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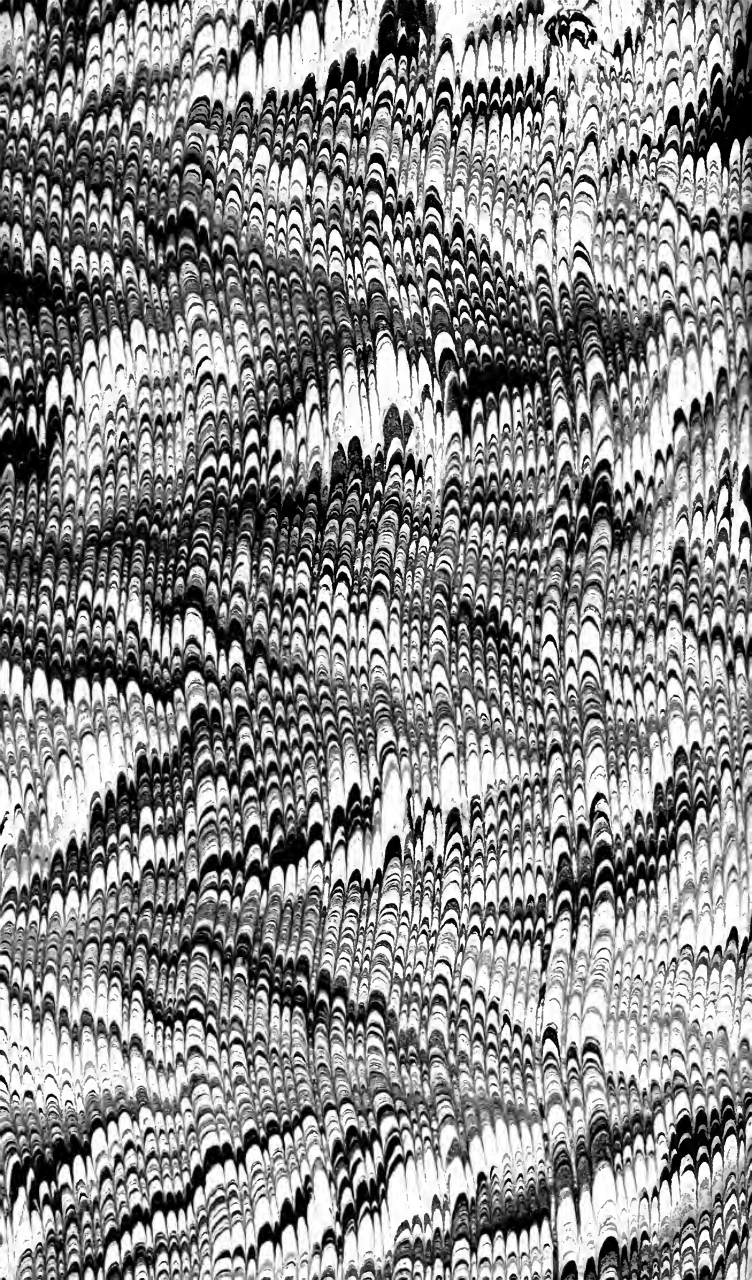
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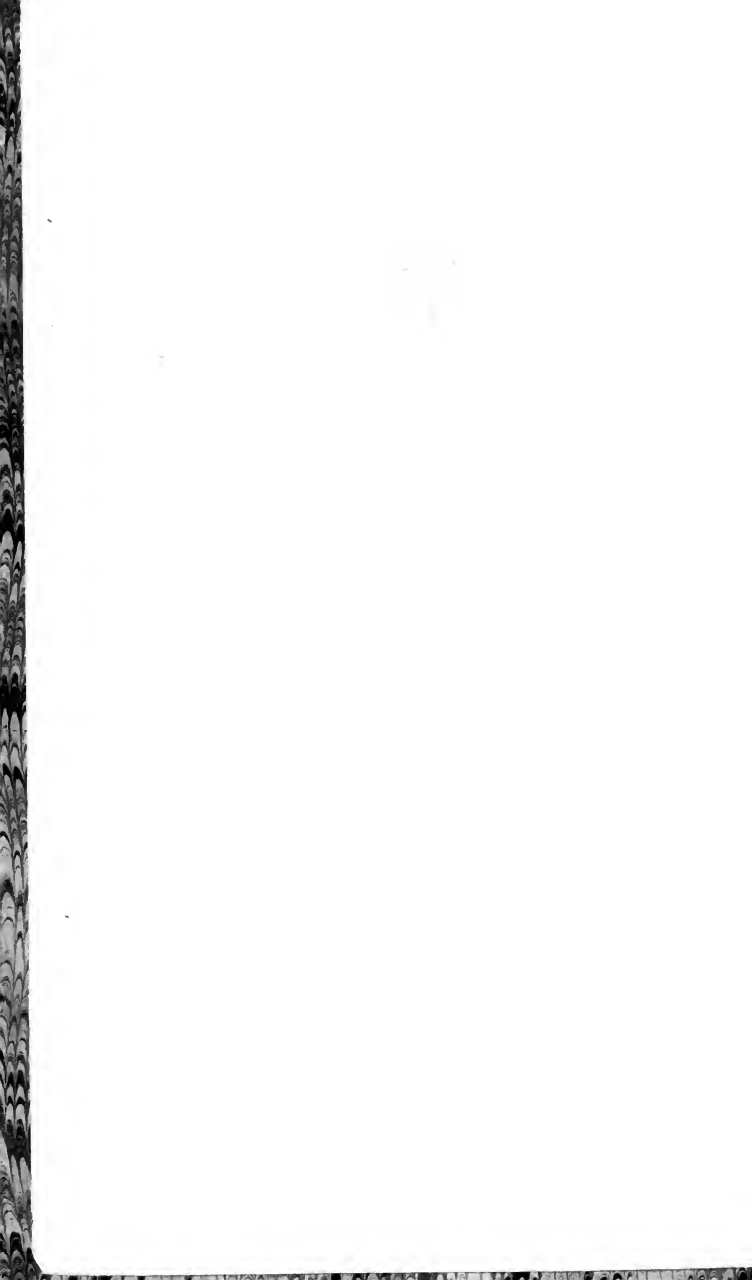


