly, by looking to him for the remuneration of victory at last. The soldier warreth in hope: and it is not wrong for the Christian, like Moses, to have respect unto the recompense of the reward. The reward is indeed of grace; but it is a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. And while we look for it as the fruit of his mercy, we can claim it on the ground of his truth; for he has said, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."

Jehovah-Nissi!

AUGUST 14.—"Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."—Gen. xv. 1.

OUR misery or happiness depends upon the relation in which God stands to us. What an adversary must he be, who is everywhere present, who is Almighty, who has the command of every creature, and the direction of every event! Have we an arm like God, or can we thunder with a voice like his? If he be against us who can be for us? And if he be for us who can be against us? Blessed are the people whose hope the *Lord* is; and who can claim *Him* as their helper, their guide, their guard, the strength of their heart, their portion for ever—their shield, and their exceeding great reward—"Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."

"Fear not, Abram." But had Abram expressed any fear? God seeth the state of the mind. He knows the apprehensions which his people feel, and are ashamed to utter; and he provides for their relief; and from the remedy we may always infallibly infer the disease. Abram feared the presence of evil—Therefore says God,

“I am thy shield.” And he feared the absence of good—and therefore says God, “I am thy exceeding great reward.” But what is this to us? Every thing. God is the same in all ages; and they that be of faith are blessed with faithful Abram. They also have their fears. But are they exposed? Do they live in the midst of dangers? Are they conscious of inability to defend themselves? They are not defenceless. Their defence is of God—Their defence is God. He is interposed between them and all evil—“I am thy shield”—a shield too solid for any weapon to penetrate; and so capacious as to leave no valued and endeared interest uncovered. The truth of this fact constitutes their security; but the belief of it creates their confidence: and it should be their concern to realize and apply it by faith; that their souls may dwell at ease; and be in quiet from the fear of evil.

But do they feel not only dangers which require a powerful preserver; but exigencies which call for a munificent benefactor? Let these exigencies be as numerous and as great as they may, their sufficiency is of God—“I am thy exceeding great reward.” The language of the Scripture is peculiarly strong. David does not say, the Lord enlightens and defends me; but, the Lord is my light and my salvation. Isaiah does not say, Thy God, thy glorifier; but thy God, thy glory. And the Lord does not say here, I will reward thee, but I am thy reward. The meaning, however, is not so much, I will recompense thee for whatever thou doest for me; as I will supply all thy need: only in a way of condescension he calls these bestowments by a word which would seem to intimate as if we deserved or earned them. But we must not suffer his glory to be injured by his goodness. A creature can never merit any thing from his creator. A sinner only deserves punishment. A Christian will acknowledge that he is not worthy of the least of God’s mercies—If a reward be of *grace*, it is a free benefaction, whatever service it may be connected with. Hence the vastness of the good—not only thy reward, but thy *great*, thy *exceeding* great reward; surpassing all example, all representation, all conception. We therefore never need be afraid of the participation of others; for there is enough, and to spare. And we may give full scope to our own desires and hopes. Whatever spiritual wisdom, or strength, or comfort we need, we are commanded to ask and receive, that our joy may be full. In temporal things too, we should remember, that the silver and the gold are his. We should learn, in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content; assured that if any wish be denied us, it is from wisdom in our generous Friend, and not from a want of love or a deficiency in his resources. Let us honour him, by living on his fulness in the failure of every creature succour. When Paulinus heard of the sacking of Nola by the Goths, and the destruction of all his property, he lifted up his eyes and said, “Thou knowest where my treasure has long been.” And what says the Church? “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

Let us think of the full possession and enjoyment of our supreme

good. There is a medium here between impatience and indifference. When a Christian is in a proper frame of mind, he will be content to live, if the pleasure of God requires it; but he will be ready to go. "What is my condition here, but a vale of tears, a wilderness of briars and thorns, an enemy's country! I cannot pray without distractions. I cannot sing without some jarring notes. When I would do good evil is present with me. How partial always, and how often interrupted, is my communion with God. How remotely do I now feel from that state, in which we shall behold his face in righteousness, and be for ever with the Lord."—

AUGUST 15.—"If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."—Isaiah vii. 9.

THIS closes the address of Isaiah to Ahaz and his people on a very interesting occasion. It was this. Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, had confederated together to invade and destroy Judah. They had begun their march, and were spreading desolation and terror: and when Ahaz heard, "his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind." The figure is uncommonly expressive, and shows the restlessness and bendings of their minds under the violence of fear. Isaiah was ordered to go and encourage him, not for his own sake, for he was a very wicked prince, but for the sake of the house of David. Two things are observable. First, he was to take along with him his son Shear-jashub. The reason for this does not appear; unless there was a reference to the import of his name, which signified, a remnant shall return. Secondly, the very spot is specified where he should meet Ahaz; "At the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the high way of the Fuller's Field." Perhaps he was there to order the water-works, so as to secure them from the enemy; or perhaps he was to be there passing by accidentally. If so, we see that occurrences and movements the most minute and contingent with regard to us lie open to God's view, and the greatest consequences hinge upon them.

But what was he to say to him? "Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah. Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal: thus saith the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass." Yea, the assurance goes on to announce not only that the designs of these adversaries should be defeated, but that they themselves would be speedily destroyed. All this however is closed with a very significant reflection: "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

This betrays an apprehension that the message was not likely to be readily and firmly credited—Such fools, and so slow of heart are we to believe all that the prophets have spoken! It also shows that God does not regard us as merely passive in religion. We are not under his influence like timber under the saw, the chisel,

and plane, unconscious and inactive. He does not work upon us, but in us; and he works in us to will and to do. What he does for us, he does also by us. Neither is his operation like the agency of a charm, whose process no one can explain, and during which the patient may as well sleep as wake. If we are taught, we must understand and receive: we are not carried, but led into all truth. If he blesses us, he stirs us up to value and seek after his favours; and the asking is as necessary as the giving—yea, the one is the medium of the other.

It might seem here as if faith was in our own power. It is not so in every respect: and it is not so in any respect as to nature. But what is impossible to nature is possible to grace. Without Christ we can do nothing; but through his strengthening of us we can do all things. And therefore as his grace is sufficient for us, and attainable by us, we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit; and he said to Thomas, Be not faithless, but believing; and he said to his disciples, "Have faith in God;" and he upbraided them for their unbelief.

But the principal thing is the essentiality of faith to religious stability: "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." There are three kinds of stability in the Christian life. A stability of judgment—This refers to the truths of religion. A stability of practice—This refers to the duties of religion. And a stability of hope—This refers to the comforts of religion. Each of these faith is able to produce: but faith alone can produce them. Let us reflect upon all this———

And then we shall soon see enough to condemn and bewail in unbelief, not only as it dishonours God, but as it robs the soul, and leaves it stripped, wounded, and half dead; a prey to error, temptation, and grief. Who can imagine the aggregate of the good which it has prevented in our experience, ever since we have known God, or rather, have been known of him? Oh what characters might we have been!—how firm, how free, how happy, how useful, how ennobled! And what has kept us back from all this honour? "An evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." LORD, INCREASE OUR FAITH.

AUGUST 16.—"We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."—2 Cor. v. 1.

SOME things in these words are very plain; others may involve a little difficulty. The Apostle obviously intends the body when he speaks of "the earthly house of this tabernacle:" and nothing can be a juster representation of it. Man is not a machine; or a mere mass of organized matter. He has something more than flesh and blood. There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. What we see is not the agent, but only the instrument; not the inhabitant, but the dwelling. The body is called "an house" for its accommodation. The soul might have had another residence given it, and a very inferior one. Injured as the structure is by sin, it has enough of excellence yet in it to excite admiration, and induce us to say, "I am fearfully and

wonderfully made." Galen, a physician atheistically inclined, after examining the body in the number, the perfection, and the exquisite adaptation of all the parts, was fully convinced of the being of God, and composed a beautiful hymn to his praise. No mechanism will bear a comparison with that of the animal economy. It would be much more reasonable to suppose that a watch made itself, than that the eye, in which there are such marks and proofs of design and contrivance, should be the effect of chance. But it is an "earthly" house—earthly in its composition; earthly in its support; earthly in its destination—"Dust thou art," says the sentence, and "unto dust shalt thou return." It is the case not only with the body of the peasant, but of the prince—"His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his dust." And so it must be with the relics of the most endeared connection. The beauty of Sarah, who had endangered kings, was soon despoiled of its charms, and after a wish, how natural! to keep even the lovely shrine a little longer, Abraham was compelled to say, "Bury my dead out of my sight"—So the bereaved go, and inscribe over the grave of the once sparkling eye, and the once ruby lip, and the once fascinating tongue—

"How lov'd, how valued once avails thee not,
To whom related or by whom begot:
A heap of dust alone remains of thee,
'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be."

It is also the earthly house of this "tabernacle." This reminds us of its weakness, frailty, and danger. A tabernacle, though covered, has no foundation; it has no nails fastened in a sure place, but pins and cords instead; it is a moveable, temporary, slender abode, soon taken down, and easily destroyed—The Apostle therefore speaks of its being "dissolved."

But what means "a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?" Some suppose that it is a description of the resurrection-body. The body, when glorified, may well be thus expressed: but the reference here is to something nearer, something to be found at death, and enjoyed before the revival of the body; as we see in the verses immediately following. It is therefore a representation of the blessed condition into which the soul enters as soon as it leaves "dull mortality behind." The Apostle would intimate that the soul does not die with the body. It does not resemble Job's sons; when the house fell with them, they were crushed in the ruins; but here while the house is destroyed the resident escapes. The believer at death is not like an ejected tenant, forced out of his present dwelling without having another provided to receive him. "I go," said Jesus, "to prepare a place for you:" "where I am there shall also my servants be." This blessed abode is characterized by four articles. The first tells us that it is solid. It is not a tabernacle, but "a building." The second that it is reared by a divine agency. It is a building "of God," and "not made with hands." The third marks its permanence. It is "eternal." The fourth shows its situation. It is "in the heavens." We must arise and depart hence to enjoy it.

But here is a confidence expressed with regard to it: "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have

a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The confidence is twofold: the confidence of faith and the confidence of hope. The first regards the reality of the thing. The belief of this is necessary. Some deny it; others doubt it: but Christians know it. This knowledge was not possessed by the heathens. None of them ever thought of the restoration of the body: but many suppose that they believed in the immortality of the soul. Yet what was their belief? Did they ever teach the doctrine publicly? Did they ever reason from it as a principle? Did they ever urge it as a motive in their morals? They could not; they were not *convinced* themselves. Seneca dared not decide whether death destroyed the soul or delivered it. And he who, of all their philosophers, spake the best upon the subject, left suspicions at death that his mind was not satisfied. But, as Paley says, among a thousand *conjectures* one of them happened to be right; and with them it was nothing better than conjecture—they had no proof of the thing itself: and if, as he justly adds, nothing more is *known* in religion than is *proved*, "life and immortality were brought to light through the Gospel." Now every Christian, however poor and illiterate, admits it as a fact; and though he cannot evince the certainty of his belief, as many did in the first ages, who suffered the loss of all things, yet he acts upon it, and in the whole course of the religious life "walks by faith, and not by sight."

There is also the confidence of hope. This regards not the reality of the state only, but our own claim to the possession of it. The one of these does not necessarily produce the other. How many, alas! are there, who believe there is such a glorious state, who have either no expectation of enjoying it, or an unfounded one that will issue in the most dreadful disappointment. They never, how strange! give themselves a moment's concern about it; though nothing can be of equal importance; and they *know it!* And *know* that if they do not receive a happy immortality they must endure a miserable one; and thus the greatest blessing will prove the greatest curse!

Yet all the partakers of divine grace do not possess this confidence equally. We read of the *full* assurance of hope, which supposes inferior degrees of it. We may also observe that no degree of it, however established, is free from fluctuations. The confidence of appropriation therefore, even in the Lord's own people is not so extensive as the confidence of belief. Neither is it essential to their safety—Yet how necessary is it to their comfort. How desirable is it amidst the troubles of life, and the growing infirmities of nature, to know that "when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, we shall have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation:" and "give me a token for good."

What a question then arises here—"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and who shall dwell in his holy place?" The best way to ascertain your title to the inheritance of the saints in light is, to look after your meetness for it. Your hope of the one without the other is presumption and madness: for can you imagine that God will bring you into a condition which it is impossible for

you to fill or enjoy? But if he has prepared you for the blessedness, be assured he has prepared the blessedness for you. It is a holy state—and if you now love holiness: it is a state in which Christ is all in all—and if you are now rejoicing in him as your portion, “He that hath wrought you for the self same thing is God, who hath also given you the earnest of the Spirit.”

AUGUST 17.—“And Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and, as they followed, they were afraid.”—Mark x. 32.

THEY were now, it is said, in the way going up to Jerusalem, where *he* was to suffer and die upon the cross, after enduring every kind of insult and cruelty. But a circumstance is added which is worthy of our attention—“Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and, as they followed, they were afraid.” That this is not mentioned without design may be inferred from the brevity of the Evangelists. Had every thing pertaining to the history of our Lord been recorded, the world could not have contained the books that would have been written. But when it is necessary to comprise much in a little, a writer if wise, will introduce nothing that is insignificant and uninteresting—The incident therefore is mentioned to show how far he was from being unwilling to advance to the post of danger. The action intimates how full of zeal and courage he was; and that in the knowledge of all that lay before him he was eager to engage in the conflict. Many have vapoured away while the enemy was not at hand: and the children of Ephraim, carrying bows and spears, yet turned their back in the day of battle—Such a difference is there between an imaginary and a real, between a prospective and a present encounter. But this distinction does not apply to him. He who in the beginning said, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God, I delight to do thy will; yea, thy law is within my heart,” could also say as the scene approached, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am straitened till it be accomplished!” and after administering the memorials of his death, he arose from the table, and said, “That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.” Oh! if we were as willing to receive the blessings of his great salvation, as he was to procure them for us by anguish and blood, we should all be able immediately to rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory!

At other times he seemed to give his disciples the precedence. When any advantage was to be gained he followed them. It is an honour and a privilege to preach the word first in any place: and this privilege and honour he conferred on his disciples; for he sent them “before his face into every city and place whither he himself should come.” But when the call was to suffer and die he went before them, to stimulate, encourage, and embolden them, by his own example—And who would not follow where he leads the way? How well may we glory in any fellowship with him! How fully may we be assured of the goodness of the cause! How confidently may we reckon upon our succour and success! “Lord,” by thy grace “I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.”

But "they were amazed." It is not wonderful that his disciples expressed so much surprise, but so little: for things had never been seen "on this fashion;" and they were every day in the midst of something peculiar, remarkable, and even miraculous. But many of their feelings are not recorded; and what is marvellous and extraordinary, by repetition and continuance, becomes familiar, and ceases to strike. The Jews, after a few weeks or days, gathered the manna from heaven with as little reflection as our rustics reap the corn, and viewed the pillar of fire as thousands do the sun, that is, without any surprise or one thought of the agency of God!—On this occasion, perhaps they were amazed to see him so cheerful and full of ardour, in view of so menacing an expedition—Perhaps, indeed, at the thought how *he* could suffer at all. Nothing had ever occurred like it before. Many had suffered; our earth had always been a vale of tears; but every sufferer before had sinned—whereas *he* did no sin, did nothing amiss, did all things well, and was "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." "If *he* suffers where is Providence? Where is the God of judgment if *he* is spit upon, and scourged, and crucified? We also trusted that this was *he* which should have redeemed Israel!" At present their knowledge was very limited and indistinct. They resembled the blind man when half enlightened, who "saw men as trees walking." They were unable as yet to comprehend the spirituality of his empire, the nature of his salvation, and especially the giving his flesh for the life of the world. They were in a kind of dawn, and "the light was neither dark nor clear." Their glimmerings and their doubts kept them in a degree of surprise, conjecture, and confusion, significant of the experience of many with regard to various things which, all through life, keep them in a sort of amazement.

Though *he* was ready, they were not so forward; *they* required drawing on—"And as they followed they were afraid." The fear we conceive was not only or principally on *his* behalf, but on their own—"If he is apprehended and put to death how shall we escape? What will become of us?" As yet they were not sufficiently mortified to the world, and willing to deny themselves. They preferred a whole skin to a scar. It was not till the Holy Ghost was given that they were able to rejoice and glory in tribulation. But as their knowledge, and faith, and hope increased, none of these things moved them, neither counted they their lives dear. It was enough that Christ was magnified in their body, whether by life or by death.

Do we not here see how worthy the Scriptures are of our confidence? How honestly they report facts. The writer of this Gospel was himself one of those who appeared to so little advantage on this occasion, compared with their Lord and Master. Yet he makes no scruple to tell us all their fears and faults, regardless of consequences. Truth was his only concern; and his very manner commends it to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

AUGUST 18.—“Which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus.”—Heb. vi. 19, 20.

In the preceding words the Apostle speaks of the Christian's hope. He likens it to an anchor; and commends it as sure and stedfast. But the anchor to secure the vessel has a place of holding, so has this hope. Yet mark the resemblance and the difference between them; for every image applied to spiritual purposes teaches both by comparison and disparity. The anchor searches after something invisible; it does not rest in the water, but searches the bottom—and this hope regards something beyond our sight. The anchor is cast downward—but this hope ascends. The anchor grasps the ground—but this hope seizes something in heaven. What is it? It is Jesus—“Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus.”

He is called, expressly called, “our hope,” and “the hope set before us.” Every thing, as perishing sinners we need, is to be found in him, and only in him: for “it hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;” and we are blessed “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in him;” and he alone can encourage and justify our hope—He is the only ground of it—There would be no more hope for sinners than for devils were it not for *his* incarnation and atonement, who “took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham,” and “was in all points made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” But what are we not authorised to hope for when we think of *him*, and thank God for his *unspeakable gift*? “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

But the Apostle here particularly fixes our hope upon him—as being within the veil—and as having entered as our forerunner for us.

In truth, if our hope entered within the veil, and found he had not entered there—it would find nothing in heaven itself to fasten upon, and must shrink back in despair. But it is enough—it is every thing to find *him there*. Then we see that he is in a condition and capacity to save and bless us; and we resemble Jacob, when he heard that Joseph was alive, and lord of all the land of Egypt. Then we also see that he has accomplished his mediation on earth. He had taken our place; our iniquities were laid on him; and he became answerable for them as our surety. But how could we know the ransom was paid unless he was released? We know he died, but unless he is risen again, and gone unto the Father, our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins. Therefore, says Peter, God “raised him from the dead, and gave him glory; that our faith and hope might be in God.” For then we know that he has accomplished the work that was given him to do; that he has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; that he has made peace by the blood of his cross; and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

But there is an additional confirmation of our hope in the character under which he entered heaven. Enoch and Elias ascended

to heaven embodied; but they entered for themselves; and it did not follow because they entered that we should enter also. We might have inferred the possibility of our following them, but not the certainty: they entered before us, but were not our forerunners—But Jesus as “our forerunner entered for us.” There was a joy set before *him*; and he was received up into glory; and had a name given him above every name: but the Apostle here does not speak of his entering for himself, but for us. Had a forerunner entered for him, it would not have been so wonderful: but as if we were the grand party, the forerunner is for us—and he that forerunner *himself*! Now this shows a connexion between his entering and ours; and a relation of a peculiar kind; and containing nothing less than a pledge. A forerunner was a harbinger, one that preceded the rest, to awaken attention, to arrange things for those behind, and to be in readiness to receive them. In other cases the forerunner was inferior to the company for which he acted. Thus John, the forerunner of the Messiah, acknowledges that he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose the latchet of his shoes. But here the forerunner is infinitely the greatest, and the whole transaction can only be resolved into the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, and made himself of no reputation, but took upon him the form of a servant. Oh! wonder of wonders! The forerunner, the King of kings, and Lord of lords—Was ever such condescension displayed! The company represented and provided for; the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind—Was ever such honour conferred! Yet such honour have all his saints. Because it was expedient for them, he went away; and entering the holy place, he said, “I am come—and all my people are coming—I am come to prepare a place for them—and where I am, there they shall be also.”

AUGUST 19.—“And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.”—Matthew ch. xiv. 10.

JOHN was pronounced by the Judge of all to be greater than they who had been born of women before him; and to be more than a prophet. He wrought indeed no miracle, but he ushered in the Messiah; and baptized him; and proclaimed him to the multitude as the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world; and cheerfully said, He must increase, but I must decrease.

Who can help grieving that this burning and shining light should not have gone out naturally, instead of being suddenly extinguished in full blaze? Yet so it has often been. Many of the Lord's most eminent servants have been removed in the midst of their days and usefulness—Perhaps to tell us that his cause does not depend on any instruments, however necessary as well as desirable they seem to us—but upon himself, who has the residue of the Spirit. John not only died early, but suffered a violent death. It was the consequence of his fidelity. Herod, (the son of Herod the Great) tetrarch of Galilee, a dissolute prince, in his journey to Rome had been entertained at the Court of his brother Philip, tetrarch of Trachonitis. While there he formed a criminal intrigue with his brother's wife. He was now living incestuously with her in defiance

of all shame, when John had an interview with him. John acquitted himself with unflinching integrity. He told him that rank did not excuse crime, and that kings are no more above law than their subjects—"It is not lawful for thee to have her." From that hour his doom was determined; and he was only spared for a season, from the tyrant's fear of the people. It is probable however that Herod would not have put him to death, had he been left to himself, for he seems to have had a veneration for John. But when a man has a mistress he is no longer his own; he is a servant, he is a slave—and engaged in a course of iniquity, he proceeds from evil to evil—and finds one sin necessary to another.

Nothing can equal the revenge, the restlessness, and the cunning of an imperious, whorish woman. With her, when there is a will a way will soon follow. Herodias seizes an opportunity for her foul purpose on the king's birthday; she introduced her daughter to dance—the dance it is presumed was what they now call waltzing. It excited and charmed Herod, "whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she should ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, give me here John Baptist's head in a charger. And the king was sorry: nevertheless, for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her." Not a person present, male or female, interposed a word in his behalf! The barbarous deed was done without even the form of a trial; done privately, and in prison!—When God shall make inquisition for blood, and the earth shall no more cover her slain, what scenes of horror will be brought to light! Perhaps John was praying; perhaps sleeping, when the executioner arrived—But he was ready for the event, and the axe would only release him into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Yet the head, the veins bleeding, the hair clotted with gore, the eyes all wan and half opened, was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel; and she brought it to her mother, who, according to Josephus, stuck the tongue full of needles—what tenderness and delicacy—and yet these females had often affected to tremble at the shaking of a leaf! But there is no ground for general reflections here. A virtuous woman need not feel herself dishonoured by wretches who have disowned her sex, and renounced her very nature. We do not think the worse of the elect angels because some of their order, and created at the same time with them, became devils.

Let us turn from the master to his disciples. Two things they did. "They took up the body, and buried it." Whether his head was returned for interment with his body, or whether the ladies kept it for further entertainment and insult we know not: but doubtless the disciples obtained it if they could. Respect is due to the remains of God's servants. Stephen's corpse, stoned with such malice and fury, must have been a dreadful spectacle; but devout men carried him to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. It is probable Zechariah and Elizabeth were dead, and none of his other relations were at hand; but his disciples felt a deep interest in him, and performed the last rite—It required courage thus to espouse and honour one the king had first imprisoned and now slain: but perfect love casteth out fear.

Again. "They went and told Jesus." He needed not the information, but they did right to lay the sorrowful case before him; it was their duty; it was their privilege. While John was living these disciples were jealous and envious of his successor and superior; and were much concerned to keep up a separate interest. But they have now dropped their prejudices and strife; and are willing to go over to him, and become *his* followers. And thus we already see their loss turned into gain. Whatever brings us to him is a blessing.

AUGUST 20.—"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."—Psalm i. 1, 2.

HAPPINESS is "our nature's end and aim." All seek it: and David here tells us who finds it. To prevent mistake, and to secure impression, he describes his character negatively and positively.

First, he says, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." Here we see not only continuance but progression. Accordingly not only the Scripture, but all observation shows us that the wicked proceed from evil to evil, and wax worse and worse. One sin often pleads for another, and often renders another necessary, either for the purpose of assistance or concealment: while every fresh act of transgression weakens the restraints of fear and shame, and adds to the force of habit.—The sinner's course is here accurately traced. He begins with evil company, and is flattered by their maxims, excited by their entreaties, encouraged by their commendations, and emboldened by their example—"He walks in the counsel of the ungodly." Evil communications corrupt good manners. Bad principles lead to bad practice; and having tampered with danger, he exposes himself to temptation, and by his heedlessness and position even invites it—"He stands in the way of sinners." At last he feels a comparative rest from those uneasinesses of conscience and doubts of mind that once frequently disturbed him, and can scoff as well as sin, reviling the good, and mocking at things sacred—"Thus he sits in the seat of the scornful." He who has reached this distance may judge of his progress; he may see how far he has gone, and how far he has to go—which indeed is very little; for "the scorner's chair," says old divinity, "is placed very near the door of hell."

"But all this is negative." And in a world like this, and with such a nature as ours, no small part of religion consists in avoiding that which is evil. All the Ten Commandments are prohibitory with the exception of two. "Honour thy father and mother"—this is positive. And "Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day"—this is positive—yet a part, even of this command, is interdictory; but all the other mandates tell us what we are not to do: and "God having raised up his own Son, sent him to bless us, by turning away every one of us from our iniquities." But negative religion is not sufficient. "Cease to do evil, and *learn to do well*," is the requisition of that God who not only forbears to punish, but enriches and

dignifies; who not only saves from hell, but exalts to heaven. The tree that was ordered to be cut down and cast into the fire brought forth no good fruit: and the servant that was condemned to outer darkness was wicked because unprofitable. A man may not swear, but does he pray? He may not rob the poor, but does he relieve them? We are to be zealous of good works. Therefore,

Secondly, he says—"But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." If the law here spoken of be what we call the moral law, it is true that every partaker of Divine grace, with Paul, delights in it. How indeed can it be otherwise? since the essence, the whole of it is to love; to love God supremely, and his neighbours as himself. But it here means the word of God. It is called his law because it is not opinion, counsel, or advice, but the will of God, from which lies no appeal, and the authority of whose decisions the day of judgment will ratify. David could here speak from his own sentiments and feelings. There is nothing in which he seems to have found so much delight as in the Scripture. "I rejoice at thy word," says he, "as one that findeth great spoil." "Thy testimonies are the rejoicing of my heart." "I love them exceedingly." "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." Yet David had but a small portion of revelation. How much has been added since! No wonder therefore that every believer is distinguished by his attachment to this blessed volume. What renders it so attractive is that it meets him with discoveries, promises, invitations suited to all his wants. As lost, he is here informed of a Saviour, and a great one. As guilty and weak, he here finds righteousness and strength. As having nothing, he is here replenished with all the unsearchable riches of Christ. His experience also, as he advances in the divine life, adds to its preciousness. He has tried it in every condition; it has often relieved his fears, refreshed his weary spirit, revived him in the midst of trouble; and he can say to the praise of its glory, "Unless thy law had been my delight, I should have perished in mine affliction."

Hence, in this "law he meditates day and night." It is the peculiar, yet common subject of his thoughts. He not only sets apart frequent seasons for the more express performance of the duty, but his mind naturally, and readily, and pleasingly returns to the exercise whenever it is disengaged. For the thoughts follow the affections. Where the treasure is there will the heart be also. If my meditation be sweet it will be frequent; and I shall be able to say, "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee."

AUGUST 21.—"Little children."—1 John ii. 12.

THIS is a mode of address which, if not entirely peculiar to our Apostle, is employed by him with such frequency that it may be of use to inquire what he would imply or express by the appellation.

When you meet with it, therefore, remember that it may intimate four things.

First, his advanced age. He had now "the hoary head;" and it was "a crown of glory," because it was "found in the way of righteousness."

Secondly, the affectionateness of his disposition. He was not only "the beloved," but "the loving" disciple: and seems to have imbibed very largely of the spirit of him on whose bosom he leaned. It would be well if all who are engaged in the sacred office were distinguished by more of "the meekness and gentleness of Jesus Christ." Instead of insulting, scolding, and menacing, it would be better for love's sake to entreat, and endeavour to win. Indeed there is no gaining the heart any other way. It cannot be forced—but it may be won—and "he that winneth souls is wise." This was the original method—"We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us."

Thirdly, the effect of his usefulness. Many of them were his converts. He had begotten them through the Gospel; and he regarded them as his spiritual progeny; the most important and interesting of all offspring. Such children are indeed a heritage of the Lord—Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them: he shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with the enemy in the gate.

Fourthly, the character they were to display. He would have them resemble the qualities of little children. He would have them receive the kingdom of God like little children, who implicitly confide in their Father's declarations. He would have them, like little children, to depend on their father's care to provide for them; and be free from all anxiety and fear. In malice he would have them children retaining no resentments, and if angry easily pacified. He would have them free from pride and disdain; condescending to men of low estate; not ambitious and worldly minded.

Whatever we may think of these things we know how they are regarded by the Judge of all. "The disciples came unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." From this Divine decision it is first obvious—that these attributes are not *natural* to us, but the effect of *conversion*; we *become* such. And secondly—that the change producing them is *indispensably necessary* to our hope; for *except* we be converted, and become as little children, we *shall not enter* the kingdom of heaven—We are without title and without preparation, and as the same authority tells us in another passage, "we *cannot* see the kingdom of God."

The conformity however is not to be universal. You are not to "be children in understanding," but "full grown men." You are to be "no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." Little children are fond of trifles, and will cry and fight for toys—But, says the Apos-

tle, it shall not be so among you—"Little children, keep *yourselves* from idols. Amen."

AUGUST 22.—"David served his own generation by the will of God." Acts xiii. 36.

EXAMPLE has a thousand advantages over every other mode of tuition. Hence God—for none teacheth like him—has filled his word, not by documents and dissertations, but facts; and spreading before us the lives and actions of men, commands us not to be slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

We have here a noble testimony concerning David. In his early days he was in obscurity, being the son of a plain yeoman, in the village of Bethlehem, and employed in the humble occupation of a shepherd. But he was soon called to expose himself in the field of battle, and obtained for his countrymen an easy victory, by killing the wonder and terror of the age. After this—for as he rose he suffered—we find him in exile, under the persecutions of Saul, wandering and hiding himself in wildernesses for his safety, and hunted like a partridge upon the mountains. At length, through much tribulation, he entered his kingdom, and was crowned, first over Judah, and then over all Israel. But after distinguishing himself as a warrior, and a ruler, he was compelled by the rebellion of Absalom to leave his palace and his capital, and ascend, weeping and barefooted, the mount of Olives, where his son, and his Lord the Messiah, ages after, agonized and triumphed. Then we find him re-established in more power and authority than ever, and reigning in safety, peace, and honour—and at last we find him anxious to build a temple for the name of the Lord, amassing an abundance of materials, and sparing no expense; so that he could say, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." From this glance at his life, we see that it was very eventful and singularly diversified. But in every period, and in every relation, and in every scene, he displayed principles and dispositions which rendered him not only civilly, but morally and religiously useful. In youth; in manhood; in obscurity; in splendour; in adversity; in prosperity: by his wealth; by his power; by his authority; by his wisdom; by his inspiration as a prophet; by his genius as a poet and a musician; in all his resources he constantly served his generation.

But he also served his *own* generation. Not indeed exclusively; for he has served every generation since. He is now serving the present. Christians now living bless God for his writings. Who has not found in them a treasury of experience? a flame at which he has often lighted his torch? a harp that has often driven away his evil spirit? There are some who not only serve their own age, but levy a tax of admiration and gratitude upon every future one. Such were the reformers. Such were Luther, and Calvin, and Knox, and others. And nothing can be more unjust than to censure these men who did so much, because they did no more; or diminish their fame by reproaching them with a few faults, which were rather the errors of the times than of the men. Such were those patriots who resisted unto blood striving against sin, and pro-

cured for us the invaluable blessings of civil and religious freedom. Such were the translators who gave us the original Scriptures in English. Such have been the writers who have defended the truth of the Gospel, and furnished materials for private and domestic devotion. How useful is Watts, even now, by his Psalms and Hymns, in which millions bless God; and by his songs for children which, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings perfect praise. No man indeed knows how any good he does may be perpetuated and enlarged.

But if we cannot serve other generations let us serve our own. Some strain too much after distant objects, and overlook what is immediately before them. Some leave large sums when they die—they had better be their own executors, and see and enjoy the application of their own liberality. They had better convince the world that they act from choice; for at death they can retain nothing, but *must* part with all they possess. The endowments bequeathed by many of our good forefathers have operated rather injuriously than otherwise; retaining the support of error in some places of worship, and relaxing the zeal and generosity of congregations in others; for people have an amazing keenness in perceiving when their assistance is not wanting. The cause of the poor and the cause of God will be hereafter committed to others; they are now entrusted to us: let nothing draw us off from present duty.

He also served his own generation *by the will of God*. Nothing comes by chance in our affairs. The Lord determines the bounds of our habitations, appoints us our stations and offices, and assigns us our talents and opportunities. How obviously was it his pleasure that David should be what and where he was. It was all without his design or thought. And therefore when Saul's courtiers reproached him that he was a restless ambitious youth, who, dissatisfied with a private condition, sought to work himself into notice and eminence; he could appeal and say, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother; my soul is even as a weaned child." Others too, without any purpose on the part of their friends or their own, have been laid hold of by the hand of Providence, and conducted forward so as to exemplify the promise "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight."

But it was not only by his providential will that David served his own generation, but also by his revealed will. This he made the rule of his conduct. "Lead me," said he, "in thy truth, and guide me, for thou art the God of my salvation, on thee do I wait all the day"—like a servant, to receive and obey the orders of his master. We must not follow our own fancies, or do that which is most agreeable to our feelings; but what God requires of us. For this purpose we must repair to his holy oracles, and ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" A woman is not to usurp authority and to teach in the church. A man is not to assume the office of the magistrate under a notion that he could discharge it better. If

a village preacher on the Sabbath leaves his own family without control and without instruction, he may be serving his own generation, but not according to the will of God. God enjoins us to abide in our own callings. If we step aside from them we may be useful; but the effect is often equivocal, the good is more than counterbalanced by the evil arising from the violation of order, and God asks who hath required this at your hand?

Let this example induce our imitation. We all have it in our power to be useful; and let us see to it, that we decline not doing what we can, because we cannot do what we would. Let us immediately and earnestly call into action whatever influence we possess to serve our own generation by the will of God. Our generation serves us. None of us liveth to himself. All the endowments conferred upon us look beyond ourselves; and as good stewards, we are to minister the manifold grace of God. It is as much our privilege as our duty. It enthrones us in the esteem of our fellow creatures, and with such sacrifices God is well pleased. When a Christian comes to die, he must be humble in looking back upon his imperfections; but he will have reason to be thankful, if by the grace of God he hopes that he has not wholly lived in vain. I, said the learned Dr. Donne to his friends when dying, I repent of all my life, but the part of it I have spent in communion with God, and doing good to men.

AUGUST 23.—“And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”—Exod. iii. 5, 6.

THIS address of God to Moses contains an admonition to restrain and regulate him; and an assurance to establish and encourage him.

The admonition may be understood and improved as a check to vain curiosity. Here was much to excite the notice and surprise of Moses. The bush was burning, but he saw no fire near it, or lightning from heaven to kindle it. He also saw what was more unaccountable still, that though it kept flaming, not a spray or a leaf was consumed. It does not therefore appear wonderful that he should have been tempted to turn aside to see this great sight. Yet it would seem he was not free from blame. He should have been satisfied with the prodigy, and have waited in adoration the development of the design: but he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and wanted perhaps philosophically and speculatively to explore “*Why* it was not burned.” And therefore the voice cries to him, “Draw not *nigh* hither.” This curious desire of knowing things that do not concern us is too natural to all. But we should endeavour to repress it rather than increase it by indulgence. In the common affairs of life, and the concerns of our fellow-creatures, it is an impertinent, troublesome, offensive disposition, and is sure to fix upon a person in time the odious character “of a tattler and a busy body in other men’s matters.”

But it is yet more to be guarded against in religious affairs. Nothing can be more inconsistent with, and injurious to, that spirit of child-like submission which a Christian is to cherish

We have no time in the concerns of our souls for nice and useless speculation. One thing is needful, and whatever draws us off from this, even if it be something true and good in itself, will be an error and an evil to us. The grand principles of the Gospel are few and plain; and they are always held forth in their practical bearings, and no further. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever; that we may do all the words of this law." Let us therefore be satisfied with the words the Holy Ghost useth, without requiring human definitions of them. Let us improve the parts of the Scripture as they lie before us, without systematizing them. Let us distinguish between the uses and the essences of the subjects the Gospel reports. Let us take the religion of the facts and leave the philosophy. When the man asked, "Are there few that be saved?" Did our Lord rebuke or gratify the inquirer? When even his disciples asked, "Wilt thou at this time again restore the kingdom to Israel?" Did he not answer, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power?" In all such cases did he not invariably say, "Draw not *nigh* hither?"

The admonition would also remind us of the humility and awe with which we should approach where God is. And in all our worship we come before him. Outward tokens of respect and reverence vary in different ages and countries. In the East, unshoeing of the feet was the same as uncovering the head with us; and Solomon refers to it when he says, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God." The act enjoins the principle which it is intended to express and cherish. Bodily exercise profiteth little; but we are complex beings, and we are to honour God in our bodies as well as in our spirits. Holiness becometh his house for ever. God will be sanctified in all that come nigh him. He is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints—"Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

But what says the assurance? "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." God has always bestowed his favours in a way which showed a regard for righteousness: he often therefore did good to some for the sake of others: and thus men were prepared to regard the importance of the Messiah, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. When the Assyrians were pressing Jerusalem, "I will deliver it," says God, "for my servant David's sake." When Job's three friends had offended God by their improper speeches, God said to them, "Take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly." How often does he express himself, in addressing the Jews, as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because the covenant made with them was for their descendants: therefore, says Moses, "Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day." "Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart dost thou go to possess their

land; but that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." But the better covenant, of which all the spiritual Israel shall glory, was made with One who was before Abraham, whose goings forth were from of old from everlasting: and *they* are blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Hence in the New Testament the language is changed, and we are constantly reminded of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Surely even at this early period a future state was not unknown. When God said to Abraham, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward; I will be a God to thee;" he must have referred to something beyond the present life; how else was it fulfilled? Accordingly the Apostle tells us that Abraham "sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Yea, says he, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." And hear how our Saviour argues with the Sadducees: "Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." The relation was even then existing, though their flesh had seen corruption. Our Lord therefore applies it not only to prove an intermediate state, but also the resurrection of the dead: "For he is not the God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him;" now, as to their spirits; and hereafter as to their bodies: for purpose and accomplishment are the same with him.

Let us apply this to our own case. Have we been bereaved of pious connexions? The relation between them and their God and our God remains the same. Where now are their dear spirits? With himself in glory. Where are their dear bodies? Sleeping in the grave. But his covenant is with their dust: and the inviolable union into which he has entered with them, assures thee—thy brother—thy child—thy mother shall rise again. We shall be, we are still one with him and with each other—

"The saints below and all the dead,
But one communion make;
All join in Christ their living head,
And of his grace partake."

AUGUST 24.—"Renew a right spirit within me."—Psalm li. 10.

THIS Psalm will always show the reality and degree of the author's repentance; and will afford sentiments and language peculiarly suited to the sinner in his conversion to God at first; and

to the believer, in his return after any departure from him through life.

The words which we have read, speak of "a right spirit." "A right spirit" is such a spirit as God requires, and takes pleasure in; and such a spirit as becomes the condition of those who profess to be his followers. It would be easy to prove that such a spirit must—be a spirit of faith and trust: a spirit of contrition and humility: a spirit of thankfulness: a spirit of love: a spirit of patience and submission: a spirit of zeal: and a spirit of firmness and constancy. Such is the spirit produced in all the subjects of divine grace.

But this right spirit may be injured and reduced. We see this was the case with David in consequence of his fall; and it was in a measure the case with him before; for we read of his "first ways;" and the words intimate that these were in some respects his best. Hezekiah, after his two great deliverances, which he felt so much at the time, "rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up." Jeremiah was to cry in the ears of Jerusalem, "Thus saith the Lord; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first fruits of his increase." The Church of Ephesus had left her "first love," and is called upon to remember from whence she was "fallen" and to do her "first works." Hence we have so many cautions and admonitions against declension in religion. And when we consider how adverse every thing within us and without us is to our better principles, and how the enemy of our souls employs all his devices to injure them, we need not wonder at the frequency of our hindrances and declinings. The defections sometimes appear in gross falls: but let us not think too well of ourselves if we have been preserved from these, or suppose that backsliding consists only in foul and outward misconduct. There is "the backslider in heart," as well as the backslider in life; and while we stand fair with our fellow Christians and our ministers, we may have much to lament before God in the loss of that spirituality, and fervour, and confidence, and delight in ordinances which once distinguished our experience.

We also see that it is necessary when it is impaired to have it renovated. Nothing is right in religion if "the heart" be not "right with God;" and, therefore, says Solomon, "Keep thine heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." We may go on in the performance of duty, but if "the right spirit" be wanting, the mere action is of little worth. The Lord looketh to the heart. Two donors may give alms; one from a principle of charity, the other from vanity: two attendants may repair to the same sanctuary, the one to seek and serve the Lord, the other, led only by custom or curiosity: but how differently do they appear in the view of God, and how differently are they regarded by him. We act in the same manner towards our fellow-creatures as far as our knowledge extends. In what they do for us, we are affected by our apprehension of the spirit with which they are influenced. If we think the favour conferred be from esteem, or love, or gratitude, we prize it, however small; while, if it appears to originate in selfish design, we cannot value it however great. But the want of a right spirit

affects our comfort as well as our duty. We consider it an unfavourable sign in some professors, that they are so lively and cheerful. We should have much more hope concerning them if they felt fear and distress: we are sure that if they belonged to God, he would reprove them in their defective walk, and improper temper, and hide his face from them till they acknowledged their offence. A Christian may get into a wrong spirit, but how differently does *he* feel? What a loss of peace and satisfaction does he sustain? How is his communion with God interrupted? and his delight in devotion deadened? He becomes also fretful with regard to others: fretfulness is generally the offspring of guilty sensation, arising from some neglect or misdoing. Then, uneasy within, we are pleased at nothing without; and so storm in passion, or ooze in peevishness, like a continued drooping in a rainy day. We are never happy but as we have a right spirit within us.

But we here learn that when it is impaired it is God alone who can renew it. He giveth *more* grace: he is the God of *all* grace: As he begins so he carries on the good work. He strengthens that which he has wrought in us; he perfects that which concerns us.

And therefore, lastly, we must go to him for this purpose, and pray, as David did, "Renew a right spirit within me." A life of dependance must be a life of application. A religion of grace must be a religion of supplication. If I want certain things, and *must* be supplied, and *cannot* derive them from myself, I shall surely repair to him who is able and willing to succour me—especially if the exercise itself exerts an influence every way conducive to the revival and increase of religious principle; and this is the case with prayer; and if he has established it as the medium of his communications and said, "For all these things will I be enquired of;" and if he has pledged himself that we shall not call upon him in vain. And is not this his own promise, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find?" "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come."

AUGUST 25.—"The Revelation of Jesus Christ."—1 Peter i. 13.

THE display of *him* is every thing. Be it therefore observed that "the revelation" of him is fourfold: and though the last of these manifestations be here intended, all of them may be properly and usefully noticed in their order.

The first revelation of him we call scriptural. This began very early, even in Paradise. There the sun of Righteousness dawned, and from thence shone more and more unto the perfect day. He was announced as the seed of the woman, and the bruiser of the serpent's head—Then, as the seed of Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed—Then, as the Shiloh of Judah, to whom the gathering of the people should be—Then, as the Son of David, and his Lord. Of him Moses, in the Law, and the Prophets, did write. He was held forth not only in words but types. He was seen in Moses as a prophet, in Aaron as a priest,

in Joshua as a conqueror, in Solomon as the Prince of Peace, in Jonah as dying and rising again. Every bleeding sacrifice expressed him as an offering for sin; the manna from heaven, and the water from the rock, as the bread and water of life; the tabernacle and temple, as the residence of the divinity, in whom dwelt all the fullness of the godhead bodily. This exhibition of him may be likened to a perfect portraiture of a most distinguished and endeared personage, at full length, rolled up on the side of a room, and which the owner gradually opens to the beholders, till the whole figure stands disclosed—So God gradually revealed the Desire of all nations, while his delighted and wondering church exclaimed “He is fairer than the children of men”—“Yea, he is altogether lovely.”

The second Revelation of him is incarnate. “God was manifest in the flesh.” “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he should destroy the works of the devil.” “We know that he was manifested to take away our sins, and in him was no sin.” Thus he was not only declared, but perceived. He appeared not in vision, but in person. Not tremendously, as in the giving of the Law, when even Moses said, “I exceedingly fear and quake;” but familiarly, “clothed in a body like our own.” Not transiently, as when he paid visits to his people of old, but by a continuance of three-and-thirty years—for “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us—full of grace and truth.”

The third revelation of him is spiritual. And we call it spiritual because it is produced by the Spirit of God in the spirit of man. It is expressed by sight—Not a carnal sight of him; not a sight of him by the eye of sense, but by the eye of faith, according to the words of our Saviour: “He that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, hath everlasting life.” It is such an acquaintance with him as draws forth our admiration, excites our love, gains our confidence, and secures our obedience. It is what Paul means when he says, “It pleased God to reveal his Son in me”—and which he prayed for an increase of when he said, “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made comfortable unto his death.”

The fourth revelation of him is final and glorious. For after all he is now much concealed. There are hundreds of millions of our fellow-creatures who know nothing even of the existence of such a Being. Even where he is professedly known, there are multitudes to whom he has no form nor comeliness, nor any beauty, that they should desire him. Even among those who wear the name of Christians there are many to be found who deny his divinity, renounce his redemption, and ridicule the operations of his Spirit. Thus he is despised and rejected of men. This, to those who know his name, and put their trust in him, is humbling and distressing. But they are relieved and cheered with the thought that it will not be so always. They believe that the number of his admirers is increasing. They are sure that he will be exalted and extolled, and be very high: that he will sprinkle many nations; that all nations shall fall down before him; and the whole earth be filled with his glory. They know also that there is a day approaching, called by way of distinction, “the day of Christ:” “the reve-

lation of Jesus Christ." He will then appear the second time without sin unto salvation. He will come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him. We shall see him as he is. He will be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. Then his grandeur will be acknowledged. Then his love, power, patience, and truth; his character as a Saviour; his tenderness as a friend; his dominion as Lord of all will be developed; and he will enter, accompanied by a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, a world where he will attract every eye, and engage every tongue; and saints and angels will unite with a loud voice, "worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

But what is to be expected at the revelation of Jesus Christ? "THE GRACE THAT IS TO BE BROUGHT UNTO YOU."

AUGUST 26.—"THE GRACE THAT IS TO BE BROUGHT UNTO YOU at the revelation of Jesus Christ."—I Peter i. 13.

Two inquiries may here arise.

What does "the grace" here spoken of mean? It comprehends the fulness of the promise, "I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also"—His changing their vile bodies, and fashioning them like unto his own glorious body—His absolving and acknowledging them before an assembled world—His commendation; "Well done thou good and faithful servant"—His invitation; "Come ye blessed of my Father"—His placing them in a state of blessedness, which far transcends all our powers of expression and conception. After all our knowledge derived from Scripture and experience, it doth not yet appear what we shall be—"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the hearts of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." It is a glory which *shall be revealed*.

But why is it called *grace*? Why is it not said "The glory that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ?" May it not be—first to exclude merit from all share in attaining it? There is only one Being who reigns in heaven by his own right. Jesus deserved his throne, and could claim it on the ground of worthiness. But we are not worthy of the least of all God's mercies. How then could we claim an immensity, an eternity of riches and honour? If we look for a reward, it must be a reward of grace. Our work bears no proportion to the recompense. If our obedience was perfect, it could not be meritorious, because it is due to God: but our services are really full of defects and defilement, and therefore if they were dealt with according to their desert, they would be rejected. To which we may add, that all our good works are performed in the strength of the Lord: we live and walk in the Spirit. Every one therefore that knows himself, will say with the Apostle, "By the grace of God I am what I am: not I, but the grace of God which was with me." And we are sure the top stone of the spiritual temple will be brought forth "with shoutings, crying, grace, grace unto it."

And secondly, may it not be so called to show the identity of

grace with glory? They are not only so intimately and inseparably connected, but so greatly resemble each other, and are so essentially the same, that the one is interchangeably used for the other in the Scripture. Thus Paul calls glory grace, when he says, "We are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord;" meaning advancement from one degree of glory to another; or as it is elsewhere expressed, being "renewed day by day," or going "from strength to strength" in the divine life. And here Peter names glory grace. In fact, grace is glory in the bud, and glory is grace in the flower. Grace is glory in the dawn, and glory is grace in the day. But the morning and noon are produced by the same sun: and the bud and flower issue from the same plant.

Let us remember this—That glory is nothing but the completion of what grace begins. It is the perfection of those principles, dispositions, services, and enjoyments by which Christians are distinguished even in this world. Have we anything of heaven in us already? It will be a state of sinless purity—Do we delight in holiness now? It will consist in the society of the godly—are they our dearest companions now? Death changes our place, but not our state, not our nature. The change to a Christian, is a change not in quality, but degree. He has the foretastes of the bliss; the firstfruits of the harvest; the earnest of the inheritance—"He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who hath also given to us the earnest of the Spirit."

What then is our duty in the prospect of the event? For the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, "GIRD UP THE LOINS OF YOUR MIND, BE SOBER, AND HOPE TO THE END."

AUGUST 27.—"GIRD UP THE LOINS OF YOUR MIND, BE SOBER, AND HOPE TO THE END for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."—1 Peter i. 13.

OUR duty with regard to this event is expressed three ways. First, confirmation of principles—"Gird up the loins of your mind." The loins are the seat of physical strength. It is said of Behemoth, "his strength is in his loins." If the loins of a man yield, his body soon fails. When therefore he is weary, nature instinctively teaches him to put his hands on his loins, as if to support them. And hence the bandage or girdle worn about the loins by those who would prepare for strenuous exertion of any kind. In reference to which says another Apostle, "Let your loins be girt about with truth." It is not necessary that a man should make up his mind firmly upon every inferior opinion; but if he be loose in his leading principles in religion he will never excel. There may be a foundation without a superstructure; but there can be no solid and safe superstructure without a foundation. Wherein does the profiting of those appear who think it is a matter of little importance what a man believes? And how do we read the Scriptures? "Buy the truth and sell it not." "Exhorting them to continue in the faith." "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines, for it is a good thing that the heart *be established with grace.*"

Secondly, temperance of attachment—"Be sober." Some would think to enforce such an article as this was not preaching the Gospel—and it may not be preaching *their* gospel: but when Paul spake "concerning the faith in Christ," he "reasoned concerning righteousness, *temperance*, and judgment to come." Others think this order only regards excess in eating and drinking. Sobriety intends nothing less than this, but it comprehends much more, at least in the Scripture. One would suppose that common decency, and a regard for life and health, would restrain a man from gluttony and drunkenness. But a Christian is to moderate all his appetites and passions. He is not to be indulgent in sleep; nor suffer this downy foe to rob him of so much of his time. He should consider sleep an infirmity rather than a privilege. It is humbling to think of dying half our time to be alive the rest—Angels are nobly free from this mortifying necessity. We should be sober in all our affections and pursuits as to earthly things. Our Lord speaks of our hearts being overcharged, not only with surfeiting and drunkenness, but the cares of this life—These may morally intoxicate. And as wine oppresses the senses, disturbs reason, and hinders us from any thing useful; so worldly anxieties besot the mind, and unfit us for every good word and work. Paul exhorts "young men to be sober minded." And we see how well they are exemplifying this—How suspicious they are of their own judgments—How disposed they are to consult the aged and the experienced—And how backward they are to decide or speak upon every difficult subject! He also admonishes women to "adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety!" And how well it is to see this also so fully verified "in women professing godliness."

Thirdly, constancy of expectation—"And hope to the end." There is nothing more desirable or necessary than this. We not only rejoice in hope; but "we are saved by hope." It keeps our hearts and minds from the allurements and seductions of the world: and it sustains us in trouble; being, as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast. Where is the Christian but has often said—

"Amidst temptations sharp and long,
My soul to this dear refuge flies;
Hope is my anchor firm and strong,
While tempests blow and billows rise."

Yet it is no easy thing to maintain the full exercise of hope; especially under those trying dispensations, which seem as if the Lord was angry with us to destroy: and also under a sense of our unworthiness, arising from our unprofitableness and deficiencies. These ought to humble us; but we must not cast away our confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. There is enough to bear up our hope in every change of condition, and under every moral infirmity, in the promises of the Gospel, and the fulness of the Redeemer. And the time of trial is limited. Though we are to hope to the end, the end is not far off; "for yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Then the burden will be removed from the shoulder. Then the warfare will be accomplished. Then we shall be with him, where he is to be hold his glory, and be filled with all the fulness of God. "Be pa-

tient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

AUGUST 28.—"And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."—Psalm i. 3.

THE heir of this promise is described in the preceding verses: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." "*He*" is the person whose condition and prospects are here displayed by images the most pleasing and instructive.

"*He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water*"—Here we see how he came to be found in a situation so favoured. He was not there naturally, but "planted" there. And this was done by a Divine hand: "for they shall be called trees of righteousness, *the planting of the Lord*, that he might be glorified."

But see the advantage of the situation itself—He is planted "by rivers of waters." It means an affluence of resources necessary to growth. The deficiencies of Christians cannot be charged on Christianity. They are not straitened in their condition, but only in themselves. These rivers of waters mean two things. First, the means of grace. Though these would not be efficient of themselves, there is a subjective suitability and tendency in them to do us good; and they are appointed for this very purpose; and we may look for the Divine blessing in the use of them. They who undervalue prayer, reading the Scriptures, private meditation, Christian intercourse, the preaching of the word, and the table of the Lord, show little concern for soul-prosperity: but they who are diligent in the proper use of them will be fat and flourishing, and not only have life, but have it more abundantly. Secondly, the Spirit of grace. Divine ordinances are good, but Divine influences are better. Every Christian has what the Apostle calls "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." And so ample and rich as well as necessary is this supply, that we are said to "live in the Spirit," and "walk in the Spirit," and to be "filled with the Spirit."

Of such a privileged individual three things are here spoken. First: "He bringeth forth his fruit in his season." From a tree planted in dry and scorching sand it would be unreasonable to look for produce; but not if planted by rivers of waters. As God provides for the fertility of his people, he expects it, and he is not disappointed. They have all the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. He finds it indeed in various degrees; for all the trees are not of the same size and age; but there is not one barren among them. A tree has his time for bearing; and it is enough if he bringeth forth his fruit in his season, his natural, proper, and appointed season. So it is with a Christian. He is required indeed to be always

abounding in the work of the Lord; but this does not hinder the special claims of particular periods. As we have opportunity we are to do good. We are to be humble when we are applauded; to be liberal when riches increase upon us; to possess our souls in patience in adversity: and under bereavements to say, the will of the Lord be done.

Secondly, "his leaf also shall not wither." The leaf is a part of the composition of a tree in its perfect state. It is produced and nourished by the same sap that feeds the fruit. It even aids the fruit by moisture and by shade, and adds to the beauty of the tree, which without it, would appear naked, cheerless, and uninviting. We read of trees whose leaves are for healing. The leaves of others afford a covering from the heat, so that persons may sit under their shadow as well as partake of their fruit. Here we approve of the application of "the sweet Psalmist" of our Israel.

"Green as a leaf, and ever fair,
Shall his profession shine;
While fruits of holiness appear
Like clusters on the vine."

In trees bearing fruit, leaves are not sufficient without it; but as accompaniments, and additions they are valuable. A form of godliness is nothing without the power, but the power cannot properly dispense with the form. When profession results from principle it is not ornamental to religion, but useful to ourselves and others. And when the Christian appears what he really is, when he not only gives himself to the Lord, but to his people, by the will of God; when he not only believes with the heart, but confesses with the mouth, and holds fast not only the reality but the profession of his faith without wavering, he is the tree whose "*leaf also shall not wither.*" We have evergreens; but none of our fruit-bearing trees are such. All these with us at the approach of winter drop their verdure, and remind us of our decay and mortality. "We all do fade as a leaf." But in warmer climes there are trees which retain their foliage by constant and fresh vigour all the year. And there are Christians that exemplify this. The profession of many is undurable: it has no root in themselves; it is not sustained by any internal and vital succour: it is influenced only by outward excitements which often fail; and thus even all their pretensions are given up. But God puts his Spirit within his people, and thus causes them to walk in his statutes. The water he gives them is in them, and springs up into everlasting life. One of the finest sights in the world is a Christian at the end of a long course with an unsullied reputation, not only sincere, but without offence, and still alive to the things of God—His hair may be white, but his leaf is green—and the hoary head is a crown of glory being found in the way of righteousness.

Thirdly; "whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Here the metaphor ends. Exertion cannot be ascribed to a tree. Some indeed would carry on the figure, alleging that the word "doeth" admits of being rendered "beareth;" and so they would read, "And whatsoever he beareth shall prosper," that is, it shall not be blasted or blighted, but shall reach maturity. But this had been previously insured. Our translators saw no propriety in this change. They

knew that God's word is not bound by the rules of human criticism; and that metaphors should not be carried too far. It is wise to know when to drop them. The assurance addresses itself to a common feeling in our nature—It is hope of success that induces men to labour. Who, if he knew it, would exert himself in vain? To a Jew such an address would be peculiarly suited; as on his obedience, prosperity was invariably to attend. With regard to the Christian, the promise cannot be taken without some distinction. In his temporal enterprizes he is not authorised to look for his success in all he does. His plans and wishes may often fail; but welfare requires this; and all things work together for good to them that love God: while success is sure to attend him in his spiritual affairs. There he cannot labour in vain. He prays, and he shall prosper in it; "for he that seeketh findeth." He fights, and he shall prosper in it; for "his enemies shall be found liars unto him, and he shall tread upon their high places." He sows, and he shall prosper; for "they that sow in tears shall reap in joy"—AND WHATSOEVER HE DOETH SHALL PROSPER.

AUGUST 29.—"For thou hast a little strength."—Rev. iii. 8.

THIS is the language of Christ to the Church of Philadelphia. It is obviously spoken in a way of commendation and encouragement. Though they were distinguished by no great attainments, there was something in them really good and spiritual; and therefore he would not deprive them of the privileges they enjoyed, but would even enlarge them: "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it—for thou *hast a little strength*, and hast kept my word, and not denied my name." It is thus he comes down like rain on the mown grass. It is thus he verifies the prediction, "a bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory."

It would be an abuse of this passage were we, in consequence of it, to become remiss in duty, and, as the Scripture says, "to settle upon our lees." It shows a low aim, and is even an unfavourable proof of a man's sincerity, when he only seeks to be satisfied of the existence of his religion and of his eternal safety. We ought to be anxious, not only to have life, but to have it more abundantly. We should be concerned for the honour of God, and our usefulness to men. By the weakness of our grace we lose much in a way of evidence and comfort. We are commanded to "grow in grace;" and are assured that God "giveth more grace." Indeed the principle naturally urges the progress, and they who have tasted that the Lord is gracious will desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby.

But the declaration does afford "strong consolation." And such consolation the Apostle tells us is necessary, not only to them that are fleeing, but "to them that have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them." It is no easy thing when persons are pressed down by a sense of their vileness and imperfections to keep them from fearing that they have no part nor lot in the matter, and that their hearts are not right in the sight of God. They are prone

to judge of the truth of their grace by the degree of it; and lose the comfort derivable from what they have, in thinking of what they have not. Comparing themselves with saints of great eminence, and dwindling into nothing before *them*, they forget that in the household of faith there are various ages and statures; and that those who are not "fullgrown men" may be "little children." The fold of the heavenly Shepherd contains not only sheep but lambs, and he gathers the lambs with his arm, and carries them in his bosom.

The weakness of our grace should therefore humble us, but not drive us to despair; and while we lament that we have not more, we should be thankful that we have any. Though the mixture is lamentable, the Lord will not reject the ore for the dross adhering to it; and will in due time separate the one from the other. As soon as it is sown we say, This is a field of wheat. The blade is not the full corn in the ear, but it will become so—"Four months and then cometh harvest." If it be but the dawn with us at present, the dawn, though less than the day, is better than the night, and proves that the sun is rising, and at hand; and what shall stop his course, or turn him aside? And "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

What a lovely Being have we before us! He is fairer than the children of men! Let us give him all the confidence of our hearts. Let us admire, and praise, and recommend him.

And let us be concerned to imitate him. Hence it is said, "Be ye followers of God as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also loved us." Is he forgiving, and meek, and condescending, and tender, and compassionate? As the professors of his Name let the same mind also be in us: and let us remember, that if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. If we resemble him we shall not despise the day of small things. In our social state as a church we shall not exact perfection, and if we have not all the satisfaction we could desire, we shall lean to the side of candour, and receive one another as Christ receives us. If we are strong we shall bear the infirmities of the weak, and not please ourselves. We shall give up things in which we could conscientiously indulge ourselves, lest we offend the consciences of our weaker brethren. We shall not press young beginners with high and difficult doctrines, but patiently wait till experience prepares for the admission of them. He taught his disciples as they were able to bear it. Milk is for babes: who could think of giving them not only strong meat, but the bones of controversy, which, if they happen to have a little flesh upon them, or marrow in them, are beyond *their* use. If a brother also be overtaken in a fault, let us restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted, and thinking of him who took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses. Let us always have a word in season for the weary. Let us comfort the feeble-minded. Let us make straight paths for our feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Blessed Jesus! Beholding as in a glass thy glory, may we be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

AUGUST 30.—“He shall sit and rule upon his throne.”—Zech. vi. 13.

A THRONE is literally the seat of a king, and therefore the emblem of royalty. Solomon's throne was made of ivory and gold; it was six steps high; and had the same number of lions on each side of it; so “that there was none like it in any kingdom.” But a greater than Solomon is here. And a greater than angels—“Of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire: but unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” In the year that Uzziah died, says the Prophet, “I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple”—And the Evangelist makes no scruple to add, “These things said Isaiah when he saw *his* glory and spake of *him*.”

Yet however sublime and unrivalled, it is *his* throne. He has dearly earned it; and he sees in it the travail of his soul—Because his soul was made an offering for sin, he sees his seed, and prolongs his days, and the pleasure of the Lord prospers in his hand—Because he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name. But it is *his*, not only by Divine ordination, but by the suffrage of his people. They are all made willing in the day of his power. They all acknowledge with shame and sorrow, “O Lord, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us:” but they can all avow, “Henceforth by thee only will we make mention of thy name”—

“Jesus is worthy to receive
Honour and power divine;
And blessings more than we can give,
Be, Lord, for ever thine.”

Faith is our amen to God's testimony, especially as it concerns the record that he hath given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son. It brings us into *his* views and designs: and by enabling us to adopt them it makes them our own acts and deeds—and hence *we* are considered as doing what *he himself* does: “The children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint them one head, and they shall come up out of the land.”

Many, if they ascend a throne, can hardly be said to sit and rule there. They are soon hurled from it by violence, or drop from it by weakness. And if they continue awhile in it, they have little pleasure or repose: they are filled with cares and fears, and cannot do the things that they would. The sovereign of a hundred and twenty-seven provinces labours hard till the going down of the sun to save his prime minister, but in spite of him Daniel is thrown into the lion's den. What a wretch is Ahab, who, though King of Israel, is sick, and can neither eat or drink, because he cannot get a few feet of garden ground from a faithful subject whose principle he ought to have admired—But Jesus “shall *sit* and *rule* upon his throne.” This intimates successful government, established

dominion, continued possession, full enjoyment. The King of Zion will never be deposed; will never die. Nothing can impede him; nothing shall perplex him; nothing shall induce him to change his proceedings—His enemies shall be made his footstool. He has enemies; but he rules in the midst of his enemies. It comports with his plan to suffer them to continue and to oppose him for a time; but he has them in derision, and can more easily destroy them than a giant can dash in pieces with a rod of iron a potter's vessel. He will display his wisdom and power in correcting their designs; he will make all their efforts to subserve his own purposes—The wrath of man shall praise him; and the remainder of wrath will he restrain.

For though his spiritual empire at present be limited, yet let two things be remembered—First, his real dominion is universal. He is not only the King of saints, but the King of kings, and the King of nations. All creatures are his servants, from a worm to an archangel. Not only are the treasures of grace his, but the elements of nature, and all the dispensations of Providence. He has power given him over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given him. He is head over all things to the Church. And this was necessary; for unless all things were put under him how could he make them all work together for the good of his people. Yet this is the case; and it will be a noble part of our future employment and pleasure to trace the correspondences, and to acknowledge that all his ways have been mercy and truth.

Secondly, though at present his spiritual kingdom be limited, and the subjects who obey him from the heart be comparatively few, it will not be so always, nor will it be so long. He shall have the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. "Yea all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him."

Let the prospect and the assurance enliven our exertions and encourage our hope—"Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King."

AUGUST 31.—"And he shall be a priest upon his throne."—Zech. vi. 13.

IN the Jewish economy, kings were not priests, nor priests kings. The offices were always separated. God divided them between two tribes and two families: the diadem was given to Juda, and the censer to Levi; the one belonged to the house of David, the other to the house of Aaron. And so evil and dangerous was it to unite them, that when Jehoash dared to burn incense his hand withered, and he was taken out of the temple a spectacle of Divine displeasure. But Jesus is anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows; he combines these functions and dignities; and is "*a Priest upon his throne.*"

Something of this kind had indeed occurred before the Law, in the case of Melchisedec. He was priest of the Most High God; and he was also king of righteousness, and king of Salem, which is, king of peace. Hence the Apostle considers this wonderful character as a greater type of the Messiah than any of the Aaron-

ical order—because he was not only to officiate as a priest, but to rule as a king.

Now let us look after the fact; and we shall see that he never appeared in one of these offices without exemplifying the other. Do we view him when he was more peculiarly the priest? That is, in the days of his flesh, when his whole life seemed a sacrifice, and he died upon the cross? But do we here see the priest only? Does not the king also appear? Did not the wise men from the East come to worship him as born King of the Jews? Did not the winds, and waves, and diseases, and devils, yield him subjection? And when he poured out his soul unto death, did not the sun, and the earth, and the rocks, and the graves adore him? Did he not by a look turn the heart of Peter? Did he not promise the dying thief a place in Paradise with himself? And did he not rise the Lord both of the dead and living? Or do we view him when he seems more peculiarly the king? That is, after he was received up into heaven, and was crowned with glory and honour, and had a name given him above every name? But do we here see the king only? Does not the priest also appear? Did not John see him “clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle?” Did he not see Jesus “in the midst of the throne as a lamb that had been slain?” Did he not hear the songs of the blessed, saying, “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood?” Do not his ministers preach him as crucified? Does not his own supper show forth his death? Yea, says the Apostle, if he were on earth he would not be a priest. There he performed the sacrificial part of the office: but he performs the intercessory and benedictory above, where he ever liveth to make intercession for us, and commands the blessing even life for evermore—Thus he is a Priest upon his throne.

Whence, O my soul! see the nature of our condition since the fall. How necessitous is it; and how various as well as numerous are our wants. We are ignorant and need enlightening; enslaved and need redemption; guilty and need pardon; unholy and need renovation; lost and need all the salvation of the cross and the throne.

—And what a multiplicity of excellences and influences do I behold in the Lord Jesus! “Thou art fairer than the children of men.”

SEPTEMBER.

SEPTEMBER 1.—“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.”—Luke iv. 16.

To a man of reflection, feeling, and piety, it will always be interesting and impressive to come to the place where he had been brought up. How many events will revive, and rush over his mind. It will be well if he be not afflicted with instances of early depravity, and be made to possess the iniquities of his youth. He must be grateful—“Here I was sustained in infancy, and preserved in childhood.” Here “the length of my days” made the outgoings

of my mornings and evenings to rejoice. The scenery remains the same, the river, the hills and the vale, the wood and the lawn—but how changed am I in my connexions, prospects, opinions, and feelings—and how many who once knew me, know me no more for ever.

No being ever returned to such a place, and with such sentiments as he who was fairer than the children of men.

What was Nazareth? A small country town among the Zebulanites in Galilee, seventy-two miles north of Jerusalem, and west of mount Tabor. It was so reputeless for achievement and excellency, that when Philip said to Nathaniel, We have found him of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph; Nathaniel incredulously exclaimed, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth.”