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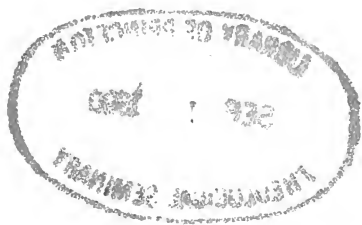
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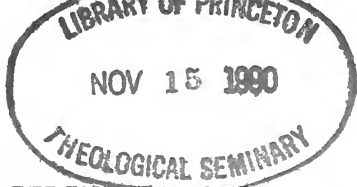




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NINE LECTURES

UPON THE

HISTORY OF SAINT PETER.

BY THE

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TO HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF RICHMOND.

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PREFACE.

AMIDST the numerous occupations in which every parochial clergyman must be engaged, there is little time for the composition of elaborate discourses. All that can usually be effected, is to speak plainly and affectionately, week by week, and day by day, of those great and blessed truths which engage, we trust, some portion of our own hearts, and of the hearts of many among the flocks committed to our charge. That nine

Lectures preached consecutively should, therefore, possess small claim to public attention, will astonish no one; that they should have been published at the desire of some of the Congregation, will not astonish those, who know any thing of the partiality naturally existing, between every Minister, and the people among whom he dwells.

The endeavour of the author, has simply been, to bring before his hearers some of the admirable points in the character of St. Peter, and to illustrate some of the striking situations in which he was placed, in the hope, and with the prayer, that acting in faith upon the Divine promises,¹ this feeble effort for the glory of God, and the good of his

¹ See Isaiah lv. 10, 11.

people, may not be permitted to be wholly fruitless, but that the bread of life thus cast upon the waters may be found after many days.

Chelsea, June, 1829.

PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

IN offering a Second Edition of his small work to the Public, the Author cannot refrain from expressing his gratitude for the rapid sale with which it has met. He has only to hope, that although a feeble effort, it may not, by the Divine blessing, be a fruitless effort in the great cause to which it is humbly dedicated.

Chelsea, July, 1829.

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LECTURES.

LECTURE I.

LUKE v. 8.

“WHEN SIMON PETER SAW IT, HE FELL DOWN AT JESUS' KNEES, SAYING, DEPART FROM ME, FOR I AM A SINFUL MAN, O LORD.”

HAVING found, upon a former occasion, that the biography of one, eminent in the writings of the Old Testament, offered many valuable lessons, both to the Christian minister and the Christian hearer, it is my intention, during the present season of Lent, to bring before you some of the remarkable passages in the life of one of the great and good men under the New Testament dispensation.