But how came he to be brought up in this place? Here indeed he had been conceived of the Holy Ghost: for Mary lived at Nazareth when the angel Gabriel came unto her and said, Hail thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. Yet he was born in Bethlehem Judah, according to the prophecy of Micah. “But the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: and was there until the death of Herod. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child’s life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea, in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.”

And how was he here brought up? The Scripture is little adapted to gratify our curiosity. A veil is thrown over the private life of Jesus which it is impossible to draw aside. Nothing can be more idle and absurd than the Popish legends concerning his infant manners and miracles. “And when he was twelve years old he was found in the temple, in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions; and all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers”—“And he said unto Joseph and Mary, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” “And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.” “But his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.” “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”—This is all the Holy Ghost has seen fit to communicate concerning the thirty first years of his life. He had no public education; and therefore it was asked by those who could not be ignorant of the fact, “How knoweth this man letters never having learned?” And

as Joseph and Mary were poor, it is not likely that he lived in indolence: nothing is so inconsistent with a Christian life as doing nothing and having nothing to do. His reputed father was a carpenter, and once the name is applied to himself. We are sometimes amazed, considering the brevity of his life, that he should not have entered on his ministry till his thirtieth year. But it was the same with his forerunner John, whose life was yet shorter. God's thoughts are not our thoughts: and we are unable to assign, without presumption, full and precise reasons for any of his dispensations. But surely we may learn that importance and usefulness are not confined to publicity—that we must be willing to be hid as well as displayed—that a great work requires much preparation—and that before we teach we must learn—"not a novice, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil."

But seeing this was the place where he was brought up, why is it said "and he came to Nazareth?" Because he had been absent. He went to Bethabara, beyond Jordan, to be baptized of John. After this he was forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, tempted of the devil. Then he "returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all." The case was this. Though he was full of courage, he was to deal prudently. He knew that a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and among his own kindred. Familiarity, if it does not produce contempt, reduces veneration. They who have seen a man in his youth, and mingled with him in common life, are less likely to reverence him as a teacher of religion. It might have been supposed that our Lord would have furnished an exception to this proverb, owing to his wisdom and sanctity—But what to many are wisdom and sanctity—Yea, and divinity too, if unconnected with worldly recommendations? He knew what was in man, and was acquainted with the prejudices of the Nazarenes against him. And therefore he did not begin his public career at home. For a considerable time he visited other parts; till, by his preaching and miracles, he had acquired a renown which would serve favourably to introduce him among his townsmen and relations—Thus he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up—

And what did he there? "He went into the synagogue on the sabbath day." Surely his example has the force of a law to all his followers; especially as we are here informed that it was "his custom" to do this. But do all who wear his name constantly observe "the holy of the Lord," and repair to "the place where his honour dwelleth," for devotion and instruction? Are they not often detained by trifling excuses, which they know, and their domestics know, would keep them from nothing—but the sanctuary? Surely these things are as proper for us as for him; and we need the frequency of them as much as he did—

"And he stood up for to read." Reading the Scriptures was always a part of the synagogue service: and it tended much to maintain the knowledge of Moses and the prophets. It deservedly and commendably occupies a large share of the Liturgy of the Estab-

lished Church. It should be a part of our employment whenever we assemble and meet together for the worship of God. It is a great advantage to the ignorant and illiterate who cannot read for themselves. It honors the written Word as the supreme authority in our religion. It removes prejudice, by showing the people where the preacher finds his doctrine, and that even his language harmonizes with the words the Holy Ghost useth. It solemnizes the mind, and prepares the heart for devotion and instruction.

Let us be always in time for this part of divine service.

And let us love the Scriptures, and read them more than we have done in our closets and in our families. They are the charter of our privileges, the warrant of our hopes, our guide and guard through the wilderness, our song in the house of our pilgrimage. "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."

SEPTEMBER 2.—"The people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits."—Daniel xi. 32.

THESE words stand in the midst of a prophecy respecting Antigonus, that bitter enemy of the Jews. A recital of his cruelties would harrow up all our feelings. Suffice it to observe that God would never permit such wretches to exist could he not bring good out of evil, and make the wrath of man to praise him. "O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction." As fire separates the dross from the ore, and the fan expels the chaff from the wheat, so persecution serves to distinguish between the true servants of God and mere professors. Hence this tyrant would discover the faithless Jews: "And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall be corrupt by flattery"—But not so with the upright in heart. Their piety would be unyielding and invincible, resisting, his usurpations, and bearing his menaces and sufferings: "But the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits."

"Exploits" are rare, difficult, remarkable, and illustrious actions. And for these God's people are prepared by their knowledge of him, and the strength they derive from him. They are not common characters, but a peculiar people. They "do more than others;" they "are men wondered at." Noah builds an ark, and sails over a deluged earth. Moses divides the red sea, and fetches water out of a flinty rock. Elisha made iron to swim. Elijah carried the key of the clouds for three years and six months, and drought and rain came at his bidding. Joshua ordered the sun to stand still while he finished his victory. "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought right-

eousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy."

They have done, therefore, exploits as sufferers. And here we need not refer to the book of martyrs, but to common and private life. The afflictions of the righteous have been often many and peculiarly trying; but they have surprised the world, who are ready to deem their experience and conduct under them unaccountable and incredible. They have not only submitted, but acquiesced; they have not only exercised patience, but "all longsuffering with joyfulness." "When troubled on every side," they have "not been distressed." Yea, they have "gloried in tribulation also:" and been able "in every thing to give thanks." We admire those who magnanimously bear the necessary excision of a limb. But the Christian himself is the operator, as well as the subject: *he* plucks out his right eye; *he* cuts off his right hand; *he* crucifies the flesh with the affections and lusts.

They have done exploits as scholars. It would be deemed no easy thing to acquire an entirely new language, especially when advanced in life. But we have known Christians, even after they have been old, acquiring "the language of Canaan," not a word of which they knew before, and speaking it fluently, and with little of their native dialect. Decyphering is a difficult act. Dr. Wallis, the celebrated mathematician, was many months ascertaining from the characters the sense of a French dispatch which had fallen into our hands. But Christians can read and explain the most perplexing dispensations of Providence, and can discern the salvation of God, even in the hand which seems lifted up to destroy—"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." "To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness."

They do exploits as merchants. They traffic not for time, but eternity. They trade not to the ends of the earth, but beyond the heavens. They deal not in corruptible things, such as this world's goods, but in all spiritual blessings. They run no risks, but are sure to gain unsearchable riches. One bargain alone is enough to signalize and immortalize them: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

They do exploits as travellers. The march of the ten thousand Greeks under Zenophon; the journey of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan under Moses; the return of the Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, were in the eye of angels far inferior to the passage of a soul from a state of nature into the glory that

shall be revealed. What a distance to reach! What difficulties to pass through! What an end to attain!

They do exploits as warriors. Is it a great thing to take a city? But "he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his own spirit than he that taketh a city." Is it a thing of renown to take a kingdom? But "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." "Who is he that overcometh the world? He that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God." Yet this is only one of his adversaries: "for he wrestles 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." A victor has sometimes barely vanquished; another conflict would have ruined him. But the Christian having done all stands, and could defeat as many more—Yea, in all these things he is more than conqueror

They have often also distinguished themselves as donors and benefactors. Witness the Israelitish women at the erection of the tabernacle. "Moses made the laver of brass, and the foot of it of brass, of the looking-glasses of the women which assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation." When we consider the value of a looking-glass to a female, that it is the first and last object she regards as she enters and leaves an apartment, how desirable it is that she should impress, and how necessary it is to be able to adjust every article of attire; what self-denial was here! For we are to judge of things not by their intrinsic worth, but the estimation in which they are holden—It was saying we care not how we appear if the service of God be provided for. What immense treasures did David lay up in his lifetime and leave at his death for the building of the temple, as you may see in the last chapter of the first book of the Chronicles. And read what Paul speaks of the poor Macedonians: "In a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy, and their deep poverty, abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves; praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." But see the people at the treasury. Many gave, and the rich cast in much; but a poor widow cast in two mites; and this was the exploit of the day. For they gave of their abundance; but she gave all she had, even all her living. There may be wonders and prodigies of kindness and liberality where very little is given if there be a willing mind. The Lord looketh to the heart.

These exploits therefore are not confined to any particular rank. No condition, however humble, is excluded from moral and religious distinction. The poor as well as the rich, servants as well as masters, can be *truly* great. They can be "great in the sight of the Lord" and can obtain "the honour that cometh from God only."

SEPTEMBER 3.—“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?”
Micah vii. 18.

To whom will ye liken me? or shall I be equal, saith the Holy One? God is a being incomparable in his essence, his perfections, his works, and his ways. Hence the sacred writers are constantly expressing their admiration of him. Sometimes they extol the displays of his wisdom; sometimes those of his power; sometimes those of his holiness. But they never utter themselves more forcibly and feelingly than in the praise of his goodness. Hence David exclaims: “Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!” And if this be exemplified in the provisions of nature and providence, how much more in “the exceeding riches of his grace?” “Herein is love.”—“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?”

—Pardon regards guilt. Guilt is obnoxiousness to the penalty of the law we have transgressed: for the soul that sinneth it shall die. Pardon frees us from the sentence of condemnation, absolves us from all liableness to suffer; and gives us the security arising from innocence. Now in the exercise of this, God is supreme and unrivalled. None pardons like him.

None so peculiarly. He displays at once his justice and his mercy: his justice with regard to our surety, his mercy with regard to us. He laid on him the iniquity of us all; and was pleased to bruise him, and put him to grief, and make his soul an offering for sin. Thus he magnifies his law, preserves the honour of his government, declares his righteousness, and shows himself just in justifying the ungodly; and the offender is not allowed to escape without being reminded that he had forfeited his life, and owes every thing he has to mere favour. For with regard to himself this pardon is an act of mercy. The law was holy, and just, and good, and entirely worthy of God; and this was true of the penalty as well as of the precept. He could righteously have inflicted the penalty upon the person of the transgressor; and his willingness to release him, and admit a substitute, was an exercise of pure grace, to which he was not obliged. Besides, if he required an atonement he provided the propitiation, and it was his own Son, whom he spared not. How wonderful is this! A king cannot thus at once equally display his justice and his mercy. If he punishes the rebel he shows his justice, if he spares him he shows his mercy; but he cannot equally evince both in the same instance—This is the prerogative of God only—But

“Here the whole deity is known;
Nor dares a creature guess,
Which of the glories brightest shone,
The justice or the grace.”

None pardons like him—None so readily. Men, if not implacable, are yet commonly backward to forgive. They often assume airs of haughtiness; require the offender to feel the effects of his misconduct; exact from him the most trying humiliations; and always think it enough to comply after they have been frequently

and earnestly implored. Every thing shows that it is their strange work, and not natural to them. But the Lord not only waits to be gracious, and is exalted to have mercy, but is ready to forgive. It is true that he requires confession and submission—and must require them; but it is equally true that he himself encourages and excites them. The first advance is always from him; and he not only makes the overture, but beseeches us to be reconciled.

None pardons like him—None so perfectly. He forgives our trespasses, however numerous, and however aggravated. "Come," says he, "and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." In confirmation of this assurance he has added examples, and shows us in his word characters the most criminal and hopeless obtaining mercy. He also tells us that in this dispensation he is not to be judged of by a human standard; men's usages and conceptions with regard to forgiveness being infinitely below his own: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." So he pardons fully and for ever. As far as the East is from the West, so far he removes our transgressions from us. He throws them behind his back. He casts them into the depths of the sea. If sought for they shall not be found. He not only forgives them, but forgets them; he remembers them no more for ever. He retains no anger, no indisposition towards us. He delights in us as if we had never sinned. He restores us to the most intimate friendship. He allows us not only to dwell in his house, but to lean upon his arm, and repose on his bosom.

There are some who not only believe all this, but know the truth of it from their own experience. They were once children of wrath, even as others; but they were made to see and feel their desert, and to cry, with the publican, God be merciful to me a sinner. And they were heard and accepted in the Beloved. They are now passed from death unto life, and their grateful hearts are saying, "O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation."

Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven! But how dreadful is the condition of those who are strangers to this remission. You lie open every moment to all the afflictions of life, the sting of death, and the damnation of hell. How is it you can enjoy any thing like pleasure by day, or sleep at night, while you know that lying down and rising up the wrath of God abideth on you. But if willing to return you need not despair. There is forgiveness with him. O hear his voice. Come and seek a share of this blessedness for yourselves. He will in no wise cast you out. But the time wherein he may be found is short and uncertain. Therefore seek

ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. "Behold, now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation."

SEPTEMBER 4.—"And David was greatly distressed."—1 Sam. xxx. 6.

IN a fit of despondency and imprudence, having resolved to escape into the land of the Philistines, David went to Achish, king of Gath. After dwelling some time in the royal city, he requested the king to give him some place in the country for his residence: and Achish gave him Ziklag. After dwelling there a full year and four months, war broke out between the Philistines and the Israelites, and he was called upon by Achish to accompany him to battle, and was made the commander of his body guard. Here he was thrown into the utmost perplexity. He found himself under obligation to Achish; yet could not serve him without violating his conscience. If he fought against Israel, where were his patriotism and piety? And if he turned against the Philistines where were his fidelity to his master, and his gratitude to his benefactor? God, who is always better to us than our fears, and has all hearts under his controul, extricated him from this dilemma, through the jealousy of the lords of the Philistines; who insist on his being sent back. But while exulting in his escape from one difficulty another befalls him: and we need not wonder at his being "greatly distressed" when we glance at the ingredients and circumstances of the affliction.

For when he arrived at Ziklag the "Amalekites had smitten it and burnt it with fire." It is never safe to boast of to-morrow; for we know not what a day may bring forth. Little can we imagine, when at any time we leave our home, what may occur before we return. It is a mercy if no evil befalls us, and no plague comes nigh our dwelling, and we find our tabernacle in peace. But Naomi, when her neighbours were congratulating her upon her return, exclaimed, "Call me not Naomi, call me Marah; for the Lord hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." And David, when he returned to his residence, found his house and all his property consumed to ashes! Nor was this all—

They had taken away the women and the children captives. Persons may be tried not only in their circumstances, but in their connections; and relative distress is frequently keener than even personal. Some of us have been bereaved, but it was in the course of nature. The objects of our attachment died in peace. We watched their bed of languishing with tenderness; we closed their eyes; we laid them in the grave; and have often repaired to the spot that contains their endeared dust. But David's family was carried off by an infamous and cruel banditti to be sold or used as slaves. Yea, he knew not at the time but they had been degraded, violated, tortured, or even put to death.

The complicated calamity was also perfectly unthought of—"For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." After a march of three days, cheered by every step that

brought him nearer home, and rejoicing in the eager hope of finding rest in his dwelling, and delight in the embraces and hailings of his household, all this mass of misery meets him like a spectre instantly rising up in the road. He knew, he suspected nothing of the whole, till his eyes told him by the ruins, and his ears by the tale of the roofless sufferers, of the captivity of his family. We are prepared for what comes on gradually, and to be forewarned is to be forearmed. But what befalls us unawares often upsets the mind, and we have hardly the power of reflection, through which alone religion can operate. When the sky is lowering, and the waves begin to curl, and rise, and roll, the mariner takes in the sail: but here the storm burst without a signal.

In addition to all this, he had to bear the reproaches and menaces of his attendants and townsmen: "for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man in his sons and in his daughters." We can excuse their grief, but what can we say of the brutality of their purpose? How unenviable are the situations of public and official characters! If ever they sleep, it is seldom on beds of roses: or if they do, the roses retain their thorns, and the fragrance ill pays for the piercings. Is good accomplished or a glory gained? They divide it with others, or share it with chance. Does disaster or calamity occur? All is imputed to them, even to the result of pure accident. They are made answerable, not only for wisdom and diligence, but for success, for events, yea, for the seasons and elements themselves. How often did the Jews talk of stoning Moses! If they wanted bread, or water, or met with any difficulty, he was the cause or the occasion of it. Vulgar and ignorant minds must always have some object at hand against which to vent their feelings.

Finally, we see the deep impression the catastrophe made upon the mind of David—"Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no power to weep." He wept thus though a brave man: true courage is always tender. And he wept thus though a good man: grace does not deprive a man of sensibility: resignation and patience cannot be exercised without much feeling. The degree of grief is not always to be judged of by cries and tears. In general noisy sorrow is superficial, as the deeper stream is the more silent. But it was otherwise here—"David was greatly distressed"—

Yet he was a man after God's own heart. If it were a rare thing for the godly to suffer, we might draw from our sufferings suspicions concerning our relation to God. But what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? Since through much tribulation the heirs of glory must enter the kingdom, these trials should rather be viewed as way marks. They are really the effects and tokens of love. We shall see this hereafter; we should believe it now: and till we walk by sight we should be concerned to walk by faith.

"They all are most needful; not one is in vain."

They are to try our trust, to exercise and strengthen our principles, and to bring us to the throne of the heavenly grace. And well will it be if we are led to follow the example of David, as it will

appear in the next article—But “David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”

SEPTEMBER 5.—“But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”

1 Sam. xxx. 6.

IT was a dreadful day for David and his fellow-sufferers, as we have seen in the foregoing article. But if the rest had no God in this time of evil *he* had one; David encouraged himself in the Lord *his* God. He seldom addressed him in the Psalms without saying, “My God.” The same privilege have all his people: they have a God who claims them, and a God whom they claim—“God, even our own God shall bless us.” “This God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide, even unto death.”

“All people will walk every one in the name of his god.” All have some rock; but “their rock is not as our rock, our enemies themselves being judges.” They who love and serve the creature more than the Creator are really worshippers of idols; and what wonder if the God they have forsaken for very vanity should say to them, in their distress, “Where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? Let them arise if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble.” Hence they faint in the day of adversity. All their resources are found worse than nothing. A Christian would rather perish than think of such comforters and deliverers—“God,” says he, “is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever”—“It is good for me to draw near to God.” So it was with David—“David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”

But in what pertaining to the Lord his God did he encourage himself? and in which all his followers may encourage themselves also? He encouraged himself in his relations. One of these he has mentioned, describing the confidence he derived from it: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” He encouraged himself in his perfections. How relieving is the thought of a Being whose mercy endureth for ever; whose understanding is infinite; whose power is almighty; whose presence is every where. He encouraged himself in his engagements. They are great and numberless. They are adapted to all that we can feel or fear. They insure grace and glory; and withhold no good thing from us. And they are all yea and Amen, in Christ Jesus. And therefore David, for their certainty, calls them a covenant, which used to be confirmed by oath and sacrifice; and says, “although my house be not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.” He encouraged himself in the belief of his providence. He knew that a sparrow falleth not to the ground without our heavenly Father, and that the hairs of our head are all numbered. All my times, said he, are in his hand. I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for

me. He encouraged himself in the review of his dealings. First, his dealings with others. "Our fathers trusted in thee and thou didst deliver them." Secondly, his dealings with himself. "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."

☛ Ah! Christian, know your resource. Hear your God saying, Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee; and thou shalt glorify me. Make use of him as your "hiding place," your "resting place," your "dwelling place." Beware in your distress of crooked policy, of unlawful means of relief, of impatience, of dejection. By nothing can you so much please God as by your confidence in him; and by nothing can you so recommend your religion as by showing the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keeping your heart and mind through Christ Jesus. Check therefore every tendency, not only to murmuring, but to despondency; and after the example of your model this evening, say, "What time I am afraid I will trust in thee." "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

SEPTEMBER 6.—"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

John i. 14.

THERE is something peculiar in this name—"The Word." John is the only one that applies it to the Messiah. Yet it is not on this account the less entitled to regard, for John wrote as he was moved by the Holy Ghost; and he has supplied many things omitted by the three former Evangelists. But the origin of the title has given rise to much inquiry. Some have supposed John derived it from Plato the philosopher, and some from Philo the Jew. Yet why should we suppose that he borrowed the term at all? Why not consider it as one of the words the Holy Ghost useth? and which it is possible the writer did not *fully* understand himself?

Yet what is the term designed to intimate? His office and designation? That as by his reason and speech a man displays his mind and will, so Jesus makes known the mind and will of God? "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Three things may be safely observed.

First, John uses it to express a *person*. Nothing would be more forced and false than to suppose "the Word" means an attribute only, that is, the wisdom of God. Of what use would it be to tell us that the wisdom of God was in the beginning with him? Could it ever have been separate from him? And how could this wisdom be made flesh, and dwell among us?

Secondly, That this person had *a being previously to his birth*. For in saying the Word was *made* flesh, John intimates that he was something before this took place. Yea, he fully expresses this—"In the beginning was the Word"—In the beginning of what? The Gospel? No, but the world—The creation of all things. How

useless and absurd to say that he was in the beginning of his own ministry!

Thirdly, That his pre-existence was a *Divine existence*. Observe the name of God is given to him—and “the Word was God.” And the creation is ascribed to him: “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.” Could all this be affirmed of him, without the possession of Deity? Had he been but a man, an angel, a super-angelical creature, would John have expressed himself in a way so proper to lead men into error and idolatry—telling us not only that he was with God, but that he was God, and making him the fountain of all life and being? Is not this enough to entitle him to all adoration and praise?

But “the Word was *made flesh*.” Sometimes flesh signifies the corruption of human nature; as when it is said, “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” And “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit.” At other times it intends only the composition or constitution of humanity. Thus we read, “Except these days should be shortened, no flesh could be saved;” that is no human being. And thus it is to be understood here: and as the Jews used the term flesh for man, there would be nothing strange or harsh in the phrase, “the Word was made flesh:” it was precisely the same as saying, The Word became man—Campbell therefore renders it, “The Word became incarnate.”

But did he cease to be what he was, in becoming what he was not? Here was union, but not transformation. He was God before he was in the flesh, and he was God after; but he assumed our nature into personal subsistence with his own. Because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he likewise himself also took part of the same. He took not on him the nature of angels, but of the seed of Abraham. Hence in the Scripture many things are ascribed to him which will neither agree with his divinity or humanity separately. “Unto us a child is born;” this does not belong to him as Divine. And his name shall be called “the mighty God;” this does not belong to him as man. Man is a spiritual and a material being; spiritual as to his soul; material as to his body. Yet no confusion is produced by this conjunction: both retain their respective properties. It is not the body that thinks and reasons; and it is not the soul that eats and drinks. It is not the humanity of our Lord that is every where present; and it was not his divinity that was crucified. He died as man; he fills all things as God. We pretend not by these reflections fully to explain the subject: but they are sufficient to show that there is no contradiction or absolute impossibility of conception in the case. But we allow with the Apostle, that “God manifest in the flesh is a great mystery”—And what is not mysterious? Who can explain the most ordinary appearances and the most undeniable operations of nature? But this is also “a great mystery of *godliness*.” It meets our condition. It brings down Deity to our reach. It renders him our example, our sympathizing friend, and the propitiation for our sins. And—

“ While Jews on their own law rely,
 And Greeks of wisdom boast ;
 I love the Incarnate Mystery,
 And there I fix my trust.”

“ And dwelt among us.” This adds to his humiliation—“ Will God in very deed dwell with man upon the earth ? He might have been incarnate, and have dwelt in heaven, and among angels. But he dwelt among us. And not in the highest style of our being. Some of our race live in palaces ; but he had not where to lay his head. They travel in ease and splendour ; he travelled on foot, and was “ weary with his journey.” We only read of his riding once, and then it was on a colt, the foal of an ass. They are attended with officers of state ; he was despised and rejected of men. They come to be ministered unto, but he to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. Dwelling expresses permanent residence. He had appeared of old, and had visited the children of men, but he soon again disappeared. But now he took up his abode with us for thirty-three years, well satisfied to keep out of heaven, and to remain here as long as there was any thing for him to do or suffer. This shows intercourse. He occasionally retired ; but it was to prepare by privacy for publicity. He never refused society. He was present at the marriage in Cana of Galilee. He accepted the invitation of Levi when he made a great feast and bade many. He also received sinners, and did eat with them. There was nothing in him like extravagance, or sinful indulgence ; but there was nothing monkish, abstemious, and austere, as we learn from the comparison and reflection : “ John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.” This was a slander, but as he went about doing good, so he never by his example taught his followers to shun their fellow-creatures, and exclaim, “ Stand by thyself, come not near to me ; I am holier than thou.” The truth is, we are to be in the world, but not of it. The religion of the Gospel calls us both out of the world and into the world—out of the world as to its maxims and temper—into it as a field of labour and a sphere of usefulness, where we are to be diligent in business, to relieve the distressed, to teach the ignorant, to reclaim the vicious. We are to fill our days ; and live as long as we breathe. When Calvin was requested to leave off writing and correcting, What, said he, shall the master come and find me doing nothing ? And Philip Henry’s remark is well known, who, when desired to spare himself, said, What are candles for but to burn out ?

September 7.—“ I will fill this house with glory.”—Haggai ii. 7.

Two things are certain. First, that “ this house” means the temple reared by the Jews after their return from Babylon. Secondly, the “ glory” with which it was to be filled was to arise from the coming of the Messiah to dignify it—“ For thus saith the Lord of hosts, yet once, it is yet a little while, and I will shake the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land ; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come—and I will fill

this house with glory." This was to be more than a substitute for all the distinguished articles that were found wanting in the second temple, compared with the first : and to account for the assurance, "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than that of the former."

Accordingly he appeared on earth while this house was standing, and was often found in it. The first time we read of his being there was as an infant, to be presented to the Lord. The offering that accompanied the dedication was "a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons." As this was the sacrifice allowed for the poor, in lieu of any thing more valuable, it shows the lowly condition into which he had entered. Few, therefore, for want of splendour, would notice the event. But this was not the case with all; and another kind of greatness was displayed. "There was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." "And there was one Anna, a prophetess, and she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." At the age of twelve we find him in the temple, "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers." How was his glory shed abroad when he "went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." And "the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them. And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the son of David; they were sore displeased, and said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?"

Here was now found in the temple the body, of which the law was a shadow: the reality of all the types; the accomplishment of all the prophecies; the fulfilment of all the promises; the consolation of Israel. Many eminent characters had entered the former temple: but he was fairer than the children of men: and higher than the kings of the earth. Think of his innocence. The former temple had seen good men, but never a sinless one. But he was harmless, holy, undefiled, separate from sinners: in him was no sin. Think of his devotion. What faith! what trust! what spirituality of mind! what fervour of love! what ardour of zeal!

Such worship had never been rendered in Solomon's temple—no, nor by Adam in Paradise; nor by the angels in heaven. Think of his preaching there. "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation;" and in him were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and he spake as never man spake. O to have heard him, when early in the temple he said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." O to have heard him at the passover, when, on the last, the great day of the feast, he stood and cried, "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink." Other teachers received a measure of the Spirit; but he was *full of grace and truth*. Think of his divinity. He could say, "There is one in this place greater than the temple." In him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He was the Lord of all—Well might he fill the house with glory.

The temple once thus honoured has long since been consumed. But there are temples sacred to his service now: and the Saviour's presence is the glory of them. And every believer loves the habitation of his house; and repairs to it, not for the stateliness of the edifice, the superbness of the decorations, or the effect of the ceremonies—if there was every thing in it that was Jewish, Pagan, or Popish, it would all be nothing, less than nothing and vanity, unless he could see the beauty of the Lord; but because he has said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them." And they find him faithful to his word. They hear his voice; see his goings in the sanctuary; taste that he is gracious; and are made joyful in his house of prayer: and though it may be a private room, or an upper chamber, when thus blessed and ennobled it is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven.

Christians themselves are a building fitly framed together, and growing unto a holy temple in the Lord. Know ye not, says the Apostle, that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? And he is all in all as to his church: "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her."

There is yet another temple; and this too is filled with the same glory—"Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

SEPTEMBER 8.—"For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob."—Isaiah xiv. 1.

THE Jews were carried away captive to Babylon. But they were not to be destroyed there, or to remain. "After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I

know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." With regard to this restoration two things are mentioned in the words before us.

The one is the source of it—mercy, free and undeserved mercy: "I will have *mercy* on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land." And this is the principle which always, as far as good is concerned, whether in possession or hope, leads him to deal with us.

The other is the consequence. Many, leaving their own country and their idols, would return along with them; others would unite with them after their return: "And the *strangers* shall be joined *with them*, and they shall *cleave to* the house of Jacob." And here we see a little of the design of God in their captivity. It was indeed to punish them for their sin; but his punishments are corrections; and he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. He would humble them, and prove them, and reclaim them; and not only do *them* good, but render them useful to *others*. And who can tell how many have had reason to bless God for the dispensation. For when they were conquered and enslaved they carried the elements of their religion along with them, diffusing their inspired writings, and spreading the knowledge of the true God. Many pious characters rose to distinguished eminence and influence during their stay in Babylon. Several very glorious and publicly witnessed miracles were performed on their behalf. Thus God pleaded the cause of his people, and showed that though he chastised them, they were the seed which the Lord had blessed. And their deliverance was so wonderful, and attended with such unparalleled circumstances, that it not only at first seemed to themselves, more like a pleasing dream than a reality, but induced the very heathen to say among themselves, "The Lord hath done great things for them." Hence many became proselytes, and professed the God of Israel.

Thus the Lord can change the darkest skies, and turn the shadow of death into the morning; yea, and by our sufferings not only bless us, but make us a blessing. The little girl that waited on Naaman's wife had been torn from her parents, and carried away captive, but she was the means of honouring the God of Israel. The persecution which scattered the brethren from Jerusalem spread the Gospel in all the directions in which they fled. The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the churches. The dreary imprisonment of Bunyan for twelve years occasioned his writing the Pilgrim's Progress and the Holy War. The works of many other authors, whose praise is in all the Churches, were the produce of their privations and hardships. Who can tell in how many ways we may be able to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

But we here see that religious conviction produces attachment to the people of God. Man is by nature a social being. When sin falls in with this disposition, it is corrupted, and becomes a most powerful auxiliary of iniquity; but when grace meets with it, the bias is sanctified, and operates after a godly sort. The new creature feels the want of new associations; and here, as in every thing else, like attracts like. Hence Ruth, though a Moabitess, said to her

Israelitish mother-in-law: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee, for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." And as soon as Saul of Tarsus came to Jerusalem, he "assayed to join himself to the disciples." So it is with all true converts; they easily abandon the sons and daughters of vanity and vice to "take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, I will go with you, for I have heard that God is with you." They can now say, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee." In them "is all my delight." They will be joined with them, and cleave to them in their assemblies as fellow-worshippers; in their communion as Church members; and in their practice and experience as joint workmen in God's building, labourers in his husbandry, soldiers in his army, and followers in his ways.

Here is a good test by which you may judge yourselves. What would make you most happy in your retirement? Would it be this confidence of faith? "Thou hast given me the heritage of them that fear thy name." What is your principal desire when you consider your own condition and that of others? Is it this? "Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto them that love thy name?"

Happy they who can pray, "Deliver me from men of the world, who have their portion in this life." I ask not to be numbered with the rich, the mighty, and the noble. Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon. I long for their Shepherd, their pasture, their repose—

"O may I see thy tribes rejoice,
And aid their triumphs with my voice;
This is my glory, Lord, to be
Joined to thy saints, and near to thee."

And if the *subjects* of divine grace may be the *mediums* of it too, how much depends on our character and conduct. He that winneth souls is wise. Let us therefore walk in wisdom towards them that are without. Let us do every thing in our power to remove their prejudices. Let every thing in our religion be, not repulsive, but alluring, not only impressive, but amiable. Let us so hold forth the word of life as to be perpetually saying, "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." And if we are the means of bringing one individual from the world into the church of the living God, we have done more than any conqueror who has delivered a whole nation from civil bondage. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

SEPTEMBER 9.—"To the law and to the testimony."—Isaiah viii. 20.

THE "law" and "the testimony" are a fine representation of the Scripture. Both these names are often applied to it especially in

the book of Psalms. They are both significant and striking. It is called the law to remind us of its authority, equity, promulgation, and penalty. It is called the testimony because it contains the mind, the judgment, the deposition—the witness of God himself concerning all those subjects, which it is of importance for us to be acquainted with, especially concerning the way of salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. The whole Gospel is therefore called “the witness which God hath testified of his Son.” And our Saviour, speaking of the writings of the Old Testament says, “They are they that testify of me.”

To this word we are to appeal. We are to appeal to it *only*—“To the law and to the testimony,” and to nothing else. This in various instances is eluded. A Jew admits the Scriptures of the Old Testament to be of God; and could you lead him to these *only* you might easily convert him to Christianity. But in his case they are surrounded with Talmudical and Rabbinical appendages, the errors, falsehoods, follies and absurdities of which can scarcely be conceived. These render Moses and the prophets almost inaccessible, or pervert their meaning; and little can be done unless you separate the vile from the precious, and lead them at once to *the* law and *the* testimony. A Papist admits the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testament to be divine: and could you contend with him upon this ground only, a victory would be easily obtained. But he admits along with these the Apocrypha, tradition, the decrees of councils; and the word of truth is approached, if not through these, yet in full company with them, and can only speak as they approve. And there are Protestants who invite you into the temple of Revelation, but you must enter leaning on Calvin, or Arminius, or some other interpreter, who is to tell you how the responses of the sacred oracles are to be taken; for you cannot be trusted alone. Hence articles, and creeds, and systems, are drawn up by fallible men, who have no other sources of information than ourselves, and these are to be taken as including all the faith once delivered to the saints. But however large the vessel they construct, it will not contain the ocean. Christianity is “all the fulness of God.” If these formularies are designed and used as human and limited aids to help in arranging, remembering, or understanding the divine record, they may be not only unexceptionable, but useful. But how apt are they to grow in their claims, so that in time they are virtually regarded by many as of paramount importance with the Scripture itself. But to the law and to the testimony. If they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them; and they are to have no dominion over your faith. Stop nowhere on this side the great Teacher sent from God. If Moses and Elias were to appear with him in glory, the voice would cry, “Hear ye *Him*.” If I called myself after any human leader it should be an inspired one. I would call myself a Johnite after John, or a Paulite after Paul. But was Paul crucified for me? or was I baptized in the name of Paul? Let it be enough for me to be called a Christian after Christ. Every thing more is forbidden by himself: “Call no man master upon earth, for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.”

As we should appeal to it *only*, so we should appeal to it *wholly*

—To the law and to the testimony, with every thing religious. We say religious, for this is the subject in question. Other things may be carried to other tribunals. In matters of learning, science, and commerce, reason may fill the judgment-seat. But here, in all cases, the authority of Scripture must decide. Four things in particular we must always take to this standard.

First, take your state to the law and to the testimony. Some never examine themselves. Others are satisfied to live year after year trembling between hope and fear. Others draw a conclusion in their favour, but it is a groundless one, and will terminate in the bitterest disappointment and anguish. It is a very serious thing to determine your condition before God. And yet how desirable is it. Even if you find yourselves condemned already, it is well to learn it while deliverance is yet possible: and if you are justified by the Saviour's blood, how much will the knowledge of it conduce to the glory of God and your own comfort? But by what can you safely determine your state? The word is to judge you in the last day. Judge yourselves by it now.

Secondly, take your principles to the law and to the testimony. I need not inform you of what importance just sentiments in religion are: you are therefore commanded to buy the truth and sell it not. But great differences with regard to what truth is, prevail among those who call themselves Christians, and they cannot all be right. There are diverse and strange doctrines; but it is a good thing for the heart to be established with grace, by which the Apostle means the doctrines of grace. And here all our satisfaction must be derived from the conformity of our creed with the written word. Bring therefore your views of sin, of the fall, of the person and work of the Lord Jesus, the foundation of our acceptance with God, and the order and stability of the everlasting covenant; bring them all, and weigh them in the balance of the sanctuary. Like the Bereans, search the Scripture daily to see whether these things are so. Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.

Thirdly, take your experience to the law and to the testimony. Some ridicule all the various feelings in religion. But the subjects of Divine grace are well acquainted with them. And Christianity must be an experimental thing, for it must enter the mind, and affect the conscience and the heart, before it pervade the conversation and life. There is however much that is fanciful, and enthusiastical, and wild; and therefore it is necessary to bring all the influences and operations of this kind, and compare them with the work of the Spirit, and the effects of Divine truth in the soul, as described by the sacred writers.

Fourthly, take your practice to the law and to the testimony. Your religion is nothing without this. See whether your conduct—with regard to God—with regard to your fellow-creatures—and with regard to yourselves, be such as this word describes and enjoins. If you thus fairly appeal to the Scripture, it will doubtless censure and condemn you in many things; but do not consider it your enemy because it tells you the truth. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. The discoveries you will make may be, and often will be humbling; but the sacrifices of God are a broken heart. You will be gainers by a process though painful, that checks self-righte-

ousness, that induces you to rejoice in Christ Jesus, having no confidence in the flesh, and urges you to pray for more of that grace which is alone sufficient for you. Indeed the very willingness to come to this standard is a token for good. "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." Blessed is the man that can kneel and pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting."

SEPTEMBER 10.—"Sit thou at my right hand."—Psalm cx. 1.

It will be remembered how our Saviour perplexed the Pharisees, by showing that these words were addressed by the Father to the Messiah, whom David calls his "Lord," though he was his "son." But let us notice the expression itself, and the more so because the expression occurs so frequently in the Scriptures. It may be considered as importing repose and refreshment after all his exertion and toil. For he did labour as he said, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, wherein no man can work." At the close of life therefore he could acknowledge, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." And though from the state of his mind and heart, to do the will of him that sent him and to finish his work, was his meat and drink, yet he was no stranger to weariness and suffering. But he hath entered into his rest, having ceased from his own works as God did from his. He bleeds, he "dieth no more." "For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Sitting at the right hand denotes pre-eminence. At the last day the saints are represented as at the right hand of the Judge. Joseph wished the right hand of his father to be imposed upon the head of Manasseh his first-born. At Solomon's right hand sat the queen, in gold of Ophir. The greatest honour a king can show to any person is to seat him at his right hand. Hence all the glories of empire therefore were to descend from this station, as we see in the Psalm before us. From thence his enemies were to be made his footstool; from thence he should send forth the rod of his strength out of Zion, and rule in the midst of his foes; from thence, in the day of his power, he should obtain a willing people, numerous as the dew of the morning; and from thence he should strike through kings in the day of his wrath, drink of the brook in the way, and lift up his head as more than a conqueror. Hence the Apostle considers it the extreme of dignity: "To which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" And again; "He set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, 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 hath put all things under his feet."

Much of this is at present unrealized. But we see Jesus, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour. And the view should gratify our affection. Love delights in the glory of its object. If therefore we love in sincerity, after sympathizing with him in the garden, and smiting on our breast at the cross, what a satisfaction shall we feel to view him possessed of power over all flesh, all power in heaven and in earth, and exalted far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. John could not go on with his description of him without pausing to express the adoration of his heart; "To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Let the view also encourage our hope. We are deeply interested in his elevation. It was expedient for us that he went away. In his ascension he received gifts for men. As glorified he gives the Holy Ghost. As exalted he is a Prince and a Saviour to rule and relieve his people, and to make all things work together for their good. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." He is our head and representative, and by reason of our union with him we are "quickened together with Christ, and raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ."

And let it wean us from the earth. Where the treasure is there will the heart be also. But he is your treasure, and he is in heaven. Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen. Follow him; and "seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." What an inducement was it to Jacob, at a period when nature dislikes a change, to leave his own country, and go down into Egypt, when he heard the message, "Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me ruler throughout all the land of Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me—and there will I nourish thee." At once his aversion and fears gave way. "And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die." And what says Jesus to his people? Come up hither. I am Lord of all the region into which ye shall enter—Come, and be near me—Come, and be for ever with the Lord.

And let it embolden us, while here, to acknowledge and honour him. Were we to be ashamed of him, or to deny him, we should be far guiltier than Peter. For we run no such risk in confessing him as he did—He trembled for his life. And when he disowned him his Lord was a prisoner at the bar, and going to be crucified, under a charge of blasphemy and sedition—But we deny him on the throne, angels, principalities, and powers being subject unto him, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in the world to come. "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession."

SEPTEMBER 11.—“Fear thou not; for I am with thee.”—Isaiah xli. 10.

THERE are more than sixty admonitions against fear addressed in the Scripture to the Lord's people. And what do all these imply, but their proneness to apprehension, and the groundlessness of their alarms. Hence the injunction is never unaccompanied with an argument to enforce it. For whatever the men of the world may think, religion is wisdom, and its children are able to give a reason of the hope that is in them. Hence knowledge always befriends a Christian. It is injurious to the comfort of many, because their comfort is founded in delusion: they think themselves safe while their house is built upon the sand; and therefore a discovery of the truth must tend to distress them: but though the Christian may fear, every thing is safe and right with him; and therefore the more he truly examines his condition, the more he must be satisfied with it; his doubts are mistakes, his apprehensions are misapprehensions—He only needs to be informed of things as they really are, and he is free indeed. Hence nothing can be of more importance to the subjects of divine grace, than just and clear views of their state and privileges; for though their safety does not depend upon the degree of their knowledge, their consolation is much affected by it—They that *know* his name will put their *trust* in him.

The presence of God is the most effectual resource against the fears of his people: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee.” This does not intend the essential presence of God by which he is every where. When his presence is spoken of in a way of promise, it refers not to a perfection of his nature, (though this is always implied,) but to his peculiar nearness and influence as their Saviour and friend. He is in one place as he is not in another. He is in heaven as he is not on earth; and he is with his Church as he is not with the world—“The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”

What the Lord says to all his people, he says to each of them individually, “Fear *thou* not; for I am with thee.” And what fear will not this assurance prevent or remove?

Do your temporal exigences excite your fear? Fear thou not, for he is with thee to provide for thee. He sustained the Jews with manna from the clouds, fed Elijah by ravens, and multiplied the widow's oil and meal. You are not to look for miracles; but you may look for the Lord, who performed these wonders of old. He is with you; and his hand is not shortened that he cannot save, nor his ear heavy that he cannot hear—

“And sooner all nature shall change,
Than one of his promises fail”

And what has he promised? Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure. O fear the Lord, all ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing. “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”

Do your perplexities excite your fears? Fear thou not, for he is with thee to guide thee. The Jews had before them a wayless desert; but to relieve them from their anxieties, the Lord furnished them with a pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night. As this paused they rested, as this moved they followed straight on, or turned to the right hand, or to the left, according to the direction of their leader, till it brought them to a city of habitation. You have the same advantage. You have the world before you, through which you must pass to reach a better, even a heavenly country. How much depends upon your course, yea, and upon every movement. And the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. Neither is it necessary, if he knoweth the way that you take, and he will direct you with his eye. And he is with you for this very purpose: "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

Do your duties excite your fears? Fear thou not, for he is with thee to aid thee. You are indeed called to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts; to forgive injuries; to walk by faith; to have your conversation in heaven. You will not quarrel with these demands; you will acknowledge them to be just and good; but you will lament your want of conformity to them: and sometimes they may discourage you—They must indeed always dismay you if you view them only in connection with your own strength. But your sufficiency is of God. His almighty Spirit shall help your infirmities. He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. His strength is made perfect in weakness.

Do your dangers excite your fears? Fear thou not, for he is with thee to keep thee. It cannot be denied that you are surrounded with enemies, compared with which you are nothing in yourselves. But though a worm, Jacob shall thresh mountains. If God be for us, who can be against us?

"A thousand savage beasts of prey
Around the forest roam,
But Judah's lion guards the way,
And guides the traveller home."

Do trials excite your fears? Fear thou not, for he is with thee to comfort thee. "I, even I, am he that comforteth you." "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem." And his consolation is not only tender, but strong consolation, sufficient to bear up the mind under any burden, and to cheer the heart in every distress. "Yea," says one who had often been revived in the midst of trouble, "yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for *thou art with me*, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Death is a trying hour; but it should not appal you. You are not to judge by your present feelings what your experience will be when the season arrives. He is peculiarly with his people in their afflictions, and his grace is proportioned to the time of need—He will not, he cannot fail you in your last extremity: and you may say, with Dr. Grovenor, "I can smile on death, if God smiles upon me."

Well, here is enough in every period, in every condition, in every circumstance, to embolden and animate us—if we can but lay hold of it. But what is all this without faith? Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!

SEPTEMBER 12.—“O thou preserver of men.”—JOB vii. 20.

THE word may be rendered, and in some versions has been rendered, “O thou *observer* of men.” And it is a true and an awful reflection that “his eyes are upon the ways of men, and he seeth all their goings: there is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.” He is an unerring observer; an observer whose glance nothing can escape; an observer who records all he witnesses, and records it with a view to exposure and trial: for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.” It has been contended too, that the connection in which the term is found requires this translation: “I have *sinned*, what shall I do unto thee, O thou observer of men.” But in this, as in *almost* every other instance, we deem the present rendering preferable, and preferable even on account of the connection. Here is a penitential confession; but in all repentance, at least in all repentance that is unto life, a view of the *goodness* of God is necessary, both to excite hope, and to produce godly sorrow: and it is here seen and acknowledged: for “it is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not; they are new every morning”—

We need not endeavour to prove that man needs preservation. As he did not make himself, so he has no sufficiency of his own to sustain himself. If left to himself for a moment he would relapse into nothing. He lives and moves and has his being in God. He is constantly surrounded with dangers, yet he is not sensible of even one in a thousand of them, and he is unable to ward off those he apprehends. And who among his fellow-creatures is interested enough, wise enough, powerful enough, always near enough, patient enough, to watch over and secure him? But God is infinitely qualified for the office, and he graciously condescends to assume the character of “THE PRESERVER OF MEN”—Let us bring this home to ourselves.

Why died we not from the womb? Why dropped we not when babes from the hands of a heedless or unfortunate nurse, and, like Mephibosheth, become a cripple for life? Why fell we not a prey to the perils of infancy, childhood, and youth? How many victims of accident, of disease, and of mortality have we known? But we are the living to praise him as it is this day. And wherefore? Ebenezer! “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.”

And if the Preserver demands gratitude for the past, he authorizes our confidence and comfort with regard to the future. Let us think of him under this endearing relation, and in all the uncertainties before us be encouraged—encouraged when we lie down, and have to pass through the darkness and dangers of the night-season—encouraged when we rise in the morning, and have to go

through the business and perils of the day—encouraged when we travel at the call of duty, or for the purpose of friendship or health: let us say, as we advance, “O Lord, thou preservest man and beast;” and as we return let us remember the promise, “Thou shalt know also that thy tabernacle is in peace, and thou shalt visit thy habitation and not sin” Yea, in all the parts and passages of that life, in the midst of which we are in death, and know not what a day or an hour will bring forth, let us strengthen and cheer ourselves with the persuasion that nothing can befall us by chance, that all our times are in his hand, and that we are immortal till our work is done. A sparrow falleth not to the ground without our heavenly Father; and the very hairs of our head are all numbered.

But the subject has a peculiar bearing upon Christians. For while he is the Saviour of all men, he is especially so of them that believe. A man takes more care of his jewels than of his common property; and is more concerned for the safety of his wife and children than of his cattle. God’s people are to him more than these images imply. Accordingly we are assured that he takes pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy. He keeps them as the apple of his eye. Lest any hurt them, says he, I will keep them night and day. This is the promise made to every Israelite indeed; “Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.” And the soul is the main thing. Now this is absolutely secured. Other things are only secured conditionally. The Christian may suffer from the strife of tongues, he may lose his substance, his health, and even his life—but he can never lose his soul. With regard to his eternal all, he can say, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.” Thus he is not afraid of evil tidings, for his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. My enemies are numberless and formidable, and I am as weak as I am exposed; but “the Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.” Thus it is said, “They shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.” How lonely, dreary, terrifying the situations! But amidst the howlings of the wilderness, and the horrors of the woods, they shall dwell safely *there*, and sleep soundly *there*. So David, when Absalom had driven him from his palace, and he had few troops to support him in the field, garrisoned himself in God: “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.”

SEPTEMBER 13.—“For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him.”—2 Sam. xiv. 14.

JOAB was resolved to reconcile David to Absalom. For which purpose he “sent to Tekoah, and fetched thence a wise woman, and said unto her, I pray thee, feign thyself to be a mourner, and put on now mourning apparel, and anoint not thyself with oil, but be as a woman that had a long time mourned for the dead.” Though she is called “wise,” she seems very little deserving of the appellation, unless she displayed more wisdom on former occasions than she does in the present instance. For there is scarcely one article in the whole of her long wordy address that pertinently and justly bears on the subject. Joab indeed furnished her with the leading part of her story—for it does not deserve the name of reasoning. But he had an unjustifiable measure to accomplish, and therefore he did as well as he could, to make the worse appear the better cause. He was also aware “that the king’s heart was toward Absalom.” He knew what tune pleased David, and therefore he depended not on the goodness of the music, but the nature of the effect. And accordingly, weak and irrelevant as the statement was, it succeeded! For, as

“He that’s convinced against his will,
Is of the same opinion still;”

So when a man is inclined to a particular course, a little child may lead him.

We may here remark, and it is of importance in reading the Scriptures to observe it, that the Holy Ghost does not sanction as righteous, or as true, every thing recorded in them. The sacred writers relate facts as they occurred, leaving us to employ our reason in distinguishing things that differ. We are not to believe all the arguings of Job’s friends because they are found in the book of Job; it is obvious that they sometimes laid down wrong principles, and at other times drew unfair inferences from right ones. And in the Ecclesiastes, Solomon more than once utters sentiments not as matters of his own credence, but as the language of worldlings, or libertines, whose objections he would answer.

Let us apply this to the case before us. The woman having by a kind of parable drawn from David a sentence of censure and condemnation, which, as she supposed, affected himself, she makes an application of it—“Let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak one word unto my lord the king. And he said, Say on. And the woman said, Wherefore then hast thou thought such a thing against the people of God? for the king doth speak this thing as one which is faulty, in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished.” And then, to enforce her suit, she adds, “The word of my lord the king shall now be comfortable: for as an angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad; therefore the Lord thy God will be with thee.” She adduces two arguments. The first drawn from man’s mortality: “For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person”—As much as to say, Amnon would

have died if he had not been slain by his brother. Absalom will die, and severity may hasten the event. Thou, David, though a king, art dying, and wilt become as one of the people—This was a poor reason for dispensing with civil justice against a murderer and a fratricide. Yet the argument is true in itself; and there are cases on which it will be found to bear—cases of private and personal injury, and where we are required not to avenge ourselves. Has a fellow-creature offended you? The offender will soon be incapable of receiving forgiveness, and you will soon be beyond the power of exercising it. Whatsoever therefore thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, knowledge, repentance, or wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest. Remember that anger *resteth* in the bosom of fools. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Especially, let not life close upon you before you are reconciled to your brother. Would you enter the presence of God implacable? Yet there is but a step between you and death—Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

The second is drawn from God's goodness: "Yet doth he devise means that his banished be not expelled from him"—And therefore, as if she would say, resemble him, and be like him, not only in power, but in clemency and kindness. This again is a poor plea in favour of the impunity of a public malefactor. We are not to spare those who deserve to suffer by the laws of the land because God is merciful and gracious. The minister of God is not to bear the sword in vain. He is set for the punishment of evil-doers, as well as for the praise of them that do well. Yet the argument is true in itself; and applies to cases of private and personal office. *There* we are required to exercise forgiveness; and it is enforced by this very motive. Hence says the Apostle: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." To which we add the parable of the Saviour: "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.—So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

SEPTEMBER 14.—"We must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person."—2 Sam. xiv. 14.

HERE we are reminded that we are under a necessity of dying; that the effect is irretrievable; and the stroke without partiality.

—"We must needs die." The necessity was not original, but induced by the Fall. It resulted not from nature, but sin—"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death hath passed upon all men, because all have sinned." All creatures die, yet we never speak of a mortal bird or a mortal beast, but only of a mortal man. He only deserves the epithet as a reproach. He

only was made immortal, but he degraded himself from the dignity, and being in honour abode not, but made himself like the beasts that perish. *Now* it is appointed unto men once to die. It is the present law of their nature: and from history, observation, and experience; from the numberless accidents and diseases to which they are exposed; and from the infirmities and decays they feel in their bodies, the living know that they shall die:

—“And be as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again.” When we see our little family asleep we are not alarmed or concerned, though they are unconscious of our presence, and for the time know not any thing; because we have it in our power to restore the sensibility when we please; yea, nature, if left to itself, will soon recover it. But while suspended over the breathless corpse, in vain we watch to see a movement—we speak in vain—and touch the cold cheek in vain—and we bury our dead out of our sight. We are not denying a future state of existence, but we have no restoration from the grave *here*. “O spare me,” says David, “that I may recover strength before I go hence and am no more.” “In the morning,” says Job, “ye shall seek me—but I shall not be.” Ah! could we re-gather their precious remains, and inspire and revive them; Rachel would no longer “weep for her children, and refuse to be comforted, because they were not;” Jacob would no longer say, “Joseph is not;” at the domestic table “David’s seat” would no longer be “empty;” nor would the lonely friend heave any more at the thought, “we took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company.” But in vain we seek them—They are gone the way whence they shall not return—The places that knew them shall know them no more for ever.

—“Neither doth God respect any person.” He does not overlook the little, or fear the great. He does not spare the poor from pity or the rich from favour. He is not moved by the venerableness of age or the charms of infancy. He gives the destroyer a universal commission, and orders him to strike impartially as to time, place, and manner. Youth, and beauty, and strength, and learning, and wisdom, and usefulness, lie down equally in the dust. “No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean: to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.”

“But the wide difference that remains,
Is endless joy or endless pains.”

SEPTEMBER 15.—“He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.”—2 Chron. xxxiii. 2.

MANASSEH, of whom these words are spoken, is a name proverbial for wickedness. This indeed is not invariably a sure rule to go by. A man cannot always be judged of by his infamy, any more than by his fame. Subjects have been called rebels when they

have been only maintaining their lawful rights. Christians, because they were not understood by their calumniators, have been deemed enthusiasts when they have only spoken the words of truth and soberness. A public charity wears the dishonoured name of Magdalene, as if she had been a prostitute of the grossest description before she became a follower of our Lord, and ministered to him of her substance: whereas, however we explain her case as having been dispossessed of seven devils, it imports nothing against her previous virtue—But Manasseh well deserves all the infamy attached to his character. Witness the portrait given us by the pen of inspiration. Witness his oppression and cruelty—“Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to the other.” The language is doubtless hyperbolic. But take it in the lowest sense consistent with truth, and how many persons under false pretences must have perished from public or private assassination to gratify his avarice, ambition, or revenge. For it was not the blood of criminals, but innocent blood that he poured out in such torrents: and we have reason to believe that a great portion of the victims suffered for the sake of religion. Early ecclesiastical history asserts, we know not on what foundation, that Isaiah was sawn asunder by his order. Witness his idolatries—“He built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.” Witness his superstition—“And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom:” that is, he either sacrificed his offspring to Moloch, or dedicated them to the service of the idol, to be employed in the execrable rites of his worship. Witness his infernal alliances—“He observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards.” Witness his open contempt of every thing sacred—“And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, in this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever.” Witness his concern and zeal to corrupt others—“So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.” From the parallel passage in the book of kings, it is said, “He seduced them.” His example, being in high life, would be very influential; but he exerted himself to lead others astray; and what means and resources could such a man employ? Witness the aggravations of his guilt. He was piously descended. His father was the good Hezekiah. The palace in which he had been brought up was none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven. He had been under the care of pious priests and prophets. How much had he to unlearn. But he could not unlearn it; he had therefore to fight with conviction, and to overcome all the remonstrances, and to get rid of all the uneasiness of conscience. He was also divinely warned from time to time: this is the meaning—“And the Lord spake to Manasseh,

and to his people: but they would not hearken." And this impentence crowned and confirmed all his iniquity—

And now what think you of this representation, on the truth of which we can perfectly rely? Is it not painful and humiliating to reflect upon it? Yet this man was a partaker of our own nature; and if we do not resemble him, are we to glory in ourselves? Yea, ought we not to be thankful? All have not the same opportunities and temptations. Who can tell what we might have been had we encountered the perils in which others have been wrecked? What would any of us have been in a world like this without Divine restraints? "There goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God," would the martyr exclaim when he beheld the transgressor. Our Lord therefore leads us from the effects to the hidden cause, and fixes on the human heart. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." According to this decision the principles of the blackest crimes in practice lie in the recesses of many a character that appears fair to men. They are not suffered to spring up, but who will not honestly own that he has felt them in their most secret workings? Anger is the germ of malice; lust of sensuality; covetousness of theft. A desire to conceal the excellences of another from ourselves, or from the world, genders false witness. Hard conceptions of God lead to blasphemy. Ah! how little permission of Providence, or encouragement from circumstances, do the evils of our nature require, to bring them into exercise, and to degrade us to a level with the vilest of the vile—Lord, what is man!

And what think you of the pardon and renovation of such a sinner! "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Should we not, in reading his history, have expected that he would perish a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men? But God's thoughts and God's ways are not ours. Where sin abounded grace did much more abound—Manasseh is saved!

When the elder brother heard of the reception of the prodigal, he was angry and would not go in. And such mercy as Manasseh experienced may be offensive to some now, who trust in themselves that they are righteous and despise others. "Of what use are our good breeding and morals? What, are the dregs of depravity to be saved as well as we? and to enter into life with us?" Yes; and if you had the mind of Christ, and if you were like angels, who rejoice when a sinner repenteth, you would gladly hail any of your fellow-creatures who were the subjects of such free and sovereign goodness, and magnify the God that displays it. Every penitent may say with David, when recovered from his fall, "They that fear thee will be glad when they see me, because I have hoped in thy truth."

Such mercy may be abused; and it is abused by those who continue in sin that grace may abound; who hope that God, who is so ready to pardon, will not be severe to mark what they do amiss, but that when they can sin no longer, he will, by some extraordinary interposition, subdue their unwillingness, and deliver them from the condition in which they now voluntarily continue. But how dreadful is it to be evil because God is good! Is this likely to gain his

favour? He is merciful, but his mercy is exercised in harmony with all the perfections of his nature. And his goodness is designed to lead us to repentance. And now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. His Spirit is now striving with you, but if you refuse to fall in with his motions he may righteously decline to address you in future, and hide from your eyes the things that belong to your peace. You cannot deserve his grace, but you may provoke his wrath, and nothing is so sure to provoke it as your "doing despite unto the Spirit of grace."

But such an instance of mercy should encourage you if you are disposed to return to the Lord. Then, however guilty, you have no reason to despair. "Come," says he, "and let us reason together; though your sins were as scarlet they shall be white as snow, though they were red like crimson they shall be as wool."

And let it animate us in our concern for others. Whatever lengths they have gone, let us never consider any of our fellow-creatures abandoned, so as to give up prayer and the use of means—And let us use them in the faith of him who is mighty to save—Is any thing too hard for the Lord?

SEPTEMBER 16.—"I was wounded in the house of my friends."—Zech. xiii. 6.

FRIENDSHIP is a boon which has always been highly valued and extolled. It has been called the charm of life, and the balm of grief. He is deeply pitiable who has not a friend; and he is in a most privileged condition who has never had reason to complain, "I was wounded in the house of my friends."

We are formed for society; we love society: we need society; we derive much of our happiness from society; and yet in one way or another our connections are very expensive things. There are here, so to speak, four kinds of wounds. First, those that arise from the honest and salutary reprehensions of our friends. Solomon commends these by way of contrast: "faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." Instead of complaining of these, we shall be thankful for them, if we are like-minded with David; "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities."

Secondly, Those that result from their sufferings. Paul speaks of the comforts of love: but it has its sorrows too. If I love another, and in proportion as I love him, I shall make his case my own: I shall weep when he weeps: I shall bear his burden when he is oppressed: and perhaps suffer as much by sympathy as he himself suffers, when I hear him cry, "Pity me, pity me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me."

Thirdly, Those which are produced by our being bereaved of them. There are few but have felt these losses; while some have had peculiar reason to sigh, "I sit, and am alone, as a sparrow upon the house-top"—"Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." Oh! the anxieties that precede—the anguish that accompanies—the dreariness that follows—the feeling of heart-desolation that arises at the sight of the walks in

which we communed with them, the seats they occupied, the books they folded down, the flowers they planted—the nightly visitations of thought when darkness and wakefulness let in busy memory, to recall the past, and open the wounds afresh which time had tried to heal!

Fourthly, Those which are inflicted by their improper conduct. Even the sincere are imperfect; and may wound us by ignorance, rudeness, wayward temper, misapprehension, and censure without cause. But some are altogether vanity and lies. Their friendship is a mere flash of feeling. It is the working of selfishness, during which they make you their scaffolding, and then lay you aside. They only elevate to depress: they only flatter to spread a snare for your feet; they only insinuate themselves into your bosom to prove the viper there.

Thus therefore we often hear of being wounded in the house of friends. But though many make the complaint, few seem concerned to improve it. And thus they bleed in vain, while it is possible for them to derive a remedy for the poison, and to turn their losses into gain. In all these murmurings or lamentations about friends, we should do well to inquire whether we have done nothing to deserve what we suffer: for often we may trace our sin in our trials. The blame is not always on the side of the censured: the most complaining is frequently the most culpable. He that will have friends must show himself friendly; and attachment must be supported in the same way that it was gained.

We should also consider whether we do not complain without just cause. We talk of the wounds we have received, when perhaps they are hardly incisions skin deep. We are not to look for perfection; but remember that as every relation in life is filled with fallen creatures, so it will necessarily partake of human infirmity. And what, are we to exact from others a faultlessness which they never met with in us? Neither should we become in these cases, misanthropic; harbourers of suspicion; and railers against our fellow-creatures at large. David said, "All men are liars;" but it was "in his haste;" and he acknowledged his rashness and injustice.

We may, however, regulate and modify our regard, and especially our dependance and expectation: and we ought to hear the voice of the word, when it is feelingly enforced by events: "Cease from man, whose breath in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?"

"Then let us trust the Lord alone,
And creature-confidence disown:
Sure as on creatures we depend,
Our hopes in disappointment end."

Blessed is the man who trusteth in the Lord; and whose hope the Lord is. He will not, he cannot fail us. See the use the Prophet made of what he was compelled to acknowledge—"Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide: keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter in law against her mother in law; a man's enemies are the men of

his own house. Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me."

Should we not also do well to make the conduct of our fellow-creatures towards us a glass in which to contemplate our conduct towards God? Then must our severity fall upon ourselves much more heavily than upon others. For what are our claims upon our connexions compared with God's claims upon us? And what are the forgetfulness, and ingratitude, and perverseness, and unkindness, and treachery of those we have befriended, compared with the instances of vileness which our infinite Benefactor has constantly to witness in us? It is a good turn which Watts gives to our reflections upon the state of the Jews—

"Great God! how oft did Israel prove,
By turns, thine anger and thy love!
There in a glass our hearts may see,
How fickle and how false they be."

SEPTEMBER 17.—"As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation."—1 Peter i. 15.

CHRISTIANITY is not only, as we see in the preceding verses, a system of grace, but of holiness also; and however the term may be abused or despised, the professors of the Gospel are to be distinguished as saints. Observe the extent and the enforcement of the obligation they are under.

They are to be "holy in all manner of conversation." The word conversation, as now used, signifies discourse; and no little of our religion consists in the sanctification of our speech: but the term never has this acceptation in the Scripture. There it always intends carriage, deportment, the course of action. It would be easy to prove this; but it is needless. Let us rather observe that no part of a Christian's conduct is to be uninfluenced by sanctity. He is to be holy "in all manner of conversation." His holiness is to be universal with regard to times, with regard to places, with regard to conditions, and with regard to circumstances. It is to appear not only in devotional exercises, but in common actions; and whether he eats or drinks, or whatever he does, he is to do all to the glory of God. Not that he can be always distinctly thinking on this end; but by making the word of God his rule in all things, all he does has this tendency and effect. Paul attended to a thousand claims, yet as he made all his actions conduce to the same purpose, he speaks as if he had but one engagement; "This one thing I do." The husbandman manures, ploughs, sows, weeds, reaps, gathers into barns, threshes, fans, and sells; yet all he does is one thing; and that is comprised in husbandry. Even real religion is defective in its degree, but it is always impartial in its regards; and enables the possessor to say "I esteem all thy commandments concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way."

The reason why we are to be thus holy is "because he who called us is holy." We must therefore resemble him. He every where proposes himself as our example; we are commanded to be followers of him as dear children; and we are renewed after the

image of him that created us. Observe the excellency of holiness—It makes us like God—and like him in his highest excellency!

As we cannot be conformed to him, so neither can we love him without holiness. They are only the “saints of his” that can “rejoice and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.” But they, being partakers of his holiness, feel congenial with his very nature, and delight in his law, his gospel, his ordinances, his people, as they all appear in the beauties of holiness.

Without holiness, too, it is impossible for us to enjoy him. How can two walk together except they be agreed? What communion hath righteousness with unrighteousness? Without holiness no man *shall* see the Lord—no man *can* see him: he is wholly unprepared for the state, the work, the pleasure. But the holiness which makes us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light insures the blessedness. God does nothing in vain; but he has thus wrought us for the selfsame thing, and given to us the earnest of the Spirit.

It is therefore no easy matter to be a Christian indeed. Yea, it is an impossible one as to ourselves. But with God all things are possible. There are not only millions around the throne, but multitudes now living, who are his workmanship. “This people,” says he, “have *I* formed for myself, they shall show forth *my* praise.” Instead of endeavouring to fetch holiness out of yourselves, pray, with David, to the God of all grace: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

Christians! under many of your present feelings, you are ready to conclude that your holiness will never be perfect. But be not dismayed. Consider what he has done for you already. How unlikely was it once that you should ever have valued what you now esteem, and have ever desired what you now above all things seek after! Had he been minded to kill you he would not have shown you such things as these. He who gave you the will, thereby also furnished you with the pledge of the power. And we are confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Soon—what a prospect! you will be sinless, faultless! “It doth not yet appear what you shall be, but this you know, that when he shall appear, you shall be like him, for you shall see him as he is.”

SEPTEMBER 18.—“Lest any of you be hardened.”—Heb. iii. 13.

LET US take some views of the evil against which we are here admonished. It may be considered in reference to its *seat*. In many places it is spoken of as “the heart.” “They hardened their hearts.” “All the house of Israel are hard-hearted.” It is sometimes represented as “the neck.” Nothing can be more common than the expression of hardening the neck. The idea is taken from a refractory ox refusing the yoke, and expresses disobedience to the commands and rejection of the service of God. At other times it is represented as “the face.” “They have made their face harder than a rock, they have refused to return.” This marks insolence, impudence, shamelessness. But these are all related. The hardness of—the heart—of the neck—and of the face follow each other.

Sin is always progressive; and transgressors wax worse and worse.

We may consider the hardness as *natural* and as *acquired*. The heart, though naturally hard, admits of an increase of hardness. Thus Paul says to the Hebrews, "Harden not your heart, as in the provocation." Every call of God we refuse renders us more callous. Every act of sin we commit reduces our awe of God's authority, and prepares us for another commission. The young man first dreads evil company, then endures it, then delights in it. Habits are formed by the repetition of actions; and as "well might the Ethiopian change his skin, and the leopard his spots, as they learn to do good who are accustomed to do evil." The hardening of the heart is like the hardening of ice. When the water begins to freeze it will not bear the weight of a pin, but after some hours, or some days, it is capable of sustaining the heaviest pressure.

We may also observe in this hardness the *concern of the sinner*, and the *concern of God*. We read that "Pharaoh hardened his heart," and at the time it is said that "God hardened his heart." There is no doubt therefore that there is a part that belongs to God in this business. But what is it? And what can it be to accord with the perfections of his nature, and the language of his word? He cannot properly and absolutely harden the heart. But First, by his Providence he can expose men to those temptations which meeting with innate and indulged depravity will aid their impenitence. And Secondly, he can deny them the means of grace, or withhold or withdraw from them the influence that can alone render them efficacious. Thus God is said to give men up to "a reprobate mind;" and "to strong delusion to believe a lie." But he never acts thus judicially and penally but as the effect of deep provocation. He never says, "Let them alone," till "they are joined to idols." "Israel would none of me, so I gave them up unto their own heart's lusts; and they walked in their own counsels." "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?"

Again: we may distinguish this hardness as *entire* and as *partial*. Christians are renewed in the spirit of their mind. The stony heart is taken away, and a heart of flesh is given. Yet our Lord said to his own disciples, "Have ye your heart yet hardened?" "And he upbraided them with the hardness of their heart." And Christians may be less lively in their religious duties and affections, not only than they ought to be, but even than they once were. It is indeed well if we feel this; it is a proof that *all* is not hard within: but the want of more sensibility of heart is a great practical evil; and will much lessen our comfort. And the evil is induced by sin; and by little sins as well as by great ones; and by omissions of duty as well as by actual transgression. We are peculiarly liable to this evil when we are indulged—"Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." What a difference do we perceive between David as an exile, persecuted from place to place, and as a reigning monarch. With regard to the former he had such tenderness that his heart smote him, when he had only cut off the skirt of his enemy's garment: but see the insults and miseries the King

inflicted upon the Ammonites, after taking the city from its brave defenders. Who can bear success and gratification without injury? "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation." Wherefore keep yourselves in the love of God. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

SEPTEMBER 19.—"The sin which doth easily beset us."—Heb. xii. 1.

By this we are to understand, according to Owen, what our divines call indwelling sin. Sin reigns in the children of disobedience. But this is *not* the case with the godly; sin shall not have dominion over them, for they are not under the law, but under grace. But though it is dethroned in them, it is not as yet destroyed. It still exists and exerts itself. And it may well be called "the sin which so easily besets us," being always near us to assail us in the world, the family, the church, the closet; yea, always in us, working our departure from the living God, vexing our peace, spoiling our performances, and rendering us susceptible of injury from external influences—"The sin," says the Apostle, "that dwelleth in me;" "another law in my members wars against the law of my mind;" and the effects of which make me groan, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death." This, as the principle of corruption, and the source of all other evils, we should seek to subdue and destroy. And whoever would see this subject practically and *evangelically* treated should read the admirable work of Owen, on "the mortification of sin in believers."

But there are various ways in which the same innate depravity may operate. Isaiah speaks of our all going astray, but says, "We have turned every one to his *own* way." And the expression of the Apostle has given rise to the notion of some particular sin to which we are more exposed or addicted than to another: and thus we often hear of a man's besetting sin, and easily besetting sin. And it is undeniable, that by outward circumstances, or natural temperament; some are more inclined to peevishness and fretfulness, some to anger and revenge, some to pride and vanity, some to intemperance and sensuality.

We should imagine that every one must be acquainted with his own peculiar propensity, especially after some course of years. But what is habitual is naturalized; we are blind to our own faults; self-love covers a multitude of sins, and this among the rest. Yet in many cases a man's ignorance, owing to the power and prevalence of the evil, must be mere affectation.

A man's easily besetting sin is—that to which he is most frequently tempted—and which he is most anxious to conceal—and the discovery and reprehension of which most mortifies and offends him.

Such a sin, unsearched after, unbewailed, unopposed, is incompatible with "simplicity and godly sincerity." If we regard the

safety and welfare of our souls, however painful the result may be, we shall faithfully examine ourselves. And when we see where we have been most easily overcome, or drawn aside, we shall peculiarly watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation. "A right spirit" will lead us to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear—"Blessed is the man that feareth always."

SEPTEMBER 20.—"Master, I have brought unto thee my son."—Mark ix. 17.

THIS is the commencement of a very interesting and instructing narrative. The leading circumstances were these.

The man was in affliction. The affliction was indeed relative; but there are cases in which relative trials are more severely felt than even personal. And what relation is more susceptible of this than the parental? It was a child—an "only" child—possessed by "a dumb spirit," the distressing and fearful effects of which are thus described: "whersoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire and into the waters to destroy him." And this had been the case with the unhappy child from his infancy. As nothing is said of his mother, it is probable she was dead, or surely she would have accompanied this application.

But who does not feel for the pitiable condition of the father? And yet who knows what is good for a man in this vain life? But for this calamity perhaps this suppliant had never known or addressed the Saviour. How often is the valley of Achor the door of hope! How many can say, "it is good for me that I have been afflicted!" How often does trouble send us in search of the friend of sinners. It is the merciful design of it. It is the effect of it when sanctified, both in the conversion of the soul, and in renewed applications to the throne of grace all through life—

But observe the man's mistake. At first he goes and applies to the servants instead of the master: but the disciples "could not cast him out." And do not we often err in the same way? Do not our ignorance, carnality, and impatience lead us to stop at instruments? But they are nothing without God; and the sooner we are convinced of this the better, that we may not weary ourselves for very vanity. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength." What can ministers do for you? If you come looking only to us you will return as empty as you came. The excellency of the power is of God, and not of us. "Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." The heathens made gods of every thing that afforded them profit or pleasure: and we are paganish in the same way. But we are more criminal than they, because we know him, and know that with him is the fountain of life. And God is jealous of his glory, and is always provoked to destroy or render useless the instrument that robs him of his praise.

Despairing of all other help, the man now comes to Jesus himself—But see with what low apprehensions, and how full of suspicion

and fear. "If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us." Faith admits of various degrees, and we see it in the views and feelings of those who applied to him in the days of his flesh. How free from hesitation was the Centurion? "Speak but the word," says he, "and my servant shall be healed." The leper seemed to question his willingness to act: he "worshipped, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." But this man seems to doubt his power. And we sometimes do the same. We are not indeed always aware of this. We presume that it is only his willingness to help that we question: but if we fully trusted in his power, how is it that our confidence sinks or wavers as ordinary means fail, or difficulties multiply? Is any thing too hard for the Lord? Are we ever straitened in him? Yet the Jews, after all the displays of his omnipotence, said, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?" And even Moses himself staggered at the promise of God through this unbelief: "The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them? And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not." Let us beware of this evil. Let us bring our faith to the apprehension of his power. Let us believe—that we may see the glory of God.

Our Lord both reproveth and encourages him. The reproof was general in the expression, but it was designed to bear upon himself: "He answered him, and said, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto me." The encouragement was conditional; but it precisely met his case. "If thy son be not recovered the blame will lie at thy own door; it will be owing to no inability in me, but a want of faith in thyself: Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." Thus he ascribes a kind of omnipotence to faith. And it is certain that faith can prevail with God. It can obtain the pardon of all sins. It can make us more than conquerors over all our enemies. It can bring us supplies for all our wants.

But let us observe the effect of our Saviour's declaration on the mind of the poor father. Loving his child, and longing for his deliverance; and knowing that every thing now depended upon his believing and feeling in himself a sad struggle between faith and unbelief, he "straightway cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."—Let this be the subject of the following exercise.

SEPTEMBER 21.—"And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."—Mark ix. 24.

WE have reviewed the narrative; but we may consider the words now read as the common language of religious experience. For

what Christian is there that does not "cry out, and say with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Four things are observable in the speaker.

First: he acknowledges his faith—"Lord, I believe." A man may be conscious of his own grace. Grace brings evidence along with it. It does not operate like a charm; nor are its operations to be classed with those occasional and superficial emotions which give no character to the person, or fixed bias to the disposition. It enlightens the understanding, it renews the heart, and becomes a governing principle in the life. Faith without works is dead. Living faith works by love.—Neither should we be unwilling to own what we experience; for the praise does not belong to ourselves; neither will it ever be claimed by any of the real subjects of it. Paul says, "I laboured more abundantly than all the apostles;" yet this was not the language of pride, but praise; for he adds, "Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." The fault of most is, that they deny their sin; but there are some who deny their grace. If they would do justice to their views and feelings, they must be constrained to own, that under all their complaints they have been made to differ from others, and that there is something which they have received. "If repentance consists in having the heart broken for sin, and from sin,—Lord, I repent. If love to thee is determined by a supreme desire to enjoy thee, and a fear to offend thee—Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. If faith is self-renunciation, and a reliance upon thyself only for salvation—Lord, I believe."

Secondly; he confesses the imperfection of his faith—"Help thou mine unbelief." A man may be alive and not in full health. A Christian, though renewed in the spirit of his mind, is not free from infirmities. Sin does not reign in his mortal body, but he feels a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, so that he cannot do the things that he would. We read, therefore, of "weak faith:" and our Saviour, addressing his own immediate disciples, said, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith." Now as far as faith is wanting, unbelief prevails.

Thirdly; he speaks of his unbelief with sorrow—"He said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." It is pleasing to see sensibility in religion: and the Christian has a heart of flesh. His defects are his distresses; he groans under them, being burdened. Even his views of the love of Christ render his failures the more grievous.—He is not only affected with gross and scandalous offences visible to his fellow-creatures, but mourns over evils that are never noticed by natural men: such as dullness in duty, wanderings of thought in devotion, backslidings in heart, and the weakness and waverings of his faith and hope in God.—There is nothing he more deplors than the remains of his unbelief; to these he can no more be reconciled than a convalescent can be reconciled to the remains of an offensive and painful disorder; such a man is thankful for returning health, but he sighs to be entirely well.

Fourthly, he applies to the Saviour for succour—"He cried, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." In the same way "the Apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith."

Had this prayer been improper, the receiver ought to have rebuked it; but he encouraged it. Let us not be afraid, with all the first Christians, and immensely the majority ever since, to call upon his name. Let us bring all our complaints to him. He is the author and finisher of faith. He has the words of eternal life. He quickeneth whom he will. He alone can relieve us; but in him all fullness dwells. You will make no progress in the Divine life if you think of advancing without him. Your growth in grace is not the offspring of your own resolutions and exertions, but your being under his agency, and receiving the supply of his Spirit—your living in the Spirit—walking in the Spirit. “Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

SEPTEMBER 22.—“Thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor.”
—Psalm lxxviii. 10.

THE acknowledgment refers to the gracious attention of God to Israel his pensioners, while they sojourned in the wilderness. They were destitute of all ordinary supplies, but “he commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and rained down manna upon them to eat, and gave them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angels food: he sent them meat to the full.” We are not to look for miraculous provision; but God has not forsaken the earth, nor forgotten to be gracious. Let us observe the nature of this goodness, and the subjects for whom it is prepared.

The goodness of God appears in the produce of the ground, not only for man, but beast. Indeed man is concerned in the brute creation, and a deficiency with regard to them would materially affect his own welfare. But while the Lord cares for oxen, and causes the grass to grow for the cattle, he provides *corn* for the more immediate service of man. This forms, owing to our dependence upon it, what the Scripture calls “the whole *stay* and *staff* of bread.” Judea was famous for this noble production. Moses calls it “a land of wheat.” By a boldness of metaphor he speaks of “the kidneys of wheat.” In the restored prosperity of this highly-favoured people, this commodity is not overlooked: “They shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord for wheat”—“The barns shall be full of wheat”—

But let us pass from Judea to our own country; a land the Lord careth for, and whose inhabitants are “fed with the finest of the wheat.” Who that has lately watched the springing of the earth, seen the vallies standing thick with corn, heard the little hills rejoicing on every side, and shouted as the precious treasure was safely conveyed into the garner, can help exclaiming, “Thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor.” And shall we expose ourselves to the reproach of the prophet, “Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain. both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.”

Two things in this case may hinder or weaken the impression of his goodness. The one is the constancy of its return. It is easy to see that this is really an argument for greater thankfulness, unless we are to be evil because God is good; for surely the commonness of benefits multiplies them, and increases our obligation in a corresponding degree. Yet what is usual ceases to strike; what is frequently repeated, and returns continuously in a fixed and known regularity, arrives without emotion, and is regarded as a thing of course. When the manna first fell upon the ground every eye would be turned towards heaven; but it soon became "this light food." And one reason why God sometimes withdraws or suspends an enjoyment is, that we may learn to feel the worth by the want of the blessing.

The other is, the means he employs. These keep us from seeing his hand; yet that hand worketh all in all. Away with the semi-infidelity of philosophers. He has established no mechanical laws which render his continual presence unnecessary. Instruments are nothing without his agency. If they succeed, it is only because he uses them. Second causes are moved by the first: "I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel." David therefore fixes our eye at once upon God; and says, "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it; thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly; thou settlest the furrows thereof; thou makest it soft with showers; thou blessest the springing thereof; thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness.

Miracles rouse attention for the moment, but the ordinary workings of Divine Providence are no less truly wonderful in themselves: yea, the instant and immediate production of an effect develops less of his perfections than the securing of it by various and numberless combinations, not one failing. We admire the word that multiplied five loaves into a sufficiency to feed a large multitude; but whose operation is it that annually increases the seed that is sown "and dies," thirty, sixty, and one hundred fold? If we have faith enough to see God only in extraordinary events, our godliness will be very occasional and limited. But there are some who live in his presence, who "walk with God," who confess him in every trial and comfort, and are preparing for that heaven where God is "all in all."

If some things would prevent our gratitude, others are adapted to excite and strengthen it. Let us, if we would be impressed with this goodness, think,

First, how easily he could have destroyed our hopes. All was suspended upon his will. War might have ravaged and desolated our fields. Insects, blasts, and mildew, were at his nod. The heavens over us might have been as brass, and the earth under us as iron, through continued and scorching heat. Excessive rains might have deluged the soil, injured the ripening of the corn, and hindered the ingathering.

Secondly, let us reflect how dreadful the effects of dearth would

have proved. He has not only relieved, but indulged us. With how many sounds, and perfumes, and colours, and relishes, has he gratified our senses. But these might have been withholden without annihilating human support. We never feel in viewing a flower as we do at the sight of an ear of corn. It is when we lean on the stile and see the waving bounty, or when we walk through the pathway of the standing ears; it is then we exclaim, "Thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor." It is not difficult to convince men of the importance of what relates to their bodies. The flesh cries out, and if denied ease or food will be heard. Animal appetites often return, and the relief of them is even essential to the preservation of life. What so powerful as the cravings of hunger! We have also relations to be provided for as well as ourselves. Many have families: some have large families. What is it for a mother to hear a child cry for want and have no sustenance to give it!

Thirdly, we must not forget how much we have deserved his displeasure. We cannot estimate properly his goodness without considering our unworthiness of the least of all his mercies. Here there is a difference between us and other creatures. The eyes of all wait upon him, and he giveth them their meat in due season. But they have never offended him, they have always fulfilled the end of their being. But we have renounced our allegiance to him, we have followed idols, we have joined in alliance with his foes, and have daily and hourly provoked him to his face—What claim has a rebel upon his gracious sovereign? or a runaway servant who has robbed him, upon a kind master? Where is the benefactor who would continue his bounties after numberless proofs of ingratitude, and enmity, and insult? Where then should we have been if God had rewarded us according to our iniquities? Our guilt has been aggravated beyond that of any other country, by reason of our pre-eminent advantages. Surely it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. Surely at the end of another harvest we are constrained to exclaim, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us; but to thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake."

But we are here reminded not only of the nature of his goodness, but the subjects of it: "Thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor." It is not for them exclusively. "The king is served by the field." A supply for the poor is of course a supply for the rich; and it is easy to see that a suspension of the Divine goodness would involve all ranks. The rich can no more create than the poor; and should the course of vegetation be stopped by him who has power to destroy as well as to produce, what profit would a man have of all the wealth he possessed? Wealth would be nothing if it could not be laid out; and if the time ever came, which the Lord forbid! in which there was neither earing nor harvest, the proprietor, as well as the peasant and the pauper, would perish. But it is spoken in reference to the poor, because,

First, they are the larger mass of mankind, and whatever pride may think, in the eye of reason, policy, and revelation, by far the most important, useful, and necessary part.

Secondly, they would be more peculiarly affected by deficiency. Dear purchases can be made by the rich, who, as the price of provisions advances, can follow it; but the poor are speedily straitened, and become a prey to scarceness; and every door is shut against them but that of precarious charity.

Thirdly, to encourage those in humble and trying life to depend upon him. What he did formerly he does now. He prepares of his goodness for the poor. He may try you, and require proof of your confidence, before he communicates relief: but "the needy shall not always be forgotten, the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever." "Trust in the Lord, and do good, and dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." And, "a little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked."

Fourthly, to enforce our attention to them from the Divine example. We see how he had his eye upon the poor in the Jewish economy. It is delightful to read the various provisions concerning them in the law of Moses. All the earth spontaneously yielded the seventh year, belonged to the poor. At harvest the owners were not to cut down the corners of their fields, they were to scatter some handfuls behind them for the gleaner, and if they dropped a sheaf they were not to go back for it. See what is said with regard to their borrowing and pledges: "If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as a usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury. If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: for that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious." Again: "Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry." Hear James calling men away from the gold ring and gay clothing: "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?" And, "Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth." We enveigh not against the distinctions and ranks of life; yea, we would maintain them, and are persuaded the invasions of them are no more advantageous to inferiors than to their superiors. Yet they may be carried to an extreme. Neither would we wish to relax for one moment the apostolic law, that "if any man will not work, neither shall he eat." It was never the design of Providence that the poor should be fed without labour; but if they are willing to labour, and cannot procure a decent and comfortable support for themselves, something must be wrong somewhere in the state of the community: and rulers and subjects should remember the awful admonition: "Behold, is it not of the Lord of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?" "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I

arise, saith the Lord ; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him."

Every season shows his goodness on behalf of the poor. Let us be merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful ; and followers of God as dear children. "If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth." What a responsibility attaches to the affluent ! What a disgrace, what a curse will their abundance be without diffusion ! "Charge them that are rich in this world that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy ; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate ; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." Let us thus fall in with the designs of God in befriending the necessitous. The poor we have always with us, and their distresses are great. Let us feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, and cheer those who are ready to perish, and cause the widow's heart to sing for joy : and be so many little images of him who prepares of his goodness for the poor. It will be one of the best ways in which we can show our gratitude on the present occasion—But let us sing a song of praise to the Author of all good, in the language of David, so beautifully versified by Watts—

" Good is the Lord, the heavenly King,
Who makes the earth his care,
Visits the pastures every spring,
And bids the grass appear.

" The clouds, like rivers rais'd on high,
Pour out, at thy command,
Their watery blessings from the sky,
To cheer the thirsty land.

" The soften'd ridges of the field
Permit the corn to spring ;
The valleys rich provision yield,
And the poor labourers sing.

" The little hills on every side
Rejoice at falling showers ;
The meadows drest in all their pride,
Perfume the air with flowers.

" The barren clods, refresh'd with rain,
Promise a joyful crop ;
The parched grounds look green again,
And raise the reaper's hope.

" The various months thy goodness crowns ;
How bounteous are thy ways ;
The bleating flocks spread o'er the downs,
And shepherds shout thy praise."

SEPTEMBER 23.—"And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined."—Isaiah xxv. 6.

WE might remark here the author of the entertainment ; and the place where it was to be made ; and the richness of the provision : but let us notice only the universality of the design. When men make a feast they invite only their relations and friends, or their rich neighbours, who can bid them again, and make a recompense.

But there is one feast to which are invited the occupiers of the highways and hedges, and the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. Belshazzar the king made a great feast; but it was to "a thousand of his lords." Ahasuerus made a great feast; but it was "unto all his princes and servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and rulers of the provinces being before him." It is true that at the close of it "the king made a feast unto all the people that were found in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace." But how large soever the court of the garden was, it could contain only a few thousand partakers, while millions in his one hundred and twenty-seven provinces were excluded from the festivity. But in this mountain the Lord makes "unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees; of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined."

That he is able to do this shows his greatness and all-sufficiency. That he is willing to do this shows the exceeding riches of his mercy and grace. It serves to distinguish Christianity from Judaism. The provisions of the latter were chiefly confined to one people, and comparatively a very small nation: but here there is no difference between Jew or Greek. Jesus is the Saviour of the world; in his Name shall the Gentiles trust; in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

It displays the unchristianism of monopoly. It is lamentable to think how fond some are of inclusion, and still more, if possible, of exclusion. If God was to sanction the anathemas of his rash and erring creatures, how few would be saved! But if, though they should call upon him as long and as loud as the worshippers called upon Baal, he will not hear them. And if they were fairly to consult his word, his word would tell them that they know not what manner of spirit they are of. If they were in a good frame of mind, though they would not wish to sacrifice truth to candour, they would rejoice in the thought that others, *all* others are invited as well as themselves, and that for all there is enough, and to spare.

This universality should also check despondency. "I feel my need of these blessings, more than of my necessary food, and long, above all things, to partake of them. And O my soul, what hinders me? If the feast be made for all, why may not I come, and partake freely? The inviters were ordered to bid as many as they should find, both bad and good to the marriage. It would therefore be, not humility, but even disobedience, to refuse the command of the king. And this is his commandment, that we believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ."

Here too is the annihilation of excuse. You will be able hereafter to plead no peculiarity in your circumstances as a reason for your irreligion. You will see persons at the right hand, of the same country, connexions, calling, condition; and of the same nature, weakness, passions, and depravity too, with yourselves. Truth will not allow you to say, I perished because there was no Saviour able or ready to save me; because no redress adequate to my relief was proposed to my hope, and placed within my reach. I sought deliverance, but could not obtain it. He turned away my prayer, and said, you are an exception—the benefit was free for all

—but you. No. You will have no cloak for your sin. No alleviation of your misery. This will be the hell of hell—You would not come to him that you might have life. You were soul-suicides. *You destroyed yourselves.*

SEPTEMBER 24.—“Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.”—John vi. 45.

MANY perhaps have never particularly observed this expression. But it is very instructive.

It shows us what faith is—It consists in coming to Christ. He is no more in the world, so as to be known after the flesh. The coming to him could not mean a corporeal approach, without excluding all now living, and all who have lived ever since, from the promise, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest: and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” Yea, when he was on earth, this coming intended much more than a bodily access to him, for he complained of those who were then near him and followed him, “ye will not come to me that ye might have life;” “ye also have seen me and believed not.” But it is a representation of faith by its operation and effect. Faith is not a mere notion or belief, but *such* a belief as is accompanied with an application to him for all the purposes of salvation—Therefore coming to him, and believing on him, are used by himself as synonymous with each other.

It reminds us also of the reasonableness of faith. Faith is not the offspring of presumption and ignorance: it flows from instruction, from divine teaching—“Every one, therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.” A fool only would entrust something immensely valuable to a being with whom he was unacquainted. I have ventured, says the Christian, such an interesting, such an infinite treasure in the hands of Christ, that I should be the most miserable of all creatures had I any suspicion concerning him. But I am not ashamed; I cannot be confounded. “I know whom I have believed, and am *persuaded* that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.” And every believer is able to give a reason of the hope that is in him. His house is great and weighty, and the fall would involve not only the furniture, but himself, and many a rain and many a flood will arise and be sure to try it; but he feels secure, because he is conscious that it is founded on a rock. It is therefore said, “they that know thy Name will put their trust in thee, for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.”

We see also the entire importance of the Lord Jesus. We cannot infer the value of a thing from the aim of men; they may attach themselves to a trifle, and expend their labour and sacrifices on a thing of nought. But the Lord is a God of knowledge; by him actions are weighed. And if God fixes upon an end, and always keeps it in view; and if, in all he says and does, he seeks the promotion of it, we may be assured that the object is unspeakably excellent and necessary. Now we here see that all the teaching of God, both in the revelation of the word and in the work of his Spirit, is designed to make us feel our need of Christ; and to induce us to

desire him, and to repair to him. This is telling us plain enough, that

“None but Jesus
Can do helpless sinners good.”

That there is salvation in none other ; that in him all fulness dwells ; that he is all, and in all.

Here is a rule for ministers to go by. If they would conform to the mind and method of God himself—and none teaches like him—every one that hears and learns of them will be guided to Christ, and will hear nothing but the call, “Behold the Lamb of God.” This is not the case with all preachers. If we were to hear and learn of some, they would lead us far enough from him ; we should be conducted to Epictetus, or Moses, or referred to our poor and wretched selves for righteousness and strength, instead of being left looking only unto Jesus, and crying, Lord, save, or I perish.

Finally, here is a test by which we may judge of our spiritual state. If we are a people of no understanding, he that made us will not have mercy on us, and he that formed us will show us no favour. Am I then taught of God ? Have I heard and learned of the Father ? How shall I answer this question, so essential to my peace and comfort ? *How do I stand with regard to Christ ?* Have I forsaken the world, and do my thoughts and desires reach out after him ? Is it the prevailing concern of my heart to win Christ ? to be found in him ? to know the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, and to be made conformable to his death ? Am I coming to him as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious ? This, this is the test—Every one that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto him ; and every one that cometh unto him hath heard and earned of the Father.

SEPTEMBER 25.—“And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.”—Matt. xiv. 12.

WHILE you sympathize with them in their loss, and applaud their conduct on the occasion, you are perhaps ready to envy them the privilege they enjoyed. “Ah ! happy disciples, to be able to repair to Jesus, and tell *him* your grief.” But *you* may do the same. He has said, Lo ! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. And therefore though he is no longer on earth corporeally, he is here spiritually. Though you cannot see him, you can approach him, and find him a very present help in trouble. Yea, you have the advantage of those who lived in the days of his flesh. He was not then in every place, but,

“Where'er we seek him he is found,
And every place is holy ground.”

They often had to go to a distance. Martha and Mary had to call in a servant, and send to him beyond Jordan, saying, “Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick.” But you can instantly fall upon your knees, and cry, “Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me ;” and prayer will reach him in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye—“Before they call I will answer. and while they call I will hear.”

Realise therefore the privilege; and remember that the best thing you can do with your trouble is to take it to him. This is sanctioned by the highest authority: "Is any afflicted? Let him pray."

It is recommended by experience:

"What various hindrances we meet
In coming to a mercy-seat:
Yet who that knows the worth of prayer,
But wishes to be often there."

Of all the millions that have tried it, there is not one but will say, "It is good for me to draw nigh to God:" and also add, "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen *thine* heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

There is nothing like the influence of the exercise, in calming the ruffled mind, healing the broken spirit, and preserving us from all the unhallowed feelings to which we are liable in the hour of distress.

To whom can we be so encouraged to go as unto him? Others are often wanting in kindness. Their patience is soon exhausted. By our continual coming we weary them. They may be in a selfish or pettish frame. They may be too busy to attend to our complaint. It may be deemed beneath their notice when they deign to regard us—What airs they give themselves—what difficulties they urge—what delays they require—how they love to make us feel our dependence—and how sure are they to remind us of our faults. But he upbraideth not. He despises not the prayer of the destitute. He is full of condescension and longsuffering. His heart is the dwelling-place of pity. He presses us to make free with him—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

If men were kind, they are often powerless. If their ear is open to hear, their hand is shortened that it cannot save. They may weep when we weep, and weep most of all that their resources cannot aid their affections. But nothing is too hard for the Lord. As to the trouble you take to him, he can explain it, and show you wherefore he contendeth with you. He can support you under it. He can deliver you from it. He can turn it into a blessing. He can enable you to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

Therefore go and tell Jesus. It is not in all cases and in all respects improper to unbosom yourselves to a fellow-creature, and especially a fellow-Christian; some solace and relief may be obtained: but, says Cowper—

"Were half the breath thus vainly spent,
To heaven in supplication sent,
The cheerful cry would oft'ner be,
'Hear what the Lord hath done for me.'"

Have you, like these disciples, been to the grave, and left your hope and comfort in the dust? Go and tell him who wept himself at the grave of Lazarus, and who can be better to you than ten sons.

Have you received intelligence that alarms or distresses you? Do as Hezekiah did—He went and spread the letter before the Lord.

Have you a heart's bitterness, known only to yourself, and which you feel not at liberty to divulge to any earthly connexion? There

is nothing but you may communicate to him. He enjoins you in every thing to make known your requests unto him.

Are you a backslider, and after knowing the evil of sin, and tasting that the Lord is gracious, have you turned again to folly? Have you said, I have loved idols, and after them will I go? "Oh! turn! turn again." "Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord." You will find him where, and what he was—the change has been only in you—

"Behold, great God, we come to thee,
Though blushes veil our face;
Constrain'd our last retreat to seek
In thy much injur'd grace."

And O thou sinner, just awakened to look into thy condition; and pressed with a sense of thy guilt, and depravity, and danger, art asking, "What must I do?" Go thou to him. Wait for nothing to recommend thee.—He looks for nothing. Throw thyself at his footstool. Say, "Lord, mine is a pressing case; I must obtain relief, or be undone for ever. Other refuge have I none. In thee is my help—Leave not my soul destitute." And he will not, he cannot reject thee; for he has said—**HIM THAT COMETH UNTO ME, I WILL IN NO WISE CAST OUT.**

SEPTEMBER 26.—"He hath given all things into his hand."—John iii. 35.

LOVE is always generous. It delights to heap favours upon its object; and never thinks it has done enough. But what munificence is here! "The Father loveth the Son, and **HATH GIVEN ALL THINGS INTO HIS HAND!**"

How far does this universality reach? If we compare the assertion with other passages of Scripture, especially with the words of our Saviour after his resurrection, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth;" and with the words of Paul, "He ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things:" we shall see that it cannot be taken too extensively.

It takes in all in nature. To him, as we learn from the application of the Apostle, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, David refers when he says, "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas." Accordingly in the days of his flesh all creatures confessed and obeyed his power. He made summer and winter. The day is his, the night also is his. The silver and the gold are his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. The world is his, and the fulness thereof—He is unworthy the name of a Christian who does not acknowledge his rights and agency in all the scenes of creation around him; walk with him in the bounties of the field; and the beauties of the garden; see him in the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys; and hear him in the voice of every bird, and the breeze of every wind.

It takes in all in Providence. All that is devised and carried on in our world is under his rule. The government is upon his shoul-

der. There is not a being to be found but is either his servant or his slave; who does not obey him voluntarily or by constraint. He doth according to his own will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand. He changes the times and the seasons. He removeth and setteth up kings. While they deal proudly, he is above them. While they follow their own passions they fulfil his designs. When they move in the line of his purpose they are resistless; and when they turn from it, and attempt to go forward, he has a hook for their nose, and a bridle for their jaws. The wrath of man praises him, and the remainder of wrath he restrains—like the owner of the mill, who admits the water as long as the grinding requires, and then drops the hatch. In all our temporal concerns he decides our successes or disappointments.

“If light attends the course I run,
 ’T is he provides the rays;
 And ’t is his hand that veils my sun,
 When darkness clouds my days.”

Sickness and health, the changes of life, the time, place, and manner of our death, are all regulated by him who “careth for us.”

It includes all in grace. The resources of the natural and providential worlds are his, to enable him to accomplish the work of grace. He could not make all things work together for the good of his people, unless they were put under him, and subjected to his control. But they are. He has power given him over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given him. He is made head over all things to the Church. Hence all his ways towards them are mercy and truth. He is also king in Zion. Every thing there is committed to his authority. He is the only Lord of conscience. He has the appointment of his own ordinances. He has given prophets, apostles, pastors, evangelists, teachers. All the influences of the Spirit are dispensed by him, and from him. Pardon and peace, righteousness and strength are in him—in him all fulness dwells. Therefore to him shall men come: to him shall the gathering of the people be.

It includes all in glory. At death he comes and receives the souls of his people to himself, that where he is there they may be also. At the last day he raises their bodies, confesses them before his Father and the holy angels, and ushers them into the joy of their Lord. That better world he viewed as his own, even here, and disposed of every thing in it as the owner and governor. “I appoint unto you,” said he to his disciples, “a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed me.” “This day,” said he to the dying thief, “thou shalt be with me in Paradise.” The righteous Judge, says the Apostle, shall give me the crown of righteousness: and all the rewards bestowed upon the churches in Asia were conferred by him—“The Father hath given all things into his hand.”

Therefore let his adversaries tremble. They may make war with the Lamb; but the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is King of kings, and Lord of lords. Escape is impossible. Resistance is vain—but submission is not.

And therefore if the Father has given all things into his hand, let us do the same. He is worthy of the surrender, and our interest

requires it. Let us give ourselves into his hand; and let us do this three ways or for three purposes—First, to be saved. Secondly, to be employed. And Thirdly, to be governed by him.

Then we may be joyful in him; and rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, exulting in the thought that he who is infinitely dear to us is so exalted, and that he on whom we entirely depend is so mighty. Then we shall have nothing to fear, but every thing to expect. Our welfare is involved in his advancement: and because he lives we shall live also. We are the followers, the friends, the children, the bride, the members of him who is higher than the highest—HE IS LORD OF ALL.

SEPTEMBER 27.—“We would not be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.”—2 Cor. v. 4.

HERE we see that it was not death they desired, but the result of it. They wished to resemble those who will be found alive at the last day, who will not sleep, but be changed: or to be privileged like Enoch and Elias, who went to heaven without dissolution, and were glorified soul and body together. They longed to be clothed, without being found naked—to be clothed upon—that this corruptible might put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality—that their mortality, instead of being lodged in the grave and devoured by worms, might be swallowed up of life, as the rivulet is swallowed up of the river, and the outline is swallowed up of the finished picture, and the dawn is swallowed up of the day, and the child of the man. That is, they wished, if it were possible and allowable, to reach their completeness gently and insensibly, without such a disruption and tearing to pieces as death. Three things may be remarked from hence.

First. The primitive Christians were not, as we sometimes imagine, peculiar beings, and strangers to many of our feelings. They were men of like passions with us, and encompassed with infirmities. They had nature in them as well as grace. They were holy, but human: spiritual, but not divine.

Secondly. A dislike of death is no proof of the want of religion. The forerunners and the accompaniments, “the pains, the groans, the dying strife,” may sometimes deeply affect a pious mind. No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it. No creature can like its own dissolution. We see this in the animals; though they have no dread of futurity, they yet struggle for life. The fear of death is as naturally inherent in us as hunger, thirst, and sleep; and only requires to be governed. Adam had it in the state of innocency, otherwise the words, “in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” would have been no threatening. Our Saviour, though his humanity was sinless, feared it, and prayed to him who was able to save him from death with strong cryings and tears, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. We may covet a thing, and not like the mode in which it is to be obtained. The husband and the father longs to see and embrace his family on the American shore, yet shrinks back at the thought of the Atlantic which he has to cross. A man is confined with a diseased mem-

ber, and his recovery depends upon the removal of it; now what he longs for is not the amputation, but the cure; and no one questions whether he wishes to be well because he shudders at the operation.

Yet, thirdly, since dying is the way, and the only way, to life everlasting, we should endeavour to rise as much as possible above the dread of it. And faith can accomplish what is impossible to flesh and blood. Let us view the subject under all the softenings given it in the Scripture. Let us remember that Jesus has taken away the sting of death, though the stroke remains: and that the stroke itself will not only be harmless, but beneficial, infinitely beneficial—To die is gain. Keep your eye not on what lies immediately before you, but on the glory and blessedness beyond. If the passage be trying, it opens into a wealthy place—and it is short—and safe—and you will not be alone in it. He has said, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” Therefore thank God, and take courage, and sing—

“ While he affords HIS aid,
I cannot yield to fear;
Though I should walk through death's dark shade,
My Shepherd's with me THERE.”

SEPTEMBER 28.—“ To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and PRECIOUS.”—1 Peter ii. 4.

EVERY attentive observer must be led to acknowledge the truth of Isaiah's words concerning the Messiah, “ He is despised and rejected of men.” When we look around us, we find the multitude rising early, and sitting up late, and eating the bread of sorrow, but not seeking after Jesus. Rejoicing in the work of their own hands, but not glorying in the Lord. This is a fact peculiarly painful to Christians, who, ever since the eyes of their understanding were opened, have been praying, “ Let the whole earth be filled with his glory.” But let them remember that he is not universally undervalued. There are some who know his name; yea, they have many and distinguished associates in their estimation of him.

They can claim God the judge of all—To him he is precious. “ This is my beloved Son,” says he, “ in whom I am well pleased.” “ Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighted.” Do we need proof of this? “ The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hands.” He forgives us “ for Christ's sake;” and assures us that whatsoever we ask “ in his name” we shall receive.

They can claim the innumerable company of angels. Though these glorious beings have not been redeemed by him, they know that he is their Maker and Preserver; and they know that he is the Saviour of their younger brethren. He was seen of angels as his attendants and admirers in the days of his flesh. They rejoice, because it is an accession to his subjects, over every sinner that repenteth. The sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow, are the things into which they desire to look. And what is the burden of their songs? “ I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders; and the number of

them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands : 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, and blessing."

They claim all the partakers of Divine grace. In whatever age and country they live : and whatever distinctions prevail among them, there is no difference here. Here they are of one heart and of one soul—For to them that believe he is precious.

In what degree ? This neither the tongue of men or of angels can express. But two things we may affirm. He is *universally* precious. There are some who may be termed Christ-dividers. They would be made the partakers of Christ, but partially. They like his cross but not his sceptre ; his sacrifice but not his service. But a real believer, when he, so to speak, examines Christ all over, acquiesces and delights in the whole of him. He is precious, says he, in his person, precious in his characters, precious in his relations, precious in his offices, precious in his life, precious in his death, precious in his doctrine, precious in his promises, precious in his commands—"Yea, he is *altogether* lovely." And he is *supremely* precious. Indeed we do not love him sincerely, unless we love him above all. No other regard becomes his claims. He is the king and the husband of his church ; and majesty and marriage allow of no competition of right, or rivalry of attachment. Children are dear, health is dear, life is dear ; but they are not to be compared with him. There is no one whose authority sways like his ; there is no one whose frown I dread, or whose presence I long for like his. Whom have I in heaven but thee ; and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee—

"All my capacious powers can wish,
In thee most richly meet ;
Nor to mine eyes is light so dear,
Nor friendship half so sweet."

SEPTEMBER 29.—"Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab ; be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler : for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land."—Isaiah xvi. 4.

THE Assyrians were going to invade Judea ; in consequence of which some of the people would flee for shelter to Moab, a neighbouring country. In the words we have read, God bespeaks protection on their behalf during their exile ; and intimates that their distress would be only short, owing to the destruction of the destroyer. There are several things here noticeable and instructive.

We see that Israelites may be "outcasts." They are not outcasts from God, for he does not cast away his people whom he foreknew. Fear may indeed lead them to say, "I am cast out of his sight ;" and to ask, "will the Lord cast off for ever, and will he be favourable no more ?" But this is their infirmity. What says the promise ? "Lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." But they may be outcasts with regard to thers. Outcasts by national distress ; for in this respect

all things come alike to all. Thus it was with the good Shunamite, whose son had been restored to life: Elijah said, "Arise, and go, thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the Lord hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years." So in the time of the Judges the same calamity prevailed; and "a certain man of Bethlehem-Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons." The want of employment also, as well as of provision, may compel to such a step. We have no pity on idlers: they that will not work should not eat: but it is hard to be willing to work, and be able to get nothing to do. A native country is dear, and a trifling cause will not, and *should* not induce us to leave it. Duty says, "Dwell in the land" as long as hope says, "Verily, thou shalt be fed:" but necessity has no law. Outcasts by the violence of persecution. Thus when the poor man, born blind, confessed the Saviour, and recommended his Benefactor, the Pharisees, it is said, "cast him out;" they drove him from the assembly and excommunicated him. At the time of Stephen's death "there was a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles." But these, though spared for the time, were also soon dispersed. How many outcasts were there from France upon the infamous revocation of the edict of Nantz? And how many, before the rights of conscience were acknowledged, left this country, and fled to America, carrying liberty and religion with them? And though now persecution is entirely unsanctioned not only by our constitution, but government, and no man can be made legally afraid, even when he calls his neighbour under his vine and under his fig tree, yet hardships are still endured by individuals from the carnal mind, that is enmity against God: and we have known wives that have been abandoned; children that have been disinherited; tradesmen that have been deserted; servants, mechanics, and tenants, that have been dismissed from their places, employment, and farms, because they adhered to their religious convictions. Outcasts by reproach. Where the person is not injured, and individuals are not deprived of their liberty or substance, the name may be cast out as evil. They may be viewed as hypocrites, as enthusiasts, as deranged, as melancholy, and be excluded from parties and circles as unworthy of their company, and fit only for scorn or pity. "Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy." For he that gathereth the outcasts of Israel—

Is not ashamed to own them as *his*—"My outcasts." Instead of despising them, he is the more ready to confess them when they suffer for his sake, or peculiarly need his favour. And though they may be poor, afflicted, and contemned, yet under every outward disadvantage they are more excellent than their neighbours, and he deems them his peculiar treasure. "When there were but a few men in number; yea, very few, and strangers in it. When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people; he suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reproved

kings for their sakes ; saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." When they were brickmakers in Egypt, he "gave Egypt for their ransom." When they were captives in Babylon, he gave "Ethiopia and Seba for them." "Since," says he, "thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee : therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." But read the language of the Apostle. "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth"—Yet adds he, "Of whom the world was not worthy."

He can raise up for them friends even among strangers and enemies. The Moabites were old, and had been often very cruel foes to Israel—yet says God, "Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab; and be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler." The people of the world ought to be kind to the people of God, for they owe much to them; they derive many exemptions and many advantages from their influence and prayers. But the world knoweth them not; and from their principles and dispositions we could look only for hatred and opposition. And yet "the earth helped the woman." The servants of God have often been succoured by persons as unlikely to serve them as the ravens were to bring Elijah food in the morning and in the evening. When you wish to carry a measure with your fellow-creatures, put the case into the hands of the Lord of all. Never limit his power or his goodness. He has not only all events, but all hearts under his controul; and he turneth them like rivers of water. The grand thing is to approve ourselves unto him: for when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh also his enemies to be at peace with him. This Jacob found, after prayer, in meeting Esau. Nehemiah prayed to the God of heaven, and the heathen monarch was induced to favour his wish on the behalf of his country. And at the three annual festivals of the Jews, when all the males were drawn to Jerusalem, and invasion seemed easy and inviting, he suffered none of the surrounding nations even to *desire* their border.

Finally, It is not long the Lord's sufferers will need assistance or protection. This was the case here; and we know how it was accomplished. The danger was great; the enemy had taken all the strongholds of Judah, and had encamped against Jerusalem itself. But there he was arrested and destroyed. This God foresaw, for he had purposed and promised it; and therefore he speaks of it as done already: "For the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land." The same may be said of all those that distress or alarm the Christian. He may be delivered from many of his difficulties and afflictions before death. But it is only during life he can want or suffer. How short therefore the season of trial! And much of this is gone already. Every day and hour your salvation is nearer than when you believed. A few more sighs, and all sorrow and sighing shall cease. A few more tears, and all tears shall be wiped from your eyes. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning; a morning obscured by no cloud, and followed by no

night. Yea, faith in the sure word of promise, realising not only the nearness, but the certainty, considers the salvation as accomplished—"It is done." "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling."

SEPTEMBER 30.—"Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses."—Hebrews xii. 1.

—WE should be encouraged to go on in our Christian course, or, as the apostle expresses it, "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." Let us notice the fact, and see how it bears as an argument. Some suppose that Paul here refers to spectators rather than examples. Persons in running a race had many gazing on them, and the presence of the lookers-on, as well as the prize itself, served to animate them. From hence, if successful, they were mortified as well as disappointed; if crowned, they were not only rewarded but applauded. It is a solemn truth that we are never unseen in religion; many eyes are upon us; and we should pray to be led in a plain path, because, as the margin reads it, of our observers. The world and the Church, our fellow Christians and our ministers behold us; we are a spectacle to angels as well as to men; we are seen by the Judge of all. But though this be a truth, we are persuaded the Apostle alludes not to spectators, but examples. He refers to the characters he had recorded in the preceding chapter, commencing with pious Abel, and reaching down to the close of the Maccabean period of the Commonwealth of Israel.

These he says, "encompass us about." Their bodies were long ago laid in the grave, while their spirits returned to God who gave them; and in this state it is commonly, perhaps justly supposed, that they have no intercourse with the affairs of this lower world; Abraham is ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledges us not. But, rescued from oblivion, their names, words, and deeds are found in the Scriptures; and by perusing these writings we bring them around us from every quarter; they strike us in every direction. We seem to see them looking anxiously on us, and seem to hear them saying, "We were once in the same state with you, and you will soon be in the same glory with us. Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

He remarks their number—"a cloud," "a great cloud of witnesses." They were few compared with their cotemporaries of the same age; but collectively considered, they were a multitude which no man could number. In the most degenerate period, the Lord had a people for his Name; and they often exceeded the estimation of hope. When Elijah supposed he was the only true worshipper in the land, the Lord had reserved unto himself seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal, and whose lips had not kissed him. But if the aggregate was great when Paul wrote this Epistle, what has it become since? And what is it now? How many millions have been added since to the general assembly and church of the first-born?—In whose fellowship we reckon up

not a few of our own connexions, with whom we have taken sweet counsel together, and gone to the house of God in company!

He gives this number a name—They are a great cloud of “witnesses”—This name God gives to all his people: “ye are my witnesses.” According to the Apostle, these glorified beings *testified* to the nature of faith, and proved it to be “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” They testified to the truth and the cause of God; and they testified by their lips and lives, and especially by their sufferings. They attested from experience that religion was a practicable thing, for they exemplified it, though they had been men of the same nature, passions, and infirmities with others. They showed also from their own experience that religion was not an unprofitable thing; they never served him in vain; but were always more than indemnified for every sacrifice they made. They all found it good to draw near to God. He was always better to them than their fears. He not only delivered but indulged them. They were troubled on every side, yet not distressed. They trod on briars and thorns, but their shoes were iron and brass. They had arduous services and trials, but as their days so was their strength. They always complained of themselves, but never of their Lord and Saviour—They spake well of his name, and have left this confirmed, this inviting testimony behind them, “O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.” “Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good.”

OCTOBER.

OCTOBER 1.—“As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness.”—Psalm xvii. 15.

THIS is the language of a man whose mind is made up; who has decided for himself; who does not suspend his conduct upon the resolution of others. “This is my choice, my hope, my relief, my comfort. If the whole world should go another way, this is mine. I would draw others, I would draw all into the same course, for I know the blessedness of it—But I dare not be governed by them—As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness.”

It is the language of a man rising in life, and with great prospects before him. From a mere shepherd he had become a hero and a conqueror; he had married into the royal family, and knew he was to fill the throne of Israel. All this he overlooks, like a true son of Abraham, who “by faith sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. The sun conceals the stars, not by a diffusion of darkness, but of superior splendor. To one who has looked within the veil, and seen the glory that shall be revealed, what are all earthly honours, riches and dominion. “Men of the world have their portion in this life—as for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness.”

It is the language of a Jew. Though the Jews lived under a dispensation abounding with carnal ordinances, some of them were far from being carnal men. Many of the promises addressed to them regarded the life that now is, and they had an obscurer revelation of a future state than we. Our Saviour tells his disciples that many prophets and kings had desired to see the things which they saw, and did not see them; and Paul says that life and immortality were brought to light through the Gospel. But this is to be taken comparatively, and not absolutely. In Judah was God known; his name was great in Israel. Jacob said, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord; but what salvation could he look for in death, unless a salvation beyond the grave. Moses "had respect unto the recompence of the reward." And David said, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness."

The source from which he derived his prospect of blessedness was God, in whose presence there is fulness of joy. If we do not make him the strength of our heart, and our portion forever, we may seek happiness, but we shall never find it. Had a capacity to make us happy been placed in any creature, we should have been necessarily attached to idolatry, by the very law of our being.

The *beholding of God's face* signifies two things. First, the enjoyment of his favour. In the Scripture, to seek his favour is to seek his face: and for God to make his face to shine upon us, is to be gracious unto us. Hence, says David, "there be many that say, Who will shew me any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." What can equal the expression of his love? In his favour is life. Secondly, intimate communion with him. David was so far reconciled to Absalom as to allow of his return to Jerusalem; but he said, "Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face." Angels are represented as "always beholding the face of our heavenly Father." And thus it is said of the glorified saints, "They shall serve him, and they shall see his face." That is, they shall enjoy the most perfect acquaintance and intimacy with him.

Of this beatifical vision we know very little, and very little can we know till the voice cries, "Come and see." But one thing we know—It is the way in which the blessedness will be realized: "I shall behold thy face *in righteousness*." Righteousness is not a casual or usual concomitant of the privilege, but an essential requisite to it. It is indispensable in two respects—as to merit or title—and as to meetness or preparation. The former is derived from the righteousness of another, in which Paul wished to be found, and which he calls the righteousness of God by faith; and which is for all and upon all them that believe. The latter is from a righteousness of our own; by which we mean, not that it is ours derivatively, but subjectively, being wrought *in us* by the influence of the Holy Spirit. The one is the righteousness of justification, the other the righteousness of sanctification: the one is a relative change, or the change of our state; the other a personal change, or the change of our nature. They are very distinguishable from each other, but they are always united, and they are equally necessary. A title to a thing is not a meetness for it: but the Apostle blesses God who

had made them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. That can never make us happy which is not adapted to our disposition. We cannot even hope for an object unless we value it and desire it: but our wishes follow our convictions and our feelings. No one longs for the heaven of a Christian but he who is renewed in the spirit of his mind; and he alone is capable of enjoying it—Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Therefore the decision is, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God: without holiness no man shall see the Lord. And the subjects of Divine grace do not feel this a hardship: *they* do not groan. What a sad thing it is that we cannot go to heaven unless we are sanctified: *they* love sanctification, and pray to be delivered from all their iniquities. Suppose a man had the promise of an estate, and was assured he should be put in possession of it as soon as ever he was recovered from sickness, would he, while suffering the effects of his vile and painful disease, say, How lamentable it is that I cannot be put into the enjoyment of my estate till I am well. He would feel that he could not enjoy it while the malady continued; and would long for his health, even for its own sake, if no inheritance followed the invaluable blessing itself.

OCTOBER 2.—“And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son!”—Luke iv. 21, 22.

This is all we have of his wonderful sermon at Nazareth. And who can fill up the outline? But while we want the matchlessness of his own exemplification, we have the text, and are able to discern something of the truth and force of the words in their bearing on him who spake as never man spake—“And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

It is useless to inquire, because it is impossible to determine, whether this scripture was one of the appointed lessons for the day, or whether he chose it purposely for the occasion, or whether it was the first passage that presented itself to his eye when he unfolded the roll. The latter would seem probable; yet, were this to be conceded, we must remember that he did nothing casually; accidental circumstances subserved his pleasure and were parts of his plan. But he asserts his qualification for his work and the design of his office. His mission was all mercy. He came not to condemn the world, but to seek and to save that which was lost. The statement more than implies the fallen perishing condition of mankind. The truth of the humiliating fact is the dark ground on which alone the glory of the Gospel can be displayed to advantage. If we deny it, the Gospel has nothing to do with us, and we shall have little to do

with the Gospel. But happy are they, however painful the conviction, who feel that they are in the state of wretchedness which the Gospel is intended to relieve. To them it will be *indeed* glad tidings. They will see that it is every way suitable to their woes and wants, and entirely adequate to their relief.

Draw near, and lay open your complaints. Are you "poor?" Envy not those who have an abundance of this world's goods. Let not your privations induce you to murmur or despair. You may be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. The poor have the Gospel preached unto them: and if you receive the message, it will bless your bread and your water; it will turn your humble dwelling into a heavenly palace; it will fill you with all the fulness of God—"He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor."

Are you "broken-hearted?" pressed down, crushed with fear and sorrow, arising from a sense of sin and guilt? A wounded spirit who can bear? But he healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up all their wounds. In other cases people are said to die of a broken heart; but here they will only die of a whole one. He is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit—"He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted."

Are you enslaved? There is no bondage like the bondage of corruption: no vassalage like the slavery of the soul under the dominion of sin, and when taken captive by the devil at his will. Have you felt the degradation and misery, and do you sigh for deliverance? Turn, ye prisoners of hope, to him who can make you free indeed—He is sent "to preach deliverance to the captives."

Are you "blind" as well as bound? This was the case with Sampson and Zedekiah; their oppressors having put out their eyes. We have known persons deprived of bodily sight who were able to see clearly the things of God: but multitudes who have corporeal vision are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart. They see no beauty nor comeliness in him who is fairer than the children of men. But he can open the eyes of the understanding, and make us wise unto salvation—He is sent "for the recovering of sight to the blind."

Are you not only bound, and blind, but "bruised?" Here is no tautology or excess—every word adds to the picture. Joseph's "feet were hurt with fetters; he was laid in irons." The magistrates commanded Paul and Silas to be "beaten;" and they were not only cast into prison, but "had many stripes laid upon them." Who can describe the injuries and sufferings of sinners! But he "sets at liberty them that are bruised."

Or are you in the condition of any or of all those among the Jews who were compassionated by the Jubilee, which returned every fiftieth year; when silver trumpets proclaimed through the land, "ye servants, you are now free from your masters. Ye debtors, you are now discharged from your creditors. Ye forfeiters of your estates, you have now your inheritances restored?" How would such an announcement be longed for—how "acceptable" would such a season prove to all who were to be relieved and enriched? "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound"—He preaches

“the acceptable year of the Lord.” The whole continuance of this dispensation, however, is only *a year*—and each of you has only *a day* of it—“Behold now is the accepted time; Behold now is the day of salvation.”

What effect has this discourse upon the audience? They were struck with admiration. But it is feared with nothing else—“all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph’s son?” They seem not firmly to have believed his declarations, or seriously to have considered his doctrine, or to have received the love of the truth, that they might be saved. If they had convictions they were ineffectual ones; or if their feelings were excited they were overpowered by their vain and worldly prejudices and passions: and therefore they begin cavilling, not indeed at his teaching, but at the meanness of his extraction. “Have we not lately seen him labouring like one of us? Are we to bow to his authority?”

“Lord, what is man!” How are the best means and opportunities rendered useless! Is it strange if modern ministers should complain of the want of acceptance and success, when even he could say, “I have spent my strength in vain?”

Yet we sometimes hope, though outnumbered by a vile majority whose astonishment soon issued in malignity, a few admired from other and better principles, and were ready to lift up their voice and cry, “Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.” So must it be with us, if we would not “wonder and perish.” How glorious his person! how divine his condescension! How full of grace and truth! We must love him. We must confide in him. We must apply to him for every purpose he is appointed to accomplish. We must feel the tendency of every view we take of his character, changing us into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth are enough to relieve every perplexity, to banish every fear, to surpass every hope, and to fill us with joy unspeakable, and full of glory—But they cannot profit, unless they are mixed with faith in those that hear them.

OCTOBER 3.—“Upholding all things by the word of his power.”—Heb. i. 3.

THIS is unquestionably spoken of the Lord Jesus. It shows us what is the nature and condition of creatures: they cannot subsist without support. They can no more of themselves continue in existence than they could give themselves life. In him they live, move, and have their being. “Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.” Preservation therefore is a divine work; and in a sense it is a continued creation. Yet he is equal to this; he does it; and observe—

The extent of his sustentation: he upholds “all things.” This takes in nothing less than our earth and the multitudes of beings attached to it. And what myriads of these are there! And the

eyes of all wait upon him; and he openeth his hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing. Yet what is our earth compared with the immensity of space? And what is the aggregate of creatures adhering to this mole-hill globe to the inhabitants of *all* other regions in the universe? Yet all—every worm—and every world is from him, and by him all things consists.

And see the ease and efficiency of his agency: he upholdeth all things “by the word of his power.” A man, however powerful, can do but little. A complication of concerns perplexes and bewilders him. The exertion of a few hours wearies and exhausts him. Impose upon him an increase of burden, and he founders and sinks. But “is any thing too hard for the Lord?” “If it be marvellous in your eyes, should it be marvellous in mine eyes, saith the Lord?” Rulers accomplish their wishes without moving; they can act by an order. The centurion was only an inferior officer, yet he could say to one of the soldiers under him, Go, and he went; to another, Come, and he came; and to his servant, Do this, and he did it. And he spake this in reference to the Lord Jesus with regard to a particular case, and to show his confidence in his powerfulness—that disorders come and go at his bidding. We read that “he sent his word and healed them,” that is, he commanded the cure, and thereby produced it. “At my rebuke,” says he, “I dry up the sea.” “He rebuked,” it is said, “the winds and the waves, and there was a great calm.” With the same facility and majesty he made the world; “He spake and it was done, he commanded, and it stood fast.” “He said, Let there be light, and there was light.” So will it be hereafter with all the millions of the dead; “all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and come forth.” What difficulty, then, can lie in his way? Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain. It is only for him to speak, and the heathens shall cast their idols to the moles and to the bats, and Mahometanism shall perish, and the Jew look upon him whom he has pierced, and mourn, and the man of sin be destroyed, and in the churches of the faithful, every plant which our heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up—And “he that sitteth upon the throne saith, Behold, I make all things new.”

And is this spoken of him who lay in the manger and died upon the cross? Can he then be any thing less than “the Lord of life and glory,” “in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily?”

It is this that displays and magnifies his condescension. His greatness was unsearchable, but he made himself of no reputation. Widows ministered to him of their substance. “Ye know the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich.”

OCTOBER 4.—“Is this thy kindness to thy friend?” 2 Sam. xvi. 17.

THIS was the inquiry or complaint of Absalom, addressed to Hushai, because he went not with him. Let us transfer it to a nobler being, and apply it to a juster occasion.

Jesus sustains the character here expressed, towards all his people. He gives them numberless proofs of a friendship the most sincere,

efficient, faithful, durable, and disinterested: he is "a friend, that sticketh closer than a brother." But they often act towards him in a manner very unbecoming the relation, and induce him to ask, "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?"

It will be allowed that we can never discharge the obligations we owe him. We must lie for ever under the burden; but the "burden is light." Nothing is more painful than to be obliged to an enemy; but we feel otherwise when favoured by a benefactor we much regard and esteem. If I could save myself; if I could renew, keep, and glorify myself, I would infinitely rather my Lord and Saviour accomplished it; as it would show his love for me, and his presence with me; and I should endlessly feel myself indebted to him, and say, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain. But though we cannot discharge our obligations, we ought to be sensible of them, and evince that we are willing to make him suitable returns, and, like the woman in the Gospel, to do what we can. Here, alas! he is often disappointed. He cannot indeed be disappointed as to fact, because his understanding is infinite; but he can be disappointed as to right. Surely he has a right to expect a certain kind of conduct from those he has so indulged; and not meeting with it he has surely reason to complain—and he *does* complain. "What more," says he, speaking of the Jewish church, "could have been done for my vineyard, and I have not done it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" And speaking of the same people under the emblem of a fig tree, "These three years," says he, "I come seeking fruit, and find none."

Surely, as our friend, he has a right to expect that we should readily obey him. If ye love me, keep my commandments. He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. And as none of these commandments are unreasonable or unprofitable, and as they afford expressions of our attachment to him, they ought not to be grievous. But have we never drawn back, or turned aside; or been partial, or reluctant in duty? Have we always asked, with Saul of Tarsus, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" or resolved with Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth?"

Surely, as our friend, he has a right to expect that we should own him, speak well of his name, and recommend him to others. Have we sought his glory? Have we laboured to advance his cause in the world? Have we endeavoured to make him known and endeared in the circle of our own connections? Have we not in some companies blushed to have found out what we profess to believe? Have we not been ashamed of him and of his words? He, though passed into the heavens, is not ashamed to call us brethren: and shall we deny him before men?

Surely, as our friend, he has a right to expect that we should credit his word. We cannot offer a greater indignity to another than to disbelieve his declarations. The affront would be aggravated if he was a person remarkable for veracity, and we ourselves had always seen nothing in him but truth and faithfulness. But suppose he had added an oath, which ends all strife, to his promises? By disbelieving him *then*, we should charge him not only with falsehood but perjury. And is not this applicable to us? How

should we tremble at the nature and consequences of unbelief? Ah! my Lord, I hear thee saying, Is this thy kindness to thy friend? Yes; I have not only contradicted thee—I have not only given thee the lie—but made thee to forswear thyself! and I cry out with tears, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

As our friend he expects that we should lay aside formality and reserve—that we should treat him with freedom and openness—that we should feel it not a task but a pleasure to come to his house—that we should never be afraid of offending him by the largeness of our applications, or wearying him by the frequency of our importunities. For he has commanded us to come boldly to the throne of grace; in every thing to make known our requests; to open our mouths wide; to ask and receive, that our joy may be full. But though we are not straitened in him, how straitened are we in ourselves! How cold, and distant, and suspicious, and fearful, often is our intercourse with him. How little do we honour him by our confidence!

As our friend he expects that we regard his connexions. “Is there any left of the house of Saul,” said David, “that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” Jesus has brethren and sisters on earth, who are afflicted and poor, and feel all the exigencies of life. But we may ask, “Since they are so nearly related to him, why does he permit their want and distress?” It is partly for our sakes. He deposes them to live among us, to receive the tokens of our attachment to himself. We cannot sigh for opportunities to testify our regard, by saying, “Oh, if he were in the world again as he once was, how would I minister unto him; how would I open my doors and entertain him”—For he *is* in the world. The poor we have always with us. What we do unto one of the least of these his brethren, we do it unto him.

As our friend, if he has left us a memento to recall him to our minds, he expects that we should prize and observe it. Have we ever closed the eyes of a much loved connexion, and have we in our possession a picture of him? How much do we value, and how often do we contemplate the inanimate shadow. But suppose the painting should represent him in the attitude of dying, and dying *for us*, while endeavouring to save us from fire, or water, or the stroke of the murderer—What is his own supper but such a likeness? Does it not show forth his death? Is he not before our eyes, evidently set forth crucified among us, and sacrificed for us? Do this, he said, in remembrance of me. And can we undervalue it? Can we neglect it? Neglect it constantly? Neglect it often? Is this thy kindness to thy friend?

Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Let us not be unwilling to receive the rebuke. It is indeed humbling; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Let us learn to demean ourselves towards him in future more properly. Let us watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation. Let us search and try our ways, and turn again unto the Lord. Let us look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn. Let us grieve that he is wounded in the house of his friends. Above all, let us grieve that we ourselves ever grieved his Holy Spirit. Indeed, if I am his, and in a proper state of mind, nothing will affect me like

this—"I have acted an unworthy, an ungrateful part"—I have sinned against my best friend—

"Sure were not I most vile and base,
I could not thus my friend requite ;
And were not he the God of grace,
He'd frown and spurn me from his sight."

OCTOBER 5.—"Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also."—Acts xii. 1, 2, 3.

PERSECUTION is a thing of which we happily know very little from experience. We are a sinful people, but blessed be God, persecution is not a national crime with us ; yea, it is even punishable ; and conscientiousness is placed under legal protection. But while we rejoice in our privileges, and pray that God would preserve and prosper a country in which we sit under our own vine and fig tree, and none can make us afraid ; we do well to call to remembrance the former times, in which others endured a great fight of afflictions.—Four things are remarked concerning the persecution before us.

First, the season—"Now about *that* time"—What time ? When, as we see from the conclusion of the preceding chapter, a great dearth prevailed throughout all the world, in the days of Claudius Cæsar. Every public calamity is a judgment for sin, and calls men to repentance : but it is dreadful when the design of Providence is frustrated, and men go on in their trespasses, and instead of returning to him that smiteth them, sin more and more against God. Yet so it was here. God's hand was lifted up, but they would not see : and while famine was stalking among them, and they had cleanness of teeth in all their borders, they are fighting against God, in the guilty and cruel business of persecution.

Secondly, the author—"Herod the king." Not the Herod under whom our Saviour was born : nor Herod the tetrarch of Galilee, who beheaded John : but Herod Agrippa, father of the king Agrippa whom Paul had almost persuaded to be a Christian. We know but little of him ; and that little only shows his vileness. He reigned seven or eight years, and then departed disgracefully to meet a Being who will have a dreadful account to settle with tyrants and persecutors. Such wretches seldom die a timely and natural death. Here is the end of this child of the devil and enemy of all righteousness : "Upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory ; and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost."

Thirdly, the victims. Some of them are only adverted to—He stretched forth his hands to vex "certain of the Church : " and nothing more is said of them. We have the names of many of the sufferers for Christ, together with some of their dying words, and letters, and works, and which savour fragrantly of the prison ; but a very large portion of the noble army of martyrs are unnoticed in the annals of history. They are indeed recorded in the book of life,

and Jesus will confess them before his Father and the holy angels : but they were driven into exile, or pined away by disease in their dungeons, or were secretly dispatched, a spectacle to angels, but not to the world and to men. One of these victims however is here named. "He killed *James* the brother of John with the sword." James was a preacher. In the Church of God the post of honour has always been the post of danger : and he was the more likely to be laid hold of, as he was one of the two apostles called Boanerges, or sons of thunder, because they were rousing, bold, and fearless in their manner. He was also one of the two who wished to call for fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans, and would thus have been (Lord, what is man!) a persecutor himself: but "Jesus rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: for the Son of man is come not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." He was also one of the two sons of Zebedee, who persuaded their mother to desire a certain thing of our Lord: "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom." But Jesus answered, "Ye know not what ye ask, are ye able to drink of the cup I drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them: Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with"—Looking forward in spirit at that very moment, and seeing John banished to the Isle of Patmos, and James beheaded of Herod!

Fourthly, the continuance—"And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also." And did it please the Jews? Then were they equally guilty. They who connive at the wickedness of others—who excite and encourage it, and feel a satisfaction in it, have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, and are partakers of other men's sins—Yea, according to the Apostles, they are the most criminal "who take pleasure in them that do such things." The perpetrators may be strongly tempted, but the beholders can plead no such excuse; their delight shows congeniality with the wickedness itself.

But here we see how alive men are to the opinion and applause of their fellow creatures. Even the great can inhale incense from the vulgar: and even the wise are not senseless to the flattery of fools. What enemies are men to men! How they influence and corrupt one another! Alone the individual feels well; and resolves; and abides by his resolution—till he gets into company. Alone he feels the evidence of truth—Why then does he not hear it, follow it, avow it? A frown, a sneer, a laugh, a name! Did Felix think the Apostle deserving imprisonment? No. "But willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, he left Paul bound." Why did not many among the Pharisees believe on him whose miracles they could not deny? They *did* believe on him, but "feared to confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Let us learn to act from principle; and dare to be singular if the course of duty demands it. Let this desire of approbation turn us towards God. Let us seek to please him. The attempt will involve us in no mean compliances; and it will be sure to succeed.

We also see how, in a bad course, men proceed from evil to evil, and wax worse and worse. One sin renders another necessary, or prepares the way for it, and renders it easier. Let us guard against beginnings. Let us crush the egg before it becomes a fiery flying serpent. "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death"—"He proceeded to take Peter also."

OCTOBER 6.—"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus."—Heb. xii. 1, 2.

THE language is allusive, and in the style of the Apostle, the comparison is familiar. As one of the games, celebrated with so much pomp among the Grecians, was running in a race, he often borrows an idea from it, to express in a measure the nature of the Christian life. It is a "race." It is needless to multiply articles of resemblance. It is easy to see the impression Paul would make: no prize without running: no heaven without diligence and zeal. Religion demands the full exertion of all our spiritual powers, and allows of no indolence, no repose. Whatever view we take of it, whether as it regards our principles or our conduct, what we have to abolish or establish, to avoid or to pursue; or whether as it includes the duties we owe to God, our fellow-creatures, and ourselves;—it must appear a very active, laborious, and trying scene. It is a disgrace to the character of a Christian, and a contradiction to his profession, not only to turn aside or draw back, but to stand still, or look back, or even seem to come short. Advancement is not more obviously implied in the accomplishment of a race than progression is necessary in a course of godliness. We are therefore required to grow in grace. And Paul, exemplifying in his experience what he recommends in doctrine, says, "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

This race is "set before us"—It is prescribed, marked out, made evident in the Scripture. It is not a concern into which we drop by chance; neither is it a course of our own devising. Religion is not will-worship, human inventions, the traditions and commandments of men. No authority is binding here but Divine. We have always one question only to ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And he has in his word made things plain, in proportion as they are important, so that the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein, and he may run that readeth. He has also set before us the difficulties attached to this course, so that if we suffer we have no reason to complain. If, when we meet with them, we are tempted to despond or decline, we may say, O my soul ought I to be surprised? Am I deceived? when I gave in my unworthy name to become his follower, did he hide any thing from me? Did he not assure me that in the world I should have tribulation? Did he not say, If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me?

This race set before us is to be "run with patience." We shall constantly need this grace. We shall meet with provocations and injuries; and we are not to revenge ourselves, or even render railing

for railing, but contrariwise, blessing. We shall suffer afflictions of various kinds and degrees; and we are not to murmur and repine, but in patience to possess ourselves, and to pray for all longsuffering with joyfulness. We may be exercised with delays; and these will often be peculiarly trying, for hope deferred maketh the heart sick. God hides his face. Prayer seems unnoticed. The promise appears gone for evermore. We have little success in our spiritual warfare. Iniquities prevail against us in the sense of their guilt and the feeling of their power. The way is long. Heaven looks at an awful distance, and seems to advance from us as we advance. Without are fightings, and within are fears—But we must persevere, and “by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and, immortality.” It is not the first, but the last step in the race, that brings the candidate to the goal. He only that endureth to the end shall be saved.

This race set before us we are thus to run with patience, “looking unto Jesus.” The Apostle had mentioned a great cloud of witnesses before as exciting and encouraging us by their example: but he now passes from the saints to the Saviour; from the servants to the Master; from the witnesses of faith to “the author and finisher of faith.” He himself had an appointed course; he had difficulties to overcome, and much to endure: but he was not impeded or dismayed—“For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” That the Apostle *immediately* refers to him as our example is obvious not only from the foregoing words, and the words I have just recited, but from the application following: “For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds”—So Watts—

“Our glorious Leader claims our praise.
For his own pattern given;
While the long cloud of witnesses
Show the same path to heaven.”