The individual, whose history I have selected for this purpose, is Simon Peter—of whom it is not too much to assert, that, after our blessed Lord himself, there is no one for whom a stronger prepossession is excited in our bosoms, no one with whom we more early sympathize, or, in the affecting incidents of whose eventful history, we take a more lasting interest.

In the prosecution of this endeavour, I shall confine myself to some of the most striking incidents in the life of Peter, narrated in the *Gospels*, the length of the present season not being sufficient to admit of our embracing the whole of the instructive details of his eventful biography contained in the Scriptures.

May the divine grace so co-operate with the imperfect attempt, as to render it instrumental, through the power of the Holy Spirit of God, to the imparting to us some portion of that fervent love to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, that

zealous attachment to his service, that implicit obedience to his commands, which so remarkably characterized this distinguished apostle!

Of the early history of Simon Peter, nothing has been handed down to us by the pen of inspiration: the earliest record which is given of him in the word of God, is contained in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel.

From the period when John the Baptist became acquainted with the Saviour of the world, at the waters of Jordan, he preached him as "the way, the truth, and the life," to his own disciples. Among these disciples of the Baptist, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, the first who, directed by the testimony of John, devoted himself to the service of the Messiah. No sooner had he seen and conversed with Jesus, than, as we find in the forty-first verse of the chapter to which we have already alluded, Andrew, naturally anxious to

dispense to those he loved, something of the gratitude and joy with which his own heart was overflowing, “first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias; and he brought him to Jesus.”

Here then is the commencement of the scriptural biography of Peter—the hour in which he is carried, by the active exertions of a brother’s love, to the feet of the Redeemer. All that preceded this important event, is considered by the inspired historian as undeserving of a single word. Let others tell of the early genius and precocious talents of those whose history they narrate: to the Evangelist, the point alone from which the narrative becomes worthy of his pen, is the hour which beholds the subject of his history brought to an acquaintance with the Saviour of the world. What a lesson is this to us, my Christian brethren!

That portion of our lives which we,

perhaps, are apt to dwell upon with the greatest delight, the pleasures and follies of our youth, the exploits of our manhood, the unsanctified pursuits in which so many of our later years have been wasted, form in the sight of the saints and angels, no portion of our history. They recognize us only from the time, that “being made one with Christ, and Christ with us,” we commence a new life unto the Lord; and having become members of his blessed family, we become objects of the deepest interest and the tenderest anxiety even to the inhabitants of heaven. They reckon our years not from the day we were born, but from the time we were “born again,” and made heirs of the kingdom: of all prior to that event, the best which we can hope and ask at the hands of God is, that it may be blotted out of the book of his remembrance; that it may be cast into the depths of the sea, and never be permitted to rise up against us to shame

us in this world, or to condemn us in that which is to come. But, my brethren, while the real Christian believes, and rejoices to believe this, how does it affect the man of the world? Do I not address some, and perhaps even of those advanced in life, who, in this view, are but as infants? Do I address any who have lived their threescore years and ten, and whose spiritual life has not even now commenced? Surely here is deep cause for earnest, solemn reflection, for fervent and heartfelt prayer: fifty, sixty, seventy years thrown away upon a worthless and unsatisfying world—not a year, not a day, not an hour, really given to God. You were born a stranger to him, and you are a stranger still. The day of reckoning is at your doors, and you have nothing ready for the account. Would to God that this might be the resolution of your hearts to-day:—“The time past of my life shall suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles;” hence-

forth I will resolve, in the strength of the Lord, to begin in earnest to live to God. Let your spiritual history now commence, if you have never yet been made acquainted with the Lord Jesus Christ, never yet been brought into the blessed relationship of his family ; “ to-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts ;” earnestly and faithfully seek that spirit of adoption whereby you can alone be enabled to begin, in the children’s language, “ to cry, Abba, Father,” and in the children’s spirit, to look for the children’s home.

While commencing the spiritual history of Peter, we cannot but remark the pleasing circumstance, that it was his own brother Andrew, who first led him to his Lord and Saviour. If it be true, (and who will venture to deny it?) that the enjoyment of the social affections is the highest temporal gratification, and the interchange of the kindly offices of love the most blessed occupation here

below—then how nearly do these approach to the delights of a holier state of existence, and the occupations of a higher order of intelligences, when they are purified by the love of God, and consecrated to the cross of Christ! If it be interesting to the parent to mark the first opening efforts of the infant mind, and to trace the first springs of thought in the infant breast, how much more delightful is it to be made instrumental in sowing the first seeds of spiritual knowledge, and in teaching the first lessons of spiritual love! To behold the little countenances of our dear children lighted up, and their eyes sparkling with intelligence, while listening to a theme which angels themselves desire to look into; and to feel, while thus engaged, that we are opening up in their young hearts sources of future peace and joy, over which the present changeful state of things shall exercise no control, but which shall continue to flow on, when

time itself has ceased to flow. If there be any thing which can increase those natural feelings of love that exist between the husband and the wife, the parent and the child, the brother and the sister, surely it is the being thus made the blessed instruments in the hand of God, in bringing these near and dear connexions within the still closer bonds of the gospel of Christ.

Deeply does the Christian feel for those who cannot sympathise with him here ; deeply does he pity those to whom such blessings are unknown : even in this world there is no other real security for the strongest ties, for there is no such love as this engenders. The relationship between the spiritual father and his spiritual children, is the closest, dearest, most enduring, that can be found on earth ; and when this is superadded to the ties of natural affection, when the several members of a Christian family are thus “ knit together in

love”¹ in Christ Jesus, then it is, that family union assumes almost a heavenly character, and those who are bound by its sweet influences here will not be separated throughout eternity.

We have now beheld Simon Peter, by the affectionate efforts of his own brother Andrew, brought to an acquaintance with the Messiah; but it does not appear, that from this hour he became one of his constant attendants, or that this was the period when he entirely devoted himself, heart and soul, to the labours of the apostleship. We find that for a little period, he returned to the usual avocations of a fisher’s life, to his boats and to his nets; and although, doubtless, not forgetful of the high privilege he had once enjoyed, yet obviously requiring a more distinct and decisive command from the Lord of heaven and earth, before he became sensible of the glorious destiny which awaited him. The

¹ Col. ii. 2.

circumstances under which this command was vouchsafed, are related in the fifth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, where we read that our Lord having, upon the lake of Gennesaret, taught the people out of Simon Peter's ship, desired him to launch out into the deep, and to let down his nets for a draught. No sooner had this injunction been complied with, than so vast a multitude of fishes were taken, that "the nets brake and the vessels themselves began to sink." Then it was that Peter, enlightened by the Holy Spirit of God, began really to discover the divine nature, and to be convinced of the supernatural power of Him whom he had already acknowledged as the Messiah of God; and the immediate consequence was *that* recorded in the text, "he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

Behold the remarkable effect of a single unclouded view of the incarnate

Deity! An overwhelming sense of the greatness of the Saviour, and of the nothingness, and less than nothingness, of his sinful creatures. How uniformly has this been the result, in all ages, of a clear and visible manifestation to fallen man of the second person of the ever-blessed Trinity. Thus, in the case of the holy and devoted Job, after he had beheld that glorious vision of the eternal God, which he describes, we see him humbled in the dust, we hear him saying, in the voice of the deepest penitence and self-abhorrence, “ I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee, *wherefore* I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”² Thus was it also with Isaiah, when he beheld the Lord sitting upon his throne, and surrounded by the glorious seraphim : “ Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, for mine eyes

² Job xlii. 5, 6.

have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”³ Thus is it, even at the present moment, with ourselves; never are the power and the perfections of the Saviour truly brought home to the heart, without being accompanied by a self-accusing, self-condemning knowledge of our own souls. The first language of the convicted sinner is, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” Not that he really desires the departure of his Saviour, but that he is so overwhelmed with a sense of the power and the purity of Christ, and with the guilt and weakness of himself, that he cannot but acknowledge that he is “not worthy that the Saviour should come under his roof,” or take up his promised abode within his bosom.

We say that this is still the invariable effect of a real manifestation of the Saviour to the hearts of his fallen creatures. It is true, you may have

³ Isaiah vi. 5.

heard, read, and spoken of Christ from your very infancy, and no such effect have been produced; but this will not disprove our assertion, because you may have heard, and read, and spoken of Him, and, alas! know him not. But the moment you do know him, the moment he fulfils to you his gracious promise of manifesting⁴ himself to his people as he does not to the world; the moment you are enabled by the divine Spirit really to see “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,”⁵ you will find that the declaration of Peter is the only appropriate language of your heart, “I am a sinful man, O Lord!”