But does this exclude any other reference? Are we to regard him as an example only? We cannot indeed be Christians without resembling him. “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his.” “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked.” And every Christian loves his example, and prays to be likeminded with him. Yet what is the true exigency of our case? We are guilty—Where is the sacrifice that puts away sin? “We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.” We want righteousness and strength—Where are we to find them? “Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength.” How are we to be able to trace his dear steps as he goes before us in duty and suffering? “Without me,” says he, “ye can do no thing:” but “my grace is sufficient for thee.” We must therefore run, looking unto Jesus as delivered for our offences, as raised again for our justification, as one who ever lives to make intercession for us, as one in whom all fulness dwells, and from whose fulness we are to receive grace for grace. To him we are to look in every period, in every relation, in every engagement, in every trouble, in every danger, while we live—To him we are to look as we pass

through the valley of the shadow of death—And then we are to go and behold him in the midst of the throne, where he attracts every eye, fills every heart, and employs every tongue.

OCTOBER 7.—“And prayed unto him.”—2 CHRON. xxxiii. 13.

Few individuals ever surpassed Manasseh in depravity and wickedness. Yet he, even he, obtained mercy. And we here see the means employed for his conversion. Divine Providence so ordered things, that the enemy invaded Judah, and succeeded: “Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.” *There* thus despoiled, degraded, and distressed; *there* the seeds of truth early sown in his mind began to revive; *there* the prayers of a pious father began to be answered—“and prayed unto him.”

Affliction alone never converted one soul. We have known fools who have been brayed in a mortar, yet has not their folly gone from them. Ice may be broken and not dissolved: rock may be broken and the factions retain the same hardness as before. Yet there is a natural suitableness in affliction to produce the effect. It shows what an evil and bitter thing sin is, as the procuring cause of all our sufferings. It cuts the man off from present temptation; and affords him time and leisure for reflection; and the want of thought is the greatest obstacle to religion: hence the Scripture says, “Consider your ways:” and hence David acknowledges, “I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.” It shows the vanity of the world, and affords opportunity to introduce the proposal of a better portion; and to urge the resolution, “Therefore will I look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation.” It befriends confession and prayer; therefore says God, “I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early.” The bemoaning and repenting Ephraim had been chastised. The famine made the Prodigal think of heaven, and resolve to throw himself upon his Father’s mercy.

Here is therefore a very instructive fact. It teaches us that prosperity is no proof of Divine favour; and that adversity is not incompatible with the love of God, but may even flow from it. We congratulate our friends on their successes and risings in the world; but frequently if we could see all we should rather bewail them; for we should see their table becoming a snare, and their prosperity destroying them. On the other hand, we go and mourn with them over their losses and trials, when, if we could look forward, we should rather rejoice and be thankful; for we should see the valley of Achor given them for a door of hope; the ploughshare breaking up the fallow ground to prepare it for the seed of the kingdom; the way hedged up with thorns to keep the traveller from going astray. How should we have pitied Manasseh, had we seen him reduced from all his greatness, and thus indignantly and cruelly treated. But he soon acknowledged, with his pious ancestor, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted;” and he is now blessing God, not for his crown,

but for his fetters—not for his palace, but for his dungeon.—“This man was born there.”

Let us always look hopefully towards the afflicted. While the physician yet administers medicine we do not deem the case absolutely hopeless: while the husbandman prunes the tree, and digs about it, and manures it, we conclude he has not yet said to the feller, “Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground.”

O what fools are we to look shy upon our troubles, and be afraid of our trials, instead of viewing them as some of the means of grace which God has ordained to bring us to himself. Let us not think of the bitterness of the draught, but of the sweetness of health which it is designed to produce. “We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

OCTOBER 8.—“Verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”—MATT. xiii. 17.

SOME may suppose that our Lord here uses what scholars call an anticlimax, and be ready to say, Surely “a prophet” is above “a righteous man.” Yet there is wisdom and design in the order in which he has mentioned these characters. A prophet was not necessarily a righteous man. Balaam prophesied, but followed the wages of unrighteousness. And the Saviour assures us that he will disown many in the last day as workers of iniquity, who prophesied in his name, and in his name did many wonderful things. And when the Apostle exhorts the Corinthians to covet earnestly the best gifts, he adds, And yet I shew unto you a more excellent way—adding, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” So superior is grace, not only to all natural, but even supernatural endowments and capacities. He that humbled himself as a little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of God. O that we were wise, that we understood this! But here we see the folly of men, who are eager to join those distinctions which are confined to few, and never insure eternal life, while they disregard those privileges which always accompany salvation, and lie open to all. And we see the goodness of God in rendering what is essential to our highest welfare universally accessible. All cannot amass wealth, but all may be rich in faith:

all cannot rise in the state, but all may sit with Christ in the heavenly places; all have not opportunity or capacity to acquire human learning, but all may become wise unto salvation. None can be "prophets" now, but all may be "righteous men."

We here see that the desires of the great and the good are not always gratified. We think it hard when the schemes on which we set our fond hearts are denied us. But we must learn to leave our wishes with God, and refer them to his goodness and wisdom. There may be reasons, for the refusal of which we have no apprehension. He is often constrained to say to us, "Ye know not what ye ask." Let the Lord choose our inheritance for us. And let us not murmur or complain if we are called to drink of the same cup with the most dear and eminent of his servants. Moses, who had conducted his charge for forty years, and brought them to the border of the promised land, was forbidden to enter, and no importunity could revoke the mortifying sentence. David, who so anxiously longed to build the temple of the Lord, and for which he had been preparing materials all through life, was not allowed the pleasure. "And many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."

They who have known something of the cause and glory of Christ will long to see and hear more. These persons had been favoured with some information concerning the Messiah, otherwise they could not have expressed these desires; for we cannot desire what we are entirely ignorant of: but the glimpse made them eager for the vision, and the dawn for the full day: the assurance made them eager for the reality, and the foretastes for the full fruition. It is always so. Knowledge keeps the possessor from self-satisfaction: and the more proficiency a man makes in any art or science the less will he be disposed to say, "I have attained, I am already perfect." It was a man who had seen more of the glory of God than any human being, who cried, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." Let a Christian know as much of Christ as Paul did, and he will think he knows nothing, and exclaim, "That I may know him."

In the knowledge God communicates to his creatures there are various degrees. The patriarchs knew more than the descendants of Seth before the Flood. The Jews under Moses and the Prophets knew more than the patriarchs. John's disciples knew more than the Jewish Church before them. The disciples of Jesus knew more than the disciples of John: and he that was least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than John himself. And how much more did the Apostles themselves know after the effusion of the Holy Ghost than before, according to the intimation and promise of the Saviour, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now: howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all truth." And the same remark holds with regard to personal experience. There are many classes of scholars in the same school of Christ. How wise are some Christians! how clear, and full, and influential are their views of Divine truth. How cloudy and indistinct are the conceptions of others: they resemble the half-enlightened patient in the Gospel, who "saw men as trees walking." The stations and callings of men differ; and some require more

knowledge than others. We are like the members of the body, all are necessary, but all have not the same office. The eye is for seeing, the hand for working: the one requires light; the other strength.

Above all we should learn from hence to compare our advantages with those of others. If superior, their pre-eminence should be applied to three purposes. First, to produce gratitude. "He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord." Not that our gratitude is to turn on the destitution of others: but we need contrasts to excite our feelings. Thus, to induce us the more to be thankful for health, we compare ourselves with those who are made to possess months of vanity, and have wearisome nights appointed unto them. And thus we teach our children to say,

"Not more than others I deserve,
Yet God hath given me more;
For I have food while others starve,
Or beg from door to door."

And did we deserve our religious privileges? Did it depend upon us in what country we should be born, whether heathen or Christian, popish or protestant? Or from what parents we should descend, whether such as would neglect our souls or bring us up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Who sent us an evangelical ministry? Why have we been fed with the choicest of the wheat, and with honey out of the rock have we been satisfied? "Not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy name be glory." Secondly, to promote holiness. It would be shameful if persons below us in means and advantages should be above us in attainment and practice. Surely there is to be a correspondence between privilege and duty. He who holds the largest farm must expect to pay the largest rent. Where much is given much will be required. "What do ye more than others?" The Lord does not look for much where he bestows little; and he will not accept of little where he bestows much. Thirdly, to awaken fear. "That servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." And what ignorance can we plead? Or what want of motive? Or what refusal of assistance? "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." How did our Saviour upbraid the cities in which he had done so many mighty works, because they repented not: "Wo unto thee, Chorazin! wo unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you."

OCTOBER 9.—"All the house of Israel are hardhearted."—EZEKIEL iii. 7.

How is this charge to be taken? There are two things in which hardness of heart is to be known; insensibility and inflexibleness.

A hard heart is an *insensible* heart. The Apostle speaks of "men being past feeling." This is to be restrained to its subject. He does not refer to inhumanity, but impiety. Persons may have

feeling in other things, but here the senselessness regards "the things of the Spirit." Feeling, though not the noblest of our senses, is the most necessary and extensive: other senses are confined to particular parts, but feeling is diffused over the whole body. When there is no feeling in a member there is no more intercourse of the animal and vital spirits: and where feeling is totally absent there are no remains of life. There may be life where other senses are wanting. A man may be deaf and alive, blind and alive, scentless and alive; but if he has no feeling he must be dead. Upon the same principle the Apostle says men are "dead in trespasses and sins;" and as a dead body is insensible to material things around it, so it is with the unrenewed soul! it meets all the objects and agencies of the spiritual world with indifference and unconcern. Though he is charged with numberless transgressions, and the wrath of God abideth on him, he is sensible of no burden, and though destruction and misery are in his ways he is secure and unalarmed.

A hard heart is an *inflexible* heart.

It does not yield to *the dictates of his word*. At this a good man trembles. As he turns to the Scriptures he says, I will hear what God the Lord shall speak: but the hardened sinner says, with Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?" He may not indeed in so many terms, but he really says unto God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Though God reproveth, encourages, asserts his authority, displays the reasonableness of his commands, addresses our hope and our fear, draws back the veil that hides the eternal world, and sets life and death, blessing and cursing, before them, they turn away from him that speaketh, and reject the counsel of God against themselves.

It does not yield to the *dispensations of his providence*. God begins perhaps with others; and a good man when he sees their visitations, says with David, "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments." It is the design of them: "I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant. I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; but they rose up, and corrupted all their doings." He then comes nearer, and strikes themselves. He afflicts them in time, that they may not be condemned for ever. But they regard the suffering as the effects of chance; they feel the pain, but never think of the procuring cause, which is sin, or the final cause, which is their spiritual profit. Yea, sometimes instead of falling in with the design, they directly oppose it; when stricken they strike again; they rush upon the thick bosses of his buckler, and "say in the pride and stoutness of heart, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars." Nothing can be more offensive to God than such stubbornness as this;—"In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz." It is equally inflexible to kindness and mercy. Other creatures live upon God, but they are incapable of knowing the source of their supplies; but the inspiration of the Almighty giveth man understanding, and enables him to see the cause and author of all good; and a tender heart would love and acknowledge

the donor in his bounties. They are designed to encourage and allure us: they are cords of a man and bands of love, by which he would draw us to himself. And "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."

It yields not to *the motions of his Spirit*. When Paul reasoned before Felix of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled; but instead of cherishing the conviction he endeavoured to get rid of it, by dismissing Paul till a more convenient opportunity; and carefully avoiding the topic when they met. Israel not only rebelled, but "vexed his Holy Spirit." The old world, by the preaching of Noah, was addressed and often excited, as we find implied in the words, "My spirit shall not always strive with man upon the earth." Who has not felt motives which have almost persuaded him to be a Christian? Who has not formed resolutions to abandon the world, and cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart? Who has not had softenings of heart, in which he was drawn into retirement, and pouring out tears unto God, said, Lord, I am thine, save me? What difficulties have many had to overcome before they could advance in a sinful course? They had to break through mercies and judgments: to throw down friends and parents who kindly opposed them; yea, to trample under foot the Son of God, and do despite unto the spirit of grace—

O seek deliverance from this evil if you are the subjects of it. Remember that it is a most dreadful curse, and will be sure to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath. But reflect still more upon its vileness, and say, O what a hateful heart is mine that feels nothing! Yields to nothing! Pray earnestly. And be encouraged by the promise, "I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." Place yourselves near the cross; and look on him whom you have pierced.

And if you are saved from this evil be thankful. "But I know not that I am saved from it. I feel such unsuitableness to duty, and such dullness, such deadness in it!" But if you were impenitent, how could you *feel* this? You should rather say, with Cowper,

"Cold as I feel this heart of mine,
Yet, since I feel it so,
It yields some hope of life divine
Within, however low."

OCTOBER 10.—"All thy children shall be taught of the Lord."—ISAIAH liv. 13.

ALL therefore want tuition. We are naturally ignorant, as well as guilty, and depraved, and helpless. Knowledge is not innate, but acquired. Some are always extolling nature at the expense of art: yet what would the earth be without cultivation? What would a garden be if left without keeping and dressing, but a little wilderness of barrenness and rudeness, of weeds and thorns? Such would a child be if left to himself. What makes the greatest difference between one man and another? Not the body, the limbs, the senses—In all these the savage may have the advantage: but the difference is in their minds: and the difference in their minds is

chiefly owing to education. Few indeed will deny this ; but many are unwilling to acknowledge their spiritual ignorance, and in the concerns of religion suppose that the way of man is in himself, and that it is in man that walketh to direct his steps. Yet though vain man would be wise, he is born like a wild ass's colt. The world by wisdom knew not God ; with all their advances in civilization and science, professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. And what is the fact with regard to every unconverted sinner ? He is alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him, and because of the blindness of his heart. To enable a blind man to see it is necessary not only to bring the lamp, but to open his eyes : and the Scripture speaks of opening the eyes of the understanding, and giving us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ.

God's teaching therefore is twofold. First, external. He thus teaches us by all his works, which praise him. The heavens declare his glory, the firmament showeth his handy work, and there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. But he has magnified his word above all his name. The Scripture is given by inspiration of God. The knowledge of the grand truths in the Gospel depended entirely on the sovereign pleasure of the Almighty. We had sinned, and were left to his mercy ; and it was for him to determine whether we should be saved, and in what way. And how could this determination be discovered ? Not by any process of reasoning, but by testimony, and his own testimony : "As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his spirit : for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him ? even so, the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." And this book contains all the information God chooses to afford us on this side the irradiations of eternity. Jesus, near two thousand years ago, was the finisher as well as the author of faith, and a curse was annexed to the man who should add to the words of the book, as well as to him who should take away. As we look for no new doctrine, prophecy, promise, or precept, so we need none. Here is information enough, if we understand, and feel, and practice it. And it is the office of the Spirit to lead us into all truth—

And thus the Lord teaches internally. For revelation does not supersede our dependence on the agency of divine grace. David, who had the word, yet prayed, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Here is the book, but who teaches us to read ? Who removes our carelessness, and fixes our minds ? Who subdues our prejudices, and gives us a holy taste, so that our delight is in the law of the Lord, and we meditate in it day and night ? Who shows us not only the reality, but the beauty and glory of divine things, and gives them by faith a residence and an empire in the soul ? What a difference is there between speculation and experience ? Between the convictions of the judgment and the decisions of the will and the ardour of the affections ? The knowledge he imparts descends from the head into the heart.

The illumination he spreads is not the cold barren light of the moon, but the shining of the spring sun, which not only enlightens, but warms and enlivens, and fills the earth with fertility and beauty.

Let this direct and encourage us. It is the Lord alone that teaches us to profit: he alone can render the most common truth impressive and influential. Moses had seen the Egyptians destroyed in the Red Sea, and all the multitudes of his brethren buried in the wilderness. And needed he to be taught the doctrine of mortality? Knew he not that the days of our years are threescore years and ten? and that the period of human life is as uncertain as it is short? Yet he felt that no less a teacher than God was necessary to instruct him properly: and therefore he prays, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." And do we not see the need of this continually? Our neighbours fall around us. Death enters our houses. We feel the attacks of disease; and the decays of nature; and yet how do we live? as dying creatures? or as those who suppose they are to live here always?

But while we feel our need of this teaching let us remember that he gives his holy Spirit to them that ask him. If we perish for lack of knowledge, our sin will lie at our own door. "If any lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." We are incapable of conducting ourselves, but here is an infallible Director, who offers to accompany us, and would never leave us nor forsake us, and requires nothing but our submission—May the language of my heart be, "Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day."

OCTOBER 11.—"Man dieth."—JOB xiv. 10.

BUT how came he to die? He was not made mortal like the beasts that perish. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, because all have sinned."

But now there is not a day, or an hour, or a moment, in which man dieth not. The frequency of the occurrence hinders much of the force and seriousness of the impression it is otherwise so adapted to produce. "They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish for ever without any regarding it." And not only the commonness but the irksomeness of the event is unfriendly to consideration. The subject is too gloomy and repulsive to engage the thought of the generality of mankind: and the main concern of thousands is to keep it, or banish it from their minds. Yet their putting the evil day far off is not putting it away. The way to die safely is to die daily. Young says, "Familiar thoughts will smooth the road to death:" and the royal preacher tells us, "sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart."

We often see a fellow-creature in situations and circumstances peculiar to himself, and in which we shall not be called to follow

him : but when we see man dying we behold an emblem and an instance of our own destiny ; and we should bring home the case, and say, by-and-by I shall require these attentions—What I now hear and see I shall experience—My soul will refuse dainty meat—a shivering will seize my trembling limbs—and the world will recede from my view, and appear like land to the mariner entering the ocean. Infinitely diversified as human conditions are, they all terminate in the same result. All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Death is the way of all the earth—

And what is it for man to die ? It is an event the most solemn and affecting, whatever view we may take of it. It is the termination of all his busy concerns in life, and suffers him to interfere no more in any thing that is done under the sun. It is his farewell to earth with all its possessions and attractions ; his eye will no more see good. It is the disruption of all his ties of friendship and kindred here ; to say to corruption, Thou art my father, and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister. It is the destruction of his body, so fearfully and wonderfully made, and the reducing of it to such a state of loathsomeness, as compels the survivors to bury their dead out of their sight, and to inscribe over the sepulchre—

“ How loved, how valued once, avails thee not,
To whom related, or by whom begot :
A heap of dust alone remains of thee,
'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be.”

It is his entering into a new and untried mode of being ; his transition from a course of action to a state of retribution. It is a thing that cannot be repeated, and the consequences of which are irreversible : it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

So far one event happeneth to all : but there is a vast difference in men's dying, according as they are morally and religiously considered. *The wicked is driven away in his wickedness.* His death, indeed, is not always very dreadful in the manner. There is sometimes a strange senselessness that attends it. Frequently even the danger of dissolution is concealed from him, and he dies “ a slow sudden death.” The poet's words are not true, “ Fools men may live, but fools they cannot die :” for observation shows us that commonly men die as they live. The Scripture says of many of them, “ They have no bands in their death, but their strength is firm.” This is sometimes indeed affected rather than real. When they have died with a kind of levity and sportiveness it has been by way of diversion. They would indeed have it supposed to be a proof of the absence of fear ; but it is the effect of its prevalence—So the school-boy passes the churchyard “ whistling aloud to keep his courage up.” I have heard from dying lips exclamations of anguish and horror, which I should not like to publish. These are often attributed to disease ; and the poor wretch is supposed to be under the influence of delirium—and it may be so—But whatever may be the manner of departure, as to those that die in their sins, the consequences are dreadful beyond imagination. If they even fall asleep as gently as lambs, they awake with the devil and his angels.

But the dying chamber of the children of God and the heirs of immortality is none other but the house of God and the gate of heaven.

We are affected to see them going ; it would be criminal not to feel, and to pray, Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth, for the faithful fail from among the children of men. We lose much by their removal ; but our loss is their gain. Dying to them is but resting from their labours ; is but departing to be with Christ, which is far better—*The righteous hath hope in his death.* “ I know,” says he, “ whom I have believed. Mine eyes have seen his salvation. The warfare is accomplished. Let me go forth and take the crown of glory that fadeth not away. Let me leave this vale of tears and enter into the joy of my Lord”—

“ O glorious hour, O blessed abode,
I shall be near, and like my God ;
And flesh and sense no more control
The sacred pleasures of my soul.”

Do all the Lord's people die in rapture ? By no means. Various circumstances may affect their views and feelings, but they all die equally safe, and the issue is equally glorious. And in general the Lord is peculiarly indulgent to his dying followers. Their peace is compared to a river, and that river enlarges as it approaches the sea—Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace. Peace not only compared with the end of others, but with much of his own previous course. As to his condition and experience, the day was dark and distressing, but at eventide it was light. All this the Christian may safely commit unto the Lord. It is his duty and privilege to take no thought for the morrow. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof, and also the good. And these shall be proportioned to each other by him who has commanded us to seek for grace to help in time of need, and has promised that as our day is so shall our strength be.

But we thus see that though the religion of Jesus does not exempt us from dying as men, it prevents our dying like them. It prepares us for the change. It turns the curse into a blessing. It brings to pass the saying that is written, “ Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? The sting of death is sin ; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Lord, so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

OCTOBER 12.—“ Full of grace and truth.”—JOHN i. 14.

IN another place it is said, “ grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” But things may come by a person who is not possessed of them ; or he may possess them, and not be filled with them—But he was “ full of grace and truth.”

“ Grace” peculiarly signifies goodness, kindness, tenderness, mildness. And was he not full of these ? We cannot tell what kind of person he had, but we are sure of his temper and disposition. It was prophesied of him that he should come down like rain upon the mown grass ; that he should gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that were with young ; that a bruised reed should he not break, and a smoking flax should he not quench—And follow him in the days of his flesh

See him having compassion upon the multitude, because they had nothing to eat. Hear him saying to the poor and afflicted, Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Ask the woman who was a sinner whether he was not full of grace, when he said, "Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee." Ask the widow of Nain whether he was not full of grace, when he met her at the funeral of her only son, and said unto her, Weep not, and restored her last comfort to her embrace? See him in sight of Jerusalem weeping over it, not at the thought of the sufferings they were going to inflict upon himself, but of the miseries they were drawing down upon their own heads.

The influences of the Spirit are often called grace, because they flow from the free and undeserved favour of God. Of these he was full. He had every moral excellency in him, and in a perfect degree. All his people have the same spirit in measure, but he had it without measure. He was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. If the holiest man on earth were to dwell with you, you would find a deficiency in his grace. But Jesus was full of grace. Grace was poured into his lips, into his life: it filled every thing he said, every thing he did.

And he was replenished not only for himself but for us. It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell. And in him we are blessed with all spiritual blessings. Thus in the famine Joseph had all the corn, and Pharaoh said to the people, Go unto Joseph. Yet his stores, though great, continually diminished, and at length were exhausted. But the fulness of Jesus, however numberless the relieved, remains the same, and could supply myriads more.

He was also "full of truth." It would be a low sense to say that he was full of sincerity. But as he did no sin, so neither was guile found in his mouth. What therefore he said, could be relied upon by those who heard him; and as you have his words you may rely upon them too. But he was full of truth, as truth is opposed to figure or to error. The one is the truth of reality or accomplishment. The law was a shadow of good things to come; but he was the body. There was enough in him to realize and verify all the types, ceremonies, and sacrifices of the preceding dispensation. He was the true bread that came down from heaven; the true rock that followed the people in the wilderness; the true tabernacle; the true temple—or the truth of all this.—The other is the truth of doctrine. Darkness had covered the earth, and gross darkness the people: but for this end was he born, and for this cause came he into the world, to bear witness to the truth. What truth? For there are many kinds of truth. The truth he communicated was religious truth; the highest kind of truth; the truth that makes us wise unto salvation; the truth that shows us how we can be pardoned and sanctified, and attain eternal life. To be led into all this truth is wisdom, liberty, and happiness. Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound. Go away! Lord to whom should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

OCTOBER 13.—“Peter, therefore, was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.”—Acts xii. 5.

It is pleasing and useful to contemplate the wise and good in trying scenes: to see what they do in the hour of danger and distress: what is their resource, and how they make use of it. The church was now in a state of great suffering and alarm, on account of Peter's imprisonment and intended execution; but alone, and at their family altars, and in their social and public meetings, they made prayer unto God for him. Prayer is the refuge and solace of those who are in any trouble—It is therefore graciously prescribed; “Call upon me in the day of trouble.” “Is any afflicted? let him pray.” It is one of the designs of affliction to excite us to pray more frequently, and more earnestly: and God, who knows the importance of the exercise, and what will conduce to it, says, “I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.”

We also see that intercession or praying for others, as well as for ourselves, is a duty. Thus our Lord teaches us, when we pray, to say, “*Our Father*”—and “give us day by day *our* daily bread.” Thus we are commanded to pray for all men—and surely therefore for the servants of Christ, and those who are suffering according to the will of God. Let us not be selfish in our devotions. Let us be grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Let us weep when we remember Zion: and give the Lord no rest till he establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. Indeed Christians ought to value intercession as a great advantage afforded them. They wish to relieve others, but how little can they do for the distressed personally? They long to be useful in the cause of their Lord and Saviour; but many of them are denied this luxury, as far as it depends upon office, talent, and wealth: but all have influence—all can pray—all have power with God—he despiseth not the prayer of the destitute, but will hear their prayer.

The church here was fully aware of this; and we see the weapons, so to speak, with which the first Christians fought against their enemies and for their friends. If, says the Saviour, my kingdom was of this world, then would my servants fight—indeed they would, and show that kind of courage which the many only admire. But his kingdom is not from hence: and therefore though they do fight, the weapons of their warfare are not carnal, but spiritual, and mighty through God. They are submission, patience, tears, prayers. The church therefore thinks not of violence or resistance: yea, they do not draw up a petition and present it to Herod. They go at once, not to the jailer, but the judge; not to the servant, but the Lord of all. They knew that Herod was under his controul: and therefore prayer was made for Peter continually. The Lord exercises a twofold empire over men. The one is spiritual and saving; when he enlightens and sanctifies them: and puts his laws into their minds; and writes them in their hearts. The other is providential; when, without converting them, he changes their purposes, or defeats their pursuits. Thus it is said, “The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, and he turneth it like the rivers of water;” which, led into another channel by the husbandman, retain

the same qualities, and flow as freely as before. Nehemiah therefore did wisely when he wished to obtain a favour from Ahasuerus; "I prayed," says he, "unto the God of heaven:" and God disposed him to grant more than he could have requested. So Esau armed four hundred men, intending when he set off to kill Jacob: but Jacob wrestled in prayer; and having prevailed with God, he found no difficulty in succeeding with man. Accordingly his brother's mind, though not sanctified, was softened; and when they met they fell on each other's neck, and kissed each other—"When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Hezekiah went and spread the letter before the Lord, and prayed, and conquered Sennacherib upon his knees.

Let us therefore, when we wish even to carry an enterprise with our fellow-creatures engage the Lord on our side; and follow the admonition of David, who had often tried the measure and found it successful: "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." And the Church here found it to be true.

OCTOBER 14.—"And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands."—Acts xii. 6, 7.

How well is God characterized in the address of David; "O thou that hearest prayer." "Ask," says he, "and it shall be given you: seek and ye shall find." He never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain. It is impossible to read the Scripture and not see what an honour he has always put upon prayer. Indeed much of the Sacred History is only a record of its achievements. The deliverance before us was in answer to prayer, which was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him. But we may remark three things connected with the deliverance itself.

Observe the time when it was obtained—It was the very night preceding the day that Herod would have brought him forth to the people, like a wild beast, to be put to death for their entertainment. The Lord intended to hear their prayers from the beginning: but he suffered their faith and patience to be tried to the uttermost. A few hours more!—But before the morning the decree goes forth, Peter is released, and the Church like them that dream! He designed to relieve the woman of Canaan who cried to him so piteously on the behalf of her daughter; yet he exercises her with three repulsive discouragements before he proclaimed her success. He had engaged to deliver the posterity of Abraham at the end of four hundred and thirty years, yet the last month, the last week, the last day of this period had arrived before the accomplishment of the promise: and if they are not rescued before the next dawn the Divine bond is forfeited. But there is time enough for payment—"Even the self-same day it came to pass that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt." Thus even when he has determined to give, he holds his people in suspense; and he has

reasons for his conduct. He is a God of knowledge, and blessed are all they that wait for him. These delays operate like the repulse of the Israelites from Ai; they lead to self-examination and inquiry. They tend to destroy creature-confidence. They induce us to receive the blessing with more notice and thankfulness. It is a great thing to be prepared for a mercy, as well as for a trial. But hope deferred maketh the heart sick—And here is the patience of the saints. Yet let them quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. Let them remember how long he waited for them—that he is a sovereign, and has a right to choose his own time—that his time is the best time—and that though he seems slow he is sure. Cast not away, therefore, your confidence. Never despair, though Isaac be even bound, and laid on the altar, and the hand has seized the knife, and aimed the blow—

“Just in the last distressing hour
The Lord displays delivering power;
The mount of danger is the place
Where we shall see surprising grace.”

Observe also the state in which, when the salvation arrived, the subject of it was found—He “was sleeping between two soldiers.” Asleep! in such a condition! in such company! in such a place! at such a time!—when there was only a step between him and his execution—when he was in the jaws of death! But his cause was good, his conscience clear, his mind kept in perfect peace, being stayed on God. Such a frame of soul would turn a prison into a royal chamber, and make a pavement of clay a bed of down, and enable the possessor to say, in the midst of danger, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me—“So thou givest thy beloved sleep.” The Lord has comforts for his people answerable to every exigency, and as the sufferings abound, the consolation abounds also; so that they are often a surprise to themselves as well as to others; their new experience exceeding so much their former feelings, and falsifying their gloomy apprehensions. Yet this is only the fulfilment of the promise, “as thy days so shall thy strength be.” Peter was one thing out of prison and another in it. He who trembled at the question of the damsel in the judgment-hall can now sleep so soundly as to require a blow to wake him, though in the morning he is to die in all the horrors of a public execution.

Again, let us observe the instrument employed in the rescue—“Behold the angel of the Lord came upon him.” And what marvellous beings are these messengers. They are called “his mighty angels:” and how well are they said to “excel in strength.” Peter seemed perfectly secured. He had been committed to no less than sixteen soldiers, who were to lose their lives if he escaped. Some of them even guarded the doors; but the angel easily enters without their perceiving him. The prison was dark, but he finds his way to Peter. He was chained to a soldier on his right hand and to another on his left. The angel strikes a light; smites him on the side; severs him from his fetters; tells him to arise, and put on his sandals, and follow him—without disturbing his keepers—and opens the gates, and sets him free to return to his praying friends. How little we can judge of the nature and agency of invisible beings. One thing however we know, that the highest of God’s

creatures are his people's servants. Though they are innumerable, and have among them thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, and the "least of them could wield these elements," "are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" What monarch is attended in his journeys like the poorest, meanest child of God? "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

What right have Christians to despond? Is not he whom they serve continually able to deliver? Whatever be their straits and difficulties, he can find or make a way for their escape. That, at what time they are afraid, they may trust in him: he has not only given them exceeding great and precious promises, but he has taught and encouraged them by examples. They can remember the years of the right hand of the Most High: and they know that he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

OCTOBER 15.—"And his rest shall be glorious."—Isaiah xi. 10.

WE need not ask *whose* rest is here spoken of: for there can be no uncertainty respecting the appropriation. The whole chapter is a prophecy or promise of the incarnation and kingdom of the Messiah; and the verse from which these words are taken is expressly applied to him by Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, and there is no other that could verify and fulfil it but himself: "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious." But we may ask what is this rest of his, to which is ascribed such an attribute, or such an abstraction; for the margin is, His rest shall be "glory."

His rest includes that blessed state into which he entered after his mediatorial work on earth. Never was there such an enterprise as he had to accomplish: the execution of it would have been infinitely above the power of men and angels. But he could say to the Father, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." And what was the result? "He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his:" the one reposing after the redemption of the world, as the other did after the creation; and each thereby giving rise, as the Apostle remarks, to a Sabbath—the one to the seventh and the other to the first day of the week. Who can imagine, so to speak, the refreshment and satisfaction of the Maker of all things, when he looked and "saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good." So Jesus having obtained eternal redemption for us, for ever sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. There he dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him. There he possesses the joy that was set before him, for which he endured the cross. There he sees his seed, and prolongs his days, and the pleasure of the Lord prospers in his hand. There he sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied. There, for the suffering of death, he is crowned with glory and honour; angels, principalities, and powers being made subject unto him; and every name that is named, not

only in this world, but also in that which is to come : and his rest is glorious—

His rest means his church. “ This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it.” And whatever the world may think, “ In Judah is God known : his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion. There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey.” The glory of the Church does not arise from multitude without character, from riches and pomp, from splendid buildings and magnificent ceremonies. What glory would there be in a community dignified with all that is pagan, and all that is popish, yet destitute of the truth as it is in Jesus, of spiritual worshippers, of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost ? We read of “ the Spirit of glory and of God” resting upon Christians. And the one explains the other. It is the Divine presence that ennobles as well as defends it : “ I will be a wall of fire round about her, and the glory in the midst of her.” With him is the fountain of life, and in his light we see light. But if the Church of Christ be glorious now, how much more glorious will it be found in a period which we are persuaded is already begun, when its numbers, and graces, and usefulness, shall be increased with “ all the increase of God ;” and the assurances upon which our longing hopes repose shall be fulfilled : “ The little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation :” “ Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.” “ For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron.” “ I will make thee an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations”—His rest shall be glorious.

His rest also intends that repose into which he brings his followers. This rest indeed, as to its fulness and perfection, remains for the people of God in another life. And how glorious this will be exceeds the power of language to describe. Yet turn only to the representation of the angel to John. “ These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple : and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters : and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” But we which have believed do enter into rest : and how glorious are the earnestness, the foretastes, the beginnings of it, even here ; when the understanding is freed from the perplexities of error and doubt ; and the conscience is pacified from the horrors of guilt and the torments of fear ; and the heart is delivered from unattainable and vexatious desires ; and the will no longer resists the pleasure of the Almighty with regard to duty or events ; and the mind is kept in perfect peace, being stayed upon God. The wicked are like the troubled sea, whose waves cast up mire and dirt ; and what anxie-

ties and disquietudes must men of the world feel, who have their portion in this life exposed to a thousand accidents and changes, and who have no confidence in God as presiding over all their concerns, so as to promote their welfare. But the believer's treasure is in heaven, beyond the reach of harm; and he knows also that all the ways of the Lord towards him are mercy and truth. He has cast all his care upon one who careth for him, and whose care is accompanied with infinite wisdom, power, and love. He therefore is careful for nothing, but feels a peace that passeth all understanding. His soul dwells at ease. He is satisfied with favour, and filled with the blessing of the Lord.

Such is the Saviour we preach! This is the rest wherewith he causes the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing! His followers may have tribulation in the world, but in him they have peace. He will more than make them amends for all their services and sufferings in his cause—Yea, he has done it already. What they have been required to give up they have willingly resigned, for he has blessed them with advantages and pleasures infinitely richer and sweeter. They have meat which others know not of; they have joy which strangers intermeddle not with. He is not only their physician, but their friend; not only their refuge, but their consolation.

But what shall we say to those who neglect so great salvation? Can creatures content the cravings of immortality? Can any earthly successes or indulgences give you heart-felt repose? Could the whole world sustain and solace you when trouble comes? when your gourds wither? when your pulse intermits? and upon your eyelid sits the shadow of death? Such a moment will come; and then to whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your glory? But he cries, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." Venture upon his gracious invitation; and he will give you rest—rest unto your souls—AND HIS REST SHALL BE GLORIOUS.

OCTOBER 16.—"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."—Matt. xxv. 34.

WHAT a delightful announcement! And how perfectly opposed to the tremendous sentence addressed by the King to them on his left hand: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." There, "ye cursed;" here, "ye blessed of my Father." There, "Depart from me;" here, "Come." There, "Depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;" here, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Observe the character: "*Ye blessed of my Father.*" Some bless themselves, and some are blessed by their fellow-creatures; but the great thing is to be blessed of God. How vain would be, in all our most important exigencies, the friendship of mortals, however kind or powerful they may be. But in his favour is life. Their blessing is wishes and words: his blessing is deeds and realities. In his blessing there is an actual communication: "He commandeth

the blessing, even life for evermore:" and they whom he blesses are blessed, and none can reverse it. And how vain would the censure of the world be under the smiles of God! Let them curse, but bless thou!

But in what are they the blessed of his Father? It must be something peculiar and distinguishing. Temporal mercies they have in common with others. Even here indeed there is great difference as to efficiency and enjoyment. They have the good will of him that dwelt in the bush in their comforts: and because he "blesses the labour of their hand," and "blesses their bread and their water," therefore "a little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked:" for "the blessing of the Lord it maketh rich" without abundance, and "he addeth no sorrow with it." But what says the glowing thanksgiving of the Apostle? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." He has redeemed them from the curse of the law; justified them from all things; called them by his grace. He feeds them with the bread of life; adorns them with the garments of salvation; and gives them the earnest and foretastes of immortality.

Observe the invitation: "Come, ye blessed of my Father." Men, if judged by their dispositions and actions, often say unto him, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." But what is now their desire will hereafter be their misery. Now they have diversions, but then they will be abandoned to thought, and feel themselves in a condition in which nothing could avail them but his friendship. O the dreadfulness in that day of being renounced for ever by him!—But what a heaven will there be in the sound, "Come!" The invited were once without him, and far from him: and hence their degradation and wretchedness. He pitied them even then, and was concerned to bring them to himself. He therefore said, Come, ye poor, and I will relieve you; come, ye sick, and I will heal you; come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Come to my cross; come to my throne; come to my house; come to my table; and I will in no wise cast you out. And thus their intercourse with him began—and how is it carried on?—and how will it be completed? In the same way—"Come." Here they were made to feel their absolute need of him; here they sought him; here they often asked others, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" Here they also found him and enjoyed him—But all their desires and their hopes were not perfectly accomplished. Now they have reached the end of their faith, and are satisfied. "Come," says he, "come" to my immediate presence, "come" to my bosom, "come," and be for ever with the Lord—"Come, ye blessed of my Father."

Observe the induction: "*Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" Every word is significant. The possession. Not a mansion, an estate, a city, a province; but a portion more extensive and dignified, and suited to the highest ambition of the soul, a "kingdom." The qualification: "Prepared for you." It was not a natural endowment, or an easy acquisition. How many things were to be removed, and how much was to be done and suffered by an agency and passiveness the most illus-

trious. "I go," said he, "to prepare a place for you:" and his ascension was necessary, and his death was necessary, and his obedience was necessary, and his incarnation was necessary, and all the dispensations of his grace and providence were necessary to the full salvation of a soul. The *earliness* of the provision: "Before the foundation of the world." How impossible was it that we should be saved by works of righteousness that we had done! All was purposed, planned, promised, secured, not only without our desert, but without our desire, and ages and ages before our existence—The grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

Observe the season of enjoyment: "*Then.*" Here they walk by faith, not by sight. If they build tabernacles here they are soon taken down; and a voice is heard, "Arise, and depart hence, for this is not your rest." Every thing leads them forward. Now they sow in tears; then they will reap in joy. Now they run; then they obtain the prize. Now they fight the good fight of faith; then they will lay hold of eternal life. Now are they the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what they shall be. They are princes, but the world knoweth them not. Like David they are anointed, but not crowned—But "*then* shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

And having these promises let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Let us walk worthy of him who hath called us unto his kingdom and glory. Especially let the prospect animate us in all our religious course. It was this language that influenced so powerfully the first Christians. They thought they always heard—and their faith, their conscience always did hear—"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And this enlivened them in duty. This raised them above worldly losses. This sustained them in every trouble, emboldened them in every conflict, and made them in all these things more than conquerors through him that loved them. Ah! said they, "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

OCTOBER 17.—"There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-labourers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."—Philemon 23, 24, 25.

Thus closes this short and very interesting Epistle, and which does so much honour to the humility, and kindness, and wisdom, and godliness of the Apostle. It ends with a salutation from his connexions, and a benediction from Paul himself.

The salutation regards Philemon, and comes from five persons mentioned by name.

The first is "Epaphras." He had been a faithful minister in the Colossian church, and did not forget them when he was absent

from them, always labouring fervently for them in prayer, that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. He was now at Rome, and a sufferer with Paul; perhaps in the very same confinement: if not in the same cause. This cause was not the service of sin or sedition, but the Gospel of Christ: the Apostle therefore calls him "my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus."

The second is "Marcus." Not Mark the Evangelist, but John Mark. His mother had a house at Jerusalem, at which, when Peter was delivered from prison, the Church was praying. He was the nephew of Barnabas. He soon became a minister; and when Paul and his uncle returned from Jerusalem, Mark accompanied them as far as Perga in Pamphilia; but feeling or fearing the difficulties and dangers of his work, he there departed from them, and returned home. This was doubtless improper conduct, and some time after gave rise to a sad dispute between Paul and Barnabas; the one being willing to take him again along with them, the other refusing, because of his former defection. Perhaps both of these great and good men were a little to blame, the one being too partial, and the other too severe. However this may be, Mark was afterwards not only received by Paul, but recommended to the Colossians, "If he come unto you receive him;" and to Timothy, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry." He also was now at Rome with him. He had acknowledged his fault and been reformed, and we are not to break a bruised reed, nor to reject a returning backslider. If a brother be overtaken in a fault, they who are spiritual should endeavour to restore him. Many a character has been given up too soon. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were afraid to act an open part at first; but they came forward and honoured the crucified Saviour when all his disciples forsook him and fled.

The third was "Aristarchus." He was a Macedonian. He became a zealous Christian, and attended Paul to Ephesus, where, in the tumult raised by Demetrius the silversmith, he narrowly escaped with his life. He accompanied Paul in his return to Greece; waited for him at Troas; journeyed with him into Asia; and sailed with him to Rome, where he now was, and probably involved in the persecution of Paul, for in his Epistle to the Colossians the Apostle calls him his "fellow-prisoner."

The fourth was "Demas." At this time therefore he was a professor of Christianity, and probably a preacher of the word. But when Paul wrote his Second Epistle to Timothy he says, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica." We are not informed whether he was drawn away by the attraction of pleasure, fame, or wealth. It was probably the latter. "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Why should we be scandalized at apostacies like these? Did they not attend Christianity from the beginning? Were they not found in the purest state of the Church? They go out from us because they are not of us. Evil men and seducers may wax worse and worse:

“nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his.”

The last is “Lucas.” He was “the beloved physician.” By his skill he could render himself useful even to the bodies of men: and to the honour of the profession he observed, that we have always found men of this learned and liberal order, the most ready to exercise self-denial and beneficence in the service of suffering humanity. But Luke employed himself also in writing. He was the third evangelist; and compiled the Acts of the Apostles. Of the last four of these five saluters of Philemon it is observable, that Paul calls them “his fellow-labourers.” The name is sometimes applied to those who are not expressly ministers of the word. He calls Priscilla and Aquilla his “helpers in Christ;” and speaks of “those women who laboured with him in the Gospel.” He does not mean that they taught publicly in the church, a practice which he had forbidden: but there are many ways in which we may be fellow-helpers to the truth, consistently with every other duty. But the term is more usually significant of those who laboured in word and doctrine; and it is probable that this was the case with each of these individuals.

But let us observe the benediction of Paul himself. This is more extensive than the salutation. The salutation is addressed to Philemon only; but this takes in his wife Apphia, and Archippus his fellow-soldier, and the church in his house; and therefore he says, “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with *your* spirit.” If there be one word which was dearer to Paul than another, it was the word “grace.” Indeed we may call it the darling word of inspiration. But why is it named the grace “of *our* Lord Jesus Christ?” Because by his obedience and death he was the medium of its extension to the children of men. And because also he is the source of its residence; it hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell. Hence we are commanded to be strong “in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” Hence it is said, “Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.”

But why does the Apostle say “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with *your* spirit?” Because this is the principal seat of all real religion. Out of this are the issues of life. And therefore it is said, “Take heed to your spirit.” We are no longer in a right state than while we are in “a right spirit;” and this—and the Apostle perfectly knew it, is and can be no further right than as it is possessed and influenced by this grace. This grace will make it a spirit of faith, a spirit of love, a spirit of adoption. This grace will lead it into all truth, and prepare it for every duty. This grace will enable it to resist temptation, to bear prosperity, to endure affliction, to triumph in death. The Apostle knew that fresh supplies of it were necessary, but he knew also, not only from his own experience, but from the declaration of the Saviour himself, that it was equal to every season, every condition, every exigency; for he had said to him, and to every believer, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” This therefore he deemed the most important endowment he could wish for his friends. Had he known any thing more valuable he would have implored it on their behalf. But he knew grace was the best gift. He knew that nothing could be a

blessing without. He knew that every thing could be a blessing with it. He knew that it was profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Let us seek it for our connexions. Let us seek it for ourselves—The reality of it if we have it not—and the abundance of it if we have. “Amen.”

OCTOBER 18.—“He will subdue our iniquities.”—Micah vii. 19.

THE language is expressive of joyful confidence. But the allusion is military, and well accords with the experience of every partaker of Divine grace who finds the spiritual life a warfare. The adversaries to be subdued are their “iniquities.” They have enemies without, but their worst enemies are within. Even the world and the devil could do them little hurt without the assistance of these treacherous inmates. In this sense a man’s foes are they of his own house. But are not their iniquities enemies to others as well as to Christians? They are, and will be found so in the end; but at present others are deluded by them, and take pleasure in them. Whereas Christians have been awakened and enlightened to see their condition while led captive by them, and have been led to throw off their yoke, and to declare war against them, a war the most trying and awful, a war that admits of no accommodation, a war that must end in our victory or destruction.

But are they not already delivered from these enemies? Does not the Apostle thank God that they are “made free from sin, and become the servants of righteousness?” They are made free from its tyranny. It no longer reigns in their mortal body that they should obey it in the lusts thereof—Yet it lives, and resists, and often alarms them into a dread of being again overcome—“Mine iniquities prevail against me.” But the apprehension is groundless. Sin shall not have dominion over them, for they are not under the law, but under grace. The Lord is on their side. Their friend, their helper, their conqueror is Divine—“*He* shall subdue our iniquities.” Who is the agent? “Not by might, or by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.” Here is the only real Sanctifier: and therefore we read, that “through the Spirit we mortify the deeds of the body;” that “we have purified our souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit;” that “we live in the Spirit,” and “walk in the Spirit.” What are the means? The principal instrumentality is faith. Some imagine that faith is rather opposed to holiness; but there is no true holiness without it. Abraham, who believed God, is distinguished pre-eminently for obedience: and he who has the faith of Paul will never want the works of James. Faith in the blood of Jesus, faith in the promises of God, that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen; that faith alone enables us to stand in the evil day. This faith purifies the heart—The “sanctified,” says the Saviour, “by faith that is in me.” All the ordinances of religion are called means of grace, because in the use of them we receive “the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” Under the blessing of God the dispensations of Providence conduce to the same end.

Afflictions, which are the effects of sin, are made "the fruit to take away sin." Creature comforts are often to the soul what suckers are to the tree; and the heavenly Husbandman prunes us to secure the sap for the bearing. We are tried, that we may come forth from the furnace as gold, losers indeed, but gainers by the loss, deprived only of what injured our excellence; and rendered more valuable and useful.

But in what manner is the work accomplished? The Lord could at once execute the blessed deliverance, but as the Canaanites were driven out by little and little, so he gradually subdues our iniquities. Hence we read of "the inward man being renewed day by day:" and of our being "changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." We must therefore distinguish between the commencement and the finishing of this glorious renovation. It will not be completed till death, but it is now begun; and the very complaints of the believer are proofs that he is not what he once was, but approves things that are excellent, and delights in the law of God, and feels his remaining corruptions to be his burden and grief. Simon Brown, formerly minister of the Gospel in London, was so enervated and depressed as to believe that his soul was annihilated, and that he and no more soul than a horse. Yet he continued praying, and preaching, and publishing, as if he had two souls instead of having none; his reasonings abundantly disproving all their conclusions. Thus we have met with Christians who imagined they had no grace, while they lived so conscientiously and consistently, mourned for sin so deeply, prized the Scripture so highly, and loved the Lord Jesus so fervently, that they seemed to every one but themselves to have a double portion of the Spirit. When a man is nailed to the cross he may linger on for awhile, but his doom is fixed: and "our old man is crucified." A tree, after it is plucked up by the roots, has some sap left in it, and will even throw out shoots; but we know that in such a case it *cannot* revive: the radical, essential support is cut off—It *must* wither and die. Let us thank God and take courage. The conflict may be protracted, and we may sometimes be ready to faint, but there is nothing doubtful in the issue: and the result is not more glorious than sure.

OCTOBER 19.—"David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite."—2 Samuel vi. 10.

It was a solemn and awful appeal David made, when "he swore unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." Accordingly as soon as he was fully enthroned over all Israel, he resolved to bring up the ark from Gibeah, where it had long been, and place it in Jerusalem, where it would be public and accessible. But at first the enterprise more than failed. The appointed and prescribed mode of conveying the ark was on the shoulders of the Levites. On the present occasion this was strangely and very culpably overlooked. It was carried in a new

cart; and it was driven by Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinidab. "And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of firwood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachan's threshing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." The event seems mysterious. His judgments are a great deep. But will not the Judge of all the earth do right? We are sure there is no unrighteousness with God. We know also that he alone is the adequate judge of moral conduct. By him actions are weighed. He sees them in their principles and motives; and unerringly estimates the circumstances of extenuation or aggravation attached to them. Let us give him time, and we shall be constrained to acknowledge, "Thou art justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest."

David was both *displeased* and *terrified*. His displeasure was very censurable. Did it become him to resent what God had done, and be angry because the breach had defeated his plan, and disappointed his expectation—especially too, when all this would have been prevented, had he consulted the law, and conformed to it? But so true is it, "a man's foolishness perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord." His terror was more excusable, and might have been salutary. "God will be known by the judgments which he executeth." When he strikes some he intends that others should hear and fear, and turn unto the Lord. And it is well for us to feel our unworthiness and desert; and to inquire whether we who are spared are not equally guilty with those who are cut off—and also whether, though spared now, we shall escape always? Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.

But David's alarm was servile and excessive. He therefore broke up the assembly, and began his return home, saying, "How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?" "So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite." The event to Obed-edom was wholly unexpected. Little did he imagine, when he rose in the morning and joined the holy procession, that before he retired to rest his house would be the tabernacle of the Lord, towards which the eyes and thoughts of all the pious would be turned, and his name be had in everlasting remembrance. So Saul went out to search for his father's asses, and before he returned was anointed king over Israel. When David was carrying provender to his brethren in the camp, how little did he dream that in the course of a few hours he should be the conqueror of Goliath, and the deliverer of his country, and hear it shouted, "Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands." As to evil or as to good, we never know what a day may bring forth; and therefore we should never presume or despair. We talk of novels and romances; but we need not have recourse to fiction. What marvellous coincidences diversify actual life! "Time and chance happen to all." Nothing is indeed casual with regard to God. He sees the end from the beginning; and works all things after the counsel of his

own will; and his providence is so universal and minute, that a sparrow falleth not to the ground without our heavenly Father, and the very hairs of our head are all numbered. But what is appointment with him is contingency with us. The most important and interesting occurrences in our individual histories are often peculiarly accidental: in review they appear surprising; and in prospect, had they been announced, would have seemed improbable, if not impossible—"I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight.—These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

Obed-edom's compliance was very praiseworthy. How many, had they been placed in his circumstances, would have declined the reception of the ark! Some would have pleaded danger—They could not live under the same roof with this mysterious and dreadful symbol, which had killed Uzzah, who only touched it, and smote so many of the Beth-shemites who only looked into it. Some would have felt the expense it might entail. Some would have excused themselves on the ground of trouble—"multitudes will be constantly repairing hither, either from devotion or curiosity. The house will be a thoroughfare. We shall find it necessary to engage doorkeepers"—But if any of these thoughts occurred they had not a moment's weight with Obed-edom. Providence, says he, has laid this service in my way—It is the call of God—and I seize with gladness an opportunity afforded me to show my love to his service, and to exercise self-denial for his sake.

And what was the consequence? Had he reason to repent of the forwardness of his zeal? The ark, says our Henry, is a guest that always pays well for its entertainment. And what says the sacred historian? "And the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months: and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household."

OCTOBER 20.—"He doth devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him."—2 Samuel xiv. 14.

SOME emblems of this appeared under the law. Many persons ceremonially unclean were banished for a time from the camp, the city, and the sanctuary; but means were ordained and prescribed for their cleansing, their release, and their restoration. But let us look at the conduct of God towards his people in the means he devises for their redemption, their conversion, their recall from back-sliding, and their removal home.

Man was made after the image of God. God delighted in him and held communion with him. He was perfectly holy, and perfectly happy: the heir of immortality, and the lord of all in this lower world. These views of man only serve to enhance his fall, and make his loss so much the more deplorable. He is not now what he originally was. Adam was banished from paradise; and Cherubim, with a flaming sword, were placed to prevent his return to the tree of life. And we were banished in him—In Adam all died. We were deprived of the favour and presence of God; and separated from the supreme good; and resembled traitors, who,

having forfeited their right to their former abode and possessions, wander exiled from place to place, not daring to appear where once they lived, lest they should be apprehended and executed. What a state was this to be in! But it was not of God that his banished should be expelled from him. He desired not the death of sinners; and therefore he devised means to deliver them from the sentence of condemnation, and to bring them back to his favour and presence. And what were these means? They were such as evinced not only his clemency, but showed that he was rich in mercy—We could never have found out, and all the principalities and powers above could never have found out, a way for our return to God, consistently with all the perfections of his nature. But his understanding is infinite. O the depth both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! He forms a plan in which he abounds towards us in all wisdom and prudence; a plan which angels desire to look into; a plan, the development of which will draw forth the praise and wonder of eternity; a plan in which goodness and justice shine forth with equal beams; in which mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other; in which, while he redeems Jacob, he glorifies himself in Israel; in which, while the guilty are pardoned, the law is fulfilled, and magnified, and made honourable; in which, while there is peace on earth and good will towards men, there is glory to God in the highest. “All things are of God, who hath reconciled us unto himself by Jesus Christ.”

Redemption however is one thing; salvation is another. We have seen what God has done to bring us out of our guilty state: but we must also be brought out of our depraved state. We are darkness: how are we made light in the Lord? We are the servants of sin; how are we turned from the power of Satan unto God? The grand agency is the influence of the Holy Spirit; and hence we read of our being born of the Spirit, and being led by the Spirit: and we are assured that where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. But among the means devised for our conversion is the dispensation of the word by preaching: “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” There is not only a great and obvious adaptation and suitableness in this instrumentality to the purpose designed, but it is the ordinance of God’s own appointment; and is therefore entitled to his blessing. Accordingly faith cometh by hearing. In the beginning of the Gospel, and in every revival of it since, the work has been principally accomplished by preaching. Were any given number of converted individuals now living to tell what God had done for their souls, how many of them would ratify this truth! One would say, I had not a serious thought of God, or of my soul, before such a sermon, like a clap of thunder, awakened my sleeping conscience. A second would say, I was a Pharisee, trusting in myself that I was righteous, and despising others, till such a discourse, like a scythe, mowed down all my legal hopes, and made me cry for mercy. A third would say, I was walking according to the course of this world, spending my money for that which is not bread, and my labour for that which satisfieth not, till such an address urged

me to forsake the foolish, and live, and go in the way of understanding—But we do not limit the Holy One of Israel. There is hardly any thing but the Lord has dignified by making use of it in the calling of sinners to himself. Afflictions, as we see in the case of Manasseh; parental example; the admonition of a friend; the reading of a good book, of a mere tract—Where shall we end? “Lo! all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.”

After they are brought to God by converting grace his people are not suffered to apostatize from him. But they may backslide. Their faith may fail in the exercise, though not in the principle. Their love may wax cold. They may grow indifferent to the service of God, and rarely and lifelessly attend the means of his appointment. Yea they may yield to temptation, and fall into sin, and cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of. And what is the consequence? The Lord hides his face, and they are troubled—“O that it was with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness; while as yet the Almighty was with me.” The loss and the remembrance of their former peace and joy; galling reflections; from their own minds; brotherly rebukes; outward trials and disappointments—these are the means he employs to bring them back to himself from whom they have revolted, and who is yet saying, Return, ye backsliding children—I will heal your backslidings.

But as long as they remain here they are from home. This is not their rest. But there remaineth a rest for the people of God. And he has devised means to remove them from the kind of exile in which they now are, to their own country, from whence they were borne, and whither they long to return. He has appointed an hour in which they are to depart out of the world unto the Father. Death is the way, and however trying, the right way to the city of habitation. By death their banishment is entirely ended, and their restoration perfected for ever. “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

OCTOBER 21.—“Whose I am, and whom I serve.”—Acts xxvii. 23.

THIS was the language of Paul, when he informed his fellow-sufferers of the angelical vision with which he had been favoured in the night. But others may adopt the same avowal.

He calls God his owner when he says, *Whose I am*, and asserts nothing that is peculiar to himself. We also are his. He has numberless claims to us; and these claims we should feel and acknowledge. They are founded in creation: in providence: in redemption: in self-dedication. The Corinthian converts “gave

themselves unto the Lord." And there has been a time in the experience of every Christian, when he has done the same. And he has often renewed the surrender since. And the more he reflects upon it the more he approves of his conduct, and glories in the thought that he is not his own, but the Lord's.

Yet when he adds, and *whom I serve*; some may be ready to say, "Ah! Paul did serve him. He was called to be an Apostle; to preach the Gospel, to write Scripture, to plant churches, to work miracles. Never did one man perhaps do so much in glorifying God and serving his generation as he—But what can I do? Can I serve him?" But let it be observed that the service of God is not confined to great offices and talents. These do not depend upon us, but are dispensed by the Lord of all as he pleases; and he looks to the heart, and where this is towards him, desires are actions. Where there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not. He sees benevolence where nothing is given; and martyrdom where nothing is suffered. "Let her alone; she hath done what she could."

"No blank, no trifle Nature made or meant.
—If nothing more than purpose in thy power,
Thy purpose firm, is equal to the deed.
Who does the best his circumstance allows,
Does well, acts nobly—angels could no more."

The service of God is very extensive, and is not to be confined to what many only mean by it. It reaches further than express acts of devotion. The means of grace are indeed both duties and privileges; and they who do not value them are either in an unconverted or a backsliding state. In a proper frame of mind good men will sanctify the Sabbath, repair to the sanctuary, and retire to read the Scripture, and pray and meditate. But they will regard these things only as *means* of grace, in the use of which they renew their strength, and gain fresh supplies of the Spirit of Jesus Christ to enable them to fill up Christianly the whole of their stations in life. They therefore serve God in the week as well as on the Sabbath, and in their own dwellings as well as in the temple. They acknowledge him in all their ways; and whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, they do all to the glory of God. A constant regard to his word as their rule, and his honour as their end, elevates common actions into moral, and moral into spiritual; and thus the magistrate while on the bench, and the traveller while upon the road, and the tradesman while in the shop, and the labourer while in the field, and the mother while training up her infant charge, are all doing the work of the Lord, and have the testimony that they please him.

Servants, besides their known, usual, regular course of action, are liable to particular and occasional calls of service which cannot be previously prescribed. Thus we are to observe the movements of Providence, and fall in with those duties which grow out of events. In this spirit David said, "on thee do I wait all the day;" holding himself always in readiness to receive orders, and in effect asking, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

"They also serve that wait." There is a suffering as well as a

doing service. God is never more pleased than when we deny ourselves, and show that we love him above all, and are willing to leave all, and lose all, for his sake. As the exercise of the passive graces is the most difficult, so perhaps it is the most impressive. We peculiarly glorify God in the fires. We are witnesses for him; and testify to the excellency of the principles, and to the power of the resources of the religion we profess. We show that his grace can support us when every other dependance fails, and his comforts cheer us when all other springs of refreshment are dried up. When by accident or sickness we are led in from active scenes, we fear we are going to possess months of vanity, while perhaps we are entering some of the most useful parts of our life. If we endure as Christians, the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon us; and by our patience, submission, peace, and joy, some around us are instructed, some convinced, some encouraged—while perhaps superior beings are excited to glorify God in us—for we are a spectacle to angels as well as unto men.

But what is the nature of the service in which we shall be engaged in the heavenly world? when we shall have dropped all our infirmities? and our powers will be equal to our work and our wishes?—"Therefore are they before his throne, and serve him day and night in his temple." "His servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face."

OCTOBER 22.—"There stood by me this night the angel of God."—Acts xxvii. 23.

How Paul was now engaged we know not. Perhaps he was praying. This is the resource of the Christian in every storm; and to this the promise is made, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee." Nor can we determine where he was. Considering that he was a prisoner, and so many on board, it is not likely that he had a cabin to himself. Yet he seems to have been alone: at least the privilege was personal and individual. There were near three hundred in the ship, but none of them was aware of what was passing with Paul. The Lord, in the same assembly, and in the same seat, can hold communion with one, and not with another. "Lord, how is it," said one of the disciples, "that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" The question implies wonder; but our Saviour had promised the distinction. Luke was in the ship, but Paul only has the vision. All the partakers of Divine grace are not allowed the same indulgences. All the apostles were not to witness the raising of the ruler's daughter, and our Lord's transfiguration and passion; but only Peter, James, and John; and though he loved them all, John is called the disciple whom Jesus loved. It was not Luke, but Paul, that was to appear before Nero—Paul was the sufferer; and Divine comforts correspond with our trials, for "as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so the consolation aboundeth by Christ."

Two things are observable. First, the messenger: the *angel of the Lord*. We know little of angels. The name is expressive of their office, rather than of their nature. They seem to have been the first beings created; they are proverbial for wisdom; and excel in

strength: yet they do his commandments, and hearken unto the voice of his word. He saith to one, Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he cometh; and to each of them, Do this, and, whatsoever it be, he doeth it: for it is his will alone they regard; and they are always satisfied and delighted with it. They are elevated above us in rank and estate, yet they are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them that shall be the heirs of salvation. Such honour and happiness have all the household of faith: the highest of God's creatures are their servants; they rejoice over them in their repentance, encamp round about them in trouble and danger, convey their souls at death into Abraham's bosom, and in the morning of the resurrection will gather together their bodies from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. They will be our associates for ever—We *are* come to an innumerable company of angels.

Secondly, the season: *this night*. It was dark, pitch dark: not one star appeared. How was the angel to find Paul far off upon the sea in such a dense obscurity? We are not to judge of their senses by ours. They see not as man seeth. The darkness hideth not from them, but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to them. It was a period of extremity. The Lord could have given Paul the assurance before he had been so long tossed with the tempest; but it was withholden till all hope that they should be saved was taken away. This is what his people have often experienced. His reasons for delay are founded in wisdom and in kindness. He would destroy creature-confidence, and yet teach us never to despair with regard to himself. His conduct shows us that nothing is too hard for the Lord; at eventide it shall be light. It also displays his glory more to cure when the disease has been pronounced desperate, and all other physicians have withdrawn. Hence he abode two days in the same place, after he heard of the case of Lazarus, and was glad for the sake of his disciples that he was not present to recover him from his sickness, as it would confirm their faith more to see him raised after he had been dead four days.

OCTOBER 23.—“Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God have given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit, we must be cast upon a certain island.”—Acts xxvii. 24—26.

LET us observe the angel's address to Paul; and Paul's address to his companions.

The angel's address contains two things. First, an admonition. “Fear not, Paul.” There is nothing by which Christians honour their religion more than by confidence in danger, and cheerfulness in trouble. It would therefore have been lamentable had Paul on this occasion failed in spirit; and exposed himself to the reproach Eliphaz unjustly applied to Job: “Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees.” Yet it would seem that the frame of his mind began to be weak and wavering. He had nature in him as well

as grace. He had eaten nothing for a length of time, and was exhausted with fatigue. He knew what it was to be enervated. In one of his epistles he speaks of being "in weakness, and fear, and much trembling." In such a case the body depresses the mind; and a man has hardly the command of his own principles. Was Paul afraid whether he had done right in appealing unto Cæsar? Did he begin to shudder at the thought of appearing before such a monster as Nero? Or was he afraid of sinking? The Lord knew his frame; and remembered that he was dust.

Secondly, an assurance. "Thou must be brought before Cæsar? This was the appointment of God; and it was to answer very important purposes. There his bonds were to be made manifest in the palace, and in all other places. There he was to testify the gospel of the grace of God, and to induce others to speak the word without fear. There he was to make converts to Christianity, and converts even in Cæsar's household. Such was the design of God, and as this purpose *must* be accomplished, Paul's preservation was secure. Even a providential destination has rendered the fulfiller of it invulnerable, and insured his success, as far as he moved in the line of God's appointment. We see this in the case of Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus. All our times are in his hands, and we are immortal till our work is done. The assurance includes not only himself, but the whole company: "And, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." The angel could have rescued Paul, and left the crew to perish; but to save them all for his sake was attaching importance to Paul, and putting honour upon him. And in this way the Lord magnifies his people now. The world knoweth them not, yet it is owing to them their very existence is continued. They are the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. Nations are blessed for their sakes: and though now they are overlooked because they are not heroes and statesmen, in the annals of heaven they are called the repairers of the breach, the restorers of paths to dwell in. "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord God."

Observe also Paul's address to his companions in tribulation. It was tender: "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer." Paul had a feeling heart; and the state of his fellow-sufferers; their pale faces; their haggard looks; their shrieks when the vessel rolled or plunged: the thought of so many perishing, and perishing for ever—for there were in all two hundred threescore and sixteen: all this deeply affected him. He therefore now rejoices on their behalf, and eagerly hastens to alleviate their terror and anguish; and hopes too that the long-suffering of God would prove their eternal salvation.—It was confident: "For I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." Thus he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able to perform. Owing to this he felt as safe and composed as if already on shore. We have every reason to believe what God has

spoken ; and not only is his honour, but our own profit, concerned in our believing it—It is the only way to solid comfort in such a world as this. Surely if ye will not believe ye shall not be established. But thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon thee, because he trusteth in thee.—It was predictive : “Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island”—not a continent, but an *island*, and a—*certain* island—and we must be *cast* upon it, that is, wrecked there ; the vessel will be destroyed, though the passengers will be preserved. Why does he mention and particularize all this ? To be a sign ; that when the fact should have taken place, all might be persuaded that Paul spoke from divine authority. This is the design of all prophecy ; it is not to amuse and perplex us in the previous study, but to confirm our faith by the event ; as our Saviour more than once remarked, “These things I have said unto you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass ye may believe.”

The prediction was soon followed by the accomplishment : “And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land. And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.”—And how was Paul viewed then ? When he first came on deck they probably considered him an enthusiast, if not an impostor ; and if they did not revile him they pitied his weakness, that he should expose himself to so many hardships and dangers for the sake of one Jesus who had been crucified, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. But the storm convinced them that Paul had good reason for his attachment and confidence. While they were filled with confusion and horror, he knew whom he believed, and was not ashamed of his hope. They called every man upon his god, but none of them could hear or save their suppliants. But Paul’s master could save to the uttermost : and he not only delivered his servant, but the entire crew for his sake—So he can bring our adversaries to our feet, and make them know that he has loved us—So that men shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth—For their rock is not as our Rock, our enemies themselves being judges.

OCTOBER 24.—“Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief.”—Mark ix. 24.

How many subjects are there, concerning which a Christian is frequently compelled to express himself in these words—“Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief.”

This is the case sometimes even with regard to the being of a God. It may seem almost impossible that we should feel any doubt with regard to a truth so obvious and undeniable as the Divine existence. Many would probably deem a discourse against atheism altogether unworthy of their attention. They would observe that Moses, in the book of Genesis, does not attempt to prove a Deity, but takes it for granted ; and that only a fool would say in his heart, there is none. Yet who has never, in any instance or degree, been affected by this folly ? And who, while he acknowledges that no truth can be so unanswerably proved, does not feel that no fact is so confounding ? Who has not been dazzled into a momentary blind-

ness by the very splendour of the light? We own that there are difficulties in Christianity, but what right has a Deist to be scandalized with these mysteries? As Christians, we admit nothing so mysterious as what he admits along with us—

‘A God allowed, all other wonders cease.’

And who can reflect on a Being who is self-existent, who never had a beginning, with whom nothing is past and nothing is future, who is no wiser now than at the creation, who knows all things actual and all things possible, who is everywhere at the same time, governing all worlds, and organizing the minutest insects—and never be urged to exclaim, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief?”

This is the case sometimes with regard to the truth of revelation. Here again some may be ready to wonder. “The truth of revelation! Can a good man ever question this? Is it not the charter of his privileges? the very basis of all his hopes? And if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” This they feel; and therefore every apprehension, however partial, however far from settling into a conviction, so alarms them. Bunyan says, that all through life a thought would occasionally rush into his mind, “perhaps the Scripture is a falsehood:” and nothing, he says, can describe the shock, the momentary impression gave to his feelings. Many now living have felt the same. The most powerful objections to the Gospel are not always those that are circulated in coffee-houses, and handed about in sceptical pamphlets. Many insult rather than argue; and contemn while they oppose. They do not enter far enough, nor grapple earnestly enough, to feel those difficulties which serious minds meet with who must study the subject, and are all alive to the importance of it. There is not one of these but has often exclaimed, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

This is the case too with regard to Providence. Here the doctrine is admitted and resisted: received in theory, and denied in practice. I believe that in the management of my concerns, God does all things, and that he does all things well. I can easily reason myself into this satisfactory conclusion, for it is only to allow that he is wise, and righteous, and good; and therefore that he must always do right. Yet I seem to be often arraigning him, or wishing to direct him. Hence I am so unwilling to submit. Hence I am so prone to repine and murmur. Hence I am so full of anxiousnesses and foreboding. Hence I am so little able to cast all my care upon him, knowing that he careth for me—“Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

This is the case, too, with regard to the promises. Here again “what unbelieving believers are we!” I see these promises in the Scriptures, like the stars in the heavens. They are exceeding great and precious. They suit all my wants, and are fully sufficient to relieve them. I love them exceedingly. I long to claim and appropriate them as my heritage for ever, and to feel them the rejoicing of my heart. Yet when I read, though the God of truth says it, and he cannot deny himself—“Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out. I will be with thee in trouble. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days, so shall thy strength be”—I am often as if he had said nothing! “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

And well may the Christian thus pray, when he considers the evil of unbelief, and knows how dishonourable it is to God, and how injurious it is to himself. "If ye will not believe," says the Prophet, "surely ye shall not be established." The word preached cannot profit unless it be mixed with faith. In prayer we must ask believing, or we shall not receive. We read of the obedience, and of the joy of faith. We walk, we live by faith. And no wonder the Christian feels the remains of his unbelief; and weeps over them—And he *will*, with this father of the child, "cry out, and say with *tears*, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

But this is a token for good. And while you bewail the weakness of your faith, and you ought to deplore it, we must encourage and comfort you concerning it. What we are going to advance may be abused, but it will be first usurped by those to whom it does not belong; and it is not easy to hinder all stealing. We say then, First, that these lamented remains of unbelief shall not be suffered to condemn you. Secondly, there is nothing in them peculiar to your experience: all your brethren are familiar with the same complaints. Thirdly, the power of the evil is already broken, and shall never have dominion over you again. Fourthly, the very existence of it will soon cease for ever. Lastly, it is possible even now to subdue much more of the very being of it: so that it may much less oppose and distress you—He that hath begun the good work in you giveth more grace, and is the God of all grace. He can cause your faith to grow exceedingly; and fill you with all joy and peace in believing.

OCTOBER 25.—"Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old."—Micah vii. 14.

HERE is obviously an improper punctuation. It affects the meaning, and injures the force of the passage; in consequence of which the reader may be led to suppose that Carmel was the place in which the captives were *now* disadvantageously dwelling; whereas it was the place in which it was desirable for them to feed. The colon pause therefore should be set after the word "wood: and then the reading will be according to the Hebrew structure, "Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood: in the midst of Carmel let them feed, in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old." For "Carmel" was not a barren, dreary, wilderness country, but consisting of fine open pasture land. It is never mentioned without commendation; and is therefore here named with Bashan and Gilead. Indeed in the Scripture it is often used, as well as "Sharon," proverbially, for any scene of richness and fertility.

The prophet refers immediately to the Jews, who were exiled in Babylon, and implores their restoration to their own country, where God would deal with them according to the most favoured and flourishing periods of their history. But when we consider the symbolical language of the sacred writers, and the typical nature of the Jewish dispensations, we are authorized to pass from the natural to the spiritual Israel.

We may observe therefore the persons to be favoured. They are

called "his people." He has always had a people for his name; and to know who they are we need not ascend up into heaven, to examine the divine purposes: we have the book of life in our hands, where they are recorded, though not by name yet by character; and he may run that readeth. They are described as "the flock of his heritage." While this expresses them to be sheep, it holds them forth collectively as all one in Christ Jesus; and shows the interest Jehovah has in them. A man may have a flock in his temporary possession, and under his superintendence; but though it be the flock of his care, it is not the flock of his heritage. In the East a person's whole substance often consisted in his flocks and herds; of course he would feel a peculiar concern in them as his own. And the Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him. His portion is his people. And he derives the revenue of his glory from them. They are also said to "dwell solitarily in the wood." There are few around them with whom they can feel congeniality; for we may be alone, though surrounded with company. Yet here is not only solitariness, but unlikeliness of supplies, and exposure to danger. Are not the afflictions of the righteous many? Are they not sometimes perplexed and comfortless? Are they not often timid and alarmed, like sheep and lambs in a wood, when they hear beasts of prey howling about them?

See therefore the blessing implored on their behalf: "Feed thy people with thy rod." The "rod" is the symbol and the instrument of the shepherd; and the word "feed," by a common figure of speech that puts a part for the whole, is significant of the discharge of all his office. The meaning therefore is, that the Lord would lead them by his word and Spirit in the way that they should go. That he would heal them when wounded or diseased. That he would restore them when they run astray. That he would guard them from all their perils. And especially that he would provide them repast and repose. We mention these together, because his sheep not only hunger and thirst, but are frequently weary-worn and faint. Hence the inquiry for *both*: "Tell me where thou *feedest*, where thou makest thy flock to *rest* at noon." And when the believer realizes the blessings of his salvation, and appropriates the promises, and enjoys the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and feels the refreshment of divine ordinances, and can leave all his cares with the providence of his heavenly Father, he knows what David means, when he says, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters."

But how was the privilege to be dispensed? "In the *midst* of *Carmel* let them feed, in *Bashan* and *Gilead*, as in *the days of old*." Thus nothing less is implored than the richest measure and degree of provisions and indulgences. But are suppliants to be choosers and prescribers? And shall they who are not worthy of the least of all his mercies, not only ask for relief, but the noblest entertainments? Yes; such is the condescension and kindness of Him who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. He has said, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." Our Saviour reproves his disciples for the contractedness of their asking; "hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Let us pray therefore as Paul did, not

according to our meanness and unworthiness, but "according to the riches of his glory"—When Alexander bestowed a valuable boon, the favoured partaker said, "It is too much for me to receive." But the conqueror of the world replied, "It is not too much for me to give."

The prayer we have reviewed was very great—But was it answered? Read the very next verse. "According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I shew unto him marvellous things." So sure is it that he is a God, hearing prayer. So often does he fulfil the promise, "While they call I will answer, and before they speak I will hear."

OCTOBER 26.—"When he had by himself purged our sins."—Heb. i. 3.

THERE is a cleansing from sin by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost: and we read of the Saviour's cleansing his Church with the washing of water by the word. But here the purification has another import. It was well understood by the Hebrews from their own services—It is to clear from guilt by atonement, or to remove iniquity by expiation, so that it will not be imputed or punished. Without shedding of blood there is no remission; and in him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. This is the meaning. And therefore it is spoken of as a thing done already, and accomplished when he died upon the cross. For it is said he accomplished this purging of our sins—

"By himself." This has a two-fold reference. It distinguishes him from the high priest under the law. *He* put away sin typically, but it was not by the sacrifice of *himself*, but of the victims whose blood he shed and carried into the holy place. But Christ washed us from our sins in *his own* blood; and through the eternal Spirit he offered *himself*, without spot, to God; and thus purges the conscience from dead works. It also shows us that he was alone in the work, without a partner, without a helper, without a comforter. He trod the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with him. This was even signified by his stipulation in the garden; "If ye seek me, let these go their way:" and also by the conduct of his disciples, "when all forsook him and fled."

Here we see the vastness of his love—That he would interpose on the behalf of those who were guilty and deserved to suffer. "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "When we were enemies we were reconciled unto God by the death of his Son." And he was under no constraint or mistake. He well knew what his engagement would cost him—yet he was more than willing—yet, dreadful as the scene was, when it drew near, he turned not away his back, he repented not of his undertaking—Yea, he said, I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Surely such love passeth knowledge!

But we see his greatness as well as his goodness—that he *could* purge our sins by himself. Think of the millions of sinners saved;

think of the myriads of sins with which each of them was charged; and the evil there was in every sin—Yet “the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all! And he taketh away the sin of the world! And his blood cleanseth from all sin!” This would seem incredible; but it is called “the blood of God,” that is, of One who was Divine as well as human. No wonder *he* not only finished transgression, and made an end of sin, but brought in everlasting righteousness; not only satisfied the law, but magnified it, and made it honourable.

Hence let us never think of adding any thing to the efficacy of his sacrifice by our doings or sufferings. This was the great point so urged by the Reformers. They differed in many things, but *here* they were perfectly agreed, and resolved rather to die than to yield—that nothing should blend with the death of Christ as the foundation of our hope, and the ground of our plea, for acceptance and justification with God. In one thing they have been mistaken. Much of what they said against good works applied only to Popish good works, that is, to abstinences and performances enjoined only by will-worship and the traditions and commandments of men. They honoured what the Scripture means by good works, works done by the grace of God, and according to the rule of his own word—Yet these, even these, much as they valued them for other necessary uses, they excluded in whole, and in part, from *that* work of which the Saviour said, “It is finished.”

Let us also beware of diminishing its virtue. We really take from its all-sufficiency when we feel and talk as if it was not *by itself* fully adequate to all the purposes of a sinner’s relief. O thou of little faith! wherefore dost thou doubt? This sacrifice has satisfied Divine justice; why should it not satisfy thy conscience? why art thou afraid to rely upon a complete, an infinite propitiation for sin? So far as the East is from the West, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Think of this, and joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. That atonement, when we trust in it and plead it, renders us dearer to God than even a state of innocency could have done—It is an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour. Think of this and let it give you boldness and access with confidence in your approaches to God. Think of this and let it support you under all your trials. All may be rough under foot, but all is calm and clear over head. Men may frown, but God smiles. He may chastise, but he cannot condemn; and the correction is in love to your souls, and designed for your profit. Here is the tree for the healing of the waters of Marah.

And you, poor convinced sinner, you diminish its value unless you find in it enough to encourage even you, and even in sight of all your desert! We blame you, not for believing that sin is exceeding sinful, or feeling that the load of it is a burden too heavy for you to bear. You ought to ask, “How shall I come before the Lord, and bow before the high God?” And it is well to be convinced that you have no sacrifice of your own to offer. But there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Surely *he* hath borne our grief, and carried our sorrow. We are made nigh by the blood of Christ. Be not faithless, but believing.

“Should worlds conspire to drive me thence,
Moveless and firm this heart should lie;
Resolv'd, for that's my last defence,
If I must perish, there to die.”

OCTOBER 27.—“And as they followed, they were afraid.”—Mark, x. 32.

In these men we see a representation of Christians—*Following*; but *afraid*. The one showing their constant character; the other their frequent experience.

They are followers of Christ. They follow him under various allusions. They follow him as sheep follow the shepherd that is leading them to pasture. It is to himself he refers when he says, “When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.” They follow him as beggars follow a benefactor from whom they are seeking and expecting alms and relief. They follow him as travellers follow a guide who shows them the way. They follow him as soldiers follow a commander who leads them to warfare and victory. They follow him as servants follow their master to receive and execute his orders. More frequently they are said to follow him as disciples follow their teacher, whose doctrine they profess, and whose example they imitate. For he is not only their instructor, but their model; to him they are to be conformed. He goes before them in doing and suffering—“If any man,” says he, “will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.” And who is he that requires us to be humble and tender? He who was meek and lowly in heart. Who is he that requires us to be condescending? He who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; he who washed the disciples' feet. Who is he that requires us to be liberal? He who was rich, and for our sakes became poor. Do we suffer? He suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. In this view we are to consider him, lest we be wearied and faint in our minds. When ready to despond or repine, let us look before us, and see him bearing a heavier burden, bearing it for us, and bearing it without a murmur and without a groan.

But while they follow, they may be afraid. Let us arrange the fears of his followers in three classes. First, there are those fears which are commendable. For they are enjoined to “pass the time of” their “sojourning here in fear;” and God himself says, “Happy is the man that feareth always.” Such is the fear of caution and vigilance which they are to maintain, as opposed to the carelessness, heedlessness, and rashness of those who expose themselves to temptation, and feast themselves without fear. Such is the fear of diffidence, which keeps us from trusting in our own hearts, and depending upon own resources and resolutions, either as to duty or trials. Such is that fear of the Lord, in which David resolved to worship towards his holy temple, and which he connects with God's forgiving mercy. It is a fear of offending him, and grieving his Holy Spirit. The first Christians walked in the fear of the Lord; and we may judge what the nature of it was, and learn that there was

nothing debasing or distressing in it, for it was united with "the comforts of the Holy Ghost."

Secondly, those which are censurable. Such is the fear of man that bringeth a snare, and which led Nicodemus to come to him by night, and Peter to deny him thrice. The righteous should be bold as a lion. His cause is good, and his defence is sure—"For he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." So that we may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." Such is a slavish fear of God, who ought to be always viewed as our father and our friend. He will not reject us for our infirmities, but spare us as a man that spareth his own son that serveth him. We are excepted in the Beloved, however unworthy, and are complete in him, however defective. "We are redeemed," says Zechariah, "that being delivered we might serve him *without fear*, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our lives."

Thirdly, those which are neutral—for we know not how to commend or censure them. They are constitutional rather than moral. They arise from the state of the animal spirits; and depend on a disordered bodily frame. Much of the apprehension of death, and many of those feelings which they call temptations of Satan, and doubts, and fears, are often physical effects. They should endeavour to distinguish things that differ, and have a juster view of their state than to be affected in their conclusions by a variation in the weather, or in their animal economy. Yet how much are such persons as these entitled to our sympathy and prayers! We are sometimes much tried in dealing with them, but they refuse to be comforted, because they cannot at present take comfort, and their very religion produces a kind of unbelief—They tremble at the thought of presumption. Yet at the very time these tremblers, like "Fearing" in Bunyan, often fear nothing else but coming short at last. They are willing to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth; and, like Caleb, to follow him fully. And when others decline, and the Saviour says to them, will ye also go away? the answer rushes up from every feeling of their soul, "Lord, to whom should we go but unto thee? thou hast the words of eternal life."

Am I addressing such a one? Art thou sighing, "If I am a follower at all, I seem only like Peter, to follow him afar off. At best I come in like one of Gideon's followers, pursuing, yet faint, and ready to halt." Or with the disciples before us, and "they were amazed," and "as they followed they were afraid." Yet I dare not go back: I cannot turn aside—he is all my salvation and all my desire—no joy can be compared with serving and pleasing him.

Well he knows your frame. Your desire is before him, and your groaning is not hid from him. You may write bitter things against yourselves—but this is what he writes: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it, for thou hast a little strength, and has not denied my name." Wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land—

"Where doubts and fears shall never come."—

And we shall "be quietness and assurance for ever,"

OCTOBER 28.—“It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.”—2 Thess. i. 6, 7.

THERE is no difficulty in conceiving that “it is a righteous thing” with God to recompense tribulation to those who are troubled. It was their desert; and righteousness consists in rendering to all their due—But how does this apply to those who were troubled? Surely when they have done all that is commanded them they are unprofitable servants, and their defective obedience deserves condemnation rather than reward. We should not wonder therefore if the Apostle had said that it was a *gracious* thing with God to recompense them. But it is also an act of righteousness. Though it would be injustice to make a man suffer beyond his desert, it is not unjust to reward him beyond his desert. A man is not at liberty to punish sovereignly, but in his favours he is free, and he may do what he will with his own. God is infinitely good: in the covenant of grace he has provided for the acceptance of his people; and they are accepted in the Beloved; and God has bound himself not only to pardon, but even to honour and recompense their services and sufferings. Hence says our Saviour, “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake: rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.” And hence says Paul to the Hebrews, “God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” It cannot be supposed that a cup of cold water, given to a disciple in the name of a disciple, could merit eternal life: yet, if the Lord has promised that it shall not lose its reward, it would be an unrighteous thing in him not to reward it.

But what was the blessedness to be recompensed to these Thessalonians? “Rest.” This is a representation of the heavenly state frequently given us in the Scriptures. It is sometimes spoken of in allusion to the rest of the Sabbath. Thus the Apostle says, “There remaineth a rest for the people of God:” the word is, as the margin apprizes you, a keeping of Sabbath. To those who now call the Sabbath a delight, and look forward to it with eager desire amidst the toils and cares of the week, the notion is very attractive. By-and-by the Saturday evening of life will come, and they will wipe their hands of every thing earthly, and fall asleep in Jesus, and open their eyes on a sabbath whose hallowed pleasures will know no end. At other times it seems to be spoken of under this name in reference to the destiny of the Jews. Canaan was called “the rest” which the Lord their God gave them, and where, after the bondage of Egypt, and their tedious journeyings in the wilderness, they were to enjoy a settlement abounding with every accommodation and delight. But this was only a shadow of good things to come, a type of a better, even a heavenly country, into which death gives the true Israelites an abundant entrance. Hence the word reminds us of their freedom from every thing annoying and vexatious here. They will rest from their labours; rest from their cares; rest from their troubles; rest from temptation; rest from sin; and

rest from sinners—"There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest."

But observe how they were to enjoy it—you shall have this rest, says the Apostle, "with us"—with us, "Paul, and Sylvanus, and Timotheus," who now address you, and wish you grace and peace. Does he mention this with reluctance? No, but with delight. It rejoiced him to think that the poorest in the church of Thessalonica would be fellow-possessors with themselves, residing in the same state, enjoying the same portion. He shows the same noble disposition in another place; "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

Paul would intimate that the blessedness of the righteous will be social. This falls in with all the principles of our nature. We are formed for intercourse; and it is not good for man to be alone. Much of our pleasure is now derived from our connexions. It will also be admitted that many of our pains are derived from the same source. This however does not arise from society itself, but a particular state of it. It is easy to conceive what happiness association could yield us, if certain things were removed from our associates and from ourselves. Hereafter every moral defect, together with every cause of sorrow and alarm, will be done away; and each will be capable of giving and receiving unalloyed gratification.

It is pleasing to think that we shall enjoy this rest with the most endeared and the most dignified society. Grace here teaches our hearts to love all that love the Lord; but there are those who are peculiarly united to us by the ties of nature and friendship, and who are to us as our own souls. Who knows not the anguish of parting with such as these! And how intolerable would be the thought of losing them for ever! But the Scripture forbids the despair. We shall see and hear them again; we shall commune with them again; the intercourse will be renewed to infinite advantage, and be perpetuated for ever. We are commanded to comfort one another with such words—So fully does Revelation countenance our mutual recognitions in the heavenly world. But we shall also sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God. We shall intermix with patriarchs, prophets, apostles—you shall rest with *us*, says Paul—and *they* were the most eminent of men, men secondary in dignity to the Son of God himself, men who wielded miraculous powers, and foretold things to the end of time. There are persons pre-eminently distinguished from others, and of whom we entertain the most exalted respect. We look at the inanimate image of them in a picture. We read their lives with veneration; and when we reflect on their works we are ready to exclaim, how happy should we have been to have known them! Yet were they living and we could have access to them, we should dread as well as desire intercourse with them: we should shrink into nothing before them, at a sense of our inferiority, and feel embarrassed by delight. But nothing of this feeling will be known hereafter. Whatever distinctions may prevail, the freedom of our enjoyment will be unimpaired by them. Even angels, those glorious beings, will not confound us. The rustic will be easy at the sight and the

notice of Gabriel. Yet the greatest essential would be wanting still if we did not enjoy this rest with the Saviour himself—But we shall be for ever with the Lord.

We are therefore finally informed of the period of this blessedness—“When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.” Not that there is no intermediate state; for as soon as absent from the body, they are present with the Lord. But till then they are not complete in number, in person, in estate. But then the body will be raised and ennobled; then all the redeemed and sanctified will be gathered together unto him; then all his designs on their behalf will be accomplished; then “he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe.”

OCTOBER 29.—“For God blessed him.”—1 Chron. xxvi. 5.

WHEN Balak sent to hire Balaam, he flattered him by saying, “I know that he whom thou blessest *is* blessed.” The compliment betrays profaneness, ignorance, and falsehood. But the language will justly apply to God. His voice is almighty—His words are realities—His benediction is efficiency—He whom God blesseth is blessed; and none can reverse it. Of this blessing we here read. The subject of it was Obed-edom. The occasion is marked in an earlier portion of the sacred history. It was his entertainment of the ark when David, displeased and terrified by the death of Uzzah, refused to go on with the removal of it to Jerusalem, and carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite, where it remained three months.

But what was the nature of this blessing? Good men judge by a rule of their own: they walk by faith, and not by sight. They value no blessings like spiritual blessings, because these are for the soul and eternity. They therefore pray, “Remember me, O Lord, with the favour thou bearest unto thy people; O visit me with thy salvation.” And this we have reason to believe was the desire and the experience of Obed-edom. But what is here spoken of intends rather a temporal blessing, suited to the dispensation under which he lived, and which abounded much with the promise of the life that now is. Personally considered, he had health and strength, firm nerves, and fine spirits. His undertakings flourished. His possessions were preserved, increased, enjoyed. His domestic comforts were sweetened and relished. His wife was a fruitful vine by the sides of his house. His children like olive plants round about his table. Both before and after the text, mention is made of the number, the ability, and eminence of his sons. It is also said, “the Lord blessed his household—and all that pertained to him, because of the ark of God.”

Let us distinguish between the circumstances and the essence of this blessing. We may then ask, Is the case of this good man a singular one? Has not our Saviour said, “There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, ~~for~~ *for* the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.” Have the generous ever repented of their liberality, even on a secular ground? Have the most public-spirited Christians been the least successful

even in their worldly affairs? But a man's life consisteth not in the *abundance* of the things that he possesseth. A *little* that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. The blessing of the Lord maketh rich even with competency; and he addeth no sorrow with it. How much more desirable is it to inherit his blessing ourselves, and to leave it to our offspring, than to possess, and to bequeath thousands of gold and silver without it!

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." So said God to the selfish and saving Jews. We say the same to you. Put his word to the trial, wherein he has said, "The liberal soul deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand." "He which soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully." Herein we may see how little faith there is in the earth. They *shall* prosper that love Zion. A regard therefore to their own welfare should make men liberal; and if they believed the word of God, there would be forthcoming contributions enough for every private charity and all public institutions. But we are afraid to make God our banker; and cannot rely upon his promise and providence.

Yet while we are reproved, let us also be encouraged, and stand ready to every good work. There are two cases in which we may peculiarly resemble Obed-edom in conduct and condition. The one is when we open our doors, and receive, in a way of Christian hospitality, the Lord's followers or ministers. "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." The other is when, to use the words of Scripture, we have a Church in our house. This was the case with Priscilla and Aquila. It was a common thing in the beginning of the Gospel, before places were expressly built for religious assemblies. Nor is the practice unknown in many of our villages now. When the preacher has first gone to publish the Gospel, he has been often indebted to some poor rustic who has lent his cottage to the Lord. He has sometimes drawn upon himself reproach and persecution; but the Lord has blessed him. And when also you establish the worship of God in your family, kneeling before his living oracles, and offering the sacrifices of prayer and of praise, never imagine the time employed in these exercises lost. You cannot serve God for nought, while the promise and the threatening remain: "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just."

OCTOBER 30.—“ And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness.”—2 Sam. vi. 12.

Two things may be usefully remarked here. The first is, the fame of the blessing. It was soon known and noticed. The report of it spread in all directions, and even reached the throne—“ and it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark.” The manifestation of the sons of God is principally future. They will hereafter shine forth from every cloud that conceals them, as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The wisdom of their choice, and the advantages resulting from it, will then so convincingly appear, that those who vilify them now will be constrained to say, “ we fools counted their life madness and their end to be without honour. How are they numbered with the children of God, and their lot is among the saints.” But the Lord does not leave his people entirely undistinguished even now. He begins to honour them here. He sets a mark upon their foreheads, that the executioners may pass them by in the day of evil. He sometimes puts such a difference between them and others, that men, profane and infidel men, say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth. Even Balaam exclaimed, How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his. How easily, even in this life can he bring their enemies to their feet, and make them know that he has loved them! And has he not said, “ Their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed ?”

Let us from hence learn our duty. While we are in the world we should pray, with David; Lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies; or, as it is in the margin, observers. Many eyes are upon us; and though they cannot judge of our experience, they can estimate our conduct. They will be sure to compare it with our profession; and their disposition will not suffer them to make those allowances which candour and truth require. They will magnify infirmities into crimes, and impute the miscarriages of a few to the whole body. Let us then walk in the fear of the Lord because of the reproach of the heathen. Let us put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: yea, let us constrain them by our good works, which they behold, to glorify God in the day of visitation. Let them see that our religion is not a mere notion, but that there is a reality, an excellency, an efficiency in it that recommends it to every reflecting mind. Let them see the advantages we have derived from it, in the government of our tempers, in our readiness to forgive, in our humility when we prosper, in our patience when we suffer, in the confidence and calmness of our minds with regard to every future event. Let them see that we have found, what others are seeking after in vain, contentment and happiness. And thus shall we adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, and be ever saying to those around us, “ Come with us, and we will do you good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.”

The Second is the influence of it. It doubtless impressed many; but David only is mentioned. He is mentioned because of his eminence—not for its own sake—but relatively to his usefulness. The soul of a prince is no more precious than the soul of a beggar; but when the great are set in motion they draw others after them. No sooner was David informed of the blessing of God upon Obed-edom for the sake of the ark, than his apprehensions vanished, his zeal was roused, and he resolved to obtain a share of the same goodness—“So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness.” And here we see that the proofs others have shown of the gain of godliness should excite and encourage us to follow their example. The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. No improvements in husbandry or trade will be long confined to individuals. Every useful invention and discovery in the arts and sciences, is soon and eagerly adopted by those who are informed of them, as we see in the case of the mariner’s compass, and printing, and a thousand other things. Upon this principle, why do not men embrace the Gospel, which is so evidently conducive to the personal and social welfare of mankind? What numbers have recommended it from their own experience, living and dying! Let us repair to a Physician who has only, yet has so often, cured the complaints under which we labour. Let us reflect upon those who have been enlightened, and pardoned, and renewed in the spirit of their minds, and blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; and pray, “Bless me, even me also, O my father”—“We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”

David not only brought up the ark, but with gladness. What we do for God we should do readily and cheerfully. God loves a cheerful giver. The charity of some is like the sour emission obtained from crabs by grinding and pressing them. But it drops from a Christian like a honeycomb, or flows like a living spring. He doth all things without murmuring or disputing, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart. He cannot always claim the promises; yea, they sometimes make him tremble, lest he should come short through unbelief: but he always delights in the law of God after the inward man. He cannot always rejoice in the full assurance of hope; but his meat is to do the will of his heavenly Father. His duty is his privilege. The Sabbath and the sanctuary are his attractions; and he finds it good to draw nigh to God.

But wonder not if you meet with opposition and reflection. “As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal, Saul’s daughter, looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.” People will commend or excuse warmth in every thing but religion—*There* it is often decried as weakness or ridiculed as folly. And should we encounter this in our exertions for the cause of God what are we to do?—Do! go forward. Do! do as David did, who bound the scandal as a garland around his brow, and said, “I will yet be more vile.” So, blessed Redeemer! wast thou treated in the days of thy flesh. So didst thou bear the contradiction of sinners against thyself, thy spirit blasphemed, thy words and actions perverted, thy name cast out as evil. May it be enough for us that the disciple

be as the Master, and the servant as his Lord. May we go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach; and rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

OCTOBER 31.—“He hath opened mine eyes.”—John ix. 30.

THE miracles which our Saviour performed on the bodies of men awakened peculiar attention; but the changes which he accomplishes in the soul are much more glorious and important. The benefits of the former were limited to time, but those of the latter pervade eternity. Persons might have been the subjects of the one and have perished for ever; but the experience of the other was always accompanied with salvation.

One of the signs and wonders that were to accredit the Messiah was “the recovering of sight to the blind.” And here we have an instance of it. The story is remarkably interesting and instructive—But we may consider the cure as a symbolical representation of the agency of Divine grace in healing the disorder of the mind; and so put the language into the mouth of every Christian, “He hath opened mine eyes.”

They were once blind, and, like this man, were born blind. But the Lord never leaves them as he finds them. He “opens the eyes of their understanding,” and makes them know the things that belong to their peace; and in his light they see light. The illumination is not perfect at once; and in other things the men of the world may surpass them. But they know themselves, they know the evil of sin, they know the preciousness of the Saviour, and above all things desire to win Christ, and be found in him. The enlightening principally and distinctively consists in a real apprehension of the excellency of Divine things. There is a great difference between a conviction that there is such a Being as the Lord Jesus, and such a perception of his glory as attaches us to him: and between a persuasion that there is such a thing as holiness, and a sense of the beauty of it: and between a belief that honey is sweet, and a knowledge of its sweetness: the one derived from report, and the other resulting from relish.

Two effects follow when the things of the Spirit are thus spiritually discerned. The one is a clearer, fuller, firmer, conviction of the existence of these things. Their lustre renders them more distinct and prominent. We feel assured that they cannot be fictitious, they must be real, must be of God. And now also our prejudices against them relax and remove; and we are open to conviction, and disposed to do justice to all evidence in their favour; and become studious of them, and long to increase by every method our acquaintance with them. For the other is, a superlative regard to them. There is now felt an influence in them that fixes the mind, and sways the will and the affections. We now seek those things that are above. The love of Christ constraineth us. To them that believe he is precious. There is no true faith without works; no saving knowledge without obedience. The seat of its residence is the heart; and the sphere of its activity the whole life.

And has he thus opened your eyes? Then adore and praise y. ^{our} Enlightener. Often dwell upon your former and present condition,

and, like the man before us, be found in the temple giving glory to God, and be always inquiring, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?"

Maintain a carriage becoming your privileged condition. You were darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord, walk as children of light. It would be shameful in you to strike against the stumbling blocks over which the blind fall. See your danger and your duty. Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Pity and pray for those whose eyes are not yet opened. You would be concerned in other cases of far less moment and misery. You feel even for the blind beggar that sits on the bank, or is led along by his faithful dog. How much more would you be distressed at the sight of a brother, or sister, or mother, or child, in this groping and comfortless condition! Where are your feelings when you behold sinners incapable of spiritual action and enjoyment, and approaching senseless the verge of the bottomless pit?

You were once in the same state yourselves, and can therefore sympathize with those who are still in it. O tell them what you see and enjoy. Tell them light is sweet, and what a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the Sun of Righteousness. It would not indeed be kind to do this unless there was hope for them. But there *is* hope in Israel concerning this thing. You cannot open their eyes for them. And they cannot open their own eyes—But there is One to do it who *is* able, and is equally willing. Tell them what he has done for you. Tell them that he is now within call: that he is at this moment passing by: and never yet refused the prayer of the destitute.

NOVEMBER.

NOVEMBER 1.—"And he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God."—2 Chron. xxxiii. 13.

—By an experimental and practical knowledge of him, the effect of converting grace. He had been a monster of iniquity, and seemed beyond the reach of mercy. But he obtained forgiveness, and by his graciously overruled exile and imprisonment, as the means, he was induced to seek the Lord God of his fathers, and he was found of him.

The change was real and amazing, and verified the language of the prophet: "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign, that shall not be cut off." All conversion is a turning. In religion it means a change of views, dispositions, and pursuits, so that we become the reverse of what we were before. With some who use the term, it seems to mean much less than this, and to signify only an impression, a change of opinions, a strong persuasion—not a transformation of mind, not the renewing of the Holy Ghost, not a transition from one moral state to another. When we have heard some per-

sons talking of their conversion under a preacher, and at such a time—for they are often very particular in the date, we have been ready to say, we know not what you were before your conversion, but we know what you are since! But if a man was proud, and revengeful, and covetous before his conversion, and remains so after it, where is the change? What should we have thought of Manasseh's conversion, had he, whatever professions he made, continued in his former ways? But there was a change in the whole of his character, conversation, and conduct. He ceased to do evil, and learned to do well. By two things the reality of his conversion showed itself.

First, he lived some years after it, and thus his religion had time to be developed. This is generally the case with the Lord's people. He calls them out of darkness, that they may walk as children of light. "This people," says he, "have I formed for myself, they shall shew forth my praise." Many seem to view repentance as a preparation, not for life, but only for death. We must not limit the Holy One of Israel. He may call a man at the eleventh hour: but we have reason to believe the cases are very rare; and too much stress is laid by some preachers and some periodicals on these late appearances—conversions which take place a few days or weeks at most before dissolution. Even when persons have obtained that repentance which is unto life, and have died immediately after, though they have died safely, the change must have been less certain to themselves, and less satisfactory to others.

Secondly, by a peculiar turn of Providence, the hand that wounded him also healed, and he "was brought again to Jerusalem into his kingdom." And now is the time to observe him. Many have quickly left the religion of a sick chamber after their recovery. The serious attention to Divine things which abasement produced, prosperity has soon dissipated. But see the triumph of this man's principles among the snares and dangers of returning prosperity. No sooner is he seated again on the throne than he sets an example becoming it. He purifies the temple, restores the worship of God, and endeavours to bring back those he had led astray. "And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel." Never was there a true convert without zeal of the same kind. As soon as we feel the value of our own souls we shall prize the souls of others; and be concerned to teach transgressors his ways, and to convert sinners unto God. The earnestness we discover may offend the formal, and even the persons we strive to reclaim may deem us intermeddlers, and tell us to keep our religion to ourselves—But this is impossible. This is telling the fire not to burn, and the spring not to flow. "If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out. And if we bless those who consider the poor, and endeavour to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, how much more should we applaud the man who tries to save a soul from death, and to hide a multitude of sins.

"Ah! Manasseh *could* be useful. He had opportunities and

means. One is ready to envy a man who is disposed to do good, and finds himself in the possession of riches, power, authority—a palace!" Yet while some may be peculiarly useful, none are compelled to be useless. There is some beneficence within the reach of every individual, if he be willing to do it. It is with usefulness as it is with water; it is to be found everywhere, if people will dig enough. Let us seek the praise conferred upon Mary, "She hath done what she could."

But observe the remark of the sacred writer; "Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places, yet unto the Lord their God only." It is said indeed that they worshipped Jehovah only in them; but it was disobedience to the Divine appointment, it was will-worship, it was superstitious. And this no doubt he reprov'd and endeavoured to repress, but much of the evil he could not hinder. And here we perceive that his religion did not operate so extensively and powerfully as his former depravity had done. It is much easier to seduce than to reclaim, to corrupt than to convert.

And we see this in a very affecting instance. It was the case of his successor and son Amon. "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them; and humbled not himself before the Lord, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more." To leave his kingdom and the reformation he had begun to a son he had depraved by his example, but could not reform by his piety; and when he saw or heard of his profligacy and impiety, to sigh and exclaim, "Ah! I taught him all this"—was enough to "bring down his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave!"

Be thankful if you were moral before you were pious; and above all, be grateful if you have been blessed with the grace of early godliness. From how many snares, evils, and pangs, have you been preserved! How pestilential have some been! "One sinner destroyeth much good." What injuries a life of twenty, of thirty years of wickedness, can produce! What miseries must some feel, when, though the riches of Divine mercy have pardoned and renewed them, they think of persons whom they drew aside, and encouraged and emboldened by their example and counsels. These above all things they should endeavour to restore. "But some of them are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and despise reproof. Others are removed to a distance, and we know not where to find them. Others are dead—what can we do here?" Nothing. But seek to be useful to others. And agonize with God, that as you have been a curse, so he would make you a blessing.

NOVEMBER 2.—"When I awake with thy likeness."—Psalm xvii. 15.

DAVID therefore expected to live after death, and he tells us not only that he should awake, but awake with God's likeness.

Does he refer to the state of the soul at death? or of the body at the resurrection? or to both? We love not to press a passage of Scripture beyond its proper bounds; neither would we stop short of them. Man is a complex being; and when the dust returns to the

earth whence it was, the spirit returns to God who gave it. The Apostle tells us that when the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness; and that the Spirit of Him that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken our mortal bodies. And Watts includes each of these effects in his fine versification.

At death the soul of the believer awakes with his likeness; and the resemblance which commenced in regeneration, and advanced in sanctification, is finished in glory: all the remains of sin being then done away, and nothing left but the image of God himself upon all the powers of the mind. What is the body now but a dormitory for the soul to sleep in, rather than a mansion for it to live in? What is our present state but a kind of night-scene? Much of our life now, in the view of angels, must be judged as vain and unmeaning as dreams, and will appear to ourselves hereafter like the vagaries of sleep. Nothing reviewed from eternity will be deemed solid and valuable but what has been connected with the service and enjoyment of God. To what slender dimensions then will the sum of human life be reduced! How few will appear our exercises of sense and reason. And how short our waking intervals! Natural men are entirely asleep as to the purposes of the Divine life—*Thus* indeed Christians cannot sleep as do others. Yet they, even they comparatively slumber. They regard not many things which would strike them if they were wide awake, as they ought to be. They are often drowsy and insensible; can hardly watch and keep their spiritual senses in exercise; and read, and hear, and pray, and meditate, hardly knowing or feeling what they do. It is therefore even to these the Apostle sounds the quickening call, "It is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is your salvation nearer than when you believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand." What a difference between their present and future experience! When they close their eyes in death they will awake and shake off every slumber; and all will be reality, perception, attention, energy, life. Now in the morning they wake and find themselves in the wilderness; then they will wake and find themselves in Canaan. Now they wake and find themselves among the wicked, who vex and defile them; then they will wake and find themselves with the spirits of just men made perfect, and the innumerable company of angels. Now they wake and find a law, that when they would do good evil is present with them; then they will wake and be presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

But man, in his original state, was an embodied creature, and he must be embodied in his final condition. The intermediate and separate state, therefore, is necessarily an imperfect one: for the body, an essential part of human nature, is lying under the incapacities and dishonours of mortality. But this purchase of the Saviour's will be reclaimed: this temple of the Holy Ghost will be re-edified: this companion of the soul will share with it in the work and glories of heaven. And the sacred writers therefore, in referring to the future happiness of believers, commonly lead our views to this consummation. And death is expressed by sleep, peculiarly in reference to the body, and to intimate not only cessation from labour and the enjoyment of repose, but susceptibility of revival. At the resurrection, the body wakes. "Awake, and sing, ye that

dwelt in dust." They that "sleep in the dust of the earth shall arise."—And believers will awake with his likeness. We know, says the apostle John, that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And this likeness is corporeal as well as spiritual. As we have, in our infirmities, diseases, and dissolution, borne the image of the earthly, so we shall bear the image of the heavenly, when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality. Our conversation is in heaven, says the Apostle, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, "who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." A prospect hailed ages before by Job, as the ultimate and complete solace and relief of his sufferings—"For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."

"This life's a dream, and empty show;
But the bright world to which I go
Hath joys substantial and sincere;
When shall I wake, and find me there?"

"O glorious hour! O blest abode!
I shall be near and like my God!
And flesh and sin no more control
The sacred pleasures of the soul.

"My flesh shall slumber in the ground,
Till the last trumpet's joyful sound;
Then burst the chains with sweet surprise,
And in my Saviour's image rise."

NOVEMBER 3.—"But withal prepare me also a lodging; for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you."—Philemon 22.

THAT is, he trusted that though he was now a prisoner he should be set at liberty, so as to be able to fulfil his ministry again for their furtherance and joy of faith. Had his confidence been inspired by the Holy Ghost he would have expressed himself without hesitation; but he had only a hope in his own mind arising from what he deemed probability. Whether this hope was accomplished we are unable to determine; and the learned are divided in their opinion. But he intimated no more than he felt at the time; and his language shows another instance of the Apostle's address in enforcing his plea on the behalf of his object; for if, as he trusted he should, soon visit Philemon, how could his friend see his face in peace, or at least with pleasure, had he refused his request on behalf of Onesimus?

Paul was warm, but there was nothing in him enthusiastical: he feared God, but he was not superstitious: he lived above the world, but he was not a recluse—He never affected to contemn the feelings of humanity. He therefore desired that a lodging might be prepared for him against his arrival. Yet he was not fond of indulgence and show; and therefore a little would content him. He did not require the enlarged and various accommodations of a home, but only the needful conveniences of an inn; not a mansion, but an

apartment: such as the Shunamite made for Elisha; "Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither."

And we may rest assured that Philemon would not only readily provide for him, but in his own dwelling; knowing that a man so well educated would not be finical and troublesome; and that one so Christian would be sure to be instructive and useful, and draw down the regards of Heaven. So the house of Obed-edom was blessed for the sake of the ark. So now is the Saviour's promise; "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward."

Paul viewed his restored freedom as a privilege and a favour: "I shall be given unto you." In another place he speaks of ministers as "the gifts of Christ." And this is true of their commission, endowments, success, and all opportunities of exertion. It is he that gives them not only a door of utterance, but a door of entrance. It is easy to see what a hinderance of usefulness the confinement of such a man as Paul was. God is able indeed by his almighty power to overrule evil for good; but we must judge of things by their proper and natural tendency: and thus persecution involves the heaviest guilt. It is said of Herod, after the enumeration of his crimes, that "he added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison." This was taking the light from the candlestick, and putting it under a bushel. It was rendering him a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Hence, says Paul to the Thessalonians: "Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified." What Christian then ought to be indifferent to the progress of civil liberty, which, justly considered, always includes religious, and affords opportunity for exertion and co-operation in extending the cause of knowledge, truth, righteousness, and peace.

But see the importance and efficiency of prayer. The prayer of Abraham prevailed for the healing of Abimelech. Joshua by prayer lengthened the day for Israel to complete their victory. By prayer fifteen years were added to the life of Hezekiah. The church at Jerusalem prayed for Peter's enlargement, and he was delivered by an angel before the prayer-meeting broke up. And what says Paul to the Philippians? "I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Here also he says; "I trust that *through your prayers* I shall be given to you." Sometimes prayer succeeds in obtaining the very blessing itself which is implored: at other times the answer brings a substitute for it; as when Paul besought the Lord to remove the thorn in the flesh, and received the assurance of all-sufficient grace while under it. But the prayer of the righteous shall be granted: and the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, not only when it is offered for himself, but also for others. Here also is a proof that the usefulness of prayer is not confined to the influence of the performance, but includes also success and acquisition. The prayers we offer for ourselves really affect us

by the very exercise of the duty. But if our prayers for others benefit them, when at the very time they may be ignorant of our offering them, this must be by God's doing something in a way of answer. This is the very ground and encouragement of our offering them. And the Bible is filled with instances of the accomplishment of such prayers, as it is with commands for the performance of them.

NOVEMBER 4.—“FOR THEIR SAKES I SANCTIFY MYSELF, that they also might be sanctified.”—John xvii. 19.

HERE are two sanctifications spoken of, very distinguishable from, yet intimately connected with each other—The sanctification of Christ; and the sanctification of Christians. Let this exercise turn on THE SANCTIFICATION OF CHRIST—“For their sakes I sanctify myself.”

Here the word to sanctify does not mean to renovate or purify; but to consecrate or devote. He could not be sanctified in the former sense, because his nature was not depraved or defiled by sin. But under the law, when persons or things were dedicated to God, they were considered as hallowed or holy, and to use them for any common purpose was to profane them. Thus the Sabbath was sanctified, and the tabernacle, and the temple, with the vessels thereof. Thus Jesus devoted himself to the service of God in the salvation of sinners. “Lo!” said he, “I come to do thy will, O God. I consecrate myself to be an atonement, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. I will suffer, the just for the unjust, and bring them nigh who were once far off, by my blood.” Here he displays the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us. For,

Observe the *voluntariness* of the consecration. He does not say, I am sanctified, but, “I sanctify myself.” He was not passive in the business; neither was he compelled. No man, says he, taketh my life from me; I lay it down of myself. He made himself of no reputation. It was therefore with him a matter of the freest choice, and of the fullest purpose. A man walking by the side of a river, may see a fellow-creature in danger of drowning, and may plunge in to save him, and perish himself in the attempt. He may be considered as falling a sacrifice to his kindness; but the sacrifice with him was only eventual, not designed. Nothing was accidental in the sufferings of Christ; nothing was unforeseen; he assumed our nature, and entered our world, for this very end—The Son of man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Observe also the *relativeness* of the consecration; “For their sakes I sanctify myself”—Not his own. He had no sin of his own to expiate. He was therefore cut off, but not for himself. He was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted: but he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed. And he suffered not only for our sakes, but in our stead. His death was not only for our good, but for our redemption; and we are expressly assured that he redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. He was therefore a true and proper

sacrifice for sin. As such he was typified by the sacrifices under the law. The people were guilty. The High Priest confessed their sins, and laid his hands on the head of the victim; and having thus transferred their guilt to the substitute, he slew the victim, and taking the blood in a basin, entered the holiest of all, and sprinkled the mercy-seat, and burned incense; and then came forth and blessed the absolved congregation. And thus once in the end of the world Christ appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; and then entered the holy place, there to appear in the presence of God for us: and to them that look for him will he come forth and appear a second time without sin unto salvation.

Nor must we forget the *expensiveness* of the dedication. This it is not in our power to estimate. We must possess the same feelings, and bear the same load, before language or imagination, however lively, can enable us to do any thing like justice to the sufferings he endured. The history is not indeed silent. It tells—how he was born in a stable and laid in a manger; became a man of sorrows; had not where to lay his head; endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, bore every kind of reproach; and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. But a veil is drawn over his internal anguish. What, before human treachery or violence had yet seized him, made him to be sore amazed and very heavy? What led him to say, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;” while his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground? How well, blessed Jesus! mayest thou say, “Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow, like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.”

Finally, let us keep in mind the *unworthiness* and *vileness* of the subjects on whose behalf he thus devoted himself. We read of benefactors: but how few of them have ever exercised self-denial! And when they have made sacrifices, for whom have they suffered? Men have hazarded their lives in the field; they have been wounded, they have been slain. But they bled and died for their country, their friends, their families. But “when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Here every Christian will look at his character and his own life: he will review his years of unregeneracy; his omissions of duty; his actual offences: his heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; his depraved nature itself, shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin: and can he only glance at this, and not exclaim, with self-abasement and wonder—

“Was it for crimes that I had done
He groan’d upon the tree?
Amazing pity, grace unknown,
And love beyond degree!”

NOVEMBER 5.—“For their sakes I sanctify myself, THAT THEY ALSO MIGHT BE SANCTIFIED.”—John xvii. 19.

HAVING viewed the sanctification of Christ, let me consider the SANCTIFICATION OF CHRISTIANS—“That they also might be sanctified.”

This sanctification differs much from the former. It does indeed take in the notion of dedication. In this sense believers are sanctified, and they wish to regard all they are and all they have, as the Lord's, not only by claim, but by consecration. And in their experience there has been a time in which they “gave their ourselves unto the Lord,” saying, “Lord, I am thine, save me.” But to dispose them for this surrender, and that they may be vessels unto honour, sanctified and made meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work, a change must pass upon them. Renovation and purification are necessary. New principles must be implanted; and the promise fulfilled; “And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” Christians therefore are new creatures, concerning whom he says, This people I have formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise. This sanctification therefore is very superior to natural amiableness of temper, and outward reformation, and mere morality. It includes morality, but it includes much more: it includes piety; and while it secures the practice of all good works, it sees that the heart is right with God. At present indeed the work is not complete; but it is begun, and is advancing. The subjects of it love holiness; they mourn over the remains of sin as their greatest burden, and long and pray to be sanctified wholly, body, soul, and spirit.

But let us see what a connexion it has with the sacrifice of Christ—“For their sakes,” says he, “I sanctify myself, *that* they also *might* be sanctified.” Now this clearly shows us the importance of it. *We* may err in our estimation of things, but *his* judgment is always according to truth: and here we see his judgment.

And how precious and invaluable must he have deemed this sanctification, since he considered nothing too great or expensive to procure it for us. He well knew that unless we were delivered from the bondage of corruption, and renewed in the spirit of our minds, we could have no meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, and must be incapable of enjoying or serving God here. This therefore was his aim in dying. “He gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.” He “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

And we learn hence, That they do not improve his death aright who seek from it hope but not holiness. Such a desire has nothing spiritual in it; neither can it be realized. Jesus came by water as well as by blood: and these are as inseparable in their application to the soul as they were in their effusion from the cross. What then can we think of those who derive from his death even a licence to sin: and who, when reproved for their evil ways, satisfy themselves that Christ has satisfied for them; and not only for their past, but for all their future transgressions—and so they have nothing to fear!

But they have every thing to fear. At present they have no part nor lot in the matter; and if they die as they are, Christ will profit them nothing—For he has said, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.”

It is equally obvious that they are badly instructed in the mystery of sanctification who think to gain it from some slavish, legal, superstitious, self-righteous methods of their own, instead of repairing to the sufferings of Christ, the only fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. It is the blood of Jesus that alone cleanseth us from all sin; and this is true as to our purification, not only from the guilt, but also the love and power of it. Our old man is crucified with him. There is no true holiness separate from the cross. There he obtained for us not only eternal redemption, but all the supplies of grace.

And as the death of Christ is the source from which the Spirit is derived, so it is the principal means by which he works: for he works rationally and in a way of argument and motive. And what can equal the view of his sufferings? There we see most strikingly the evil of sin; and there we behold the love of Christ, which most powerfully constrains us. At the sight of this the Christian rises, and says, Did he devote himself thus for me, and shall I not dedicate myself to him? Lord what wilt thou have me to do?

NOVEMBER 6.—“The everlasting God.”—Gen. xxi. 33.

THE eternity of God is the most sublime and astonishing subject on which our thoughts can fix. Let us not darken counsel by words without knowledge. Three things may be said, and this is all we can say. First. He will have no end. If we carry our views forward, and add millions of ages to millions of years, till the mind be lost in the computation, we shall make no progress in the duration of the eternal God. A week is too long for the beauty and fragrance of some flowers. There are insects that are brought forth, and pass the several stages of their being, and die in a single day. The life of man is compared to a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. But the oak of the forest survives several generations of possessors and observers. The earth continues through all the changes of its inhabitants. The river Jordan, which the Jews crossed, continues to wind its uneven course: and the mount Ararat, on which Noah stepped out of the ark, still remains to be seen. The heavenly bodies shine on above the reach of our revolutionary system. Yet this is only comparatively true: nothing is absolutely durable—“They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.” Some creatures will endure for ever. Angels are imperishable. So are the spirits of just men made perfect. The soul will view untouched the destruction of the universe: yea, the body, though material, will be immortalized. But none of these will live for ever *like God*. He is the fountain of life; all other beings are streams flowing from him, and sustained by him. They are not immortal of themselves, but by his pleasure and bounty. But he has life necessarily and independently in himself, and is un-

affected by any external cause. Therefore it is said, "He only hath immortality."

Secondly, he never had a beginning. The space of time which has elapsed since the creation seems long: the globe is near six thousand years old. But through an immensity of duration, of which we can form no idea, God had been living equal to his own happiness, and able to do whatsoever he pleased. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even *from* everlasting," as well as "*to* everlasting, thou art God." It is needless to observe that this prerogative is entirely and infinitely peculiar to God. Thus he is "the first" as well as "the last." He inhabiteth eternity, and indeed constitutes it; for properly speaking, eternity is nothing else but the duration of his being and agency.

Thirdly, there is no change in his being, no diminution, no increase, no variableness or shadow of turning. We speak of the past, the present, and the future: but "I am" is his name, and his memorial in all generations. Our continuance is computed by periods: but his duration is one permanent now. We exist by parcels; we existed partly yesterday, we exist partly to-day, and shall exist partly tomorrow; but he possesses and enjoys his whole being at once. We never continue in one stay: infancy grows into manhood, and manhood descends into old age. Even in the Christian the outward man perisheth, and the inward man is renewed day by day; and even in heaven the saints will be changed from glory into glory; but he says, "I the Lord change not." He was never *less*, and he will never be *more* wise, and holy, and happy than he is. He will never be older than he is, and he was never younger. One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day.

"Why this is an abyss in which our thoughts are swallowed up." It is. And observe the inference we draw from it. Are we not therefore chargeable with the greatest absurdity, when we reject a doctrine because we cannot comprehend it? Is not this to make our understanding the measure of truth? How much reality is there that does not come within the reach of our senses, or of our reason!—We talk of mysteries. There are such in the Scriptures; and are there none in Nature? There is no doctrine we are called to believe in Revelation more difficult than this eternity of God. Every notion we can form of it involves in it a seeming inconsistency, and a real inexplicability; yet every Deist admits it; and the man that denied it would render himself universally ridiculous.

Let us therefore adore a Being who cannot, by searching, be found out unto perfection, and have grace whereby we may worship him acceptably, with reverence and with godly fear. And convinced of the infinite distance there is between him and us, let us admire his condescension. How evident is it that he does not stand in need of us, and is "exalted above all blessing and praise!" Yet we and our mean affairs have always engaged his attention—"What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? and that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?"

The eternity of God should take off our attachment and dependence from things below. Creatures, however agreeable or powerful, are

“less than nothing and vanity.” “Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; wherein is he to be accounted of? Trust in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” “Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.” Creatures may die, but he liveth; and blessed be our Rock, and let the God of our salvation be exalted. “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.” The heavens and the earth may pass away; but his covenant is everlasting, ordered in all things, and sure. As he is eternal, O Christian, thy happiness, which is bound up in him, is secure. He is the strength of thy heart; he is thy portion for ever. Realize thy union with him in all thy exigencies, feebleness, and dangers. “THE ETERNAL GOD is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

NOVEMBER 7.—“We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened.”
2 Cor. v. 4.

By “*this tabernacle*” the Apostle means the body, which is the same to the soul as a dwelling to the inhabitant. Only it is observable that he does not call it a palace, a mansion, a house, but a tabernacle. Paul was familiar with the structure of such a kind of residence, for he was by craft a tent-maker. He knew that it had a roof, but no foundation; that it was a temporary accommodation, a moveable abode, easily taken down, easily injured, easily overturned, easily destroyed. Do what you will with your bodies, they are no better than tabernacles, earthly tabernacles. Nurse them, pamper them, dress them, adorn them, idolize them as you please, dust they are, and unto dust shall they return.

But see how he distinguishes the soul from the body, and places it above the body. He speaks of the body as if it did not belong to our persons, “*We that are in this tabernacle*”—as if we could live and act without it. And this is possible. The soul is the man. The soul is the inhabitant. It is *in* the body, but not *of* it. It is immaterial, immortal, and capable of endless improvement. We cannot save the dwelling, but we may save the inhabitant. And should not this be our supreme concern? Does not he who knows the value of the soul, from the price he paid for the redemption of it, ask, “What is a man profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” Yet there are persons who live as if they deemed the soul unworthy of a moment’s thought; yea, and they often die so too. They send for the physician, they employ the lawyer, they dispose of their substance, they arrange their funerals, and tell their friends where and how they choose to be buried: but not a word escapes them concerning the nobler and never-dying part—and none of the cruel and infamous wretches in the room will dare to break the delusion, and

ask, What, have you no soul? Is this disposed of? Is this provided for? Where will this be found in the day of the Lord Jesus?

We have seen their residence, let us hear their complaint—"We that are in this tabernacle *do groan, being burdened.*" With what? The oppressions are numberless. There are the common evils of life. We need not read the Scriptures to know that earth is a vale of tears; and that man is born to trouble. Who is secure from failure in their schemes? from worldly losses? family bereavements? bodily accidents and diseases? But, common as they are, some might have supposed that the friends of the Almighty would be exempted from these calamities. Yet many are the afflictions of the righteous. They have frequently more of these sufferings than others. The husbandman does not prune the bramble, but the vine. The stones designed for the temple above require more cutting and polishing than those which are for the common wall. Correction is not for strangers, but children—"What son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" Neither is a Christian required to be senseless under these afflictions. They are not joyous, but grievous; and only yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to those that are *exercised thereby*. He is no more to despise the chastening of the Lord than to faint when he is rebuked of him. In some respects he feels these troubles more than others: for he cannot have recourse to the diversions and stupefactions of the world under them; he sees in them all the dreadful evil of sin; he often fears they are proofs of God's anger towards him; and trembles lest they should not be sanctified.

There also the hatred and opposition of the world. What did the Maccabean Jews, and the first Christians, and our own forefathers, suffer? We do well to remember the former times, and compare them with our own. Yet what cannot be done legally may be done really; and many wives, children, servants, and dependants, are at this hour enduring persecution, even in this country. The strongest ties of affection towards a man will, upon conversion, relax and loosen, like the cords of life at the breaking up of the constitution; and what was warm friendship before, degenerates into mere civility, perhaps into open malignity. The carnal mind is enmity against God; the tongue can no man tame. They that go forth to the Redeemer without the camp must bear his reproach. The people of the world will never act justly and candidly towards real religion. They always affect to pity or despise it. It is weakness, or derangement, or enthusiasm, or mercenariness, or hypocrisy. "Speaking evil of you"—"Cruel mockings—"

There are also grievous temptations. What do *some* suffer from this quarter! Yet each Christian, as knowing only his own heart's bitterness, is ready to exclaim, "No one endures such temptations as *I* do—They not only attend me in the world, but follow me to the throne of God and the table of the Lord—They often lay waste my comfort, and I fear will prove my destruction at last"—"The enemy hath persecuted my soul; he hath smitten my life down to the ground; he hath made me to dwell in darkness, as those that have been long dead." Yet is not the Christian life always spoken of as a warfare? And did not even Paul and his fellows say, "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 there is nothing with which the Christian is so much oppressed as his sins. "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me to bear"—At first in the guilt of them, till by believing he enters into rest—But afterwards and always, in the remains of them. When I would do good, says he, evil is present with me, and how to perform that which is good I find not; O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? He is a stranger to Divine grace whose imperfections are not his afflictions. The Christian mourns even over those infirmities which are not even viewed by others as sins: such as wandering thoughts and cold affections in duty. He has a renewed and tender conscience, and like the apple of the eye, a mote will pain it. To love purity and feel pollution—to be eager to advance, and be hindered by baffling detentions—to wish to be a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, and never be able to put any thing out of his hand that is not marred and spoiled—to love the Saviour, and yet grieve his holy Spirit, and pierce the very bosom on which he leans—Here is enough to make him groan, being burdened. It is said of that beautiful bird, the bird of paradise, that when it is caught and caged, it never ceases to sigh till it is set free. "Just such is the Christian"—Nothing will satisfy him but the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

NOVEMBER 8.—"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."—Deut. xxxiii. 27.

How various and striking are the representations which God has given of himself in his Word! They all correspond with the state and wants of his people; and are adapted and designed to fill them with everlasting consolation and good hope through grace. Here we are told that he is their *Defender* and their *Supporter*—

"The eternal God is *thy refuge*." A refuge reminds us of exposure. Dangers encompass them on every side. Their enemies are numberless, and according to the Apostle, the greatest of them are not visible: "For 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." They cannot stand of themselves; and creatures also, however disposed and powerful, are unable to secure them. But their defence is of God, who saveth the upright in heart. He is not only their protector, but their protection. It is only in his covenant engagements, and perfections, and presence, and providence, that they can realize their safety. But encouraging themselves in the Lord their God, they may be emboldened into confidence, and even triumph, and say with the Apostle, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." And this is the interest that awakens their chief anxiety. While they are here, their outward

concerns have their claims; but "one thing is needful." Temporal comforts, as far as they are good for us, are secured: but these may be injured and destroyed; not because God is not able to preserve them, but because he is wise, and knows that these are cases in which the loss of them will be more profitable than the possession. But spiritual blessings are "the sure mercies of David." Whatever becomes of the trader, the Christian is secure. The outward man may perish, but the inward man shall be renewed day by day. "I give unto them," says the Saviour, "eternal life; and they shall never perish."

— "And *underneath* are the everlasting *arms*." Are his people then children? The mother upholds the helpless babe. Sometimes the knee bears the pleasing load; but when she would press it to her bosom, or convey it sleeping to the bed of repose, her arms softly sustain it. "And as one whom his mother comforteth," saith God, "so will I comfort you, and ye shall *be* comforted." Are they invalids? How soon is the strength of the patient reduced, and another is required to raise and remove him from posture to posture, and from place to place. And thus "he giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." Are they heavy-laden? Sin is a burden too heavy for them to bear. The guilt of it often bows down their spirits; and the remains of it constrain them to complain, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" They frequently feel a load of cares, and wants, and crosses, and griefs. "Lord," say they, "I am oppressed, undertake for me." And the promise says, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." And thus it has always been. They have frequently looked forward with dread and despondence; but when the afflictions arrived, they found grace to help in time of need; and as their days so was their strength. Yea, they were not only supported, but in the multitude of their thoughts within them, his comforts delighted their souls.

There is one individual to whom this will peculiarly apply. It is you, O aged believer. The evil days are now come, in which you have little pleasure from outward things. Many of your connexions have fallen off, one after another, like leaves in autumn. Lover and friend have been removed from you and your acquaintance into darkness. Your memory is unfaithful. Your senses begin to fail. The eye and the ear are becoming dim of seeing and dull of hearing. The limbs decline: the hands and the knees tremble. Fear is in the way. The grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails. But while you cry, "Cast me not off in the time of old age, forsake me not when my strength faileth," he who has borne you from the belly, and carried you from the womb, says, "And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you."

NOVEMBER 9.—"And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing."—Luke xv. 5.

JESUS is the speaker, and he refers to himself. The allusion is metaphorical, and regards him under one of the most endearing characters he sustains—The Shepherd.

The address was occasioned by the nature of his audience, and the insinuation of his enemies. "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him"—Drunkards, adulterers, swearers, liars, Sabbath-breakers. The proverb says, Like begets like; and there is much truth in the old adage. Show me a man's company, and I will show you his character. Accordingly, "the Pharisees and the Scribes," pious souls! as if alarmed for the interests of morality, and pretending that the freedom of his conduct was incompatible with the sanctity that should distinguish a Teacher sent from God, "murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." The apparent difficulty was to be solved by an easy distinction which they were not prepared or disposed to make. Our Lord was among these sinners not because he loved their sins, but would save their souls; or, as he explained himself on a similar reproach, he was among them as a physician walks the wards of an hospital, not because he is charmed with disease, but in order to prescribe for his patients: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Here he has another equally striking justification. He spake this parable unto them, saying, "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it"—he belabours it with his rod till it pants again? No such thing—"he layeth it on his shoulders"—complaining of the dangers he has incurred, the many weary steps he has taken, the sufferings he has endured in the research? No—but "REJOICING." Blessed Jesus, how well couldst thou say, "I am the good Shepherd!"

He not only seeks and saves—but whatever it may cost him, he does it with joy. In the anticipation of it, he "rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men." When he was actually becoming incarnate, he said, "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God. I delight to do thy will; yea, thy law is within my heart." With regard to his obtaining eternal redemption for us by his blood, he said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" See him at the well of Sychar. The disciples had left him hungry, and had gone away into the city to buy meat. But when they returned and spread the entertainment before him, and said, "Master, eat;" he said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." He refers to the pleasure he had just experienced in the conversion of the woman of Samaria, and in the approaching salvation of her neighbours by her means—This was his repast: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."—"He layeth it on his shoulders, REJOICING."

It is the joy of *success*. Nothing is more mortifying than to labour in vain, especially when we take great pains, and make great sacrifices. But how pleasing and delightful is it to see the fruit of our exertions. How delighted is the soldier after his marchings, privations, hardships, conflicts, and wounds, to retire in peace, and share the spoils of victory and the applause of his king and his country? "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world."

And this is the very image the prophet applies to the Messiah: "He shall see his seed." "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." Paul and his companions call the Thessalonians their "glory and joy." Yet they were only ministers by whom they believed. If converts are the glory and joy of those who are only the instruments of their conversion, how much more are they the glory and joy of him who is the author of it!

It is the joy of *benevolence*. No pleasure is so unselfish; so pure; so blissful in prospect, and in review, as the pleasure of doing good. But this pleasure will always be in proportion to the degree of benevolent disposition in the benefactor. Who then can imagine the measure of delight in the communication of his favours *He* must enjoy, "whose heart is made of tenderness," who, when he was rich for our sakes became poor, and died that we might live? O that we were as willing to be blessed as he is to deliver and to indulge us. Then the giver and the receiver would rejoice together.

The joy is *encouraging*. The awakened and convinced sinner feels his need of strong consolation. But why should he despond? Why should he ask, will he receive me if I apply to him? Does not the Saviour command him to look? Does he not invite him to come? Does he not complain that he will not come? And does not his application afford him pleasure? In pleading with you therefore, O sinner, we have to urge *his* interest as well as your *own*. You have long enough dishonoured him, and grieved his holy Spirit. Surely now you ought to delight him; and there is one thing by which you may be sure to do it. Retire with weeping and supplication to his footstool: and cry, Lord, save, I perish; and thy sorrows and sighs will yield him as much satisfaction as the songs of angels—"The prayer of the upright is his delight."

The joy is *exemplary*. As Christians we must not only depend upon him, but resemble him: not only glory in his cross, but tread in his steps. We are commanded to walk in love as Christ also hath loved us: and are assured that if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. Let therefore his grief be our grief: let his joy be our joy: and let his joy be fulfilled in us. Let us spare no exertions, let us grudge no sacrifices in our concern to save sinners. Let the work be its own reward. Let the very doing of it be our pleasure. It is what he himself enjoins and expects. "And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." The persons intended are angels and saints. The former readily comply: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." And can the latter refuse? *They* who have themselves been recovered and restored? *They* who have known the misery of sin, and the joy of his salvation? Can *they* see the grace of God and not be glad?

NOVEMBER 10.—"Unto you therefore which believe he is precious."—1 Peter ii. 7.

YET there are many to whom he is not precious who yet believe, and would be offended if they were called infidels. Peter cannot therefore refer to every kind of belief. There is a faith which is

without works, and dead, being alone. But "the faith of God" is operative. It "worketh by love;" and especially love to the Saviour.

When we consider how much depends upon faith; that it is the principle of all genuine religion; that it is the medium of our justification; that we are saved through faith; and that by faith we live and walk; it must be of great importance to know whether we are the subjects of it: and accordingly we are commanded to "examine ourselves whether we be in the faith." And here we are furnished with one of the most pleasing and convincing evidences of the fact. It is the endearment of the Lord Jesus. Is he in our view fairer than the children of men? Is he altogether lovely? all our salvation and all our desire? our glory and our joy? He is so to them that believe—To them "that believe he is precious."

But if this preciousness be the evidence of faith, it is no less the consequence of it. The saints in light do not require faith to endear him. They no longer walk by faith, but by sight. Ah! ye spirits of just men made perfect, in whose number we now reckon many of our own connexions, you see him as he is, and are satisfied by beholding his face in righteousness! But if he is made precious to us in this world it must be by faith. For, first, it is by faith that we gain our information concerning him. We cannot love him without knowing him: but it is faith alone that reveals him to the mind, and tells us where he is, and what he is, and what he possesses, and what he has done, and suffered, and promised. And, secondly, it is only by faith we can, when he is known, make use of him for all the purposes he is ordained to accomplish. He is the refuge, and he is the food of the soul: but a refuge cannot secure us unless it be entered; and food cannot nourish us unless it be eaten: but this application to him, and of him, is the work of faith. It is not a mere notion, but an actual experience, that attaches the Christian to Christ. He has "received him," and received him "full of grace and truth." He has found him infinitely suited to all his wants, and adequate to his relief. Yea, he has healed his broken heart, he has calmed his troubled conscience, he has made him free indeed, he has given him boldness and access with confidence into the holiest of all. And he does not need to be told that all this is the effect of believing on the name of the only begotten Son of God. Thirdly, without faith we have no complacency in him. We cannot esteem and rejoice in any thing unless we feel some congeniality with it. "They that are after the flesh do mind," that is, love, savour, and relish, "the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." And to "be spiritually minded is life and peace." Christ is a holy, spiritual, heavenly Saviour. He was named Jesus because he was to save his people from their sins: and he gave himself for them, that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. A natural man therefore can have no delight in him or communion with him; "for what communion hath light with darkness, or what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" But to a believer he is precious because he has this principle of conformity. He has the Spirit of Christ; and he received this Spirit not by the works of the law, but by the hearing of faith.

His heart is purified; and the heart is purified by faith. He is sanctified, and we are sanctified by faith that is in him.

It follows from the admission of this truth, that the reason why he is not more precious, is because of our remaining unbelief. Wherefore let us "pray always that our God would count us worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in us, and we in him."

NOVEMBER 11.—"He is precious."—1 Peter ii. 7.

WE have seen to whom he is precious. "To them that believe." Let us now ask what proofs do they give of this preciousness? And in what seasons do they peculiarly realize the force of it?

In evidence of this preciousness see how he fills their minds. To the miser his money is precious, and therefore his mind dwells upon it: the child is precious to the mother, and therefore she cannot forget it—So the believer thinks of Jesus, and his thoughts of him are frequent and pleasant. "My meditation of him shall be sweet. How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God, how great is the sum of them—when I awake I am still with thee." See how he employs his tongue. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. The impressions made upon our feelings by an object pre-eminently dear and interesting, can hardly be restrained. When the Pharisees desired our Lord to silence the multitude who were acclaiming him in the temple; he answered, "If these should hold their peace the stones would cry out." And when Peter and John were ordered by the council to speak no more in the name of Jesus; they replied, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." David therefore says, "My mouth shall show forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof." And he could equally reckon upon the disposition of others: "Thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom." See also what sacrifices they are willing to make for him. For him, says Paul, I have suffered the loss of all things. The noble army of martyrs followed him to prison and to death. There is the same spirit in believers now, and they evince it as far as opportunity allows. They go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For his sake they endure the sneers of neighbours, the frowns of friends, the menaces of superiors. For his sake they give up the world; and all their sins, though dear as a right eye, or profitable as a right hand; yea, and forsake all that they have, as far as it comes in competition with him. Their regard appears too in their valuing every thing in relation to him. They are never so pleased with the works of nature as when they are emblems of his beauty and glory. They are never so delighted with ordinances as when they are mediums of communion with him. The Bible is most precious, as it is the word of Christ, and testifies of him. Heaven is most attractive as a place in which they shall be with him to behold his glory. No cause interests them

like his. Their very souls are identified with it. They are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, and the reproach of it is their burden: while no news equals the success of his affairs, and the increase of his empire. In a word, he is so dear and essential to them, that nothing can be a substitute for him on earth or in heaven; while he can be a substitute for any thing—for every thing: “Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

Thus he is always undeniably precious to them that believe: yet there are seasons in which they peculiarly feel the force of it. Such is the day of effectual calling. If ever food is relished it is when we are hungry. If ever we prize the physician, it is when we are sick, and long for health and cure. Our Lord promised to send the Holy Spirit, to convince us of sin, and to glorify himself: and the former is necessary to the latter. When we see our true character and condition as sinners, then the proud looks are humbled, and the lofty looks are laid low, and the Lord alone is exalted.

Such is the Sabbath. It is named in honour of him “the Lord’s day.” It is to bring him to our remembrance as rising from the dead, and entering into his rest after finishing the work that was given him to do. His people hold some communion with him through the week: but week days are always in a degree worldly days. They have some glimpses of him, and some words from him, in pressing through their ordinary concerns. But they want larger and more intimate intercourse with their best friend. And when the Sabbath comes they take him to their retirement, and he manifests himself to them. And they go to his own house, where they see his power and glory in the sanctuary, and praise him with joyful lips.

Such is the period of holy fellowship at his table. In reference to this, where is the believer who has not been able to say, I sat under his shadow with delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste? In no other duty have we such views of him as here. We see him in the very act of dying for us. He is evidently set forth crucified among us. As a risen Saviour he comes and shows us his hands and his feet, and assures us that because he lives we shall live also.

Such is the day of trouble. A friend is born for adversity, and endeared by the time of need; but many who wear the name are then found to withdraw themselves. But he comes near—and must come near if his word can be trusted—“I will be with thee in trouble.” He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and in all our affliction he is afflicted. Human friendship, when sincere and lively, is limited. But nothing is too hard for the Lord. He can comfort us in all our tribulation; and turn the shadow of death into the morning.

Such is a dying day. The day of trouble may come, the day of death will come; and if it does not bring Christ with it!—But if he is with us when heart and flesh fail; if we can by faith view Jesus as having put away our sin by the sacrifice of himself, as going to prepare a place for us, and as coming again to receive us to himself, that where he is there we may be also; this will turn

the chamber of sickness into the house of God and the gate of heaven—we shall be joyful in glory, and shout aloud upon our beds—

“Jesus, the vision of thy face
Hath overpowering charms ;
Scarce shall I feel death’s cold embrace,
If Christ be in my arms.

“Then, while ye hear my heartstrings break,
How sweet my moments roll !
A mortal paleness on my cheek,
But glory in my soul.”

NOVEMBER 12.—“Behold, I go forward, but he is not there ; and backward, but I cannot perceive him : on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him : he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.”—Job xxiii. 8, 9.

SOME have considered this allusively, and exemplified it thus—I go “forward ;” forward to the promises. These abound in the Scriptures, are adapted to all our wants, and provide for a great while to come ; and there was a time when I could claim them as my own, and plead them in prayer, and make them my songs in the house of my pilgrimage : now they seem only the property of others, and if they are not wells without water, they seem as springs shut up, and fountains sealed to me—I go “forward, but he is not there.”—I go “backward ;” backward to experience. I once thought that I had been convinced of sin, that I had trembled at his word, that I had rejoiced in his salvation, that my fellowship had been with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ : now my former views and feelings, my distresses and my comforts, and which I had supposed to be spiritual and divine, appear suspicious, and I fear I have no part or lot in the matter ; and that my heart has never been right in the sight of God—I go “backward, but I cannot perceive him.” I turn to “the left hand, where he doth work, and survey the operations of nature.” These are his inferior doings, but they are the produce of his wisdom, power, and goodness ; and all his works praise him. And there was a time when in the field, the meadow, the garden, I walked with God. I saw *his* sun rising upon the evil and the good, and *his* rain coming down, and *his* paths dropping fatness. Every thing seemed full of God. Yea, I saw my Redeemer in the rose and in the lily, and said, As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons: now creation seems a kind of blank—“I cannot behold him.”—I turn “to the right hand,” among his nobler works of grace. I think of the glories of redemption, the operations of his Holy Spirit ; I mingle with his people in the sanctuary, I repair to the table of my dying Lord—“But he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.”

Now all this is true in itself, and many a reader perhaps may be able to make it his own. But evangelical spiritualizers have not a little injured the Scripture, by giving it meanings which are not its own. What is true in doctrine is not always true in the text, from which, by force or artifice, it is derived. A preacher is bound, however he may use it as an allusion or illustration, to inculcate the true and real import of every passage. Therefore we observe that Job here, by a fulness of phraseology, would express his ignorance and perplexity with regard to God’s present dispositions and dispensa-

tions towards him: "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him."

God may withdraw from his people; not indeed entirely. This would be inconsistent with his engagements; and were he *thus* to depart from them they would relapse into a state of nature, and sin have again dominion: but he may so withdraw himself as to elude their views and apprehensions. He may conceal from them the manifestations of his special favour; they may not see his smiles as before; he may seem to be an enemy, while yet he is their best friend; like Joseph, who made himself strange, and behaved himself roughly to his brethren, to humble them, and bring their sin to remembrance, while his bowels yearned within him, and he sought where to weep. And this applies much to his providential dealings with them: these are frequently so trying and mysterious, that they are unable to find out his meaning and design. He even derives a character from hence; "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." And when we consider the vastness of his understanding, and the littleness of our own, is it wonderful that in many of his proceedings he should be far above out of our sight? and that requiring us to trust him instead of tracing him, he should often say, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter?" We now see only the beginnings, not the end; we only see parts, not the whole; and of these parts we see not the relations and the bearings; and the little we do see we see through crevices and in fogs.

We may however remark, that much of the difficulty of Providence results from our selfish and worldly feelings. We do not think Providence mysterious when we have all things and abound. We never heard Christians expressing surprize or perplexity when they had ease, and health, and business, and agreeable connexions—all is plain enough then: but as soon as the scene changes, and trials befall them, "his way is in the sea, and his path in the deep waters, and his footsteps are not known!" Yea, they do not think the conduct of God so incomprehensible, when losses and afflictions befall others. They can go to them, and say, All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth; he hath done all things well; as many as he loves he rebukes and chastens—But when these good talkers about afflictions become the subjects of them, how frequently do they draw upon themselves the remark, "Thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled!"

Many things too would no longer remain incomprehensible or *unaccountable*, if persons were willing to censure themselves; for the things which *confound* them are only the natural consequences of their own misconduct. "The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord." If persons eat freely, and lie late in bed, and take no exercise, ask a physician what right they have to complain of low spirits and ill health. If God, who knoweth our frame, has forbidden the widow to marry unless in the

Lord, and disregarding his judgment she yokes herself to an unbeliever, and is deprived of her religious freedom : if he has assured us that to walk surely is to walk uprightly, and by fleshly wisdom we have our conversation in the world : If he commands us to cease from man, and we will make flesh our arm ;—Why should we wonder at the results which he foresaw and foretold ? Having sown tares, why should we think it strange that we do not reap wheat ? Or marvel that we cannot gather grapes from the thorns or figs from thistles ? All would be as plain as the day, were we to say, “ I have erred.”

We frequently expect too much from Providence. We wish it to act preternaturally, instead of conforming to its established laws and rules. We seem to rely upon it not only to assist us in our difficulties, but to countenance us in our mistakes ; to free us from responsibility when we act freely ; and to afford us impunity in imprudence. But if he places us in the way, and clearly directs our goings, and tells us to look straight on, and to ponder our steps ; and we close our eyes in raptures, or fix them among the stars in speculation ; Is God's providence to be accused because an angel does not come to keep us from striking against a stumblingblock, or falling into the ditch ? And are we to lie bruised or bemired, complaining that clouds and darkness are round about *him*—instead of crying, “ I have sinned ; what shall be done unto thee, O thou Preserver of men ?”

But see the temper of Job while in this trying condition. He is restless ; he is after God in every direction—No quarter is unexplored : “ Behold, I go forward, but he is not there ; and backward, but I cannot perceive him : on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him : he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.” The righteous are “ the generation of them that seek him.” But they do *not* seek him whose “ strength is to sit still.” *Their* wishes are “ the desire of the slothful which killeth him because his hands refuse to labour.” Our disposition is to be judged of by our exertions and our sacrifices. A good man may be at a loss for God, but he cannot be satisfied without him. He loves him, he needs him, he has tasted that he is gracious ; and therefore when God hides his face from him he is troubled. For he is always enjoying God or searching after him. The latter is as much a proof of grace as the former : yea, many who are now holding communion with him have less powerful desires than some who are lamenting after him.

NOVEMBER 13.—“ Cast thy burden upon the Lord.”—Psalm lv. 22.

ALL men are not exercised in the same way, but every one has something trying and oppressive in his condition that may be called *his* burden. And we may make one remark concerning this universal experience—We are commonly prone to reduce the burdens of others, but to magnify our own. Each sufferer is ready to say, “ Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow like unto my sorrow.” But this is the language of ignorance as well as of self-importance. How little do we know what thousands of our fellow-creatures en-

sure ! Indeed no one can judge perfectly concerning the burden of another. For the whole of that burden, which may seem inconsiderable to you, is never known, and often a small part of it only appears. The weight too is relative : a burden which a strong man can carry would crush an infant or an invalid. It may be also increased by imagination, in which case, though there may be only fancy in the fact, there is reality enough in the feeling—"The heart only knoweth his own bitterness."

But if all are not equally unhappy, all have somewhat that bears upon the mind : "Full bliss is bliss Divine." And if the question was addressed to a number of persons individually, What is *thy* burden ? One would answer, My burden is made up of care and anxiety. An event is before me that perplexes me by day, and holds my eyes waking by night. It is a movement in life. I know how much depends on a wrong step, and I wish to be found in the path of duty : but when I would determine, I seem equally poised by claims and difficulties on either side, and I know not the way I should take.—Another would say, My burden is made up of malignity and calumny. I wish not only to approve myself unto God, but to stand fair with my fellow-men : yet they misrepresent my motives, and vilify my actions, and cast out my name as evil—And if all manner of evil is spoken of you falsely, it is the very thing your Saviour told you to look for ; and the same affliction has befallen your brethren who were before you in the world. Yet we wonder not that you feel. The Apostle throws in "cruel mockings" among the severest sufferings of martyrdom ; and the Saviour said, "Reproach hath broken my heart."—A third says, My burden is outward trouble ; disappointments, losses, and embarrassments in my worldly substance and circumstances. My purposes are broken off, my schemes and dependences have failed,

"And day by day some current's thwarting force
Sets me more distant from a prosperous course."—

I wish to provide things honest in the sight of all men, but with growing demands I have diminished resources, and often look at the state of my family, and ask, "What shall they eat, and what shall they drink, and wherewithal shall they be clothed?"—A fourth says, My burden is bereavement. How have I been stripped and peeled ! I had a child, I had a parent, I had a friend who was as my own soul, I had a companion with whom I took sweet counsel. Now I sit alone, and am as a sparrow upon the house-top. Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.—Another says, My complaint is bodily indisposition ; disease threatens me, infirmity weakens me, shattered nerves and broken spirits often deprive me of the privileges of the sanctuary, and discolour as the medium all my views even of Divine things.—Another says, My age is labour and sorrow. The days are come of fading eyes, and ears dull of hearing, and trembling limbs ; fears are in the way ; the grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails.

"My vitals, with laborious strife,
Bear up the crazy load ;
And drag the dull remains of life,
Along the tiresome road."

Another says, I could bear every thing else if all was clear, and calm, and inviting at the end. But there is death—at the sight of which my peace flies, and my comforts are embittered. O how shall I ever meet the king of terrors! Ye departed saints! you have passed the event; death is behind you; but it is before me, and it is ever before me. I hear some talk of their departure with confidence and joy; but I am always subject to bondage through fear of death—

Well, I want not to hear what constitutes thy particular burden—Be it what it may, “Cast,” says David, “thy burden upon the Lord”—Not upon creatures, not upon good men, not upon ministers. It is true, in a sense we are all to be burden-bearers: “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” And “a friend is born for adversity.” But when wanted he is not always to be found. And he may not enter into your views and feelings. And if his sympathy be kind, it may not be efficient. He may pity, but be unable to relieve. Men at their best estate are nothing without God. Cease, therefore, from them, and say with the Church, “Therefore will I look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation, my God will hear me.”

“But how can I cast my burden upon the Lord?” By faith. When you believe that he can be found, that he is near, that he is a very present help in trouble, that the very hairs of your head are all numbered, that all your ways are before him, that he is pacified towards you by the blood of the Cross, that he who spared not his own Son will also freely give you all things, that he invites you to come and put your trust under the shadow of his wings, that he careth for you, and will make all things work together for your good; then the spirit is freed, relieved, composed; and the promise is accomplished—“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon thee, because he trusteth in thee.” It is also done by prayer. “Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.” “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Prayer is therefore not only a duty, but a privilege. It is good for us to draw near to God. It not only relieves us by diverting our sorrow, but by soothing and reducing it. Prayer opens the heart, and lets out grief; and opens heaven, and lets down grace. It succours us not only by its exercise, but by its success. God answers prayer by acting for us and in us. To deny this is to explain away the constant and express language of the Scripture—But we must enter into the spirit of prayer. If we pray carelessly and formally the burden will remain still pressing us down. Hannah was full of anguish, and prayed, but “she prayed in her heart.” And what was the result? “When she had poured out her soul before the Lord, she went her way, and did eat and drink, and her countenance was no more sad.”

Some have not yet found their way to this relief in their trouble; but the Church says, “A glorious high throne from the beginning has been the place of our sanctuary”—

“ And who that knows the worth of prayer
But wishes to be often there.”

NOVEMBER 14.—“ Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.”—John vi. 53.

THIS language gave great offence when our Lord delivered it. Many of his disciples said, “ It is an hard saying, who can hear it ?” We need not wonder therefore if it should be disrelished by some now. It certainly requires some explanation, for it has given rise to several abuses or mistakes. We may remark two of these. The first take it in a sense too gross. It is the doctrine of transubstantiation, which has rolled down from age to age in blood. According to this, it is believed that the words, “ This is my body ; and this is my blood,” do not mean emblems of them, but the things themselves ; and that as soon as the bread and the wine have been consecrated by the priest, they are changed into the very body and blood of Christ, and that he is thus eaten, and may be eaten by thousands at the same time ! In the same way they may as easily prove that he consists of boards and nails, for he says, “ I am the door.” What a strong delusion to believe a lie is here ! Be it observed, our Lord has here no reference at all to the Sacrament, for this was not instituted till long after. Besides, the participation of his flesh and blood, of which he speaks, is inseparable from salvation—“ Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life ; and I will raise him up at the last day.” But are all saved who partake of the Lord’s supper ? And do all perish who never received it ? The second takes it in a manner too refined, and is derived from the enemies of evangelical truth, who have always shown a peculiar aversion to the death of Christ under any other notion than that of an example or witness. They tell us the diction is very strong, and must be much qualified. Our Lord, say they, is here speaking of himself as a teacher, and refers to the design of his doctrine ; for knowledge has always been considered as the food of the mind. This is readily allowed. Yet what teacher ever said to his pupils, You must eat not my instructions, but myself ; not my lessons, but my flesh and blood ! The language is certainly very metaphorical ; but it is founded in truth, and designed to convey an important reality. The thing is, we live not by the life of things, but their death. It is so with vegetables, and birds, and fishes, and beasts ; they serve to nourish us by their death. We live spiritually by the dying of the Lord Jesus ; and the allusion refers to his mediatorial offering for our sins ; and teaches us, that faith is necessary to our deriving benefit from his sacrifice—“ Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.”

For this eating and drinking represent our believing on Christ. The resemblance between these and the exercise of faith appears in four things. There is in each of them *appetite*. Our Saviour speaks of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Hunger and thirst are natural, powerful, returning appetites. Such are the desires which all believers feel towards the Lord Jesus. There is in each of them *application*. A man may hear of food, see it, hold

it in his hand, present it to his lips; but this is not eating. In eating there is an actual reception of the food into the animal system. And in believing we receive Christ Jesus the Lord. His suitability and all-sufficiency to our case are made known in the Gospel, and all the blessings of his salvation are brought nigh; but still we perish unless we are made partakers of Christ. How often does the old and good divinity tell us, that an unapplied Saviour is a non-entity to us. In each case there is *satisfaction*. Medicine may be necessary, but we are not said to eat medicine—we take physic; but we eat meat because there is pleasure in it. Food is essential to our subsistence; yet when we sit down to a well-spread table, we never perform it as a duty to save us from death—There is immediate gratification in the action, and this secures the performance. The reception of Christ is not only indispensable, but free and delightful. Like Zaccheus, we receive him joyfully. We not only submit to the method of his grace, but we acquiesce, we glory in it. We love his salvation. We rejoice in his name. In each there is *nourishment*. This is the design and effect of food. It is thus the child grows; it is thus the man is sustained, and rendered equal to his labour. And “the just shall live by faith.” “The life that I live in the flesh,” says Paul, “I live by the faith of the Son of God.”

Every image applied to the Redeemer fails to do him justice. We say there is no subsisting without food; yet Moses and Elijah lived forty days and forty nights without eating. But to live for a moment spiritually, without Christ, is a miracle that never has been, and never can be accomplished. Food, though necessary to life, is not sufficient to preserve it. This was the case even with what is called “angels’ food,” and “meat from heaven.” “Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” Blessed Jesus! thy flesh is meat indeed, and thy blood is drink indeed! Evermore give us this food.

NOVEMBER 15.—“Nevertheless, let us go unto him.”—John xi. 15.

HE is never too confident in his resources, nor too late in his movements. We are often mistaken with regard to our wishes and designs. We raise expectations which we cannot realize; and begin enterprises which we are unable to finish. Among men some are strong and some are weak; but the difference between them is only comparative. The one may break a larger rod than another; but when you bring them to the mast of a ship they are perfectly upon a level. But he who speaks in righteousness is mighty to save—“He is able to save unto the uttermost.” Therefore he says—

“Nevertheless, let us go unto him.”—Not to *them*, but to *him*—Not to the sisters, but to the brother—Not to Martha and Mary, but to Lazarus. “To what purpose? Lazarus is dead. It is now too late.” It would be too late for you; but not for me. Your extremity is my opportunity. I turn the shadow of death into the morn-

ing, and can do more than you are able to ask or think. I surprise as well as succour; and love to arrive at the place of difficulty when creatures are all withdrawn, having said, Help is not in us.

“Nevertheless, let us go unto him”—“But he is not only dead, but buried; and has lain in the grave four days.” Can the dead praise thee? Can they who go down into the pit hope for thy truth?—What! visit a corpse in a state of putrefaction?—He cannot receive thee, see thee, hear thee. But he can hear, and see, and receive *me*. Let us try what an interview will produce between death and the grave, and the resurrection and the life.

And did he go in vain? We can visit the “long home” of a friend. We can go to the grave to weep there; but were we to attempt to open an intercourse with the inhabitant we should be laughed to scorn. But Jesus said, Lazarus, come forth; and in a moment his lungs heaved, his blood liquefied and flowed again, and he came forth in newness of life! What a journey, what a character was here! Had you met him in his way to Bethany you would, in appearance, only have seen a man like ourselves. But had one of the disciples stepped back, as soon as he had passed, and said, There is Jesus of Nazareth; he is going to visit a man in his tomb; and could he have informed you of the result, would you not have followed him? Wherever I see him going I will go with him. The journey will be for his honour, and my profit—He cannot move in vain—Nothing is too hard for the Lord. When the Egyptians were pressing upon them, and the Red sea was before them, he said, “Go forward.” What, into the deep? Yes, into the deep. To be drowned? No, but to go through dry-shod. They were to obey: he was to open the passage. In the first creation “he spake, and it was done.” And in the second “he calleth things that are not as though they were.”

Let us never despond, but trust in him. Let his all-sufficiency encourage us with regard to others. Let those who in doing good meet with unlikely materials to work upon: let ministers who seem only preaching many of their hearers into impenitence; let parents, whose hearts are bleeding over ungodly children, think of him who was taking this seemingly useless journey, and never abandon their endeavours or hope. Let them use means in *his* name; and by faith and prayer bring *him* forward—He can make these dry bones live—The Son quickeneth whom he will. And let it encourage us with regard to ourselves. Am I a sinner? I ought to feel that my case is bad; but it is not desperate. Hopeless indeed it is as to myself and all creatures; but in him is my help found. He can say to the prisoners, Go forth. He can make the blind to see, and the deaf to hear—He can make all things new. Am I a Christian? Let me bring my confidence, in every exigency and difficulty, to his power, and say, with Paul, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.” “Yea, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us.”

But, says one, “My wound is incurable—He will not go to the grave of my departed hope.” If he keeps away it is not because he is unable to re-animate thy dead, and give back the dear treasure to thine arms; but because his power is under the direction of his

wisdom ; yea, and of his righteousness and kindness too. But the truth is, that he will visit the interesting spot—Thy brother, thy mother, thy child shall rise again. The period is coming when he will look down, and say to his mighty angels, “ Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep”—And, lo ! he descends, and the dead arise, and you embrace to part no more. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

NOVEMBER 16.—“ For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.”—Hebrews ii. 18.

THERE can be no question of whom these words are spoken. Let my thoughts commune with him as the sufferer and the succourer.

He himself suffered, being *tempted*. Then a man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. In this sense the Lord Jesus was not tempted, neither indeed could be, for he “ was the holy One of God.” We are tempted when we are solicited to sin. Hence Satan is called the tempter : and thus by him our Saviour was tempted to unbelief, presumption, and idolatry. But the word temptation does not always or principally in the Scripture signify attempts to draw into sin. God is said to tempt Abraham ; and we read that we are to count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations ; and that if needs be we are in heaviness through manifold temptations. Here, and in many other places, the word means afflictions. These are called temptations because they are designed and adapted to try us—to prove our principles and dispositions—to evince the reality and the degree of our grace to ourselves and others. His being tempted therefore, means his being subject to all the distress, pain, and anguish, which characterised him a man of sorrows, and justified his saying, Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.

But he *suffered*, being tempted. This attests the impression made upon him by what he endured ; and shows us two things—That his divinity did not absorb his human nature, so as to render it incapable of passion : and—That as man, his patience was not a physical apathy, or a philosophical insensibility. There is no patience in bearing what we do not feel : and no resignation in giving up what we do not love and value—as there would be no virtue in fasting if we had no appetite to food. Our Lord, instead of being less susceptible of suffering than others, was more so. That which adds to the impression of pain, is the delicate and fine crasis and constitution of the part aggrieved. The composition of our Saviour’s body perfectly fitted it to receive the most quick and sensible touches of every object. And the same may be said of his mind. A being dull and stupid feels much less suffering than a man of lively conception and reflection : in the one case pain falls upon a log of wood ; in the other upon the apple of the eye. Jesus groaned in spirit : wept : made supplications with strong cryings and tears ; was sore amazed, and very heavy ; his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death ; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling to the ground—But the sufferer

Is also the *succourer*. The one is the consequence of the other. "For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." This ability therefore is relative and acquired. He was made perfect through suffering; and in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted, by way of atonement, by way of example, by way of sympathy, by way of efficiency. Able

By way of atonement. And is it a light thing to know, in our deepest sufferings, that we are enduring nothing that is penal? That Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us? That every affliction is only the stroke of a fatherly rod, chastising us for our profit? That we are accepted in the beloved? That we can never come into condemnation? Able

By way of example. We are naturally like bullocks, unaccustomed to the yoke; and even after some degrees of religious experience, we know little of the holy art of "suffering affliction, and of patience." But Jesus "suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." And as in him we see what disposition we should exercise towards men, who are the instruments of our distress, so we learn also how we are to submit to God, who is the author of it: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me—nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." One thing is of great importance here. In his conduct we see that we are never to go aside either to *meet* or—to *miss* our cross; but when we find it in our way, to take it up, and follow him. Able

By way of sympathy. We may compassionate a sufferer, but we cannot properly sympathise with him, unless we have been through the same. Now he was in all things made like unto his brethren; and he remembers how he felt, and what he desired and required when in our condition. He knows the poverty of his people much better than by report: he was poor. He knows the effect of slander: "reproach," says he, "hath broken my heart."

"He knows what sore temptations mean,
For he has felt the same."

He knows what it is to die, and to enter the darkness of the grave. Able

By way of efficiency. Pity is not power. Many can sympathise with their connexions who have not the means of relief and redress. The ear is not heavy that it cannot hear; yet the hand is shortened that it cannot save. But he is mighty to save. He is able to save unto the uttermost. He can always support, deliver, sanctify. He can turn the shadow of death into the morning. He can turn the curse into a blessing. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. But this efficiency is the consequence of his suffering—"for the suffering of death—he is crowned with glory and honour"—all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Well may he be called "the consolation of Israel!" Let us say of him as Lamech did of Noah, "This same shall comfort us."

Let us also be concerned to resemble him. Let us be tender-hearted, and concerned to comfort them that are cast down. We cannot do much ; but let us do what we can ; and be little images of him who is the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, and as rivers of water in a dry place. What is most admirable in us is not our wealth, or splendour, or even talents, but those feelings which render us pitiful and courteous ; humane and *divine*. And these sentiments are best learned in the school of affliction. This is one of the motives that should reconcile us to our trials. We are not detached and unrelated individuals, but parts of a whole whose welfare should be dear to us—and in that we suffer, being tempted, we are able to succour them that are tempted.

NOVEMBER 17.—“ Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.”—Matthew x. 32.

LET us see what this promise requires of us in a way of DUTY. It is confession ; “ Whosoever *confesseth* me before men.” Three inquiries will serve to explain it.

First—*Who* is to be confessed ? “ He that *confesseth me,*” says the Saviour. Him therefore we are to confess in his being, person, character, offices, relations ; in his sufferings and glory ; in his cause, ministers, and members ; in every thing that concerns him as he is revealed to us in the Scripture. Only it is necessary to observe, that as the opposition to him is often varying, so the duty of his confessors will vary accordingly ; and the truth we are peculiarly required to witness must be determined by the nature and exigency of the call. The Apostle speaks of being “ established in the present truth ;” by which we are to understand some doctrine particularly opposed or neglected, and the confirmation and reconfirmation of which is more immediately called for. According, therefore, to the seasons and places in which we live, we shall have to testify sometimes in favour of his divinity and atonement, sometimes against self-righteousness, sometimes against superstition, sometimes against enthusiasm and fanaticism, sometimes against Antinomianism, and often, very often, against a mere form of knowledge or godliness, without the power thereof.

Secondly—*Before whom* are we to confess him ? “ He that *confesseth me before men.*” What men ? Godly men only ? It is an easy thing to confess him before his admirers—But we are to confess him before bad men, before his enemies as well as friends. Before the poor and the vulgar only by whom we are little influenced ? Nay : but before the rich, the great—“ I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.” Before the ignorant and illiterate only ? No : but before the sons of learning and of science, who may pity or ridicule our want of understanding. Before those only who know us, and who would despise us for denying what we profess ? No : but before those who are strangers to us, and cannot be aware of our inconsistency.

Thirdly—*How* are we to confess him before men ? The source of the confession is faith ; as it is written, “ I believed, therefore have I spoken ; we also believe, and therefore speak.” If our testimony does not harmonize with our convictions and sentiments,

it is worse than nothing, it is hypocrisy and lies. But though the spring be within, the stream is without; though the one is invisible, the other is to be seen. There are three ways in which our confession of him is to be made.

Verbally. Thus the martyrs confessed him; for they would not have suffered, had they hid his righteousness within their heart. When Peter and John were forbidden by the council to speak any more in this name, they answered, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." We are to glorify God in our body as well as in our spirit. He has given us speech, not as many use it, but to honour the giver; and with David we should pray, "Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise." We could not be satisfied with the heart of a friend if his tongue was always engaged against us, or indeed if it was never employed for us. Yea, we should say, The thing is impossible; if we had his heart we should have his tongue: "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Here, however, be it observed, that we are not to rush into every company like an armed soldier, or to draw the sword of the Spirit upon every one we meet. We are not bound to exasperate or to rebuke when it will call forth more profaneness or obscenity. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." "A word," says Solomon, "fitly spoken, how good is it! it is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." There is a zeal which is not according to knowledge: and wisdom is profitable to direct. Yet we may err on the side of deficiency as well as excess: and while we shun imprudence, we may be restrained by a cowardly fear or shame, from seizing opportunities that present themselves of speaking usefully, without the violation of any duty or decorum in life. How many of these have we suffered to pass unimproved! "Lord," would Usher often say, "Lord, forgive my sins of omission."

Practically. Confession may be attached to conduct as well as to language: yea, actions, it is proverbially said, speak louder than words. A minister has two individuals belonging to his congregation. The one says little of him, and less to him; but he is constant in his attendance, and bends every thing to enable him to enjoy what he deems a privilege, as well as a duty. The other always extols him much, both before his face and behind his back; but he is seldom in his place, and suffers the most trifling excuses to keep him from what he so admires! Does not the practice of the former decide more than the commendations of the latter? We read of those who profess that they know God, but in works deny him; and of the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie. Many, like Ezekiel's hearers, with their mouth show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness: many, like Judas, even while they kiss, betray. We are required to hold forth the Word of life, not only by our tongues, but tempers; not only by our lips, but lives. When we exemplify the holiness and excellency of the Gospel by our deportment in every condition, and especially when we fully discharge every relative duty;

then it is that we adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, and commend his religion to others.

Passively. "They also serve that wait;" and they also confess that endure. When his followers are willing to sustain the loss of all things rather than forsake him, and instead of complaining, rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer for his name, they evince the strength and force of their attachment to him, and he is glorified in them. Persons may be exercised with many afflictions who are not called to endure persecution. It is peculiarly as sufferers that many are the Lord's witnesses: and how do they glorify him in the fires, when in patience they possess their souls, and can even rejoice in tribulation also! What a testimony do they bear to the power of his grace, and the comforts of the Holy Ghost, when they show that he sustains them when every earthly support gives way; and refreshes and delights them when all creature-consolation is dried up or embittered! The passive graces are with more difficulty exercised than the active. The active fall in with several principles of our nature, especially our love of activity and notice: but to sit alone and keep silence; to suffer on week after week, and month after month, unobserved, unless by partial friendship; mourning indeed but not murmuring; every word, every feeling softly confessing, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me: let thy loving kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant:"—when I have turned away from such a scene as this, I have said within myself, I have often heard of religion, but I have now seen it: and I have been ready to invite others to return with me, exclaiming,

"Behold the awful portrait and admire,
Nor stop to wonder; imitate and live."

NOVEMBER 18.—"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven."—Matt. x. 32.

LET us see what this promise insures in a way of PRIVILEGE. It is confession: "him will I *confess* before my Father which is in heaven." The word signifies more than mere attestation: it means acknowledgment with approbation and applause. This would seem incredible, did we not know that the reward is not founded in our worthiness, but is designed to display the exceeding riches of his grace. The Lord thinks better of their works than they ever do; they often blush and weep over their performances, but he will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Nothing is more pleasing than praise; and nothing is more stimulating. The desire of it is generally connected with some of the finest sensibilities of our nature. He who is dead to it betrays a mind destined to no distinction, and on which no great or good impression is likely to be made. But observe three things which enhance the privilege here spoken of.

The First is the applauder: "*I* will confess him." In all praise much depends upon the person from whom it is derived. A real

proficient therefore in any art studies to approve himself to such as are masters of it. To their judgment he appeals, and their approbation supports and gratifies him under the neglect or the censure of the rude and incompetent. The praise of some is worse than reproach. Our Lord forbid the devils to confess him. Paul was displeased with the spirit of divination in the damsel that cried, These are the servants of the most high God, which show unto men the way of salvation." Wise men lay little stress upon the caresses of the multitude, who are easily wrought upon, and are led by humour rather than conviction, and can seldom comprehend what they pronounce upon. And therefore a heathen philosopher, when shouted home to his door by the populace, turned round, and said, "What folly or harm have I done to deserve and obtain *your* commendations?" Some hearers are afraid to say a word of praise to a minister, lest they should make him proud and vain. But the danger is imaginary; he has no opinion of their judgment. Praise is debased, and becomes more than worthless by insincerity; it is then flattery, and "he that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet." All the friendship of the world is only "lies in hypocrisy." Human applause can add little to our welfare and happiness. The influence of it is confined to time: what can it do for us when sickness spreads a gloom over our comforts, and mortality draws the curtain upon all that is valued on earth? Paul therefore says, "It is a light thing to be judged of man's judgment; he that judgeth me is the Lord." He knows all things; he reads the heart; he is truth itself; *he* is approved whom the *Lord* commendeth. "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable in *thy* sight, O Lord my strength and my redeemer!"

The Second is, In whose presence he will acknowledge us: "I will confess him before *my Father which is in heaven.*" Could you choose before whom you would be owned and praised, it would doubtless be one you most highly esteemed, in whose regard you placed your happiness, and who was most able to advance and secure all your interests. And whose blessing maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it? In whose favour is life? Who can do for you exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think? Suppose a general, after the termination of a war, returning home, and entering the presence of the king, the fountain of honour; and introducing one by one those who had distinguished themselves under him: he calls them by name, he relates their exploits, he testifies their obedience, their skill, their prowess, their perseverance; and asks for their remuneration and preferment—What could be more gratifying and glorious? Yet what would this be, compared with the conduct of the Lord Jesus, the leader and commander of his people, when, his warfare being accomplished, he shall present those who have fought the good fight of faith before the throne of the Majesty of heaven and earth, and claim for them the promises of the new and everlasting covenant: "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am to behold my glory?"

The Third is the period of commendation. We all know how much depends upon the seasonableness of an action. There is a

critical hour when a word spoken in our favour may gain for us a friendship we otherwise should not have known, or an office we should not otherwise have filled; yea, it may decide the whole of our future life. The Lord Jesus does not leave his people without witness now. In various ways he confesses them even here. But in these words he refers to his confessing them before his Father "at the last day," when he has summoned together the whole universe, and is distributing endless disgrace or honour, happiness or misery. They will have confidence, and not be ashamed before him *at his coming*.

Let this reconcile them to their present comparative obscurity. The world knoweth them not. It is not proper, it would not be safe for them to have all their distinctions here. Their day is coming. It is called the manifestation of the sons of God. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

NOVEMBER 19.—"I am a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed."—1 Peter v. 1.

THIS is one of the three characters by which Peter describes himself to enforce his "exhortation." In the two former, wherein he calls himself "an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ," there is something personal to him: but in the third designation there is nothing peculiar—any further than all real religion is a peculiar thing in our world, where the multitude are evil, and thousands among those who wear the form of godliness are strangers to the power of it. But all who are born of the Spirit stand upon the same ground with Peter with regard to eternity. They are heirs together with him of the grace of life, and each of them is *authorized* to say, "I am a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." Hence three things are observable.

First, The destination of Christians is "glory." The radical idea of glory is brightness, splendour. The secondary notion is excellency displayed—and *this* is what the Scripture intends when it so frequently expresses heaven by the term glory. We think more of the happiness of the state than of the glory. But it will display all kinds of excellency—natural—corporeal—intellectual—moral—social excellency—and the excellency of pleasure, called "the joy of their Lord," "joy unspeakable and full of *glory*."

Secondly, This glory is for future development—It "shall be revealed." It has in a degree been revealed from the beginning. The Jews partially knew it; and as to a clearer discovery of the nature of it, and the way of obtaining it, life and immortality were brought to light through the Gospel. But as yet it has not been revealed externally to all; or internally to many; or completely to any: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Believers indeed have the advantage of something in addition to testimony; and they know more of heaven from what they experience than from what they read or hear. They have

certain views and feelings which raise their sentiments more than any thing else—"O if these were rendered permanent and perfect!" But who can imagine what the perfection of them includes? Flesh and blood can no more comprehend than they can inherit the kingdom of God. The full disclosure would be too much for our physical powers to bear, and would subdue all the interests we feel in a thousand things which claim a share in our present attention. The degree of information is wisely adapted to our present state, and while it prepares us for our end does not disqualify us for the way. But we shall not always walk by faith. The object will not always be veiled. "It doth not *yet* appear what we shall be; but this we know, that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall *see* him as he *is*"—It "*shall* be revealed."

And, thirdly, it admits of present participation—"I am," says the Christian, "a partaker of this glory." This seems strange, and we are ready to exclaim, Is then his warfare accomplished? Has he finished his course with joy? Has he passed the valley of the shadow of death? Does he not daily groan, being burdened with afflictions and infirmities? Yet, according to the Scripture, by grace he *is* saved; he *is* come to the new Jerusalem; he *hath* everlasting life; he *is* a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. He is so by union with Christ, his head and representative, who procured it, and has prepared it for him, and has taken possession of it in his name, and holds it on his behalf—"He hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." And he is so by the certitude and appropriation of faith: for faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. The believer can realize as sure and as present whatever God has engaged to give. He is so by actual possession in the foretastes, the earnestings, the beginnings. Under whatever representations heaven be held forth the Christian has it in quality, and in degree. He is a partaker of it as the bud partakes of the flower, and the dawn of the day, and the child of the man. The believer's anticipations are not confined to any particular season or condition, but he is often *peculiarly* a partaker of this glory in four cases—In the seclusion and liberty of the closet—In the ordinances of the sanctuary—In the supports and comforts of affliction—And in the elevated experience of a dying hour.

Is this your attainment? Can you say, "I am a partaker of the glory which shall be revealed?" How ought you to feel and to demean yourself? Walk worthy of God who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. Let your conversation become your condition—Let it be dignified, cheerful, and especially grateful. You were children of wrath, but are now heirs of glory, yea and even partakers of it—What should you render for blessings so great, and obtained by means so infinitely expensive?

And if you are not partakers should you not lay it to heart? Should you not seek after an interest in it? Whatever else you possess you must soon leave; and no abundance of it can afford you satisfaction even in the enjoyment. But here the object will relieve every want, it will fill up every desire. And success is sure

to crown your application if you seek according to the true order. Only remember the time of finding is both short and uncertain. You cannot be happy too soon; and your safety leaves you not a moment to lose—"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

NOVEMBER 20.—"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."—Matt. xxv. 41.

WHAT a contrast between this sentence and the language addressed by the same Judge to those on his right hand! That says, "ye blessed of my Father;" this, "ye cursed." That says, "Come;" this, "Depart." That says, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" this says, "Depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

The words are not for declamation, but belief. This "terror of the Lord" was not intended to be defined and comprehended, but was to be left to those forebodings of imagination in which there can be no danger of excess—"Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Even according to thy fear so is thy wrath." We shall not therefore dwell upon the duration, or the nature of this misery; but only remark three things.

The first regards the origin of this dreadful state. It was not it seems at first provided for the human race, but "prepared for the devil and his angels." Yet being prepared, the abode could receive any other rebels as well as they; and those who will join his party in our world, and do the works of the devil, as they have shared in the same sin, must share in the same suffering with him and his followers. Thus the sinner renders *their* place his *own*; as it is said of Judas, "he went to his own place."

The second regards the certainty of the doom. The denouncement is not an idle tale; it is not the offspring of the nursery, or the creation of priestcraft. The consciences of men tell them this, and much more frequently and seriously than they are willing to acknowledge. The misery is such, that if there was only a probability, or even a possibility of incurring it, wisdom would justify a submission to all the self-denial and sacrifices the Gospel demands. The children of this world act upon this principle, where their temporal interests are concerned. They throw overboard the lading of the vessel when they are not sure, but only apprehensive of a shipwreck: and yield to the painful excision of a limb when the preservation of the whole body is not certain, but probable, and in some cases possible. But before a man can suppose that this misery is not possible, and even probable; before he can question the certainty of it, he must prove either that our Lord never uttered these words as the Gospel affirms, or that if he did utter them he is not to be depended upon. But he is the faithful witness; and the Scripture cannot be broken. What a task then has the infidel to perform before he can lay his apprehensions to rest, and bid defiance to this sentence—He must prove that the Bible is a lie, or Jesus a liar. Men may be ignorant of these things, but they must be "willingly ignorant." And they cannot be ignorant long. And, considering the uncertainty of life,

how soon, very soon may they be convinced too late! Hobbs said, when dying, "I yield my body to the earth, and my soul to the great perhaps." Thistlewood the traitor said to one of his comrades as he was ascending the drop, "We shall soon know the great secret"—He meant, whether there was another world; and after death the judgment. What wretched infatuation to leave the decision till the discovery and the remedilessness arrive together! It is hardly necessary to observe that the denial of the thing will not disprove it. Suppose a criminal by some delusion persuades himself that the assize will not be kept—He goes on—but while he is engaged or amused, hark! the trumpets sound, the judge is entering, and to-morrow he must appear. Men may reason, disbelieve, ridicule; but the scene neither slumbers nor lingers—"The end is come; the end is come."

The third respects the character of those who fall under the malediction. And surely they must be persons charged with crimes too shocking for human nature often to commit: surely they can only be Cains, and Pharaohs, and Belshazzars, and Herods, and Robespierres. But no. They are not represented as tyrants, robbers, adulterers, murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers. Many of them were free from what is commonly called vice. They had negative virtues, and often boasted that they did no harm. But they led easy and indolent lives. They exercised no self-denial. They made no sacrifices not only for God whom they had not seen, but for their brother whom they had seen. They have judgment without mercy, because they showed no mercy. They had unfeeling hearts, and tearless eyes; their hands never relieved the necessitous; their feet never visited the door of affliction—It is the decision of One too wise to be mistaken, and too faithful to misrepresent—"For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

NOVEMBER 21.—"I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty."—Ruth i. 21.

THESE are the words of Naomi, who, from the famine which raged in her own country, had fled to Moab for succour, and had now returned back to her native place. In a village every occurrence, especially the coming back of an inhabitant after years of absence, excites notice, and the news soon spreads through the neighbourhood. So it was here. The arrival of Naomi, accompanied with Ruth, her daughter-in-law, awakens curiosity, and huddles together the rustics in little groups, pointing with the finger, and making remarks and inquiries—"So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were

come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them; and they said, Is this Naomi?" At which she burst into tears, and said, "Call me not Naomi"—that is, pleasant; "call me Mara"—that is, bitter: "for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me—I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." Whence we may observe,

That when persons go from home, they little think what may befall them before their return. This will apply even to life itself. Some, like Elimelech, never come back. An accident demolishes their frame; or a disease arrests them too violently to admit of their removal: their relations arrive just in time to see them die, or they die in the midst of strangers. They little imagined that when they left their own door they were never to enter it again; and that the leave they had taken of their family was a farewell for ever! "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

It applies also as to character. Some have been converted while from home: they have met with a godly acquaintance whose conversation, or have attended an evangelical minister whose preaching has been useful to their souls; and they have returned with new views and feelings, and have become all anxious to bring their connections into the same state with themselves. Others, alas! have gone out moral and returned vicious, profaning the Sabbath they had once revered as the holy of the Lord and honourable; and ridiculing a book which they once regarded as given by inspiration of God. How many, in travelling, run uncalled for into dangers! And how necessary is it, even in lawful, because necessary journeys, to commit our way unto the Lord, and pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!"

It also applies to our outward circumstances. Some go out empty, and come home again full. This was the case with Jacob. He left Beer-sheba with nothing but the charge and blessing of Isaac: and in his pleading with God in his journey, he only asks for bread to eat, and raiment to put on, and a return to his father's house in peace. But hear him on his return: "with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." And thus it has been with many since. They set off with no raised expectation, and with no design formed, excepting to gain a humble subsistence: but difficulties vanished before them; the Lord prospered their way; blessed the labour of their hands; and gave them power to get wealth. Others have gone out with confidence flattered by the most pleasing prospects. But every enterprise failed; every dependance gave way; every comfort fled; till they were left like a beacon upon the top of the mountain, or a vessel stranded and wrecked upon the shore—Therefore we observe again,

That it is no unusual thing for the same individual to experience both fulness and privation. "Ah," says Naomi, "once I had a husband, now I am a widow. Once I had children, now I am child-

less. Once I had importance, now I am without influence. Once I had substance, now I am destitute—I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.” Not only is there a diversity of conditions among men, so that while one is in splendour another is in obscurity, and while one is rich another is poor—but the very same person may successively be distinguished and neglected, be wealthy and indigent. These transitions are sometimes gradual; and sometimes sudden and wholly unlooked for. But Scripture, and all history and observation, more than remind us of the possibility of these changes: and wisdom admonishes us to improve them—First, by not depending upon our possessions and enjoyments. Shall we set our heart on that which is not? Secondly, by using them liberally while we have them. Riches make to themselves wings, and flee away: but, says an old writer, we may clip their wings by charity. And Solomon says, “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.” So that not only is the principal safe, but the interest Divine. “Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight: for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.” And Thirdly, by being prepared for every vicissitude. “I know,” says Paul, “how to be abased, and how to abound; every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” It is one thing to know what it *is* to possess, and what it is to lose, and another to know *how*—that is, how to behave in each as becometh the principles of a Christian. It is a great thing to prosper and not be exalted above measure; and to be reduced without being swallowed up of over much sorrow. To be full and not deny him, and say, Who is the Lord? And to be poor, and not steal or take the name of our God in vain. Yet this is possible; and through the grace of the Holy Spirit the soul may be braced up to such a moral strength of constitution, as to brave any climate or change of weather, however great or sudden.

See also how piety will acknowledge the hand of God in every event. An ordinary mind would have said, “I went out full, and am come back empty.” But Naomi did not live without God with her in the world—Naomi says, “I went out full, and *the Lord hath brought me home again empty.*” So Eli said, “It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.” And Job, instead of dwelling on the Sabeans and the elements, said, “*the Lord hath taken away.* Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

God is not the author of sin; but as to suffering—“Is there an evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it?” Does not he make darkness as well as create light? There is nothing like chance, especially in our trials; neither are we to think only or principally of second causes. It is a view of God’s agency alone that can preserve us, either from sinning or sinking in the day of adversity. But the cup which my Father giveth me shall I not drink it? I can trust in him—He spared not his own Son—He has always my welfare at heart—

“Good when he gives, supremely good;
Nor less when he denies:
E’en crosses from his sovereign hand
Are blessings in disguise.”

O let me hold communion with him, not only in his word, but in his works: not only in his ordinances, but in his dispensations. Let me cleave to him as my exceeding joy, and my everlasting portion, in all the revolutions of time. And look forward not only to a pure, but a permanent state of blessedness—

“All, all on earth is shadow—all beyond
Is substance. The reverse is folly’s creed.
How solid all where change shall be no more !”

NOVEMBER 22.—“Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.”—Matt. xxii. 4.

God has provided for all his creatures according to their kinds: “the eyes of all wait upon him, and he giveth them their meat in due season.” Man is a compound being; for his body there is the storehouse and wardrobe of nature. But in all this there is nothing for his nobler part, the mind. Here the Gospel comes in to meet his exigences—and with nothing less than a feast—and while every other feast is for the body—this is entirely for the soul.

The spirituality of this feast constitutes the excellency of it, and at the same time accounts for the neglect of it. If provision was made to gratify the animal appetites, or the desire for worldly riches and honour, it would easily excite attention. But men are earthly, and sensual; they are governed by things that are seen and temporal. Hence they hear of spiritual and everlasting things with indifference. But is not this folly and madness? Is not the mind the man? Does not he who knew the value of the soul from the price he paid for the redemption of it, does not he ask, “What is a man profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

The feast here is not an ordinary one. It is a royal feast, a royal marriage feast, a royal marriage feast for the king’s son. Yet what may we look for in such a feast as this; that is not to be found in the dispensation of the Gospel?

Is it plenitude? Here we have it. We read of “abundant mercy”—of “plenteous redemption”—of a Saviour “full of grace and truth”—of “all the fulness of God.” Is it variety? Here we have it. Our wants and hopes are not only numerous, but various; and equally so are our supplies. Here is light for our darkness. Righteousness for our guilt. Strength for our weakness. Renovation for the heart. Peace for the conscience. The supply of the Spirit. The comforts of the Holy Ghost. Is it richness of entertainment? What else can be the meaning of the expressions, “a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined?” God prepares dainties for his guests, and they are all supreme in their kind, and infinitely expensive. The Jews did eat angels’ food: but what was the manna in the Desert compared with the bread of life? He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” Is it fellowship? A feast is not a private meal, an individual indulgence, but an enter-

tainment designed to promote friendship, and social intercourse, and gratification. And here we have it. We are not solitary partakers, but have companions the most agreeable, and excellent, and numerous. We sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, with prophets and apostles, with the noble army of martyrs; with the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven. Is it enjoyment? A man at a feast discharges himself from anxieties, and gives up himself to pleasure and delight—"a feast is made for laughter." "Joy becomes a feast," and is promoted by it. But no pleasure, no delight can resemble that which results from an experience of Divine grace. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound." What a contrast between them and others! "Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit."

Yet it is lamentable to think that, though all things are ready, and all are invited to the feast, many make light of it, and go their way. We are therefore commanded to "compel" you to come in, that the house may be filled. Not that violence is to be employed. The compulsion is to be suited to a rational nature; and therefore to consist only of the urgency of persuasion by argument and motive. And here the difficulty lies not in convincing the judgment—since no one, unless an infidel, will deny the propriety of complying with this call at some time—but *not at present*. Go thy way, therefore at *this* time you really, if not verbally, say to the importunity, when I have a more convenient season I will send for thee. But is not this delay and postponement infinitely dangerous? Your season, your only season, is rapidly passing away. How soon will the bridge be drawn, and the door be shut! And then the things which belong to your peace will be hid from your eyes. Admitting that according to your *present* feelings you are resolved to seek at some future period, that period may never come. Sickness is not always the forerunner of death. The disease too may render you incapable of thought, and then your purposed repentance will be impracticable. Impracticable it will always be unless the Spirit of God works in you; but if you resist his strivings now, what right have you to expect that he will return then, and by the most wonderful operation conquer your inveterate indisposition?

Yea, the procrastination is as unreasonable as it is dangerous. Your compliance is as necessary to your living comfortably as to your dying safely. Though the happiness of those who receive Christ Jesus the Lord is completed above, it is begun below. They have many present attainments. They do enter into rest. Their souls are satisfied as with marrow and fatness. The Lord is their shepherd. To him they have committed all their concerns. All that is really good for them is secured by his power, love, and promise. Their tormenting fears are removed. Their vain and restless desires are subdued. They have indeed their afflictions, but these are sanctified and softened; and in a little time all tears shall be wiped from their eyes. Can you imagine that God will suffer his enemies to be more happy than his friends? Can a persuasion that

God is your Father, and death your deliverer, and heaven your home, tend to make you less happy? What has the world done for you? Have you not found the way of transgressors hard? Forsake the foolish and live. All is "prepared" for you—God is ready to receive you, angels are ready to rejoice over you, believers are ready to hail you—"All things are ready—Come unto the marriage."

NOVEMBER 23.—"HE THAT DOETH TRUTH cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."—John iii. 21.

OF the individual here spoken of, the CHARACTER, the BUSINESS, and the AIM are all very instructive and improving.

What is his CHARACTER? "*He doeth truth.*" It is not said he readeth truth, heareth truth, speaketh truth, but doeth truth. Doing truth is rather a peculiar expression; and the question is how truth is to be here understood. Now there is the truth of doctrine, and the truth of sincerity.

He doeth truth according to the former of these who pays it practical attention. In this case the truth is the word of God, which is filled, not with curious speculations, but matters of unspeakable importance; and designed not to inform our judgments only, but to sanctify and govern our hearts and lives. Hence it is called, "the way of truth," because it is something in which we are to walk: we frequently read of "walking in the truth." "If ye know these things," says our Saviour, "happy are ye if ye *do* them:" and he compares the man who heareth his sayings and *doeth* them not to a fool who builds his house upon the sand and is ruined by the storm. The Apostle speaks of "the work of faith;" and tells us the word of God "worketh effectually in them that believe." The whole of it is a doctrine "according to godliness." No part of it can be uninfluential when properly regarded. Its threatenings are designed and adapted to awaken our fear. Its promises are to excite our hope. It is needless to mention its commands—these can be given for no other purpose than to be obeyed. And are we not commanded to forsake the world, to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, to follow the Saviour, to go forth to him without the camp bearing his reproach, and when we have done all to say we are unprofitable servants, and to look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life? And he that doeth this doeth truth.

He doeth truth according to the latter of these who acts consistently with his convictions of it. There are many who resist their belief; or, as the Apostle says, "hold the truth in unrighteousness:" the word is, imprison it. They will not suffer it to enter their tempers, and sway their conduct. They believe that the world is vanity and vexation of spirit, and the belief is true, yet it does not induce them to forsake it. They believe that the worship of God in their families is a duty, and the belief is true, yet they neglect it. The same may be said of a thousand other things. But the man that doeth truth gives up himself to his convictions, and follows them whithersoever they lead him, regardless of consequences. He may have little knowledge for the time, but he conforms to it; for sincerity cannot consist with the omission of any known duty, or the indulgence of any known sin. Nathanael was the very man in our

text; and therefore our Lord said of him, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." He had laboured under considerable mistakes; but he loved retirement, and had been alone praying to be made wise unto salvation. He had little light, but he sought for more; he was open to advice and reproof; he complied with Philip's invitation, "Come and see" for thyself; and upon our Saviour's intimation, "When thou wast under the fig tree I saw thee," he exclaimed, "Thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel"—And upon this Jesus promised to show him "greater things than these."

There are some who are not equally prudent and kind. They are not tender of persons who cannot for the time go all their lengths. Yet were not they led into their present views step by step? Have they not been for years learning what they do not yet sufficiently understand? And do they wonder that others are not completely initiated in a few days or weeks? What a difference is there between the dawn and the day! and yet is not the one the beginning and the pledge of the other? And "the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." And "then," says the prophet, "shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." If I see a man convinced of sin, humbled under a sense of his unworthiness, delivered from the spirit of the world, and seriously engaged in the use of the means of grace, let me not be harsh because he feels some doubts and difficulties from which others are *now* delivered: let me affectionately admonish him, as far as he has already attained, to walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing, assured that if in any thing else he be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto him in his own time, and way, and degree. Let me not engage him in angry disputes, or force upon him the deep things of God which he is unprepared to receive; but leave him for time, and observation, and experience to enlarge his views, and be willing to teach him as he is able to hear it. Paul gave strong meat to them that were of full age, and who by reason of use had their senses exercised to discern both good and evil: but he fed babes with milk—Some give babes strong meat, yea, and even the bones of controversy!

It is well for persons to try their ground, and to feel their own way; and he walketh surely that walketh uprightly; and he that doth his will shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God. Some of the most eminent characters that have adorned the Church attained their evangelical sentiments by degrees, and principally derived them from experience. The changes in nature are gradual; the seasons melt into each other; there are no disruptions. There also things are slower in their growth in proportion to their value. The oak, the king of the forest, does not shoot up all at once like nettles and reeds. The mushroom is the vegetation of a night—We are not fond of mushroom-converts. We have never been taught by the result to admire those who instantly become so wise, talkative, disputatious, and decisive. Their knowledge gets dangerously in advance, while its companions and guardians, experience and practice, are left so far behind. The knowledge they boast of

is like the head of a rickety child, too large for the other parts of the body ; it is the effect not of strength, but of weakness and disease ; and by destroying proportion, is not a beauty, but a deformity.

Whatever be the defects of him that doeth truth, he may be known by this—If he has not the light, “*he cometh to the light.*”

NOVEMBER 24.—“He that doeth truth COMETH TO THE LIGHT, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.”—John iii. 21.

WHAT IS HIS BUSINESS ?

“*He cometh to the light.*” He is not averse to it. He is not afraid of it. Why should *he* wish to shun it ? It is for the thief, the murderer, the adulterer, to feel the morning as the shadow of death ; not the man who is honestly going forth to his work and to labour until the evening. “If,” says the man that is upright in the way—“if I am not right, I wish, above all things, to *be* right, and to be led into *all* truth. Hide nothing from me. Where my soul and eternity are concerned I dread delusion. I cannot bear uncertainty. Let me come to the light. And how does he this ? He does it five ways.

He comes to the light by self-inspection. There are cases in which he will more solemnly and expressly examine himself : such as the close of the year ; and when he is approaching the table of the Lord ; and when under those events, which are called by the sacred writers trials, because they are intended to show us what manner of spirit we are of. But he will be habitually a self-observer, and will look not only at his actions, but especially at his motives and the state of his heart.

He comes to the light by attention to the Scriptures. To their decisions, and counsels, and reproofs, he endeavours to lay himself fairly open. And instead of turning away from those parts which more particularly bear upon his own office and condition, towards *them* he will look more frequently and fully. “Am I a parent ? Am I a member of a church ? Am I poor ? Am I prosperous ? Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?”

He comes to the light by hearing the word preached. The minister is to take forth the precious from the vile ; to discriminate characters, to divide the word of truth, and to give to every hearer his appropriate encouragement or censure. And he that doeth truth will receive his words with meekness. He will not try to bribe the prophet, or desire him to prophesy smooth things. He will not be offended because the preacher is faithful ; but will say to him, as Eli did to Samuel, who had received a message from God concerning him, “What is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee ? I pray thee hide it not from me : God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.” Such a man is likely to apply too much to himself rather than too little. And this will commonly be the case with regard to those things which are said to unmask hypocrites, and to exclude the usurpers of religious privileges. It is not easy, says Bishop Hall, to beat out the dogs without making the children cry.

He cometh to the light by religious intercourse. “They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward.” And whom

can they better consult, than those who know the way, not from maps and books only, but from having, and some of them a long time, travelled in it themselves. They feel an interest in such inquiries, and will be sure to sympathize with them; and will be able to solve many a doubt, and remove many a fear. They can speak from their own experience. And blessed be God there are few neighbourhoods now in which such helpers as these are not to be found—and the Lord add to his people, how many soever they be, a hundred-fold!

Above all, he doth this by prayer; humble, and earnest, and persevering prayer, for divine teaching. This is *indeed* coming to the light; it is coming to the fountain of light, coming to “the Father of lights,” from whom every good and every perfect gift descends. He will convince us that the way of man is not in himself, and that no means, however good in themselves, can render needless his own agency. But none teacheth like him. He can make the very deaf to hear, and the blind to see. Under the influence of his direction, the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. Happy they who are brought to his feet, and are crying from the heart, “Lead me in thy truth, and guide me; for thou art the God of my salvation, on *Thee* do I wait all the day.” “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” They will not, they cannot seek him in vain. He has said, and the Scripture cannot be broken, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” “If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”

NOVEMBER 25.—“He that doeth truth cometh to the light, THAT HIS DEEDS MAY BE MADE MANIFEST, THAT THEY ARE WROUGHT IN GOD.”—John iii. 21.

WHAT IS HIS AIM?

“*That his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*”

The aim is personal: “*His deeds.*” There are some who live much abroad, and are eager to pry into the affairs and condition of others, and it extends even to their religious concerns. But we are commanded to “commune with our own hearts.” When our Lord had foretold the duty and destiny of Peter, Peter should have instantly prayed, “Lord, prepare me for all thy will;” but instead of this he asks concerning John, “Lord, and what shall this man do?” But our Saviour, far from encouraging such curiosity, said, “What if I will that he tarry till I come? What is that to thee? Follow thou me.” Many, it is to be feared, in reading and hearing, think more of others than of themselves; but we should endeavour to bring home the subject, whatever it be, to our own souls—“Am I neglecting this duty? Do I stand exposed to this threatening? Am I the heir of this promise? Have I any part or lot in this matter? Is *my* heart right in the sight of God?” This is the case with the man that “doeth truth and cometh to the light.”

The aim is practical: that “*his deeds*”—Not his opinions and

sentiments only or principally. *They* are indeed of importance, and he will be concerned to have them in accordance with the Scripture: but if a man does not in his inquiry go beyond the determination of the orthodoxy of his creed he forgets that the devils also believe and tremble. He forgets that faith without works is dead, being alone. "Can faith save him?"—Yes; but not *such* faith: and this was the meaning of the Apostle. The faith that saves, as he observes, *shows* itself by its *works*. It works by love; it purifies the heart; it overcometh the world. Real believers stand, walk, live by faith. We therefore must look after the influences and effects of the truth as it is in Jesus: we must remark our *deeds*, our actions, conduct, course of life. If we know these things, happy are we if we do them—By this our state and character are to be evinced: "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

The aim is important: "That his deeds may be *made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*" That is, whether they are the mere produce of nature, or the genuine effects of Divine grace. Here it is admitted as a principle that the religion of a Christian is not self-derived, but springs from a Divine source. How can it be otherwise? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? The stream cannot rise higher than the fountain: no effect can exceed its cause in any thing. That which is of the flesh is flesh: but that which is spiritual must be of the Spirit. Accordingly God has promised to put his Spirit within his people: and to this every thing good, either possessed or done by them, is ascribed—They are his workmanship—This people, says he, have I formed for myself, they shall shew forth my praise.

And behold the grand point to decide. It would indeed be absurd to press some of you to determine this thing. It is obvious already that *your* deeds are not wrought in God. *You* can feel no uncertainty in your minds concerning it. *You* must be sure that your disregard of private prayer, your neglect of family worship, your violations of the Sabbath, your intemperance, pride, covetousness, and revenge, cannot come from the Spirit of him that calleth you.

But some persons make pretensions to piety who would do well to inquire—whether there is any thing in their religion that requires or bespeaks a Divine agency. For surely they may have a form of knowledge, or a form of godliness, they may come to his house and honour him with their lips, they may pray without desire, and sing without praise, without having the Spirit of the living God dwelling in them. Are we not only convinced, but converted? Not only reformed, but renovated? Not only excited in our passions, but transformed by the renewing of the mind? Have we not only another heart, but a new one? Do we differ not only from others, but from our former selves? Do we worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh? Do we bear any of the unerring features of the household of faith? Do we feel like them? Are our joys, and sorrows, and hopes, and fears, the same with theirs who are led by the Spirit of God and are the sons of God? Are we running with them in the race that is set before us? and fighting with them the good fight of faith?

How much depends upon the decision! It involves the glory of God. For we cannot praise him for doing what we think he has not done, or conferring what we think he has not conferred. We may bless him for the exercise of his patience, and for favouring us with space for repentance, and the means of grace; but this is not the glowing gratitude of the man who can say, "Thou hast wrought all our works in us." It also must affect our own comfort; according to the words of the Apostle; "Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another." The joy does not arise from the consciousness of his being the *author* of the work, but the *subject* of it: it is his "own work," not as it is wrought *by* him, but *in* him. And how delightful, how animating must the persuasion of this Divine reality prove! And what may we not expect from the experience of it! "Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who hath also given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."

The decision is not more important than it is possible. We are commanded to seek it. We are provided with all the means and assistances essential to the attainment. The very anxiety to determine is a token for good; and is here made by our Lord himself to characterize the subject: "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

NOVEMBER 26.—"I shall be satisfied."—Psalm xvii. 15.

THE Lord's people are not strangers to satisfaction now. We read of their being satisfied early with his favour; satisfied with his goodness; abundantly satisfied with the fatness of his house. But this is true only in degree: that is, they are satisfied, compared with what others feel, and with what they themselves once felt. They have found the supreme good, and they desire nothing beyond it—But they desire more of it—They long to know their Lord and Saviour more clearly, to resemble him more fully, to enjoy him more entirely. David therefore speaks of his satisfaction as future; and not only mentions the source of it; "I will behold thy face in righteousness;" but fixes the period: "I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness."

Here we see, shall I say—the insatiable ambition religion inspires. What an enlargedness of views and feelings do the subjects of Divine grace experience! so that they not only pass by, as beneath their attention, what mortals idolize, but soar beyond all that God himself has done for them here, content with nothing short of his full vision and likeness in heaven; keeping on the wing, and continuing all manner of search, till they reach a rest and a prize so distant and so infinite! And we have witnessed this grandeur and elevation of soul, even in the humblest walks of pious life. The rude mechanic, and the illiterate ploughman, though incapable of constructing the poetry, have felt all the sentiment of the poet—

"He by himself hath sworn,
I on his oath depend;
I shall, on eagle wings upborne,
To heaven ascend:
I shall behold his face,
I shall his power adore;
And sing the wonders of his love,
For evermore."

How mean-spirited are the aims and taste of the worldly hero and philosopher, compared with this !

Here we behold the excellency of the soul. It is the prerogative of man only to be capable of such sublime satisfaction. But he was made for it ; and his destination explains the enigma he now presents. Detached from this prospect, his greatness would be inexplicable. He would seem a vessel freighted at an incalculable expense, for an important enterprise, and as if designed to sail an immense voyage, only to cruise a few leagues and a few days, and then founder and be lost. Other creatures have a good suited to their nature, and they partake of it, and look no further, but are satisfied. Is man satisfied ? He has faculties which carry him beyond the limits of his condition. He has an imagination which nothing can realize. He feels desires and expectations which nothing fulfils. He is struck with novelty, and pleased with diversions ; but these, after a while, lose their charm ; and by the time he has reached sixty or seventy, he seems to have run his round, and feels an ennui irksome and intolerable, unless he is animated by the spirit of our text. This would explain, and relieve, and enliven all, by showing him that the present is only the threshold of existence ; that he is now only in a state of instruction and discipline ; that nothing is designed to detain him here ; that this is only a passage to the home of his heart and his portion for ever.

But what a view does it give us of his blessedness, that it *can*, that it *will* satisfy every longing of the soul itself ! Here two things will serve additionally to enhance its greatness. Our capacities will be amazingly enlarged hereafter to what they now are. Men who have put away childish things require far more to satisfy them than is necessary for infants. We should think highly of any thing that would satisfy such minds as Newton's and Bacon's. But the least in the kingdom of heaven will be greater than they. Then we must think of the duration of the pleasure. Many things will satisfy for a while ; but here are thousands of ages to be provided for. What discoveries and employments, what acquisitions and enjoyments must those be, which will yield undecending satisfaction for ever and ever !

What do you think of this ? Is not such a prospect inviting ? Does any thing here satiate the hunger and thirst of the mind ? Do you not feel vanity in every success, as well as vexation of spirit in every disappointment ? Yet this is your best condition—It is all the happiness you will know if you die out of Christ. You will then awake ; but it will be to know the reality of the blessedness of which we speak—to know that you have lost it—lost it for ever—and lost it for nothing. You will therefore awake to everlasting shame and contempt.

But as for you, ye heirs of glory, turn the prospect of this satisfaction to your advantage. For which purpose—First, make it sure. Secondly, keep it clear. Thirdly, bring it near. Fourthly, use it daily. Carry it into your religious duties ; it will enliven you. Carry it into your trials ; it will sustain you. Carry it into the valley of the shadow of death ; it will comfort you. A notion formerly prevailed, that if a man travelled with a myrtle wand in his hand, he would feel no fainting or weariness. Here is the reality

of the fiction—'This hope is the true myrtle staff. 'Take it constantly along with you: and you will renew your strength—you will run and not be weary, and walk and not faint.

NOVEMBER 27.—“He knoweth the way that I take.”—Job xxiii. 10.

THIS, under the dark and distressing dispensation with which he was exercised, afforded Job relief and satisfaction—The knowledge of his covenant God and Father: “*He* knoweth the way that I take.” But what are we to understand by this knowledge? Acquaintance and approbation.

First, acquaintance. So he knoweth the way that his people take: and so he knoweth also the way that others take. But *they* do not deem this a privilege; yea, it is an irksome and fearful reflection; and therefore instead of having recourse to it for consolation *they* endeavour to banish it from their minds. “For he that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov- ed.” “But he that doeth truth cometh to the light.” He feels pleasure in the thought, “Thou God seest me.” Not that he is so vain and ignorant as to imagine that he can bear censureless the gaze of Omniscience; far from it: he is conscious that God will see much that is amiss in him—but he is conscious too, that God himself will see nothing wrong in him which he does not wish to have rectified. “I must be cured; and *he* alone can heal me; and therefore I rejoice that his knowledge prepares him to deal unerringly with me; and therefore I can pray, See if there be any-wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

And as this relieves him with regard to his experience, so it comforts him with regard to his outward condition and circumstances in the world. He telleth all my wanderings. He knoweth all my walking through this great wilderness. He sees all my dangers, and can defend and guide me. I know not the way that I take, but *he* knoweth it, and my welfare depends upon *his* knowledge, not mine. He is now bringing the blind by a way that they know not, and is leading them in paths that they have not known; and he *will* make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight; these things will he do unto them and not forsake them. All is now perfectly clear to him; and I can trust him when he says, And *thou* shalt know hereafter.

There is also another case. “Am I misunderstood by friends, and reproached by enemies, while acting conscientiously and uprightly? How pleasing is it to turn from creatures so liable to err, and appeal to him who searcheth the heart, and discerns our motives and aims! My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.” “Let my sentence come forth from thy presence; let thine eyes behold the things that are equal”—“He knoweth the way that I take.”

Secondly, approbation. Thus “he knoweth the way of the righteous,” but does not know the way of the ungodly. “For the way of the ungodly shall perish;” he “is angry with the wicked every day.” But if any man love God, the same is known of him. The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him. The words of their mouths and the meditations of their hearts are acceptable in his sight. And that Job here peculiarly intends approbation as obvious

from the words which follow: "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." So confesses the Church: All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way; though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death." And says David, "For I am become like a bottle in the smoke, yet do I not forget thy statutes." And it is well when in our sufferings we can approve ourselves unto God. You are not, says Peter, to suffer as evil-doers, but as Christians; and therefore he adds, "Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." Jacob had this satisfaction when he was returning from Padan-aram, and had to meet his infuriated brother: he could therefore plead, "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." Thy word has brought me into this strait; and therefore I have a gracious right to rely upon thy care for safety and deliverance. It was otherwise with Elijah when he fled from the face of Jezebel, and concealed himself in the cave at Horeb: and therefore says God, "What dost thou here, Elijah?" He was unable to frame an answer that did not reflect upon his own fear and distrust; and had not God dealt with him better than he deserved, he would have found that the turning away of the simple slays them.

But whatever be our state and circumstances, let us seek the testimony that we please God, and labour that whether present or absent we may be accepted of him. What can sustain and animate like this? "Let them curse, but bless thou."

NOVEMBER 28.—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."
—Ephes. i. 3.

THERE is a correspondence observable between God and his people; or, so to speak, a spiritual flux and reflux from God to them, and from them to God. He chooses them, and they choose him. He sanctifies them, and they sanctify him. He glorifies them, and they glorify him.

Thus, in the words before us, we have grace for grace, and blessing for blessing. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." All our happiness and duty are found in this circulation. If God does not bless us we are miserable; if we do not bless God we are criminal.

Yet there is a great difference between these benedictions. His blessing us precedes our blessing him, and we love him because he first loved us. His blessing us is a real communication; and the Apostle characterizes the benefits which it bestows four ways: by their quality; by their plenitude; by their residence; and by their relation—He blesses us with "spiritual" blessings; with "all"

spiritual blessings; with all spiritual blessings "in heavenly places;" with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places "in Christ." But our blessing of God can add nothing to his perfection. Our goodness extendeth not to him. He is exalted above all blessing and praise. Yet we can praise him declaratively; and he that offereth praise glorifieth him.

The soul of this is gratitude. Gratitude has been defined as a disposition to return a favour received. Towards man it may be thus expressed; it may be thus fully expressed; yea, more than an equivalency or compensation for a benefit has been often made: but in this manner it can never be expressed towards God. His goodness is infinite; and therefore our gratitude is to appear not in discharging our obligations, but in feeling them, and in a concern to make suitable returns while adequate ones are out of our power. Thus David asks, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" And thus we bless him, not only verbally, but practically, and show forth his praise, as it is beautifully expressed, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to his service, and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all our days.

Who does this? Who is not condemned by this subject? Instead of blessing God we are senseless or silent. Instead of abundantly uttering the memory of his great goodness, we are murmurers and complainers. Suffer the clamour of a few trials to drown the voice of a thousand mercies—Yet Paul had suffered the loss of all things, and was even a prisoner when *he* used this glowing language: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

We are backward to all religious exercises, but even selfishness may make us attentive to other duties. Compelled by our necessities, we pray; we call upon our Benefactor in the day of trouble; but when we have gained our purpose, we soon forget his works, and the wonders which he has shown us. Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Even Hezekiah rendered not according to the benefit done him, for his heart was lifted up. Who can reflect upon this, and not exclaim, "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

Let me then lay down three rules, by observing which we shall experience and express more of this blessed and blessing temper of mind.

First. Labour to ascertain your own interest in Divine things. Seek the full assurance of hope unto the end. O! when I can view the blessings revealed in the Gospel as *my* portion, when "I can read *my* title clear to mansions in the skies," when I can draw near to God as *my* exceeding joy, then all the powers of gratitude are touched; then all its springs are opened; then by the mercies of God I present my body as a living sacrifice; then I say, Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.

Secondly. Often and carefully consider your mercies. Nothing can affect us but as it is in our thoughts. Therefore forget not all his benefits. Make them pass and repass in your reviews. Dwell upon

the evils from which you have been delivered, the provision with which you have been fed, the robes with which you have been adorned—Once a slave, now redeemed; once guilty, now justified from all things; once a child of wrath, now an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ. Ebenezer! Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Thirdly. Gain and preserve a growing sense of your unworthiness. There is an inseparable connexion between humility and gratitude. A proud man was never known to be grateful. Hear therefore whatever favours you please upon him, and what thanks have ye? And the reason is, because he thinks he deserves your kindness, and that you are doing justly rather than showing mercy. But he who is sensible that he is not worthy of the least indulgence, will feel obliged by every attention. And what is the fact with regard to us? We are not only mean, but criminal. For proof of this we need not go back to the days of unregeneracy. What have we been since we have known God, or rather have been known of him? Let us look at our omissions of duty, our misimprovement of privileges, our debasements of motive; the sins of our holy things. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed! Yet we are in the possession of grace! And in the prospect of glory!

NOVEMBER 29.—“A partner.”—Philemon 17.

THE whole verse reads thus: “If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.” In this argument, on the behalf of Onesimus, Paul does not employ his authority or plead his apostleship. He does not describe himself from his extraordinary commission and endowments, but calls himself “a partner” with Philemon in the mutual interests of Christianity. John also speaks much in the same way when he refers to himself: “I, John, am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.”

As Paul here speaks of himself as a Christian, under the character of a “partner,” we are led to observe that all Christians are thus related to each other.

There are partners in business. This does not wholly apply to the case before us. The salvation of our own souls is an individual and a personal concern; and is carried on between God and ourselves. Others may do some things for us; but as they cannot eat, and drink, and sleep for us, so they cannot repent, and believe, and obey for us. Here the heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddeth not with his joy. He that is wise is profitable to himself; and shall have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. Yet there is a common concern in which all Christians are jointly and equally engaged. It is to serve and glorify God by maintaining his cause in the world, and by endeavouring to enlarge his empire and multiply the number of his followers. This does not require them to live together in the same place, or to labour in the same way: but they are bound to co-operate in the use of all the means in their power to advance the same end—abiding with God in their callings—having gifts differing according to the propor-

tion of faith—and faithful as stewards of the manifold grace of God—each aiming to be accepted of him.

But there are partners in privileges, and this applies entirely to Christians. They are all “partakers of the benefit.” “Partakers of Christ.” They “are all one in Christ Jesus.” Jude speaks of “the common salvation:” and we read of our being called by God “into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” We read also of “the fellowship of his sufferings,” by which we understand an equal right to all the blessings derived from his cross,—reconciliation, redemption, justification, and satisfaction. In the ministrations of the Word, the ordinances of religion, the influences and comforts of the Holy Ghost, we have fellowship one with another, and are heirs together of the grace of life.

This partnership may be judged of by the privileges they share in. These privileges are distinguished by four characters. They are spiritual in their nature. They are inestimable in their value. They are free—without money and without price in their bestowment. And they are in their possession secure from loss and injury—“the sure mercies of David.”

Am I a partner? There is not a better evidence in your favour than your anxious concern to determine this; and your being able to say with Paul—the partner here spoken of, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; that I may win Christ and be found in him.” David also could say, “Thou hast given me the heritage of them that fear thy name:” and how was it with him? What was *his* prayer? “Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.”

And if you are a partner, how should this encourage and comfort you, that in all your obscurity and affliction you have “the communion of saints”—an interest—an equal interest with all the blessed of the Lord, whether on earth or in heaven, in all the enjoyments, riches, and glories, which constitute their portion for ever!

And should you not be concerned to bring in others to share with you? Surely there is enough, and to spare. Your claim will not be diminished by an increase of partakers. Yea, your happiness will be augmented by it, if you are likeminded with angels—for they rejoice over every sinner that repenteth. So the first Christians who had drunk so immediately at the spring-head of benevolence and love, could not keep the blessedness to themselves: “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

NOVEMBER 30.—“This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed.”—Gen. v. 29.

THIS leads us back to the malediction denounced in consequence of sin—“And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the

ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Lamech, who here complains of the ground, had been cotemporary with Adam during more than fifty years; and therefore he had doubtless heard from him in what a happy condition man was originally placed in Eden, where indeed he dressed the garden, but without vexation or fatigue. How different from this delightful residence was the wide wilderness world in which he now was, where the spontaneous productions were only briars and thorns, while the good things he wished for could only be procured by wearisome efforts, and amidst frequent disappointments? Yet it seems strange that those who could settle wherever they chose, should talk of the difficulty of subsistence, and the hardships occasioned by the barrenness of the soil. Two things would contribute to this. They seem not to have been allowed animal food before the Flood; and therefore they depended for support entirely on the fruits of the earth. And they had not that skill in agriculture we have, nor many of those implements of husbandry which save and soften labour now. Men were therefore engrossed in the drudgery of clearing the soil from nuisances, turning it up by hand, fencing it off from beasts so numerous and near, manuring it, sowing it, reaping it, carrying it home, beating it out and preparing it for use under a thousand inconveniences—Lamech speaks like one weary of a life consumed not only in work, but *toil* to relieve the low wants of animal appetites—and having come in exhausted from the field, he takes up his new-born babe, and looking at the mother, calls "his name (so Noah signifies) refreshment, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed."

It is obvious from hence that he expected for himself and others some relief, rest, or consolation from this child. What was it? And how is the expression to be understood?—"This same shall comfort us." First, we may take it as an emotion purely parental. Lo! children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward. It is therefore natural to rejoice at their birth. "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." Jeremiah speaks of the man that brought tidings to his father, saying, "a man-child is born unto thee, thereby making his heart glad." And though children are certain cares and uncertain comforts, it seems—for the future is wisely concealed from our view—impossible for the parental heart not to indulge hopes as well as wishes. This same shall grow up into a pleasing companion—he shall continue our name and our family—he shall reward our expense and care by returns of gratitude and attention—and when we are old and gray-headed he shall be the stay and solace of age and infirmity. He may also increase the number of the faithful, and be a part of the seed which shall serve the Redeemer. We are nursing this

child for God; and what joy will it afford us to see him an heir of glory, walking in the truth, and a blessing to all around him!

Secondly, as a prophetic intimation of Noah's usefulness. Though he spake according to his natural affection, we have reason to believe he spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. He therefore announces that this was to be an extraordinary child; a deliverer; one who should serve his generation, and prove a benefactor to the human race. Accordingly, he not only, as Jarchi says, improved agriculture much, and reduced human labour, and planted vineyards, and produced wine which strengthens man's heart; but he prepared an ark for the salvation of any who would avail themselves of it. In him the race of mankind was revived after the Deluge. He was the father of the new world, and from his loins the whole globe was peopled. For his sake the face of the earth was renewed, and an assurance and a pledge obtained, of its safety from drowning, and of its enjoying the regular succession of the seasons. All this Lamech here foretold, and much of it he lived to see realizing: for he lived after the birth of Noah five hundred and ninety-five years. He therefore saw his son not only good but great; and as he lived till within five years of the Deluge, he could see the ark nearly finished, and would often doubtless go down to the scene, and sit and lean upon his staff, and watch the workmen. Noah also was a preacher of righteousness, and heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Thirdly, as an evangelical reference to the Saviour. Why should this be deemed a thing incredible or improbable? Even in these early days an expectation prevailed, derived from the promise of the woman's seed in Paradise, of a Redeemer of the human race, from the effects of the Fall; and many were raised up to hold him forth, imperfectly indeed, but really and usefully. God said to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." This seed was immediately Isaac, but, finally and principally, the Messiah that should descend from him. Abraham therefore derived his hope and consolation from him, whom his son preceded as his ancestor, and prefigured as a type. It was the same with Lamech. He predicts that in his seed the world would experience a greater deliverance than from the Flood; and that one, of whom Noah was only an emblem, should be raised up to bless us with all spiritual blessings, even Jesus, which delivers us from the wrath to come. Say not, this all-important event was then too far off—a thousand years with the Lord are as one day. Say not, it is improbable that Lamech was enlightened enough to be aware of this. The prophets were not acquainted with the degree and extent of their own communications; and therefore studied them after they had delivered them; "searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."

And blessed be God, *we* know who is the true Noah. "His rest shall be glorious." "Come unto me," says he, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Let nothing divert us from him. "This is the rest wherewith ye shall cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing." Come what will—"THIS SAME SHALL COMFORT US."

DECEMBER.

DECEMBER 1. "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father."—John i. 14.

HE had a glory; and he himself is called "the Lord of glory," and "the King of glory." But it was not the glory of this world, or the princes of this world, which come to nought. It was not such a glory as the Jews expected in the Messiah, the glory of a conqueror, striding from victory to victory, and setting his followers on the high places of the earth. It was not a glory arising from ambition and violence, from the desolations of war, from triumphs founded in blood, and from laurels drenched in the tears of widows and orphans. It was not the glory of a statesman working by policy, and ruling by cunning rather than rectitude, or even by fairer means—but a spotless, Godlike glory—"The glory as of the only begotten of the Father."

God has many children. Men are his offspring. All believers are the sons of God. Some in the household of faith have been exalted above their brethren in endowment and office. Solomon was great; but a greater than Solomon is here. Moses was faithful in all his house. Yet "this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after. But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." Adam is called "the son of God" in a very peculiar sense, as he came immediately from the hands of God, perfect at once, and was the source, head, and representative of the human race. But "so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven." Angels are sons of God: but "to which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." "Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." "To which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" He is therefore—and we ask for no human definitions—we are afraid of them; the only begotten of the Father, in a meaning infinitely peculiar. He was the image of the invisible God: and could say, consistently with all the humility that distinguished him, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. And from henceforth ye know *him*, and have seen *him*." His attributes, his actions proclaimed Divinity. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God was seen in the face of Jesus Christ. His meekness, his patience, his benevolence, his readiness to forgive, are the perfections of the Being we adore and serve.

This glory had witnesses; and, says the Evangelist, we beheld it. They beheld it two ways: corporeally and spiritually. They beheld it even with their bodily senses. At his transfiguration they

saw the lustre of his face, and the shining of his raiment, and the homage paid him by Moses and Elias; and heard the voice from the cloud, "saying, This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." They often heard his own voice speaking as never man spake, and wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. They witnessed his miracles, and many more than they have recorded. They saw him heal the sick, open the eyes of the blind, and raise the dead to life. They saw his glory in the garden, in his feeling submission to the will of God; in his tender excuse for the infirmity of his disciples; in his power in healing the ear of Malchus; in his majesty in causing the soldiers to go backward and fall to the ground, when he only said, "I am he;" in his authority in stipulating for the safety of the Apostles, "If ye seek me, let these go their way." They saw his glory also in the wonders that dignified his death and his resurrection.

But this was not all. Some witnessed his miracles, and ascribed them to the power of the devil. He said to many who had attended him, Ye also have seen me and believed not. But it was otherwise with his own disciples. Concerning these he said; "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me." How much of his glory they saw spiritually before the day of Pentecost we cannot determine. For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified; that is, it was not given so abundantly. For he had doubtless partially enlightened the disciples before. At an earlier period our Lord said to Peter upon his confession, "Flesh and blood have not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven:" and this applied also to his brethren. Yet their views were in many things comparatively obscure, till the Spirit of truth had led them into all truth, as to the dignity of his person, the design of his death, and the nature of his kingdom. Then he was revealed in them. Then they knew in whom they had believed, and could say with the most determined confidence, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

But can we make this acknowledgment? Have we seen his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father? This is *possible*. We cannot indeed view him with our bodily eyes. But we may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death. We can see him by faith. We have in our possession all that these original witnesses have told of him. We have his picture. In the four Gospels we can look into his very heart. "He that seeth the Son and believeth on him hath everlasting life."

And this perception of him is *necessary*. And if you have seen his glory you have seen enough to fix and fill your minds, to produce self-abasement, to wean you from the world, to induce you to follow him whithersoever he goeth, to recommend him to others, and to pray, "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory." And if this be the case, you will soon have another and a nobler sight of it. You will see him as he is. You will behold his face in righteous-

ness—For the prayer will be accomplished; “Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, to BEHOLD MY GLORY.”

DECEMBER 2.—“And it came to pass on the day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle, and had anointed it, and sanctified it, and all the instruments thereof, both the altar and all the vessels thereof, and had anointed them, and sanctified them; that the princes of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers, who were the princes of the tribes, and were over them that were numbered, offered: and they brought their offering before the Lord, six covered wagons, and twelve oxen; a wagon for two of the princes, and for each one an ox: and they brought them before the tabernacle. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take it of them, that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; and thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service. And Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them unto the Levites. Two wagons and four oxen he gave unto the sons of Gershon, according to their service: and four wagons and eight oxen he gave unto the sons of Merari, according unto their service, under the head of Ithamar, the son of Aaron the priest. But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none: because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders.”—Numb. vii. 1—9.

It was a sad censure and disgrace the Apostle was compelled to utter, when he said “All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ’s.” But it is delightful to see a public spirit in religion. And we have some noble instances of it recorded, not only in the New Testament, but the Old. In reading history these are the same to a Christian, as the meeting with a few green and watered spots to a traveller in a dry and sandy desert.

With regard to the fact before us, we may observe, First, the donors. They were “the princes of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers, who were the princes of the tribes, and were over them that were numbered.” This was well. They who are placed above others are peculiarly bound to take the lead in every thing moral and religious. They are under an obligation of gratitude to their benefactor, who has distinguished and indulged them. They are also under an obligation of justice, which requires them to meet the design of their elevation, which is, not the indulgence of their vanity, pride, and selfishness, but their glorifying God, and serving their generation according to his will. They should consider their resources and influences as talents, and use them as stewards of the manifold grace of God. Having more means and opportunities of usefulness than others, they will be the more guilty if they neglect or misimprove them. When wicked, they never perish alone. Children justify themselves by the example of their parents, servants by that of their masters, people by that of their ministers, and subjects by that of their rulers; and one sinner thus circumstanced destroyeth much good. But all are not so. Some are preserved amidst the snares of wealth, rank, and authority; and feel it to be their honour and pleasure to do good. And we see from the offerers before us how wrong all general and indiscriminate reflections are. Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but there are some; and in our day there is no little movement among the higher classes in life.

Secondly, their offering. They “brought before the Lord six covered wagons, and twelve oxen: a wagon for two of the princes,

and for each one an ox." As twelve oxen were necessary, every prince could give one: but as six wagons only were required, had each wagon been given by an individual, six only could have been gratified; but by uniting in pairs, all the twelve could equally share in the honour and pleasure.

Their use was to aid in the present service of the tabernacle. That service would not be needful when the ark had a fixed abode in Zion: but in its moveable state assistance was required, in transporting it from place to place. These oxen therefore were to draw the vehicles containing the appendages pertaining to the sanctuary; and hence the wagons were covered, or, as we should say, tilted; not only to preserve the sacred furniture from vulgar and rude gaze, but to keep them from dust, and rain, and sunshine, and all the injuries of the weather.

Thirdly, the manner of their giving. There is no doubt but these oxen were excellent, strong to labour, and well trained: and that the wagons were of the best materials and workmanship, and well covered in honour of their destination and use. We know some who, if they could not have escaped giving, would have looked out the leanest beast, and the least valued vehicle they had. And we know the complaint brought by God himself against the Jews in the days of Malachi: "Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it: and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord. But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen." But we may fully presume that these pious donors presented what they deemed the best they had. And we are sure they gave *readily*: for they did it the very "day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle, and had anointed it, and sanctified it." They gave as soon as the things were wanted; yea, before they were wanted, in order to be in readiness. Here was no hanging back, hoping the offering might be dispensed with; or to see what others did first, to save as much as possible their pocket, without losing their credit. They required no excitement, no sermon full of motives from Moses or Aaron to work upon their feelings—They were volunteers; self-moved; they chose to be examples rather than followers. God loveth a cheerful giver.

Fourthly, the acceptance and application of the present. At first Moses seems to have hesitated whether they should be used in the service of the tabernacle. The reason probably was, that God had given him before a model of every thing, and had said, "See that thou make every thing according to the pattern showed thee in the Mount." But the pattern did not extend to this, and here he was without orders. The thought had sprung from the pious reflection of these men; and it is not necessary that every minute circumstance in the administrations of religion should be prescribed; many things, or the world could not contain the books that would be written, may be, and must be, left to expediency. Thus David established the orders of singers; and thus the Jews, after their captivity, formed synagogues, in which our Saviour often taught and worshipped.

therefore is enjoined to receive this donation, and consecrate it to the purpose for which it was designed: "Take it of them, that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; and thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service. And Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them unto the Levites."

But see how they were distributed; for this will be found very instructive. To "the sons of Gershon he gave" but "two wagons and four oxen:" but this is said to be "according to their service;" for they had only to carry the drapery, the curtains, and hangings. To "the sons of Merari he gave four wagons and eight oxen, according to *their* service;" for they had to bear the heavy luggage, the boards, pillars, and sockets; and these were heavy. "But to the sons of Kohath he gave none; because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was, that they should bear upon their shoulders." We may hence observe, First—That there is a difference in the services to which we are called. Some of them are more public, and some more private: some more painful, and some more pleasing. One serves God more relatively, another more personally—His work, so to speak, is more shoulder work. They have no outward resources: no wagons or oxen—They cannot command others by their authority or their abilities, but they can give *themselves*. If they are without substance, they can act, they can collect, they can teach in a Sunday school, they can visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction. "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness." "For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? if the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?"

Secondly, there is a proportion between our work and our strength: and "according to" our "service" is the assistance provided. Every Christian may claim Asher's promise; "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass: and as thy days so shall thy strength be." "He will not suffer you," says the Apostle, "to be tempted above that ye are able." And has not this been exemplified in the experience of his people in all ages? And have not we found it true? Let the thought at once annihilate every tendency to envy—or despair. Say not, Ah! such an one has four wagons and eight oxen! But see what he has to carry! You may not know the extent and degree of his burden: but the Lord knows; and therefore as the sufferings abound the consolations abound also. Be not afraid of any work or trial that lies before you. View the things which would discourage you, not simply, as they are in themselves, but relatively to your resources. There is nothing to which he will call you for which he has not made provision; and his grace will be sufficient for you, for his strength is made perfect in weakness.

What is it for your difficulties or duty to be increased, if there be an increase of the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ?

DECEMBER 3.—“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.”—Heb. v. 8.

THE title here given to the Lord Jesus is applied to him *peculiarly*, and in a way of *dignity*. This is obvious from the very reasoning of the Apostle: for there is nothing wonderful in the supposition that a son should learn obedience by suffering—for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But the marvellousness is that *such* a Son should learn obedience by the things which *he* suffered.

Here let us keep close to the Scripture, and not pry into things which we have not seen. All mankind are the offspring of God, as he is the real author of their being, the framer of their bodies, and the former of their spirits within them. Adam is called “the son of God,” as he was immediately produced by his power, and made after his image, not only in dominion, but knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, in distinction from all the inferior orders of his creatures. This likeness was soon lost by the Fall, and hence the term soon became in the Scriptures a religious appellation, serving to discriminate the godly from the wicked. When all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth, the descendants of Seth are called “the sons of God,” because they worshipped, served and resembled him. Christians therefore obtain this honour in the New Testament: “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” They are so by adoption and regeneration. The angels, those pure intelligences unincumbered with our flesh and blood, are also thus characterized: “The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” But “unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son? And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.” We leave the conclusion to yourselves—It *must* lead you to consider him “above all principalities and powers, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.”

And what does the Apostle affirm concerning him? He suffered; he obeyed; he learned. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.”

He *suffered*. He was “a man of sorrows,” as if he derived his very character from them, “and acquainted with grief.” Grief is always our neighbour, and sometimes our visitor; but it was his companion, and never separated from him till he gave up the ghost. Who can describe or imagine the greatness and the number of “the things he suffered”—in his outward estate? in his reputation? in his connexions? in his body? in his soul? Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow like unto his sorrow!

He *obeyed*. His obedience was very superior to ours. It was

complete and universal. He did no sin. He omitted no duty. He always did the things that pleased the Father; and therefore at the close of the whole he could confidently make the appeal, "I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do." His obedience also appeared in his submission. We are required to obey God as our governor, as well as our lawgiver, and to acquiesce in his appointments as well as fulfil his orders. And here, alas! how often do we fail. It is no easy thing to bear sickness, to resign a pleasant situation, to part with a beloved child—to obey a correcting God! How often we rebel or repine! But without a murmuring word or feeling, he submitted to all the pleasure of his heavenly Father, saying, Not my will, but thine be done. Even his death and all that led to it was an act of obedience—He "was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." He said, "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God;" and that will required the sacrifice of himself as an offering for sins. Hence, as he was going forth to agonize in the garden, and suffer on the cross, he said, "But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do; arise, let us go hence."

He *learned*—"He learned obedience by the things which he suffered." Many do not. Experience, says Franklin, is a dear school, but fools will learn in no other. The truth is, *they* will not learn even in this. Only wise men, says Burke, ever derive wisdom from experience. Experience itself is thrown away upon others, like seed sown upon a rock or the sand of the sea. Under what an expensive course of tuition have some passed? Yet what have they learned? May we not say of them, in the language of Jeremiah, "O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return." When this is the case, the incorrigibleness is punished in one of these two ways; God either abandons the culprit, saying, He is joined to idols, let him alone; or, if he does not remove the rod, he turns it into a scorpion. He increases the severity and the grievousness of the strokes till the threatening is awfully accomplished; "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." At the most distant danger of which, the Israelite indeed falls upon his knees and cries, "O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing." And says David, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest and teachest out of thy law." This is the design of affliction, and the effect of it when sanctified. Some of our lessons have cost us much, but they have not cost us too much if we have learned obedience by the things we have suffered.

But this does not apply to the Son of God precisely in the same way it does to us. The distinction is this. He learned obedience by the things he suffered, but he did not learn to obey. David's afflictions humbled his pride, banished his sloth, roused his attention, and excited him to study the will of God; and therefore he said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes"—Thus he learned by his sufferings to obey. But

Jesus stood in need of no such stimulations and auxiliaries as these. He knew what was required of him, and was always perfectly ready to do it. *His* sufferings therefore were not the cause of his obedience, but only the occasion : they did not produce the disposition, but only afforded opportunities for the exercise and the display of it. The gold was sterling before, but the fire proved it : the field did not make the hero, but proclaimed him. Yet he could not have learned what obedience was, how trying it is, especially in affliction, and what grace it requires, without experience. But *thus* he knew it not in theory only, but in reality, as a man learns the taste of medicine by tasting it, or as a man knows what it is to travel by travelling.

DECEMBER 4.—“When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”—Job xxiii. 10.

JOB *was* indeed tried, and perhaps next to his Saviour could say, Behold, and see if ever there was sorrow like unto my sorrow!—But he remarks three things with regard to it.

First, the author : “*He* hath tried me.” In none of his sufferings did he ever lose sight of the hand of God. When the Chaldeans and the elements had spoiled him of all his substance, he said, “The *Lord* hath taken away.” And when, in addition to this, he was deprived of his children, and health, and friends, and he seemed to have no comfort left, he said, “*Thou* hast taken me by the neck, and shaken me to pieces.” And “is there an evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it? How much is that man to be pitied who does not connect with all the events of life the providence of that God without whom a sparrow falleth not to the ground, and by whom the very hairs of our head are all numbered! How consolatory to reflect, “I am not in a fatherless world; I am not the child of neglect; I am not the sport of chance; I am not at the mercy of my foes—they could have no power against me, except it was given them from above; they are chained, and he holds the chain—The wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder of wrath will he restrain—The cup which my Father giveth me; shall I not drink it?”

Secondly, the termination : “*when* he hath tried me, *I shall come forth.*” I am now in “the midst of trouble,” but I shall not remain there. He doth not afflict willingly. Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion. He hath said, “I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth : for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.” The time may seem long, but I shall not be detained a moment longer than the case requires. He hath appointed the hour of deliverance, and his time is the best time; for he is a God of knowledge, and blessed are all they that wait for him. “We went,” says the Church, “*through* fire and *through* water, but thou *broughtest* us out into a wealthy place.”

Thirdly, the benefit : “when thou hast tried me I shall come forth *as gold.*” And how is this? Gold comes forth *proved*. Thus we read of “gold tried in the fire,” and David says, “Thou, O God, hast proved us : thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.” The design of affliction is not to increase God’s knowledge of us—this is perfect already; but to make us better known to others and to ourselves; to discover and display the reality and the degree of our

grace; to *prove* whether we are humble enough to stoop, and patient enough to wait: whether we can love God when he corrects, and trust in him when he hideth himself.

Gold comes forth *purified*. A stranger to the process of refining, when he saw it melting in the intenseness of the fire, might suppose that it was likely to be destroyed, or at least that it must be injured. And it is reduced in size, and something is taken away from it—but it is only the dross, and this is better removed than retained. And who hath said, “I will also purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin.” “By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin; when he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalkstones that are beaten in sunder, the groves and images shall not stand up.” What did the three Hebrews lose in the flames? Only their bonds. When they were thrown in they were bound; “and they fell down *bound* into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.” In this state they could not have moved. But without the smell of fire passing upon their bodies; their bonds were burnt, and they were seen walking with the Son of God! Much like this Young sings.

“Our hearts are fasten’d to the world,
With strong and various ties;
But every trouble cuts a string,
And urges us to rise.”

Gold comes forth *prepared*. It is then fitted to be coined for circulation, or framed into vessels of ornament and use; and now rendered capable of a lustre which it had not before. So Christians are improved and advanced by their trials, and can say, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted.” “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” “For a season, if needs be,” says Peter, “ye are in heaviness.” “That the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” Job speaks with confidence of the blessed result, before he had realized it. So may every believer. For “*all* the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth.” And “we *know* that all things work together for good to them that love God”

DECEMBER 5.—“And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire.”—Jeremiah xxxviii. 6.

HERE he was not as “an evil-doer,” but “for righteousness sake,” and a faithful discharge of his duty. “And this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.” The condition was dreadful, owing to the depth, and dreariness, and unwholesomeness, and foulness of the place; and the heart revolts at the thought of the sufferer, sinking lower and lower in the mire by every effort to raise himself up, parched with thirst, fainting with hunger, gasping for free air, and a stone being laid upon the mouth of the pit, excluding not only ventilation, but light! And the design of the princes

was, that he should not only suffer there, but die of privation and disease; longing to rid themselves of their reprover, but fearing that a public execution would excite popular pity—Thus Herod sent and beheaded John in prison—And how many fearful secrets of this kind will be divulged when He maketh inquisition for blood!

Who could think that a number of persons in higher and more refined life, and commonly called “the better sort of people,” would be able to leave a fellow-creature, a prophet of the Lord, to perish by so lingering and frightful a death! Lord, what is man! But all things come alike to all. No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. These wicked princes are in their palaces, and Jeremiah is in the miry dungeon. But where is the God of judgment? We shall presently see—“Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him, in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”

We are not told *here*, what Jeremiah did: but he himself has informed us in one of his lamentations. “They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me. I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not.” And what was the consequence? The wrath of man praises God: the evil is overruled for good; and the prophet learns by experience that the Master he served, commanded the issues from death, and was a very present help in trouble.

What a scene here opens! “Now when Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king’s house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin; Ebed-melech went forth out of the king’s house, and spake to the king, saying, My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is, for there is no more bread in the city. Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die.” Here we find how the Lord can raise up helpers for his people from quarters the most unlikely. He “knoweth how to deliver the godly;” and often renders his interposition as marvellous as it is relieving. Here we also see that the Lord has his hidden ones, and that they are frequently found where we should little think of looking after them—“Surely the fear of God,” said Abraham, “is not in this place;” but it was there, and prevented the sin which would otherwise have been committed. Abijah had some good thing in him towards the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam. Daniel was the prime minister of Darius, and yet worshipped God three times a day. Yea, we read of saints even in Cæsar’s household! Zedekiah’s court was a very wicked one, yet here was a man of principle, and of religious principle, found in it. But who was he? A foreigner, an “Ethiopian,” and probably a negro. Call nothing common or unclean. The first may be last, and the last may be first. While all the princes and the men of Judah were destitute of humanity and piety, this Ethiopian abounded in both.

He had a place at court which secured him ease and comfort. Such persons commonly feel little disposition to exert themselves for the distresses of others, for they know not the heart of a sufferer. It is in the school of affliction we learn to weep with them that weep. But it is probable that Ebed-melech had been in trouble himself. However this may be, his interference was unsolicited and prompt, as soon as ever "he heard that they had put Jeremiah into the dungeon." And he showed herein no little courage as well as kindness. He had much to lose, and the princes were likely to unite against him, for they were all the determined enemies of Jeremiah, and their malice made them ready for any mischief, and their influence was great; and the king to whom he appealed was then sitting in the gate, and therefore he had to go to him openly. But conviction nerves a man to his purpose, and there is no fear in love.

And his application was successful. The king complied with his desire. Let this encourage us in our pious and in our benevolent endeavours. We may succeed much better than we imagine. The individual that refuses at one time may yield at another. Reflection may have changed him: some event or influence may have put him into a propitious frame. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." "Be not weary in well-doing, for in due time ye shall reap if ye faint not." All of us have some influence with others, and how seldom do we exert it as we ought—especially when we consider that the hearts of all are in the hand of the Lord, and he can turn them whithersoever he pleaseth!

DECEMBER 6.—"So Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine arm-holes, under the cords. And Jeremiah did so. So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.—Jer. xxxviii. 11—13.

DAVID had said, "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." And two instances are recorded in the Scripture to encourage us, as a kind of first-fruits. The one is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles: "A man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning; and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet." Philip joined him, instructed him, and baptized him: "and he went on his way rejoicing." The other was found ages before, in the corrupt court of Zedekiah. We have seen, in the preceding exercise, how this pious and humane Ethiopian had nobly distinguished himself, by applying to the king on the behalf of Jeremiah. Having obtained the royal permission to release him from the dismal dungeon, and being furnished with thirty men for the purpose, we here see how he accomplished the work.

If such circumstances are deemed unworthy of attention, let the Spirit of God be condemned for recording them, and not the preacher

for noticing them. We are here led forcibly to remark, that nothing should be wasted, not only in poor, but in higher life. Here we find, even in "the house of the king, and under the treasury," that is, in the store-room, old and injured apparel, laid by for use. And let it not be forgotten, that when our Saviour had shown his power by multiplying five loaves and two fishes into more than a sufficiency to supply the whole multitude, he then, even then, enforced a lesson of economy and frugality; and said, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost," to show that ability and plenty are not to justify, or even excuse any degree of wastefulness. It is by guarding, not only against needless buying, but heedless spending, that the capacity for beneficence is to be enlarged. Our resources are diminished, not only by pride and indulgence, but by want of regulation and negligence. How is it that some, with a very limited income, not only provide things honest in the sight of all men, but have to give to him that needeth?

There is little charity in giving away what we cannot use ourselves; but it is the most shameful uncharitableness *not* to do it. Yet to mention only one instance—How often, in gardens, have we seen vegetables perishing, for which many a family of hungry children would have been thankful. For we should reflect on the degrees of exigency, and remember that what is of no value to us may be of most pressing importance to others, even to the leavings of the plainest table, and the remnants of the poorest wardrobe.

Jeremiah seems to have been a large heavy man; and the ropes might have pained and bruised him; and the dungeon was deep. Ebed-melech therefore provides a softening, and lets it down, and desires him to put it under his arm-holes under the cords. We should see from this example, not only to do good, but to relieve with tenderness. As much often depends upon the manner of conferring a benefit, as upon the thing itself, we are therefore by love to serve one another, and to be not only charitable, but pitiful and courteous. We have seen some refusing with more kindness than others have given; the plaintive countenance, the melting eye, the soothing voice, showing at the time that it was not the will, but the power that was wanting. How much a female adds to the impression of her relief, by the delicacy with which she dispenses it! the manner as well as the principle of charity may render it *a grace*.

But our love is to abound in knowledge and in all judgment. We therefore, Finally, see the prudence as well as the kindness of this good man. Though he had drawn him up, he did not urge him to escape, but let him "remain in the court of the prison." He did this for two reasons. First, there he would be more under the king's protection, than if he was immediately set at large. And, Secondly, there he would be more likely to be better provided for in the straitness of the dearth, as we see from the end of the foregoing chapter, when the king ordered him to abide there before his wretched confinement: "Then Zedekiah the king commanded that they should commit Jeremiah into the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread out of the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city were spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison."

DECEMBER 7.—“Now the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah, while he was shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Go and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring my words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished in that day before thee. But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee; because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord.”—Jer. xxxix. 15—18.

It is observable that Jeremiah himself was charged with this consolatory message to Ebed-melech, who had acted so nobly as his friend, and obtained his deliverance from the dungeon. Nothing could have been more agreeable and delightful to his feelings than to be the medium of such a communication; for grace by making a man humble always makes him grateful; and though his praise is principally due to the Author of all his mercies, he will not overlook the instruments.

The address implies the apprehension of Ebed-melech, yea, it is expressly said he was “afraid.” Of whom? Of the princes whose doings he had opposed and censured? or the Chaldeans that were now encompassing the city? It is not possible to determine this; neither is it necessary. But while he is informed that the words concerning Jerusalem should be accomplished, and that he should witness it, he receives the assurance; “But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee.”

Behold the value and importance of life, and see how able the Lord is to secure it even in the midst of general calamity and desolation; according to the promise: “He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.” The preservation of Noah in the Deluge, of Lot in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, of the Israelites in Goshen, from the plagues of Egypt, and of the mourners in Ezekiel from the men with the slaughter weapons; all these show that “the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.”

If Ebed-melech believed this declaration he would not only dwell safely, but be in quiet from the fear of evil, his mind kept in perfect peace, being stayed upon God. When we consider the structure of our frame, and the numberless dangers to which we are exposed, we cannot reckon upon living a day or an hour to an end, without the Preserver of men. But all our times are in his hand, and he makes us immortal till our work is done—

Hast thou not given thy word
To save my soul from death?
And I can trust my Lord
To keep my mortal breath.

I'll go and come,
Nor fear to die,
Till from on high
Thou call me home.

But see the reason assigned for his gracious regard: "Because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord." It was really for his kindness to Jeremiah; but God notices, not the practice but the principle which had produced it, and without which he could not have been actuated to do as he had done. Men judge of motives by actions: God judges of actions by motives; and the motive is more with him than every thing else. So indeed it is with us as far as we can ascertain it in any instance of conduct towards ourselves. Hence we value a trifle if it springs from real regard, more than a much larger present if it arises from selfishness. *We* may indeed be mistaken in our constructions, but God is not mocked, his judgment is always according to truth. The case before us is not a solitary one. We should have commended the humanity and humility of the Centurion; and the prayer and perseverance of the Syrophenician woman: but our Lord only spake of their faith.

Some people always seem afraid of faith, as if it were hardly compatible with holiness and morality; whereas, it is the medium, the origin of them; it is the spring of these streams, it is the root of these branches. It is in every respect operative; but it peculiarly works by love. He is the most likely to show mercy who has received mercy; to forgive who has been forgiven.

But the whole shows us that Eben-melech had no reason to repent of his work of *faith* and labour of love towards the Lord's servant. Jeremiah could not repay him; but this was so much the better for his benefactor. This is the very reason which our Saviour adduces to excite attention to the poor: "For they cannot recompense thee, but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." It is finely said, "He that giveth to the poor *lendeth* unto the Lord." A man does not think of returning what is given him, but if he has any sense of honour and of justice he will not retain what is lent. And would the Lord borrow and not repay? He has bound himself not only to accept, but to reward the services of his people, and the reward is not the less great, or the less certain, because it is a reward not of debt, but of grace. "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

DECEMBER 8.—"One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."—John ix. 25.

THE corporeal change with which this poor man had been blessed, is the spiritual experience of every real Christian—He was blind, but now sees.

And like him too the Christian may *know* it.

We may also observe a resemblance in the *limitation* of the

knowledge itself—It extends to *one* thing : “ One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.” But this is the main thing ; and to know this is to know enough, without being able to determine a number of particular circumstances. For instance : it is not necessary to know the precise time of the change. Who knows precisely when the day begins, or which be the first beams that reach our horizon ? Yet one thing we know, that the sun is rising ; it is dawn, it is day. We know when spring is arrived, and yet who can fix the exact boundary by which it passed from winter, and the hour, the day, the week, when it will issue in summer ? unless in the artificialness of the almanack. Who perceived when he first began to live naturally ; yet he knows that he hungers and thirsts, and eats and drinks, and lives and moves, and has a being.

Neither is it necessary to be able to know the particular instrumentality employed ; whether an afflictive event, or a good book, or the admonition of a friend, or the preaching of the word. Sometimes there is such a combination and blending of excitements and impressions, that it is impossible to specify which, in the aggregate, was the most powerful or decisive. Whatever be the means, and they are various, the excellency of the power is of God ; and it is enough for us to know that the work is done, and to acknowledge that he has done it.

To which we may add the manner in which it has been accomplished. In some cases it is more sudden ; in others more slow. The Lord addresses one man in thunder ; he whispers to another in a small still voice. Here he awakens fear and terror ; there he draws with the bands of a man and the cords of love. What a difference was there between the conversion of the jailer, and the opening of the heart of Lydia : and between the revelation of the Saviour to Saul of Tarsus, and to Cornelius ! Yet in all these instances the result was the same. Two inferences may be drawn from hence. The one regards others. How careful should we be not to disown persons as religious characters, and keep them back from the table of the Lord, because they are unable to furnish a minute narrative of the dealings of God with their souls, while they walk as becometh the Gospel. The other regards ourselves. It is better indeed to err on the safe side ; and to be too fearful rather than self-secure. It is an awful thing to decide on our spiritual condition ; and, considering the consequences of mistake, should never be done without much consideration. Yet, on the other hand, decision is unspeakably desirable, and we should not refuse to be comforted, and under a feeling of humility and diffidence, become ungrateful, and deny what God has wrought in us. We are commanded to examine ourselves, and to prove whether we are in the faith ; but this is best done, not by nice and curious inquiries with regard to the influences of the Holy Spirit, but by observing the tendency of their operation, and judging by their effects—And happy is he who, whatever he may be ignorant of besides, can say, “ One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.”

And remark what a confidence the man derived from his consciousness of this one thing. These unbelievers wished and endeavoured to confound him ; but their questions and their cavils had no weight with *him*. He did not consider himself competent to dispute

with them ; nor did he attempt to consider every objection their prejudices urged—But he had—he felt one invincible, undeniable argument—“ This,” says he, “ is sufficient for me.” You say, he is a sinner—Is it likely a sinner would be so honoured of God as he has been? Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man was not of God he could do nothing. This however I must leave with you—I know what he has done for me, and cannot be mistaken—whether he be a sinner I know not ; “ one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.”

A Christian indeed is not an enthusiast. He despises no kind of evidence ; and he wishes that his religion may always appear what it really is, a reasonable service. But he that believeth hath the witness in himself. Like this man, has a satisfaction derived from experience. He has received the truth in the love and efficiency of it. He has felt its power and blessedness. Such a man could be safely trusted among infidels. They may scoff and ridicule ; they may even perplex him ; but they cannot induce a conviction contrary to his views and feelings. He has a certainty, out of which he can neither be laughed or reasoned. His heart is established with grace. And thus also he is secure, not only from infidelity, but heresy ; and cannot be drawn away from the truth as it is in Jesus, or the peculiar doctrines of divine grace. With him they are not mere notions, but principles. They are spirit and they are life. They sanctify, quicken, refresh his soul. If a man who sees could be introduced among a people entirely blind, they would consider him a liar or a madman, when he told them what he saw. Yet though he would not contemn them because of their blindness, but feel pity instead of pride, he would be in no danger of yielding to their opinion : he would know that he spoke the words of truth and soberness—He would know that though they were blind he saw.

This also qualifies a man for dealing with others in divine things. It excites his zeal, and enables him to speak with earnestness, because he can speak without hesitation or doubt. “ Lo this, we have searched it, so it is ; hear it, and know thou it for thy good.” “ That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us : and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

This also yields him a prop against despair, and a cordial under discouragement. He feels that he is far from what he ought to be, and wishes to be. “ I have much,” says he, “ to humble me, but I am not without cause for thankfulness. He *has* made me to differ from others, and from myself once. I *know* he has enabled me to see the evil of sin, the beauty of holiness, the worth of his grace. I know I love his salvation ; and I count all things but loss : for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord—And if he were pleased to kill me, he would not have shown me such things as these.”

DECEMBER 9.—“ He shall see of the TRAVAIL OF HIS SOUL, and shall be satisfied.”—Isaiah liii. 11.

THIS verse contains an epitome of the whole chapter ; and the

chapter contains an epitome of the whole Gospel. For what is the Gospel—but “the testimony of Jesus?” And what does this testimony essentially include—but “the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow?” And if “the angels desire to look into these things”—how much more should we, to whom they are not only true, and wonderful, and sublime—but infinitely important and necessary? Let me therefore indulge in three meditations on this all-interesting subject.

The allusion is obvious. “A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.” A comparison should never be pressed beyond its lawful bounds. The attempt made to force too much out of it, not only renders it absurd, but weakens it, and the spirit flies off evaporated in particles. It should suffice here to observe, that there is a strong and striking resemblance between the delivered mother and the risen Saviour. In each case there is suffering. In each case the suffering is followed by pleasure. And in each case the pleasure is deemed the recompence of the suffering—The birth of the child repays the throes of the mother; and the salvation of the Church satisfies the Saviour: “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied.” **THE TRAVAIL OF HIS SOUL.**

From ignorance and the degree of interest which things acquire in their relation to ourselves, every sufferer is prone to think that *his* endurings are peculiar and superior. Jesus could say with infinite propriety, “Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.” Two things here intimate the greatness of his passion. First, the term by which it is expressed. “Travail”—not trouble—but “travail.” And, secondly, the principal seat of it; “his soul”—“The travail of his *soul*.” The distress of the soul is the soul of distress.

Some persons are not qualified to enter into a comparison between corporeal and mental affliction. They are a kind of human animals. They are masses of flesh and blood. They have senses, and passions, and appetites; and little else. They lie down and rise up; they sleep and wake; they hunger and thirst—But they never suffer unless when they have nothing to eat, or when they cry out with bodily pain. They are strangers to all that interior of woe which to feeling minds renders the world a wilderness, more than the thorns and briars without. “The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity: but a wounded spirit who can bear?” While all is calm and firm within, external trials are borne with comparative ease. *Then* we may be “troubled on every side, yet not distressed;” like a ship in the sea, which does not sink by the water around it, but only by what gets through and gets in.

But there are some who have not only “fightings without,” but “fears within.” *They* know what inward anguish and depression mean. Ah! says David, “My bones are vexed, my soul is also sore vexed”—“O, my God, my soul is cast down within me.” And how was it with his Son, whom he yet in spirit calls his Lord? His sufferings were “the travail of his soul.” Not that he was free from other afflictions. With regard to outward distresses, he was

a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. But even his external sufferings derived much of their pressure from the sensibility of his mind, for he was all feeling. Some are little affected, even with bereavements: but he, at the grave of Lazarus, groaned in spirit and wept. Some seem careless of reputation; but he said, "reproach hath broken my heart." Some when "stricken" are not "grieved," and "have made their faces harder than a rock;" but he "in the days of his flesh made supplications with strong cryings and tears." But what led him to exclaim on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" What made him in the garden, before the hand of man had yet touched him, to be "sore amazed and very heavy?" What led him to say, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death?" while "his sweat was as it were drops of blood falling to the ground?"

"The thought of his approaching crucifixion," say some. If so, what becomes of the pre-eminence of his example? We can fetch many from history who had to endure more torturing and lingering agonies—And yet they rejoiced in the prospect, left their prisons singing, kissed the instrument of their pain, and thanked the executioner. How did Bradford, when informed that he was to be burnt at the stake the following day, fall upon his knees and praise God for an honour he had so long waited for? When a popish priest said to Hooper at the place of execution, "I am truly sorry to find you here;" the martyr replied, "O man, keep thy sorrow to thyself, and mourn over thine own wickedness. I am well blessed by God, and to die for the sake of Christ is sweet to my soul." Is then the servant above the master, or the disciple above his Lord? Here—and we will venture to say, here alone, can be found a complete and satisfactory solution. They had Calvary before them, but not Gethsemane. They had to endure the cross, but not the curse. They died by men, but not for them. They had not to bear the sins of many: they had not to bear their own sins—not one of their own sins—or they would have sunk down under the burden. But he bare our sins in his own body on the tree. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. HIS SOUL WAS MADE AN OFFERING FOR SIN.

DECEMBER 10.—"He SHALL SEE of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."—Isaiah liii. 11.

SOMETHING therefore was to be *derived* from the travail of his soul. It was the salvation of sinners. To show that this infinite good results from his suffering, he compares his dying to the sowing of seed, which *dies*, and *then* produces. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone: but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." Here we are reminded of our obligations to him. If we are reconciled unto God, it is by the death of his Son: if we are redeemed from the curse of the law, it is because he was made a curse for us. The blessing, though free to us, was beyond expression expensive to him. He accomplished it, not by a mere volition of his will, or an exertion of his power, but by his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross.

“He sunk beneath our heavy woos,
To raise us to his throne;
There’s not a gift his hand bestows,
But cost his heart a groan.”

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!

While this blessedness *is* the travail of his soul, so we find he can enjoy the *sight* of it. A child, when born, may be spared, and may grow up, and be acknowledged as the offspring of her who bare him; but if she dies, though others see the travail of the mother, she herself does not. She is laid low in the dust; and in vain her infant goes to her grave—His cries, if oppressed, cannot reach her ears, nor, if well treated, can the news gladden her heart—Her son comes to honour, but she knoweth it not; and he is brought low, but she perceiveth it not of him. So it was with Rachel: “Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also.” And she had a son, and he became a patriarch, and the head of a tribe; but she *saw* it not: for she only sighed out a name expressive of her disappointment and sorrow—she called his name Benoni, and expired. So would it have been with Jesus, had he not rose and revived. Whatever blessings he procured for us by dying, he could not have seen the application and enjoyment of them, had he remained in the grave. But he could not be holden of it. It was said of him, He shall live. A seed shall serve him. And he shall *see* his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

For there is a certainty in his realizing this vision—“He *shall see* of the travail of his soul.” It is often spoken of as a reward insured by promise and stipulation. Thus it is said; “By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” Let it not be objected, that he himself says, “I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain.” For here he complains as the moral agent, as the preacher of the word, as the minister of the circumcision. But this does not apply to the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure. This would not allow of his suffering at an uncertainty. Having performed the awful condition, it would have been unfaithful in God to have withholden the remuneration suspended upon it; especially as he died in dependance upon it, and in expectation of it. It was the joy set before him, for which he endured the cross, and despised the shame.—To which we may add, that he is fully in the possession of resources sufficient to enable him to acquire all his rights, and realize all his wishes. As yet we see not all things put under him, but we see him, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour. We see him with power over all flesh: with all power in heaven and in earth—able therefore to counteract all the designs of his enemies, and to make them subservient to the accomplishment of his own—able to take the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession—able to subdue Paganism, and the false prophet, and the man of sin—able to take away the

veil from the heart of the Jews, and induce them to look upon him whom they have pierced, and to mourn for him—able to root up in his churches every plant which his heavenly Father hath not planted—able to increase a thousand fold all the excellences and usefulness of his people. “For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron.” “Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.”

DECEMBER 11.—“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and SHALL BE SATISFIED.”—Isaiah liii. 11.

NOTHING is more trying and mortifying than to labour without success, especially when great difficulties are encountered, and great sacrifices incurred. But how pleasing is it to the husbandman after manuring, and plowing, and sowing, to go forth and see, first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear; and when he has borne the burden and heat of the day in harvest to behold the precious grain safely housed in the garner! How delightful must it be to the warrior after his marchings, and privations, and all the perils of the field, to return home in peace, and enjoy the spoils and rewards of victory! Or take the image to which Isaiah refers. How is the mother recompensed for her pain when she sees—a living child—her own—the pledge of mutual affection—the wearer of the father’s name and image—an endeared creature depending upon herself—to be fed at her bosom—to be dandled on her knee—to be aided by her in all his attempts to walk and speak—a rational being unfolding new powers—and preparing for usefulness in the community—and who, unless he be a wretch, will pronounce no word through life with half the feeling he will say, “My mother!” But there have been days wherein it was said, “Blessed is the womb that bare not, and the paps that never gave suck.” Many a “Rachel is weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, because they are not.” Many an early grave is inscribed with, “Childhood and youth are vanity.” But the pleasure of the Lord Jesus is liable to no such disappointment—“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be SATISFIED.”

Let us dwell for a moment on this satisfaction. What can be so animating and improving? Paul says to the Thessalonians, “Ye are our glory and joy.” Yet he and his brethren were only ministers by whom they believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. But if converts are the glory and joy of those who are only the instruments of their salvation, in how much higher a degree must they be so to him who is the sole author of it! When the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them, “He spake this parable unto them. What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.” We need not say, that this shepherd who instead of complaining of his wearisome and painful search,

only exults in his success, is the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. When he came to the well he was not only thirsty, but hungry, and therefore his disciples went away into the city to buy meat. When they returned they spread it before him, saying, "Master, eat"—But he said unto them, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." Upon which, looking at each other and wondering, they said, "Hath any man brought him aught to eat?" He then said, "My disciples, since you left me I have had an opportunity to enlighten and convert, by my grace, a poor sinful wretch who came here to draw water; and she has left her vessel for my use; and has gone into the city to tell her neighbours; and is, as you see yonder, returning over the plain with a large number, who will receive my doctrine and become my followers. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. Ah! my disciples, this is food! There is no repast like the satisfaction of doing good—My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

And when he sees the travail of his soul, is he SATISFIED? Then behold his benevolence. The world knew him not: his own received him not. They persecuted him through life, and at length hung him on a tree. But God raised him from the dead, and he had the means to revenge himself—and it is said revenge is sweet. And it is sweet to a brute. It is sweet to a devil. But it is not sweet to a Christian mind. But it is sweet to exercise mercy, to pass by a transgression, to overcome evil with good. So Jesus derived his satisfaction not from the punishment of his enemies, but from their pardon, and deemed their happiness a recompence for all his sufferings.

Then we see the worth and importance of the salvation of the soul. We cannot always infer the value of a thing from the pleasure it yields. Little things please little minds. We read of some who rejoice in a thing of nought. We know how men make gold their hope, and fine gold their confidence: and yet a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth. When therefore a work is performed we wish to know the opinion of one who is a perfect judge—Is he satisfied with it? It is a strong proof of the importance of salvation that the angels of God rejoice over one sinner that repenteth: for we cannot imagine that a mere trifle would throw into ecstasy those beings who are proverbial for their knowledge. But it is a stronger proof still that it is the satisfaction of our Divine Redeemer himself. O that we estimated our souls as he estimates them! Every thing else would appear less than nothing and vanity compared with their salvation.

Then we may enlarge our notions of the number of the saved. True benevolence is the most encroaching thing in the world. A generous heart is never satisfied; it is always planning, always desiring to do something more. And would *his* soul, which is compassion itself, be satisfied with a few that should be saved? How many must be made partakers of the benefit before he stays the process of mercy, and says, It is enough! If no more are called I am satisfied! But it is in reference to his claim and his disposi-

tion, that he is told by promise that his seed shall be as the stars of heaven, as the sand on the sea shore, and as drops of dew.

Then here is encouragement for faith and hope. Under a sense of unworthiness and guilt persons often fear whether he will receive them. But does he not invite them to come, and command them to come; and does he not complain that they will not come—yea, does he not assure them that it would yield him pleasure? We can therefore plead with you *his* interest as well as your *own*. You have offended him enough, grieved him enough: and surely if there be any thing by which you can yield him satisfaction you are bound to do it. Let him then see you at his feet, and hear you crying, Lord, save, I perish—This will charm him as much as the songs of angels—It is the travail of his soul, and when he sees it he is satisfied.

Then we have here a noble example to follow. Let the same mind be in us. Let his joy be fulfilled in ourselves. Let us spare no pains; let us grudge no sacrifices in order to be useful. And let the satisfaction arising from it be our reward—"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

DECEMBER 12.—"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."—Jer. x. 23.

JEREMIAH *knew* this. It was not with him a matter of opinion or conjecture, but of certainty; and therefore he could address his conviction to God himself. "But he was a prophet, and might have derived his confidence from an immediate inspiration." But we have no reason to believe this. He derived his persuasion from five sources, which lie open to ourselves.

First, *dependence*. We are not our own, and therefore the right of direction does not belong to us, but to another, in whom we live, and move, and have our being; and who has an absolute claim to us.

Secondly, *ignorance*. Vain man would be wise, but he is born like a wild ass's colt. His powers are exceedingly limited; he is liable to a thousand prejudices and delusions; and cannot be safely trusted to discern and distinguish between good and evil, appearances and realities.

Thirdly, *observation*. Read all history. See the consequences of Lot's choosing the vale of Sodom, "because it was well watered." See the sin and embarrassment to which David was reduced, when he went to Gath; yet he was so convinced of the propriety of this fatal step, as to say, "there is nothing better for me to do." Look around you. What are you continually meeting with, not only in the conduct of men, but in the mistakes even of good men!

Fourthly, *experience*. Can any one look back upon life, and attentively review the events that have befallen him; the enterprises in which he has been engaged; the anxieties, and hopes, and fears, and joys, and sorrows, which have excited and influenced him; and not be compelled to say, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."

Lastly, *revelation*. Here we have the testimony of the only wise God himself frequently interposed and expressed, in every kind of statement—"Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?" "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill: but time and chance happeneth to them all." "Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?" "He performeth the thing that is appointed for me, and many such things are with him." "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

So true is the doctrine before us. And who does not believe the truth of it? It is not the conviction we want, but the temper, the practice that becomes it, and which we might imagine would certainly be produced by it in rational creatures. But, alas! these rational creatures are also depraved creatures; hence they see and approve better things and follow worse. Yet surely this knowledge should be a *principle*, and we ought to derive from it *gratitude*. Have we been preserved from the dangers to which we were once unknowingly exposed? Have we escaped the follies and evils into which wiser and better men than ourselves have fallen? Have we been sheltered and indulged in our course? Have we had comfort in our connexions, and success in our engagements? Let us not burn incense to ourselves, as if all this was owing to our own prudence, and caution, and care; but exclaim, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory; for thy mercy and thy truth's sake." It should also yield *submission*. We may pray with regard to an affliction, "If it be possible let this cup pass from me;" if we can add, with the Saviour, "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Indeed we cannot know what the will of God is in any of our trials, till events discover it. But when it is discovered, we ought to bow to his pleasure; assured not only that he has a right to do what he will with his own, but that he is too righteous and kind to injure us, and knows infinitely better than we do what our welfare requires.

If too "the way of man is not in himself," it should check *presumptuousness*. This often appears in men with regard to their future expectations and designs. But wisdom says, "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Hence James thus reproveth a tradesman, not for any disposition to defraud and oppress, nor for the wish to improve his income; but for reckoning on the continuance of his being and his health, and success in business, as if no uncertainty could attend him, and forming his scheme without any consideration of God, on whom every thing relied: "Go to now, ye that say, To day, or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil." The certain rich man, whose ground brought forth plentifully, said, "This will I do; I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink,

and be merry." This is what *he* said—"But *God* said, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

The fact should also teach us to *apply to God for direction* in serious and earnest prayer. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." He is able to do it: he is willing to do it; yea, he is engaged to do it, if you repair with the case to him. "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

It is thus alone we can live happy in a miserable world, and be calm and confident in every disturbance or alarm. But this will enable the soul to dwell at ease. The remedy has been tried, and was never known to fail. And no wonder—It is of God's own appointing and prescribing. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established."

DECEMBER 13.—"And the princes offered for dedicating of the altar in the day that it was anointed, even the princes offered their offering before the altar."
—Numbers vii. 10.

THESE princes, "heads of the houses of their fathers," were twelve. Their offering individually was this: "One silver charger, the weight thereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them were full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering: one spoon of ten shekels of gold, full of incense: one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering: one kid of the goats for a sin offering: and for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year."

Some of these articles were for immediate use, such as the animals to be slain in sacrifice for burnt offerings, sin offerings, and peace offerings. Others were for fixed and standing use, such were the utensils to be employed in performing the service of the sanctuary. These were all of silver and gold. Was God to be served only in plate? The costliness was not for his pleasure, but for the sake of the people in an early and infantile state of the Church; to impress their imaginations; to remind them that he was "a great King;" and to teach them that they were to serve him with their best. The chargers were worth, in our money, sixteen pounds five shillings—the bowl fifteen pounds—the spoon, or ladle, seven pounds ten shillings. It is not possible to determine the value of the two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, five lambs; but the presentation of two hundred and four of such animals, and three hundred pounds in silver, and seventy-five pounds in gold, was at this period, and in their circumstances, a vast donation.

And here the first thing that strikes us is the capacity of these donors. We are amazed to think how they came by so much affluence as to be able to spare for even one offering so much treasure. They had all been oppressed and plundered in Egypt, and they were now in a wilderness, without merchandise, trade, or agriculture. But from

whatever source, or whatever way their wealth had been acquired, they had it; it was lawfully their own; they would not have been pious at the expense of justice; and they knew that God abhors robbery for burnt-offering. Those however who have riches commonly resolve to keep them; and as it is said that the ground is generally very barren about the silver and gold mines, so the wealthy often do less for the cause of God, not only comparatively, but really, than persons of less resources. But it was not so here. Who can help admiring the liberality of these men? And let it be observed, That they did this freely; they were not called upon to do it; it was not the effect of any excitement, but of the forwardness and willingness of their own minds. Nor was this the first time of showing their generosity. It had been evinced in two instances before this. The first was when the tabernacle was in framing. "Then they gave onyx stones, and stones to be set, for the ephod, and for the breastplate; and spice, and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the sweet incense." These were things much valued, and which could not be easily replaced. When also, the tabernacle was fully set up, and anointed, and sanctified with all the instruments thereof, "they brought their offering before the Lord, six covered wagons, and twelve oxen; a wagon for two of the princes, and for each one an ox: and they brought them before the tabernacle." Yet after this, immediately after this, they came forward again with the expensive donation before us.

With regard to this presentation we may remark three things. First, all the offerings were precisely the same in kind, quantity, and value. But were the donors equally rich? This is not likely. Yet they were equally disposed; they felt an equal interest in the altar; and to prevent mortification on one side, and pride on the other, by pre-eminence or inferiority, they had agreed upon this measure. We differ in our stations and in our means, but though we do not give the same in fact, we may give the same in principle. The Lord looketh to the heart, and in his sight all who give proportionately give equally; and the poor may be as liberal as the rich.

Secondly. The offerings were not to be presented at once. The solemnity continued twelve days: "The Lord said unto Moses, They shall offer their offering, each prince on his day, for the dedicating of the altar." Wherefore was this? We are never more liable to mistakes than when we assign reasons for the conduct of the Supreme Being. Yet he has reasons for all he does. And may we not suppose that he would teach us to do every thing decently and in order? As the work of God should not be done in a careless, so neither in a hurried and confused manner. "Take time," says the proverb, "and you will have done the sooner;" and if not, you will surely have done "the better." May we not learn also that we are not to complain of the length and repetition of religious services? Here were twelve days of convocation immediately following each other. But did the pious Jews cry out, "What a weariness it is to serve the Lord?" When will the work be over? Those who love the things of God call them "their pleasant things;" and in going from one ordinance to another, they only go from strength to strength. And when health, or the engagements of duty, keep them back from going with the multitude to the

sanctuary, in "their hearts are the ways of them." Again. By the protraction and the repetition of the services they would be more noticed, and more remembered by the people, and especially by their children. To which we may add, That thus an equal honour would be put upon each tribe. Each had his own standard in the army, each had his precious stone in the breastplate of Aaron, and each had a separate day for the presentation of his offering, according to the order in which they were to move, or encamp, beginning with Judah, and ending with Naphtali.

Thirdly, The account of each dedication is expressly given, and repeated in the very same words, without the least variation or abridgement. This swells the chapter to a great length. In reading it perhaps we have sometimes been ready to think the sameness tiresome; and to say, this might easily have been avoided if the sacred historian, after the recital of the offering of the first prince's offering, had said, and "so did the remaining eleven." But there is no vain repetition in the Scriptures. God would show that he was no respecter of persons; that he is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love; that a book is written before him, in which he records the services of *every* individual.

DECEMBER 14.—"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."—Heb. v. 9.

We are made perfect as sin is subdued in us, as holiness prevails, as we love the law of God, and find his service our delight. It is thus *we* are transformed by the renewing of the mind; and are changed from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. But this was not the case with the Lord Jesus. He was the Holy One of God. He had in him nothing to mortify, nothing to eradicate, nothing to convert. And the term here does not refer to his personal perfection, but to his official. He stood in a peculiar relation to us, as the accomplisher of our recovery from the Fall; and for this a certain kind of process was necessary, by way of qualification; including his incarnation, abasement, and suffering. This is fully expressed in an earlier part of the Epistle, where it is said he was made "perfect through suffering;" and that "it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren." The same is more than implied in the words before us: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things he suffered;" and, in this way, "being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." And it is by his poverty we are enriched; it is by his stripes we are healed; it is by his death we live. He was our Redeemer in order to be our righteousness and strength. He procured on the cross all that he applies on the throne.

The author of a work is very distinguishable from the means. And this is peculiarly the case in the work before us. The Scriptures, ministers, ordinances, providences, may all aid us in attaining salvation; but he is the author; neither is there salvation in any other: no man cometh unto the Father, but by him.

To be the author of some works is a disgrace; to be the author of others is a very little honour; but there are works which have

gained for their performers the admiration and praises of nations, and of ages. To be the author of salvation, is to surpass every other agent, more than the sun differs from a glow-worm. All the angels of God, and they are good judges, exclaim at the sight of it with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." All other deliverers and benefactors are as much below him in kindness and efficiency, as the body is inferior to the soul, and time to eternity.

He is the author of *eternal* salvation. Eternity would add dignity to a trifle. But what an importance does it attach, what a crowning glory and happiness, when it is added to our wishes and our hopes! What the world promises the votaries of riches, fame, and pleasure, is uncertain, short, vanishing: and they set their heart on that which is not. But you, O Christian, have chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from you. You have a better and an enduring substance. Your salvation shall be for ever. For ever—absolutely. All other salvations are everlasting only by comparison. The various deliverances of the Jews terminated in fresh ruin; and they were again conquered, spoiled, and enslaved. But the believer is passed from death unto life, and shall never come into condemnation. The crown he obtains is a crown of glory, that cannot fade away. His portion is without any qualification of the term perfectly endless—His song will always be new: his blessedness always beginning. For ever—emphatically. The present system is too narrow and too short for its developement and realization. There must be new heavens and a new earth. There must be an immortality of duration. It is to eternity this salvation principally looks. Eternity is the grand sphere of it. *There* its glories are to be displayed: *there* its treasures are to be possessed; *there* its blessings are to be enjoyed. And so shall we be for ever with the Lord.

But who will be the partakers of this salvation? "All," says the Apostle, "that obey him." Does he mean then to exclude from hope those who have hitherto been disobedient? Who then could be saved? Christians themselves will acknowledge, that they themselves were sometimes foolish and disobedient: and that it was after this the lovingkindness of God their Saviour towards them appeared. And is not the language of the Gospel addressed to such? "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." But the Apostle would intimate, that the salvation is a holy salvation; that though its blessings are derived entirely from grace, they can only be enjoyed in a state of obedience; that though this obedience is not the cause of the salvation it is the accompaniment, and characterizes all those who are the subjects of it.

Do we then obey him? How *reasonable* is this obedience? But how *necessary* is it!

We cannot be ignorant of his will. We know that he commands us to believe on his name, to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, to follow him, to seek those things which are above. What is our

practice, our disposition, our prayer with regard to all this? *Can* we say, sincerely and earnestly—

“Make me to walk in thy commands,
 'Tis a delightful road;
 Nor let my head, nor heart, nor hands,
 Offend against my God.”

DECEMBER 15.—“But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.”—2 Kings iii. 15.

WE have here a narrative of the expedition of Jehoram king of Israel against Moab. He drew into the enterprize not only the king of Edom, but Jehoshaphat the king of Judah; a good man, but who was here led into temptation, for which he would have perished, if the Lord had dealt with him after his desert. We are not to hate the irreligious, or refuse to do them good as we have opportunity; but with regard to unhallowed intimacy and alliances, we are to remember that evil communications corrupt good manners, and that as for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord will lead them forth with the workers of iniquity. This was not the first time Jehoshaphat had erred in the same thing. He had some years before joined with Ahab the father of Jehoram, and had paid dear for his folly. The proverb says, a burnt child dreads the fire. Even an animal, who has once suffered, will avoid the cause for ever after. But men are not equally wise—“Why will ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more.”

To return. “So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days’ journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them. And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!” But was it the Lord’s doing? The distress was from him, but not the cause. But so it is; “the foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.” Yet a godly man will differ from others, even in a common mistake or calamity; and “Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may enquire of the Lord by him?” He should have consulted before he took a step, both as to the war itself, and the direction they were to take. It was thus David always did, and prospered. Yet it was better done late than entirely neglected. We have also here an image of what frequently takes place. God’s servants are not thought of in ease, prosperity, and health: but when conscience is alarmed, when trouble comes, when sickness and death threaten—then where is the minister? Send for the minister!

But how came Elisha here? In such a place! In such company! He was not here as the king’s chaplain, or the army’s chaplain; he was deemed by both the troubler of Israel. It is probable, as God designed to put honour upon him, that he was there by a divine impulse. However this may be, he *was* there: for “one of the king of Israel’s servants answered and said, Here is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.” Upon this Jehoram is silent. But Jehoshaphat commends him, and says, “The word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king

of Edom went down to him. And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab."

It seems surprising that Jehoram did not resent this. But his haughty spirit was bowed down, and his conscience sided with the man of God.

It is a character of a citizen of Zion, how much more of a messenger of Divine truth, that in his eyes a vile person is contemned, while he honours them that fear the Lord. What a difference is there between the righteous and the wicked! And we should feel it, and show it in our conduct—But we must show it properly. And here some distinction is necessary. Elisha does not here speak as a subject; there is a respect due to a sovereign officially, whatever be his character; and therefore Paul retracted an exceptionable expression, remembering that it was said, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." But it was the prophet who here spoke in the name of the Most High God. Yet something of nature, it would seem, mingled with it; so that he was irritated and ruffled, and was rendered for the time unsusceptible of the prophetic inspiration. And what does he? "Bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him."

Minstrels were persons who played on the harp, and also sung, and sometimes with dancing. They are now unusual; but they were very common formerly, in most countries. There were many of them in Israel.

The love of music is generally reckoned a sign of a good temper, and the use of it may help a bad one. The indulgence of it may be carried to excess, and be abused; but upon the whole, it is one of the most innocent, as well as agreeable employments. It has often been called in to inflame unhallowed mirth; but the Moravians, and Luther, and Calvin, and a thousand more, have proved that it is not only consistent with devotion, but aidful of it. It is founded in human nature. God has constructed us alive to it. Pythagoras used it always before he retired to bed. Plato recommends the use of it in the laws of his republic. David, by his harp, often chased away the evil spirit from Saul. It was much practised by the students in the schools of the prophets: hence Samuel said to Saul, at a certain place "thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy: and the Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man." And here we find Elisha called in a devout Levite, to play and sing before him, to calm and raise his spirits, to receive the message of the Almighty.

Who thinks sufficiently of the dependence of spirit on matter? Does not every thing religious first address itself to the senses?

But let us derive an example from Elisha. Let us serve God without distraction. Let us lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting. Let us cherish in religious exercises serenity, and love, and gentleness of mind, and feeling—

"The Spirit like a peaceful dove,
Flies from the realms of noise and strife;
Why should we vex and grieve his love,
Who seals our souls to heavenly life?"

DECEMBER 16.—"Ah Lord God! behold thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and THERE IS NOTHING TOO HARD FOR THEE."—Jer. xxxii. 17.

MUCH of true godliness consists in our holding communion with God not only in his relations, but in what we call his attributes or the perfections of his nature. We should especially do this, as our circumstances and experience render the exertion of any one of them in particular peculiarly needful and reasonable. This might be exemplified with regard to our misery and his mercy, our guilt and his grace, our ignorance and his wisdom. But what is the practical use we should make of the truth before us? a truth which all will readily acknowledge in speculation? "Nothing is too hard for thee."

Why then surely we should flee from his wrath, and seek an interest in his favour. Who would not dread the displeasure of Omnipotence? Who knoweth the power of *his* anger? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God. His wrath is almighty. It can arm every creature against me, from an insect to an archangel. It can operate immediately upon my mind without the intervention of instruments. It can reach me, where no mortal foe can touch me, beyond death and the grave. Hence, said the Saviour, "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him." But if he can be an almighty enemy, he can be an Omnipotent friend. He can cause all creatures to be at peace with me; and make all things to work together for my good. If he loves me and provides for me, the providence, the love is attended with infinite means and resources: and eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

"And can this mighty Lord
Of glory condescend?
And will he write his name,
My Father and my Friend?"

He has rendered it more than possible. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" He waits to be gracious, and is exalted to have mercy upon us. He has established a ministry of reconciliation. By his servants God himself beseeches you to be reconciled unto God!

If nothing is too hard for him, let me depend upon him for the renovation of my depraved nature. Indeed when I consider myself, and think of the work that is to be accomplished, that it is not a mere change of opinion, a reformation of manners, but a transformation by the renewing of the mind, I should see no medium between utter despondency and that hope which leads me to this rock which is higher than I. He is the God of all grace. He can enlighten this understanding, dark as it is. He can soften this heart, hard as it is. He can render my duty my privilege; my work my pleasure. He can put his Spirit within me, and cause me to walk in his sta-

tutes and judgments to do them. He can give me a sense of his pardoning love under the deepest sense of my unworthiness and desert, and purge my conscience from dead works to serve the living God. He is also adequate to the continuance and carrying on of the good work after he has begun it. Through all my dangers he can preserve me to the end of my course, and make me more than a conqueror. Under every burden he can sustain me. In every duty his grace is sufficient for me—Nothing is too hard for him.

This should animate us to do good in hopeless cases. I call these cases hopeless in reference to ordinary means and mere human agency: but there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. He has a mighty arm, strong is his hand, and high is his right hand. Who brought Manasseh to himself after he had sinned away all the effects of a pious education, and had sunk to the lowest depths of vice? By whom were the Corinthian converts washed, justified, sanctified? Let ministers who look down upon hearers who have grown into impenitence under their labours; let fathers and mothers whose hearts are bleeding over children of disobedience; let all who are striving in their stations to save a soul from death, encourage themselves in the Lord their God, and remember that he is able even of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Let the reflection also sustain and comfort us when useful and valuable instruments are called away. There is much idolatry in our hearts, of which we are not aware till the idols are laid hold of and removed—Then we groan and exclaim, "My wound is incurable;" "Mine eye shall no more see good." Yet when the stream is dried up, is the fountain exhausted? When the husband and the father are withdrawn does he not still live who is the Father of the fatherless and the Husband of the widow? Many a dying saint, in the midst of weeping dependants, has felt, as a cordial to his heart, the Divine assurance, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widow trust in me." We may apply this still more to the cause of God. Here he uses means, and we ought to esteem them, but we must not depend upon them, or suppose that any of them are *essential* to his work. The government of the Church is not suspended upon men, however wise and qualified, but upon the shoulder of Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. With him is the residue of the Spirit. When Elijah was taken, Elisha was left, and endued with a double portion of his spirit. What should we have said had we lived when Paul, when Luther died? Had we seen the prisons filled, and the stake fed with pious victims, what would have been our fears for the reformation? But these prisons, these fires only extolled, and increased and recommended it. The professors, the preachers suffered as evil-doers, even unto bonds, but the word of God was not bound. Yea, the things that happened unto them turned out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel.

Finally, If nothing is too hard for the Lord, let it establish our confidence in his word of prophecy and promise, whatever seems to oppose the accomplishment of it. We cannot absolutely depend upon the word of men, for they are changeable! and if they continue in the same mind they may be unable to fulfil their engagements. But with God there is no variableness nor shadow of turning, neither can he be ever incapacitated to perform with his

hand what he has spoken with his mouth. The largeness of God's promise in the wilderness was at first too much for the faith of even Moses himself. "And Moses said, The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?" But what said the answer of God? "Is the Lord's hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not." It was otherwise with Abraham the father of the faithful. When God had made promise to Abraham, notwithstanding the improbability, and, naturally considered, impossibility of the fulfilment, "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform." So let it be with us, first as to all God has engaged to do for us personally—even to the resurrection of our bodies, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself: and secondly, as to all those declarations of a public nature, and which regard the conversion of the Jews, and the call of the Gentiles, and the filling of the earth with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. These are not visionary representations—"The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it"—and "in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength"—"NOTHING IS TOO HARD FOR THE LORD."

DECEMBER 17.—"And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: but their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket."—Acts ix. 23—25.

THOUGH this is related immediately after Paul's conversion, it did not happen till a very considerable time afterwards. The aim of Luke, the sacred historian, was not to give a full and continued series of events, but to record particular facts and circumstances as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. He therefore often passes over large intervals between without notice.

It was near Damascus the Saviour met with him, and into which he had been led after he arose from the earth: "And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth." Here by Ananias he was restored to sight, and here he received meat, and was strengthened. "Then was Saul certain days with the disciples, which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." Yet we know from Paul's own declaration, in his Epistle to the Galatians, that instantly upon this

he did not go up to Jerusalem, but went into Arabia, where, during three years, he was taught, not of man, nor by man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is probable that, during this period, he more than once visited Damascus. However this may be, here we find him at the end of it; and encompassed with danger, for he was in deaths oft, and could truly say, I die daily. His peril arose from "the Jews, who took counsel to kill him." Instead of being convinced by such a supernatural and notorious event, and which would be attested by so many witnesses, they were only enraged the more: for they viewed him as an apostate from them; and they knew from his talents and zeal how likely he was to promote the cause of Jesus of Nazareth.

Yet such things as they were now doing against him he had himself formerly done to others. How often would he be reminded of his sin in his sufferings! This would tend to keep him humble and patient. "Ah! so I persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it."

So malignant and determined were they, that "they watched the gates day and night to kill him." At first this looks not like an exertion of authority, but an assassination affair, in which a number of wretches waylaid him of their own accord. Yet the governor was apprized of their design, and was drawn over to their interest, and more than allowed them to keep the egresses: for the city was large, and the avenues many, requiring no few to keep them. The Apostle, in relating the transaction himself says, "*The governor, under Aretas the king, kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison desirous to apprehend me.*"

We have seen his danger, let us observe his deliverance. He seemed a certain prey; but "their lying in wait was known of Saul; and the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket." Here we remark two things. First, the escape was not miraculous. In this way the Lord has often delivered his servants, and in this way he is continually *able* to deliver them. But he never needlessly multiplied miracles. We cannot see how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, could have been saved out of the midst of the fiery furnace, or Daniel from the lions' den, without a miracle. A miracle also was called for to release Peter from prison, secured as he was, the night before his intended execution. But here the deliverance could be effected by human means; they were therefore properly employed, and Providence only rendered them successful. Secondly; we are not to sacrifice our lives if we can preserve them consistently with a good conscience. Our Lord told his disciples to beware of men; to be wise as serpents, as well as harmless as doves; and if they were persecuted in one city to flee to another. He himself eluded apprehension till he knew his hour was come. In the first age of Christianity we see zeal, but not without knowledge. There was nothing like enthusiasm, fanaticism, or will-worship. It was enough for Christians to take up their cross when they found it in their way; they never went *out* of their way to *find* it, any more than to *escape* it. They only suffered according to the will of God. It was after the Gospel began to be misunderstood and debased that voluntary penalties were deemed meritorious;

that a *rage* for martyrdom prevailed ; and that men *gave* their bodies to be burnt.

DECEMBER 18.—“ And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples : but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the Apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.”—Acts ix. 26—28.

WE have just seen Paul at Damascus. We now see him entering Jerusalem. And observe to whom he wished to introduce himself when he arrived. Not to the high priest : he had done business enough with him before. Not to the Pharisees, though he had lived among the strictest of them. Not to the learned, though a man of letters himself, and though he had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, who probably was still living in the city—But “ he assayed to join himself to the disciples.” They were despised and persecuted. He had himself once hated them, and endeavoured to exterminate them from the earth. But now the world is not worthy of them. He ranks them above princes and philosophers ; in them is all his delight ; and he deems it his highest honour to have fellowship with them. Have we the same mind in us ? In the course of duty, unless we go out of the world, we must often mingle with others ; but are these in our voluntary associations, our companions ? Do we take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you ? Do we give ourselves, not only to the Lord, but to them, to walk in holy communion, and to co-operate in holy exertion ? When we pass through a place as we travel, do we feel a sentiment that leads us to think, with a peculiar concern, “ Are there any here who love and serve my Lord and Saviour ? ”

“ But the disciples were all afraid of him ; ” and the reason is assigned ; “ they believed not that he was a disciple.” They supposed that he only pretended to be so, but was really come among them as a spy or informer. They well knew what a bitter adversary he had been, and had not heard of him since the wolf had been turned into a lamb. If there seems something strange in this, let it be observed that Damascus was one hundred and fifty miles from Jerusalem ; that the modes of modern communication were not then known ; and that the war raging between Herod, Antipas, and Aretas, must have interrupted the intercourse between the two capitals. Neither is it unlikely that the unbelieving Jews maliciously and artfully represented him as acting the part of a deceiver.

However this was, they seem to have known nothing of his conversion till “ Barnabas took him, and brought him to the Apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.” How Barnabas was acquainted with all this while they were ignorant we are not informed. Had he seen Ananias, or some other credible and personal witness of these facts ? One man, from various supposable circumstances, may know things, of which others, even of the same place, are

uninformed. But from this time a most tender friendship was established between these two good men. And what Barnabas testified of Paul was so satisfactory to the Church, that he was fully admitted to their fellowship, "and was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem."

We may here see, First—That these disciples were careful whom they admitted among them. They were only such as they *believed to be disciples*. They did not desire, for the sake of largeness, a church filled with indiscriminate members; and they could not bear them that were evil. Secondly, It is possible to err on the side of caution. We may be too strict as well as too lax. It is easy to carry our suspicions too far, especially with regard to those against whom we have entertained any prejudice, or from whom we have received any injury or offence. The instances of deception we have met with may weaken our confidence, and cause the innocent to suffer for the guilty. Let us guard against this, and while we do not shut our eyes let us invite into our bosoms the charity that thinketh no evil. Thirdly, we may depend on testimony concerning character in the absence of personal knowledge. This indeed is not always infallible; but there are cases in which it ought to be admitted, and should be deemed sufficient not only for individuals, but churches to act upon, in receiving others to their countenance, and their communion. Fourthly, the introducing of a young convert to the fellowship of the saints is a good work, and should be encouraged. Some are backward, not from a want of inclination, for they often sigh, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel;" but they want confidence and help. How many are there in all our congregations of this character, who are kept back when they ought to come forward. Is there no Barnabas to take them by the hand, and to bring them forward? While the Church rises up and says, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord?"

DECEMBER 19.—"But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?" 2 Chron. vi. 18.

In looking over the annals of the Jews, we find much that ought to humble us—I say, to humble *us*, for they were fair specimens of our human nature, and

"There in a glass *our* hearts may see,
How fickle and how false *they* be."

But we sometimes meet with scenes which cannot fail of being delightful to pious minds: for while, in reviewing history, the merchant is led to notice the revivals of commerce, and the scholar those of learning and science, *they* are attracted to the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; they, like Barnabas, are glad when they see the grace of God.

Such a scene is here before us at the dedication of the temple. Perhaps nothing equals it in the Old Testament; and nothing surpasses it in the New, but the day of Pentecost. The author was doubtless the Holy Ghost, the source of all good in the children of men: and it would be well for hearers and ministers to remember the Divine decision, "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit,

saith the Lord." Yet God uses means, and could we see things as he does, we should always perceive, not only that the weakness of the means requires his strength, but that the suitableness of the means displays his wisdom. The instrument here employed was Solomon, whose rank, education, endowments, and zeal, gave him a peculiar influence.

Behold then all Israel assembled, and the young monarch, the wonder and admiration of the age and of the East, leading the devotion of the solemn day. For he did not appoint one of the priests or of the prophets to officiate, but he performed the service himself. "He stood before the altar of the Lord, in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands." It was well that he *could* thus pray himself. We are far from depreciating forms of prayer in all cases: they have their use, and even their excellency too. But it is impossible to frame a form of prayer to meet every new and pressing occurrence: yet it is very desirable to take advantage of present feelings; and some are happy enough to be equal to this. And should not good men, especially preachers, and also the heads of families, cultivate such a talent? Gifts are not grace: yet we are to consider others as well as ourselves, our usefulness as well as our salvation. Though there is a *more* excellent way, we are to "covet earnestly the best gifts." "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." It is well also that he was not only able, but *willing*. He was not ashamed publicly to avow his entire dependance upon God, and to seek his favour as the relish of every enjoyment, and his blessing as essential to every enterprize. He did not view it as a disparagement to his majesty, to be his own chaplain, and to bless his large family himself. And did he ever appear greater than on this occasion, and in this exercise? And could he have been more exemplary and useful?

An ordinary mind would have been struck with the vastness of the congregation, the magnitude of the building, and the munificence of the ornaments—But Solomon rose above all this, and was only astonished at the condescension of God in deigning to regard it: "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth!"

His exclamation did not originate in any doubtfulness of the fact. He could not have questioned it. The tokens of the Divine presence were before him—"So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God. Then said Solomon, The Lord hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness." Yes, he knew that he had said, "This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it;" and, "In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." The assurance therefore reaches to us. We have succeeded to their means and privileges, enlarged as to spirituality and efficiency, though unaccompanied with their splendid ceremonies and sensible manifestations. In his word and ordinances, in the preaching of his ministers, and the assemblies of his people, he is to be found; and thousands know the truth of this from their own experience: they have heard his voice; they have seen his glory; they have felt his power, and have been convinced

of his presence by his agency : for that his name is near, his wondrous works declare.

But the exclamation regards the marvellousness of the fact upon which it was founded. Several things excited this in Solomon, and the same should excite it in us. Such is the infinite dignity of the Supreme Being who is exalted above all blessing and praise, and who humbleth himself to behold the things that are done in heaven. Yet men are lower than the angels. They are of yesterday, and know nothing. Their foundation is in the dust. They are crushed before the moth. Surely *every* man at his *best* estate is *altogether* vanity. He is not only mean, but unworthy, guilty, polluted : a rebel, a traitor. Here is the wonder, that *such* beings should be regarded by him—"Lord, what is *man*, that thou art mindful of him, and the *son* of man that thou visitest him?"

Yet the truth of all this never impresses without the humility which religion inspires. Men are naturally proud and vain : and it is possible and easy to delude them into an opinion that they can have claims upon God himself. How many are there who think they deserve his favour, and are looking for heaven itself as the reward of their doings ! But in the day of conviction the proud looks are brought low, and the Lord alone is exalted. The man then sees and feels that he deserves to be excluded from the Divine presence for ever, and acknowledges every attention shown him to be an instance of mercy and grace. Nor is his admiration of the goodness of God confined to the beginning of his religious course. As he advances he is more and more affected with it. The most eminent saints have been always as the most humble, so the most filled with this adoring gratitude and praise.

But is there not another thing equally wonderful ? God in very deed dwells with men on the earth. But will men verily dwell with God in heaven ? It is his own promise. It is their highest expectation. They shall be presented faultless before the presence of his glory—AND SO SHALL WE BE FOR EVER WITH THE LORD.

DECEMBER 20.—"Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off."—1 Kings xx. 11.

THIS was the wisest thing Ahab ever spoke ; and yet the saying was not his own, but a common proverbial speech. The admonition it contains is applicable to any enterprize in which men engage. Accordingly we shall leave the war of Benhadad with this king of Israel, and think of a better warfare, the good fight of faith.

Under this image the Scriptures frequently hold forth the Christian life ; and the experience of every partaker of Divine grace verifies and exemplifies the force of it. The conflict is no ordinary one, but the most trying in its nature, and the most serious in its results.

For this war harness is provided ; for it would be madness to go into the combat unarmed. Words in time vary their meaning ; some becoming more, and some less particular and definite in their use. When the Bible was translated, the term harness, which we now apply only to horse equipage, signified war furniture, or what we call armour. Much depends in the contest before us, upon the

kind of armour with which we are accoutred. That of the Christian is Divine; Divine in the appointment; Divine in the formation. It supplies every part—unless the back. Hence says the Apostle; “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

With regard to the actual carrying on of this warfare, there is a variety of condition in the soldiers. Some are deeply engaged in the midst of the fight. But two other parties are here mentioned. The one is entering the field, the other is marching out of it: the one is putting on his harness, the other is putting it off.

Now there is a great difference between these, and it requires a difference of feeling. Prayer more becomes the one, and praise the other. The ending justifies relaxation, and joy, and triumph; the beginning demands application, and diffidence, and caution. The laurel is to be worn, not by the candidate, but by the conqueror.

Look at the young soldier arming, and at the old warrior laying down his weapons, and you will soon see why the former should not glory like the latter. Let him that is putting off the harness exult—His privations, hardships, dangers are all past. His foes are vanquished. His labours are over. His character is formed. His fidelity is proved. His firmness has been displayed. While he had fightings without, he sometimes had fears within; but true to his cause he said, If I perish I perish. Whatever he suffered, he scorned to desert his post. Yet an honourable dismissal seemed desirable; and now it is arrived: and with his scars of honour he is returning home to receive the prize, and to review and talk over the interesting scenes of all his campaigns.

But let him that is putting on his harness remember that he has *not* borne the burden and heat of the day—that his destitutions, and watchings, and perils are yet to come—that his snares are not yet escaped—that his foes are not yet subdued. Though he will finally overcome, the warfare is *to be* accomplished. What weeks and years of painful struggle may intervene! He may sleep and be surprised. The enemy may thrust sore at him, and gain an advantage over him; and in consequence of the injury he may go halting all his days.

We say therefore to those who are commencing the Divine life—We are far from wishing to dismay you—We rather say, Go, and the Lord be with you. But the Saviour himself tells you to sit down, and count the cost, and estimate your resources for the war. A new and untried course is often flattering; and inexperience genders presumption.

Peter fell by self-confidence. Joseph was preserved by conscientious alarm—And blessed is the man that feareth always. Not with that fear which implies cowardice, but with that which excludes carelessness; not with that fear which chills and freezes exertion, but with that which leads to a survey of difficulties and to

preparation for the trial ; not with that fear which diminishes hope, but with that which forbids boasting—" Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off."

DECEMBER 21.—"I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."—1 Tim. ii. 8.

"I will," says the proverb, "is for the king." And this is for the King—the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, the blessed and only potentate. Paul is inspired by him, and speaks in his name. And though in many cases, for love's sake he only entreats and beseeches, here, to show his Divine authority, he commands—"I will." Prayer is the subject. We must not only take heed how we hear, but how we pray : some ask and have not, because they ask amiss. Here the enactment prescribes the manner which it is to be performed. Prayer is to be offered in with four qualities or characters.

The First is, universality ; I will that men pray "every where." In the sanctuary, the house, the closet, the field, the road. The expression demands constancy. If we are to pray every where, we must pray and not faint ; and pray without ceasing. And this is expressly enjoined by him who knows the importance and benefit of prayer ; and that we can *never* safely dispense with it. Had Peter prayed in the judgment hall he would not have denied his Master. But while it requires constancy as to performance, it excludes partiality as to situation, and opposes superstitious restraints. This intimation was necessary. The world was then full of people who made the efficacy of prayer to depend upon local claims. Heathens always attached the presence of their gods to particular places, consecrated to their service ; and we know what long and painful journeys some now take to pay their devotions. Among the Jews God chose Jerusalem to put his name there, and required all the males three times a year to repair thither. Various purposes were to be answered by the appointment ; but the Lord had said by Moses, "In *all* places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." And by Isaiah he said, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool : where is the house that ye build unto me ? and where is the place of my rest ? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord : but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." And as the Christian dispensation was drawing nearer, "from the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles ; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering ; for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts." Think of this, ye bigots, who imagine that God is only to be found in your particular enclosure. When will you believe, that "neither in this mountain," nor yet at Jerusalem shall men worship the Father : "but the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth : for the Father seeketh such to worship him." "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him."

The Second is, purity—"with holy hands." "If I regard iniquity in mine heart," says David, "the Lord will not hear me." Solomon also says, "He that turneth away his ears from hearing the law, even his prayer also shall be an abomination." And so consonant is this to common reflection, that the blind man could say, "We know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth." But some distinction here is necessary. The reference cannot be to perfect purity. If none were to pray but those who are completely holy, no one could approach God: for in many things we offend all; and there is not a just man on earth that doeth good and sinneth not. Yet what is the experience of every true suppliant? "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." "What I see not teach thou me." "See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." And this must be the case. The man who lives in any loved or known sin, is only a hypocrite in devotion. He cannot be sincere in his addresses to God: he therefore insults him only by pretence. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded." Of this there was a type in the ritual of the Jews; they were always to wash their hands in water before they engaged in the service of God. To this the Psalmist alludes, when he says "I will wash my hands in innocency, so will I compass thy altar, O Lord." And that prayer is not an atonement for a sinful life, or a substitute for a moral one, hear the language of God to the Jews in the days of Isaiah. "When ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil." Yet some not only pray and sin too, but make the one a cloak for the other. The Pharisees devoured widow's houses, and for a pretence made long prayers. But in many cases these things do not long remain in company: in general, the common maxim is verified, "Sinning will make a man leave off praying, or praying will make a man leave off sinning." And their separation is better than their union. It is better not to call upon a benefactor, than to go and spit in his face, or wound him in his own dwelling. The entire neglect of some duties would produce less injurious effects on the conscience of the man himself, and on the minds of others, than the combination of them with wicked practice. "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be." "I would thou wert either cold or hot."

The Third is, kindness. This is expressed by the exclusion of its opposite "without wrath." This will take in those who may be free from vice and immorality, and yet have tempers by no means like the mind of Christ; who not only rail, but pray at others; who bring their rancorous spirit into the worship of God, and would consecrate their envy, malice, and all uncharitableness, upon the altar of devotion. But that altar does not sanctify every gift. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother and then come

and offer thy gift." "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." Though Elisha was animated by religious zeal, yet as there was some passionateness of his own mixed with it, when he said to Jehoram, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee;" the spirit of prophecy could not descend upon him, till he had called for a minstrel to compose and soften him. What can we do without the help of the Holy Spirit? But that Spirit is a spirit of love, and is held forth by the emblem of a dove. Therefore says our Apostle, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

The Fourth is, confidence. This is also negatively expressed: without "doubting." This requires us to pray in faith. "Let him ask in faith nothing wavering." "Let us draw near, in full assurance of faith." This is very distinguishable from a personal persuasion of our actual interest; but it is an encouragement against despair. We are to believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; that we are as welcome as we are unworthy; that he waits to be gracious, and never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain. It also takes in a belief of the lawfulness of what we implore. I could not pray in faith, if I prayed for assistance and success in any enterprize which his word forbids; or in asking to be saved without being sanctified: for "this is the will of God, even our sanctification." "This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us."

We talk of being humbled for our sins—What think we of our duties? Can we reflect even upon our holy things, even upon our prayers themselves, and not cry, "Enter not into judgment with thy servants, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified."

DECEMBER 22.—"And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."—2 Kings vi. 15—17.

THE king of Syria had resolved to punish Elisha, because as a prophet he divulged to the king of Israel all his warlike plans and designs, and thereby prevented the accomplishment of them. How sin infatuates!—otherwise a moment's reflection might have convinced him that the same God who had given Elisha supernatural knowledge could afford him supernatural protection. Yet, finding upon inquiry that the prophet was now in Dothan, "he sent thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about."

Elisha's servant first discovers the danger. But who was this

servant? We have no reason to believe that it was now Gehazi, whose avarice, fraud, and lying, his master had lately so awfully punished: "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." Even exclusive of his distemper, Elisha would not have had such a servant any longer about him; but have said with David before him, "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight." Of the name of his new servant we are not informed, but it is here said, he "rose up early in the morning." New servants often behave best at first, especially in the article of early rising. Perhaps, however, it was a continued thing with him. This will be the case with a wise and good servant. By means of this he will do his work with ease and order. What confusion and hurry are often produced by beginning the concerns of the day an hour or two later, for the precious privilege of a little more insensibility!

What happened? When the servant had gone forth and saw the horses and chariots he ran back breathless, and exclaimed, "Alas, my master! what shall we do? We are in the hands of our enemies, and there is no way of escape."

Yet if the servant be terrified, the master is calm, and fears no evil. But a Godly man wishes others to be satisfied as well as himself; and he is no better than a brute, and wholly unworthy of his service, who feels no concern for the accommodation and comfort of his servant. To tranquillize him therefore, Elisha said, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." This only filled him with astonishment, for he saw no defenders of any kind near him. But "Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." What a number of reflections here offer themselves to our minds!

What were these horses and chariots of fire? The angels of God. "And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire." These were the convoy of Elijah. These were the body guard of Elisha. When Jacob went on his way the angels of God met him; and when he saw them he said, "This is God's host." "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

We behold here an instance of the dominion and agency of God, in the opening of this man's eyes. He can suspend the use of any of our powers, or he can increase the use of them. He that endued us with the five inlets of perception, called the senses, could, as far as we know to the contrary, have given us fifty, as distinguishable from each other in their operations and objects as hearing and seeing. And who can tell, as Baxter (not the Divine) intimates, but that there is a faculty in the human system as adapted to an intercourse with the invisible world as our known senses are suited to the material existences around us, but which power is dormant unless when for some important end it is called into exercise? We are very im-

perfectly acquainted with the mechanism of our physical constitution, and especially with the boundaries and contents of body and mind; for we are fearfully and wonderfully made. One conclusion is obvious—That it is irrational to deny the *reality* of every thing our present senses do not recognize. This valley was filled in the same way *before* the man could see it: his sight did not bring thither the celestial array, but only discerned it. Every sound, even thunder itself, is a nonentity to the deaf; fragrance has no existence as to the perception of those who are incapable of smelling; the colours of the rainbow might be denied by the blind: because they cannot hear or feel them. It has therefore been fairly argued from analogy that there may be numberless objects, real and near us too, but which, only for want of a suitable medium, we do not apprehend. As for those who believe the Scriptures, as well as the power of God, *they* must acknowledge that there is another world, and that there are agents whose influence is seldom or ever *perceived* by us, who yet have alliances with us, and are concerned in our affairs. May the Father of our spirits prepare us for a world of spirits!

We also here see the disadvantage of ignorance. In darkness we easily mistake every thing, and are sure to magnify whatever we suspect to be injurious. What therefore we deem some sprite or monster, upon the increase of light subsides into a stone, or root of a tree, or a harmless animal. This man's perturbation arose from his ignorance; as soon as he knew the *truth* of things, as soon as he saw things as they *really were*, he was tranquillized—and is not this the way to tranquillize Christians? Do not their alarms originate in their want of clearer views in religion? "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee; because thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." They that "know" whom they have believed will be "persuaded that he is able to keep that which they have committed to him against that day."

And how safe are the Lord's people even in the midst of danger. He is a wall of fire round about them. He is the shield of their help, and the sword of their excellency, and their enemies shall be found liars unto them. Let us ascertain that we belong to him; and realizing our privilege, exclaim, "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." "If God be for us, who can be against us? **THEY THAT BE WITH US ARE MORE THAN THEY THAT BE WITH THEM.**"

DECEMBER 23.—"Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord."—Jeremiah xxx. 21.

THIS is spoken, if not immediately, yet ultimately and supremely, of him to whom gave all the prophets witness.

Observe his work—It was to "approach" unto God. This he did as a man. How often do we read of his praying, which, with him, was never any thing less than a drawing near to God. But he is here spoken of as the mediator, and in the character of the High Priest of our profession. This was precisely the priest's business of old; it was to approach God mediatorially. Hence says God, "I will be sanctified in all that come nigh me." So when the persons

of the priests are spoken of, it is said to Aaron, "Whosoever he be of thy seed in their generations that hath any blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God. For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach." I dwell not here on the grounds of this exclusion, some of which were physical, some moral, some typical; but remark their work, to "offer," to "approach." And how? If the high priest had gone into the holy of holies, where God resided between the cherubim, without a sacrifice, he would have rushed upon a drawn sword. Therefore he first slew the victim, and then took the blood in a bason, and went in and sprinkled the mercy-seat, and burnt incense; upon which he came forth and blessed the people. Thus Jesus entered into the holy place, there to appear in the presence of God for us; not without blood; and not with the blood of bulls, and of goats, but with his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. There he entered, after making reconciliation for the sins of the people, to intercede for us, on the foundation of his atonement, and from thence to command the blessing, even life for evermore, on the Israel of God. But there was this difference between the type and the reality. The high priest of old offered for his own sins, as well as for those of the congregation. But Jesus had no personal guilt. He was harmless, holy, undefiled; and therefore he only bore *our* iniquity. The high priest offered oftentimes the same sacrifices, because they could not make the comers thereunto perfect: but Jesus, by the one offering up of himself, hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

For the accomplishment of this work, he "engaged his heart." Here we see willingness. His undertaking would not have been accepted, unless it had been voluntary. But he was not constrained; he said, Lo! I come to do thy will, O God. I delight to do thy will; yea, thy law is within my heart. The engaging of his heart expresses the strength of his affection and the firmness of his determination. The latter of these sprang from the former, and served to display it. Consider what he had to endure for thirty-three years as a man of sorrows; what he had to suffer in delivering us from the wrath to come, being made a curse for us. Yet though he knew all, he turned not away his back: yea, as his tremendous agony drew near, he said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" The reason was, that perfect love casteth out fear. Love produces courage, even in the fearful bird and the timid sheep. They will attack their foe to defend their young. But how the mother ventures and hangs regardless of danger over the infected body of her child. Love is strong as death; many waters cannot quench love; neither can the floods drown it. But no love will bear a comparison with his—"the love of Christ passeth knowledge."

And is he not worthy of attention? "Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord"—Who indeed? "He is a wonder to all, both below and above." Many were astonished at him. Many treated him with scorn. He was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. Numbers do not feel their need of him though he is the way, the truth, and the life. He is still despised and rejected of men. But he was seen of angels, and all the angels of God worship him. They find no-

thing in the annals of eternity and in the records of the universe that will bear a comparison with his sufferings and glory. Therefore they desire to look into these things: and every fresh gaze excites them to exclaim with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour and glory, and blessing." And to them that believe he is precious. They inquire with joy and praise, "Who is this?" And they can return an answer to themselves—He is fairer than the children of men. He is the chief of ten thousand. He is altogether lovely. He is the consolation of Israel. He is the friend of sinners. He is the benefactor whose heart is made of tenderness, whose bowels melt with love. He is the King of glory. He is Lord of all. But who can declare his generation. No one knoweth the Son but the Father—He views him with infinite complacency. "Behold," says he, "my servant whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth." "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." "He hath put all things under his feet."

The question may be asked subordinately with regard to the Christian as well as with regard to Christ. There is a connexion and a resemblance between them; and they also are for signs and for wonders. They do not indeed approach God in a way of atonement. The work is done. The propitiation has been made, and we have only to plead it: the righteousness has been brought in, and we have only to submit to it. *He* opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, and they have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. And this is their duty, their privilege, their character—they draw near to God; and they value ordinances as the means of communion with him.

For each of them has engaged his heart to do this. And it is this that yields him pleasure in the exercise and carries him through all difficulties and discouragements—"When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my *heart* answered, Thy face Lord will I seek." "O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise."

But "who is this that has engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord." A creature once far off, but now made nigh by the blood of Christ: once regardless of the things that belonged to his peace, now seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. The subject of an internal warfare; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. The bearer of many afflictions. The scorn of the world. The most excellent and important creature upon earth. The heir of glory. The dignitary of eternity. "What! know ye not that the saints shall judge angels?"

DECEMBER 24.—"And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us."—Ephes. v. 2.

THE admonition supposes a relative character. Various are the beings towards whom our love is to be exercised. God takes care for oxen, and hears the young ravens that cry: and a merciful man regardeth the life of his beast, and feels a tenderness even towards all the orders of creatures below his own nature. But we are ex-

pressly required to love our neighbour; and, according to our Saviour's own explanation in the parable, every one *is* our neighbour who needs our aid, and is placed within the reach of our kindness. We are therefore to love our enemies; not indeed with a love of esteem and complacency, which would be impossible, but with a love of benevolence and beneficence; blessing them that curse us, doing good to them that hate us, and praying for them that despitefully use and persecute us. We are also to love sinners, not their sins but their souls, having compassion, and endeavouring to save, pulling them out of the fire. None indeed have such claims upon our pity and compassion as those who were ready to perish for ever; destruction and misery are in their paths. But while, as we have opportunity, we do good unto all men, we are especially to remember them that are of the household of faith. These are related to us by grace: these are one with us by spiritual and everlasting unions. These have peculiar titles to our affection—These we are to love out of a pure heart fervently: to love as brethren.

For how is this affection to be exercised? We are to "walk in it." The term intends not only activeness and progression, but influence and prevalence. When we say a man is in liquor, or in a passion we mean to say that it has the possession and the command of him. We read of "walking in pride;" and we understand by it a man's feeling and behaving vainly and haughtily on all occasions, and in all circumstances. The first Christians "walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost:" the fear and the comfort distinguished, governed, and absorbed them. Walking in love, therefore, intimates the importance of this disposition, and that we should not be satisfied with an ordinary measure of it. We are not to have love in us, but to be in love; to walk in love. It is to be our element, our actuating principle. It is only in proportion as this prevails that our religion can prosper. This is the fulfilling of the law. This is the end of the gospel commandment. It is the bond of perfectness—Therefore "let all your things be done with charity."

And how is it enforced? "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." Does the Apostle mean to make the love of Christ our model? or our motive? or both? Unquestionably both.

He means to make it our model, and to say that we are to love others in the same way he loved us. Our love cannot indeed equal his; but it may, it must resemble it: not indeed in all its acts and qualities, but in its source and nature. He loved us really, and we must love not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth. He loved us expensively; so that when rich, for our sakes he became poor, made himself of no reputation, and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And are we to shun self-denial? And to make no sacrifices? "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." His love is constant and unchangeable; and we are to continue in his love, and never to grow weary in well-doing.

He means also to make it our motive, and to say, that as he has loved us we are to walk in love, in consequence of this, and because of this. The Apostle does not argue from fear, or mercenariness, or even the allowed hope of reward: but urges a consideration the

most pure and ingenuous ; and at the same time the most powerful. A motive strong as death, and which many waters could not quench. A motive whose efficiency he had himself experienced, and which had served to animate him in every duty, and enabled him to take pleasure in every suffering for Christ's sake—"For the love of Christ," says he "constraineth us." He therefore could not enforce even a relative duty without a reference to a motive so tender and efficient: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it—"

—"O bleeding Calvary!
The true morality is love of thee."

And here we may see that the difference between a mere moral preacher and an evangelical preacher is, not that the moral preacher enforces good works, and the evangelical preacher does not ; for the latter enforces them as much as the former. But it lies here—Both admonish and exhort ; but the one waters dead plants, and the other living ones. The one makes the tree good, that the fruit may be good—while the other is seeking to gather grapes from thorns and figs from thistles. The doctrines and the duties ; the holiness and the grace of the Gospel, never are found separate.

DECEMBER 25.—"But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel ; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."—Micah v. 2.

SOME persons derive honour from the place in which they were born ; others confer celebrity upon it. How many places strove for the honour of Homer's birth. The late emperor of France, while besieging Mantua in Italy, exempted a small neighbouring village from all exactions, in honour of Virgil, whose birthplace it was supposed to be. Nothing can ennoble the Lord Jesus ; but he dignifies every thing in connexion with him. Capernaum was an insignificant fishing town : yet, because he frequently resided and preached in it, it was exalted unto heaven. Beth-lehem was not remarkable for its buildings, or commerce, or the number of its inhabitants, or fame of any kind. Thus it was "little among the thousands of Judah." But it was aggrandized and immortalized by an event that fixed upon it the eye of inspiration, that drew towards it in the fulness of time a multitude of the heavenly host, and has rendered it dear and memorable to the Church for ever—the nativity of the Messiah. "Out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

Let this teach us not to call any thing common or unclean. Let us guard against those prejudices which are derived from worldly grandeur and glory. Jesus was not born in Rome, or in Jerusalem ; but, in accordance with all the circumstances of his abasement, in a small and obscure village. And Joseph the saviour of Egypt was taken from prison ; and Moses the king in Jeshurun from the ark of bulrushes ; and David the great from the sheepfold. The world was evangelized by fishermen from the lake of Galilee. And Jesus said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because

thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." "Base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence."

When Herod inquired of the chief priests and scribes where Christ should be born, they answered, In Beth-lehem of Judea. When it was rumoured that he came out of Galilee, his enemies immediately said, "Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Beth-lehem, where David was." Thus the place of his birth was not only fixed, but fully known. Yet what could be so unlikely as the accomplishment of the prophecy which had raised this expectation? When Mary conceived, there was not the least probability of her being delivered at Beth-lehem—She was in Galilee, living at Nazareth. But Augustus issues a decree that all the world should be taxed. This required not only that a certain tribute should be paid, but that every man should go to his own city to be enrolled. Hence Joseph went up to Beth-lehem, and Mary his espoused wife accompanied him, being great with child. "And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn." There is always something wonderful in the works of God. We frequently prescribe a course for him, or we expect him to move in a particular direction: but he brings the blind by a way that they knew not; and leads them in paths which they have not known. While we think he is doing nothing, and his promise seems to fail for evermore, his arrangements are formed, his agents are in motion, his designs are fulfilled, and we exclaim, "What hath God wrought! Let us trust and not teach him; and whenever he has spoken, believe, that if heaven and earth should pass away, his word will not fail."

"Shall he come forth unto me!"—as if he called him and he came. And he did call him: and he said, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." He had to act *with* God, and *for* him; to show forth his righteousness, to vindicate his law, to make reconciliation for the sins of his people, to glorify him on the earth, and to finish the work which he gave him to do. Therefore God calls him "my shepherd." Therefore he says, "I have laid help on one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people."

"Who shall be ruler in Israel?" He came into the world to save sinners; but he is a prince as well as a Saviour. His outward circumstances at his birth, and all through life, seemed to bespeak any thing rather than royal dominion. Yet in this estate he was previously announced: "Behold, my king cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; *lowly*, and riding upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." And the elements, and all creatures, were at his sovereign control. The winds and the waves, diseases, death, and devils obeyed him. He called Zaccheus, and he came down and received him joyfully. He said to the sons of Zebedee, as they were fishing, and to Matthew as he was sitting at the receipt of custom,

Follow me ; and they arose, and, forsaking all, followed him. "Art thou a king, then ?" said Pilate. He answered, "I am a king. But my kingdom is not of this world—Then would my servants fight—But now my kingdom is not from hence." The government of all things is indeed upon his shoulder, and he rules in the midst of his enemies, and makes their wrath to praise him. But his people only are in a proper sense his subjects. They are made willing in the day of his power, and from knowledge and attachment resign themselves to his empire ; and he not only reigns over them, but in them, by "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

"Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Surely these words imply and express an existence before his incarnation, and eternal existence too. The Evangelist bears the same testimony to this interesting truth : "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him ; and without him was not any thing made that was made." The Apostle also says, "He is"—not he *was* ; "he *is* before all things, and by him all things exist."—It was "the Spirit of Christ" that spake in the prophets. It was Christ the Israelites tempted. It was the reproach of Christ that Moses prized. He appeared in a human form to Joshua and to the patriarchs. But "of old" is not "from everlasting." Who can tell what he did before time had begun to roll ? We know that he had a glory with the Father before the world was. We know—

"His busy thoughts at first,
On their salvation ran ;
Ere sin was form'd, or Adam's dust
Was fashion'd to a man."

One remark results from all this. We see what a wonderful character the Redeemer is, and how constantly the sacred writers combine together his greatness and his abasement. Thus here, while we see him born in Beth-lehem, we behold him the king of glory, whose goings forth were from of old, from everlasting. It is his greatness that displays his goodness. He loved us, and gave himself for us. He is a man of sorrows, but it was because the children were partakers of flesh and blood that he likewise took part of the same. *He* made himself of no reputation, and *became* obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Ah ! Christians, what you have witnessed to-day will not detract from his glory in your regards. You "know the principle of all this humiliation." You know "THE GRACE of our Lord Jesus Christ ; how, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich."

DECEMBER 26.—"The consolation of Israel."—Luke ii. 25.

LET us justify this character of the Messiah.

And here to what shall we appeal ? To the language of prophecy ? Whenever the prophets would comfort the Jews they always led them to his coming and his kingdom. Witness Isaiah : "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain ; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength ; lift it up, be not afraid ; say unto the cities of Judah,

Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." Witness Zechariah: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." Witness Malachi: "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts."

Or shall we appeal to the experience of Old Testament saints? Abraham rejoiced to see his day. Moses esteemed his reproach greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. Job's solace was, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." David, at the thought of describing him, said, "My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer." And what said the angel of the Lord to the shepherds? "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."

That he considered himself as the owner of this title, and as deserving it, is undeniable, from the gracious words which proceeded out of his lips. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "In me ye shall have peace." "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come." "And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

And how was he regarded in the first and purest age of the Church? "Whom having," says Peter, "not seen, ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." And says Paul, "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." He makes it one part of the character of the circumcision that they "rejoice in Christ Jesus." Yea, he swears upon the certainty of it; "I protest by *your* rejoicing which *I* have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily." It would be easy to show from additional passages how the first Christians, taught by inspired teachers, repaired always and only to him for consolation in whatever circumstances they were found.

And need we wonder at this? What is he? How does the word of truth represent him? Is he not a hiding-place from the storm? The shadow of a great rock in a weary land? A river of waters in a dry place? The bread of life? The robe of righteousness? A light in darkness?

These representations are indeed very figurative, but they are derived from reality. And he for whom Simeon waited, more than embodies them all—"The consolation of Israel." Let me glance at four things in particular, concerning which, if he be not our hope, we are hopeless.

What can I do with my guilt without him? I cannot deny that I am a sinner; but the soul that sinneth it shall die. Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them. And what does this curse include? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Who can relieve and comfort me here but he who said, Deliver from going down into the pit, I have found a ransom? Who bare our sin in his own body on the tree, and made peace by the blood of his cross?

What can I do with my depravity without him? For I am not only guilty—my understanding is darkened, my will is rebellious, my affections are earthly and sensual—I feel my weakness—yea, my very heart is alienated from the life of God. And to whom can I apply but to him who is wisdom and sanctification, as well as righteousness and redemption? He says, My grace is sufficient for thee: my strength is made perfect in weakness. The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes us free from the law of sin and death.

What can I do without him in trouble? But this man is the peace when the Assyrian cometh into the land. This brother is born for adversity.

What can I do without him in death? But he can support and comfort me when every other support and comfort *must* fail. Ah! says Simeon, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

"Jesus, the vision of thy face
Hath overpowering charms;
Scarce shall I feel death's cold embrace
If Christ be in my arms."

DECEMBER 27.—"The consolation of Israel."—Luke ii. 25.

LET us improve this character of the Messiah. If he be the consolation of Israel—

It reminds us of the state of those who, as the Apostle says, "are without Christ." They are lying in wickedness; the victims of guilt and depravity; abandoned to the miseries of life; and all their lifetime subject to bondage through fear of death. They feel their disease in many of its effects, though not in all: but there is no balm of Gilead, no physician *there*. They have recourse to the most painful pilgrimages, and privations, and tortures, to obtain ease and hope, but amidst doubt and suspicion, lies are their refuge; the way of peace have they not known; destruction and misery are in their paths—And are they bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh? And do we not pity them? Do we not pray for them? And while we pray that his way may be known on earth, his saving health among all nations, do we not evince by our exertions and sacrifices, that our prayers are not hypocrisy or formality? *For we have the communication of this knowledge in our power.*

The character invites sinners to come to him. While you neglect

him you are only observing lying vanities, and forsaking your own mercy. Nothing can supply the place of the consolation of Israel. Suppose you prosper in the world, the abundance you possess cannot ease the conscience, or fill the wishes of the mind. You grasp at substance, but seize only vanity. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness. But what will you do in the day of adversity? And how soon may this come upon you? How mortal are your connexions? What is your health? What is your life? You are now dreaming, but how will it be with you when you wake?

"O ye gay dreamers of gay dreams,
How will you weather an eternal night,
Where such expedients fail?"

What a mercy that you can yet hear the sound of consolation! Here is a Comforter at hand, able, willing to succour you. Seek him, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

The character hails those who have found him. They were indeed strangers to all true comfort till they acquainted themselves with him. But he that hath the Son hath life. They are now the happiest beings in the world. They are justified from wrath through him. In his righteousness they are exalted. They rejoice in his salvation; and can leave all their cares in his hand. If the storm rages without, "their minds have heaven and peace within." They know that he will never leave them nor forsake them; that he has provided for every state in which they can be found; that he is now making all things work together for their good; and will soon wipe all tears from their eyes.

But how does the title reproach those who backslide from him? "Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field? or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken?" "O generation, see ye the word of the Lord. Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee? Did he not remember thee when there was none to pity? Did he not deliver thee when there was none to help? Did he not find thee in the road to hell, and turn thy feet into the path of life? Did he not bring thee health and cure after trying physicians of no value? It was a touching expostulation he addressed to the twelve when many turned back, and walked no more with him; "Will ye also go away?" And it was a fine reply; "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." We should only be losers by any exchange we could make.

What can be a substitute for him? The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways. If a fear of reproach or persecution turns you astray from Christ, you may feel such reflection and terror of conscience as may make you long for him even in a prison, or at the stake. If the love of gain tempts you, you may get the worldly advantage you seek after, but you will lose the light of his countenance, and the joy of his salvation. Whatever you lean upon instead of trusting in him will fail you, and pierce you through with many sorrows. Yes, we must learn by what we suffer, as well as by what we enjoy, that he is **THE CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL**. "A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children

of Israel: for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the Lord their God. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel."

DECEMBER 28.—"In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God."—Hebrews ii. 17.

THERE is indeed one exception. It regards the purity of his nature. This was indispensable, and therefore the Scripture abundantly confirms it, telling us that he was "the Holy One of God," that "he did no sin;" that "in him was no sin." And our Apostle is not forgetful of it in the connexion before us: "he was in all points tempted like as we are, *yet without sin.*"

But this exception being made, the conformity between him and his brethren is universal and complete; if there be any difference it is in their favour. Are they partakers "of flesh and blood?" "He himself likewise also took part of the same." "Both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." Are they poor? He had not where to lay his head. Are they reviled? "Reproach," says he, "hath broken my heart." Does the adversary assail them? He urged him to the vilest crimes. Do they complain of successful exertion? He said, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought." Have they irreligious connexions? "Neither did his own brethren also believe on him." Are their souls vexed with the filthy conversation of the ungodly? How must he have been grieved, with all his spiritual susceptibilities, when he saw the transgressors! Have they before them the trying hour of death? He knows what it is to die; and in the days of his flesh, with strong cryings and tears, said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done"—"In all things he was made like unto his brethren."

And observe the expediency of the dispensation. "It behoved him." What, could not they be admitted to favour without his humiliation and suffering? Was it only proper for them to obtain glory by his shame, riches by his penury, healing by his strokes, and life by his dying? Yes, "it behoved him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Is then necessity laid upon him? Does sovereignty itself submit to a law? Do unbounded excellency and goodness condescend to be circumscribed and regulated? And can we who are not our own complain if we are under restraints? Are we to dispense with those rules and decencies which have been established for the safety and welfare of society? Order is essential to happiness. It is allied to all greatness. It is "heaven's first law." God himself is the example of it: he acts by rule. He does not tell us what he could do, but what it "became" and "behooved" him to do; and that he does it not because he would, but because it seemed good in his sight. Let us not deny.

dispute, or doubt the expedience of this economy, because we are unable to perceive all the reasons upon which it is founded. Let us remember how limited our understanding is with regard to every subject, and how limited therefore it must be when it would explore the proceedings of an infinite Being, and where too, that Being is engaged in his highest operations. We cannot conclude that a course is right because a man adopts it; yea, the very reverse is oftener to be feared. But we may always safely infer the rectitude of God's conduct from the perfection of his nature. But if he has been pleased to inform us expressly that whatever difficulties, owing to our ignorance, may now attach to it, the plan was, he himself being judge, proper and becoming in him;—surely we ought to honour him with our confidence, and be willing to walk by faith—especially too, when he engages to explain his dealings after our state of trial and discipline is ended, and—when we can by humble attention and prayer discern enough to convince us that he has abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence, and to induce us from what we see to exclaim with regard to what we do not see, “O the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God”—“His work is perfect.”

Let us therefore remark the aim and design of this peculiar and expensive constitution. “That he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God.” “Things pertaining to God” mean the concerns of his mediation; the things in which he was to act with God for us, and with us for God. Without having our nature he could not have exercised the priesthood at all, for he would have had nothing to offer, and a priest must of necessity have somewhat to offer. But in this nature, and by this abasement and sufferings, he was

“A merciful” High Priest. He *appeared* merciful.☞ He knew that nothing could be done unless he gained for himself our confidence, and he knew how hard it was with our consciousness and fears to gain it. He therefore said, I will convince them of my compassion, and show them that I prefer their salvation to my own comfort and life. I will go and dwell among them: I will call them to behold me in the manger, in the garden, and on the cross—Will not this suffice?—He was *made* merciful. He was rendered capable of the sympathy which can only flow from experience. He only that has been a stranger knows the heart of a stranger. The most humane are those who have been trained to feeling in the school of affliction. The fact is applied to him: “In that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.” And it is thus we are encouraged to apply to him in the time of need: for though he be passed into the heavens, we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

He was “a faithful” High Priest. Faithful to what? To the prophecies, promises, types, going before? He said, “Lo! I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me.” Faithful to his own engagements? He turned not away his back; but as the awful scene approached he said, “How am I straitened till it be accomplished!” The main thing is, that he was faithful to the Divine interests; for as the former article refer to us, so this principally

refers to God. He was the mediator between God and man, and had to maintain his honour, as well as to secure our deliverance. Kindness itself may be mis-exercised; absolute mercy may not only be folly and weakness, but injustice, injury, cruelty. Magistrates are to be terrors to evil-doers, as well as a praise to them that do well. The judge is to be not only merciful, but faithful; and while he feels for the criminal, he *must* maintain the law, though he may pass the sentence with tenderness in his heart, and tears in his eyes. Sinners were not to be saved as if they had not been guilty, but in a way that should remind them that their lives were given back to them after they had been forfeited; that they had incurred the penalty of the law; that this penalty was founded in equity, and could not be dispensed with; and therefore that our Substitute bore it in his own body on the tree, and redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. Thus sin is condemned in the flesh while it is forgiven, and the law is magnified and made honourable while the offender escapes. Thus mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other, and the claims of rectitude as well as clemency are provided for, while, as the Apostle adds, "he makes reconciliation for the sins of the people."

DECEMBER 29.—"And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh."—Gen. xlvii. 7.

IT was an affecting hour when Jacob, after supposing for so many years that his son was dead, and devoured by wild beasts, received information that he was alive, and governor over all the land of Egypt. At first his heart fainted, and he believed it not. But when he had not only heard the words which Joseph had spoken, but saw the wagons that he had sent to fetch him down, his spirit revived in him, and he said, "It is enough, Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die."—He soon set off. But the journey was formidable to him. The old dislike changes, and cleave to places to which they have been accustomed. He therefore travelled anxiously, and when he came to Beersheba he felt alarmed. But he had recourse to his old and tried relief, prayer: "and God spake to him in the visions of the night, and said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation. I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes." Three interesting presentations followed the execution of this journey.

The presentation of Joseph to Jacob. "And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him: and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while." Then loosening from the lengthened embrace which all attempt to enlarge upon would spoil; "he said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive."

The presentation of his brethren to Pharaoh. "And he took some of his brethren, even five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto his brethren, What is your occupation? And they said unto Pharaoh, Thy servants are shepherds,

both we, and also our father. They said moreover, unto Pharaoh, For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen. And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: the land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle."

▷ *The presentation of Jacob to Pharaoh.* "And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh." Who can

Reflect upon this event, and not admire the wonder-working Providence of God in bringing it to pass? All this was foreseen and fore appointed: but how many agencies were set in motion to produce the result, while the agents themselves were unconscious of the bearing of their respective parts, and were all acting separately from each other, yet all working together—till at last all the discord issued in the finest harmony; and these were the strains to which it was attained: "He hath done all things well." I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not: I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord." Art thou tempted to despondence? Do the clouds return after the rain? Seest thou no way of escape? Do means fail? Does the providence of God seem not only to forget but oppose the promise? See Joseph the slave, the prisoner, lately in irons, now prime minister of a powerful and learned nation, presenting his weather-beaten father, whose fears are now dispelled, and every hope and wish of his long-aching heart more than crowned! Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At evening tide it shall be light.

What did the patriarch on this occasion? "And Jacob blessed Pharaoh."—It was an expression of salutation towards a stranger. Good men are not to be uncivil and rude, and pass this off as sincerity and faithfulness. They ought to be the most genteel people upon earth; for they ought to feel in disposition, the politeness—that is, the readiness to deny themselves, and please and oblige others, which the people of the world express ceremoniously, and often very falsely. The servant of the Lord is to be "gentle towards all men." And we are enjoined to be "courteous."—It was an act of homage towards a sovereign, whose subject he now was. We are all upon a level before God: but religious equality is not to be carried into our relative and civil concerns. The Scripture supports the distinctions of life, and calls upon us to "render to all their due; honour to whom honour, fear to whom fear."—It was an expression of gratitude towards a benefactor, who had promoted his son, and was now willing to receive all his relations, and provide for them in the most fertile region of his empire. The grace that makes us humble, makes us thankful. And while we acknowledge God as the source of all good, we must not overlook those who are the mediums of it.—It was an act of supplication on the behalf of a man who, however highly exalted, stood in need of the favour of God. The less is blessed

of the greater. And Jacob was in this respect greater than Pharaoh—He was the servant of the Most High God—a prophet of the Lord—and who had obtained the name of Israel, because as a prince, he had power with God as well as with man, and could prevail. He therefore invokes the benediction of God upon him; upon his person, upon his family, upon his government, upon his empire—thus delicately and inoffensively leading him to think of the Supreme Being, and to feel his dependance upon him. What is a palace without the blessing of God? His loving kindness is better than life.

DECEMBER 30.—“And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou?”—Gen. xlvii. 8.

WE may consider the question as an instance of condescension and kindness on the part of Pharaoh. There is something in majesty that overawes and overpowers those who have been brought up remote from it. Pharaoh was the greatest monarch of the age, and Jacob had been a plain man, dwelling in tents, and acquainted only with rustic life and manners; and he was now at a period too late to acquire new modes of address. A true nobleman can disembarass those that address him, and inspire them with decent confidence, without lowering the respect they entertain for him: and this is very much done by seizing something with which the inferior is familiar, and in which he feels more at home. Jacob probably dreaded this interview because of the conversation; the king therefore instantly begins upon his age. This would also be pleasing to Jacob. Old people love to talk of early scenes, and of things *they* saw and heard before others were born. Their years give them a kind of dignity and pre-eminence. Years have in all countries laid a foundation for respect—“Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man.”

But let the preacher bring home this question, especially as we are so near the end of another year, to all who are here present. We would not have even females excluded. In this quarter indeed we should feel an impropriety in the question if an answer were to be returned aloud. The age of only one woman, even when she died, is mentioned in the Scripture—It were rude to pry where secrecy is so sacred. Years are at variance with personal attraction and impression; and many dislike to be reminded of the failure of their reign. But if by dress and hired tints they try to impose upon others, can they be ignorant themselves? Know they not the real lapse of their time and their influence? Let them therefore be concerned to establish an empire upon something more solid than corporeal charms—Let them cultivate the mind; let them adorn the heart and life with the graces of the Holy Spirit; let them abound in good works; let them with Mary choose the good part that shall not be taken away from them—Thus they will descend even into the vale of age with honour, and be estimable even in the tomb.

Allow me then to ask each of you, “How old art thou?” It is a question which you *can* answer. There is a great difference between looking backward and looking forward. You know not what a day may bring forth. You cannot tell how long you have to live—But you know how long you have lived. It is a question you

ought to answer. There is nothing of more importance than to know how you stand with regard to the progress of your time. Time is your most valuable possession. Every thing depends upon it; and once gone it can never be recalled. Inquire therefore how much of it is gone; and how much of it probably remains.

The days of our years are threescore years and ten. Few indeed reach this period. But this is the general limit. And beyond it no man has a right to look. Philip Henry therefore, when he had entered his seventieth year, always dated his letters, "The year of my dying." Yet have not some of you even passed this period? Are not others near it? And do not even fifty, forty, thirty years, make an awful inroad upon the measure? Are you in early life? You think perhaps that you have many years before you, during which your eye will see good. But do you learn this from Scripture and observation? Do not both these tell you that childhood and youth are vanity? Are you aged? On what distance are you reckoning before you reach your journey's end? Miles? Furlongs? Feet? There is but a *step* between you and death. Are you old in sin? Your time is ending, and your work not even yet begun.

Here the question assumes a spiritual import. Christians are new creatures. They are born again. How old are we in grace? We have lived really no longer than we have lived to God, a life of faith, hope, holiness, and love. Where then are we in the Divine life? What are we in the family of God? Are we little children, or young men, or fathers in Christ?

Christian! how old art thou? "Old enough to be wiser and better. I blush to think how great my advantages have been, and how I have misimproved them. How long have I been in the best of all schools, and how little have I learned? Lord, clothe me with humility. Enable me to present thee a broken heart and a contrite spirit which thou wilt not despise."

"What have I done for him that died
To save my wretched soul?
How have my follies multiplied,
Fast as my minutes roll."

What am I to do this evening?

"Lord, with this guilty heart of mine
To thy dear cross I flee;
And to thy grace my soul resign,
To be renewed by thee."

Aged Christian! What says your answer to this question?—Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed. A few more descending suns, and "thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw herself; for God shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy sojourning shall be ended."

DECEMBER 31.—"And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been."—Gen. xlvii. 9.

THERE is something very simple and affecting in this representation. It places life before us under the image of a pilgrimage. Such Jacob's life was *literally*. We find him perpetually changing his residence. He never occupied a mansion. What the Apostle

says of Abraham applies also to Isaac and Jacob: "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things, declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." This fine passage shows us that Jacob was a pilgrim, not only or principally because of his outward condition, but his spiritual experience. He was allied to another and a nobler world by birth, by his possessions there, and by his advancement towards it.

Life indeed is a pilgrimage, even naturally considered. We never continue in one stay. We pass through successive periods of being; through days, and weeks, and years; through infancy, youth, manhood, and old age; and then we go down to the grave. In this sense none are residents here; all are travellers, hastening the way of all the earth.

But the figure is more strikingly true, if taken in a religious sense. The progression we have just mentioned is not the choice or wish of the multitude: and we can hardly call a man a pilgrim who is driven by force, and carried along as a prisoner or a captive; he only deserves the name who has an object in view, and which he is anxious to attain, and towards which he is voluntarily moving. Others are men of the world,"

"Their hope and portion lies below,
'Tis all the happiness they know."

But the Christian has his "conversation in heaven," and can say,

"What others value, I resign,
Lord 'tis enough that thou art mine:
I shall behold thy blissful face,
And stand complete in righteousness."

But Jacob attaches to his pilgrimage two properties. First, brevity—"Few have the days of the years of my life been." Yet he had lived one hundred and thirty years. But Isaac had lived one hundred and eighty; and Abraham one hundred and seventy-five, and Terah two hundred and five. And what were these ages compared with those before the Flood? And what were those compared with eternity! Yet this properly applies much stronger to our life than to the life of Jacob. There is not a man now living who expects to reach one hundred and thirty. The sacred writers have employed every image importing shortness of duration to characterize the hastiness of our continuance here. A flood. A tale. A vapour. A weaver's shuttle. An eagle pouncing on his prey. What is it then when compared with the grand purposes of life—The salvation of the soul! The glorifying of God! The serving of our generation! Surely we have not a moment to lose! And as in a letter, if the paper is small, and we have much to write, we write closer, so let us learn to economize and improve the remaining moments of life.

The second is, misery. Not only "few," but "evil," says he, "have the days of the years of my life been." His history verifies the assertion. At what period was he not called to suffer, from his early leaving his father's house down to the hour when, in the anguish of his soul, he cried, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me?"

But this attribute belongs not to Jacob's life only. "*Man* is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." From this sorrowful experience none are exempted. Evil enters the palace as well as the cottage. Solomon, the happiest of mortals as to means and opportunities of enjoyment, tells us not only that "all is vanity," but "vexation of spirit." We are often tempted to discontent by comparisons; yet perhaps the very persons we envy are envying every one else. "The heart," and the heart alone, "knoweth his own bitterness." Let us not promise ourselves in life what life has never yet realized. No condition will answer a high degree of expectation.

Let us go forth into a new portion of our time, sober in our hopes with regard to creatures, but with confidence in God. If he is the rock, they are broken reeds. If he is faithfulness and truth, they, at their best estate, are altogether vanity. And that we may be prepared for all that awaits us, let us seek that grace which can sustain us in the evil hour of adversity, and turn death itself into a blessing. Without this all the evils of time will issue in the miseries of eternity.

"This seems a gloomy view of life." But is it not a true one?—Yet it is not unmingled with good, much good. Our mercies are new every morning. And it becomes us to be thankful that in a world so full of evil we have had, during the months we are closing, so many exemptions, deliverances, alleviations, and comforts.

Besides, this was not our original state, but the consequence of sin. Moral evil produced natural evil. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin"—"Cursed is the ground for thy sake, in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

This state too is not our final one—unless we choose to make it so. The Gospel places within our view, and within our reach, regions of perfect blessedness, where it shall be said, "The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more."

Nor should it be forgotten that the evils of life themselves are rendered useful. What is the effect of sin is also "the fruit to take away sin." The world, even as it now is, is capable of seducing the heart—What would it be if it presented nothing but attraction and indulgence? This changes the aspect of our condition; and not only prevents despondence and murmuring, but enables us to say, it is good for me that I have been afflicted. O how the suffering of the present time endears the Scripture! The throne of grace! The sympathy of Jesus! The glory to be revealed!

—Here is one alleviation more. If the days of our pilgrimage be

“evil,” they are “few.” The brevity corrects the bitterness. The fight may be severe, but the warfare will soon be accomplished. The road may be rough, and the weather stormy, but our Father’s house—our home is at hand! “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” AMEN.

THE END.







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