Is not this, my Christian brethren, the first feeling of the convicted conscience? are not these the first utterings of the awakened heart? We do not hesitate to say, that the divine Spirit never, in any single instance,

⁴ See John xiv. 21, 22.

⁵ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

really reveals a saving knowledge of Christ, without at the same time thus convincing of sin. The depth of this feeling, the intensity of its anguish, the length of its duration, will vary in almost every different instance, for it is a fatal, though common mistake, to imagine that upon this point the experience of one believer forms a model or a measure for another. In some the soul is permitted to be long bowed down by a sense of sin; and days of sorrow and nights of watchfulness are wearily endured before peace is applied, and the Comforter fulfils his blessed office: in others, the conviction is so closely followed by the reception of the Saviour's promises, or rather, so identified with it, that there is nothing known of the deeper pangs and acuter agonies of a guilty conscience; but, be assured of this, that in all, yes, in every imaginable case—in the case of the most moral, the most virtuous, the

most lovely—the plague of an evil heart must be acknowledged; sin must be felt, must be deplored, must be confessed before God, or the great work is undone, the Saviour is not clearly seen, the reconciliation to God is not effected.

My brethren, I would beseech you to apply this to your own souls. Have you ever enjoyed, do you now enjoy, such a sight of your Redeemer, by the eye of faith, as compels you to confess your sinfulness, and to cry for pardon; to acknowledge from your heart “that you have left undone those things which you ought to have done, and you have done those things which you ought not to have done, and there is no health in you?” If this has never yet been the language of your soul, be assured that you have not seen him, neither known him. “You may have heard of him by the hearing of the ear,” but you cannot say, “Now mine eye seeth thee.” O! seek unceasingly

for this spiritual vision ; pray that you may be able to say, “ Whereas I was blind, now I see.” It is the sight of Jesus which (speaking not from the experience of an individual, but from the testimony of all ages of the church of Christ) alone possesses a converting efficacy here — it is the same blissful sight which shall alone possess a transforming efficacy hereafter ; for mark the testimony of inspiration itself to this important truth : “ Now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be ; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, FOR we shall see him as he is.”⁶

No sooner had Peter made the confession of which we have been speaking, than we read that Jesus said unto him, “ Simon, fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men : And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.”

⁶ 1 John iii. 2.

Observe in these words the two-fold lesson they impart; the tenderness of the Saviour—"Fear not;" the obedience of the new disciple—"He forsook all, and followed Jesus." When we speak to you of a Saviour, blessed be God, we speak of a Being unchanged and unchangeable, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Were these his words to Peter? and are they not, then, assuredly his words to you? Yes; even to you and to your children to the end of time. There is not an individual to whom I now address myself, who has ever said, or who shall ever say, from the bottom of a broken and contrite heart, "I am a sinful man, O Lord;" to whom that Lord shall not reply, "Fear not." How blessed an assurance to the truly penitent! how comforting a declaration to the sorrowing soul! Are you saying, with the deeply repentant Psalmist, "There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither is there

any rest in my bones, by reason of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head : as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me to bear.”⁷ Then hear the reply of that gracious Being to whom you complain—“ Fear not ;” “ though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool : ”⁸ “ for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” Are you not only deploring the guilt of your sins, but lamenting at the same time the weakness of your faith ? “ Fear not,” says the all-powerful and compassionate Redeemer, “ my grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”⁹ Be assured, therefore, upon the testimony of that revealed word which cannot alter, and shall not fail, though heaven and earth shall pass away ; be assured upon this evidence, that the believing penitent has no ground

⁷ Psalm xxxviii. 3, 4.

⁸ Isa. i. 18.

⁹ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

for fear ; that the same Saviour addresses you, at this hour, in the same accents of tenderness and compassion, which he addressed eighteen hundred years ago to Peter ; and that His pardon, His grace, His glory, are your own. Fall low before his feet, as Peter did, with a humble and a contrite spirit ; plead before His throne of grace with the outpourings of a full heart, and He will raise you as he did this convicted sinner, and be Himself your portion for time and for eternity.

But, my Christian brethren, we may not finish here : the love of the Saviour is indeed infinite, and unutterable, and entire ; but remember that he is “ become the author of eternal salvation unto all them ” *only* “ that obey him.”¹ “ Peter forsook *all*, and followed Jesus.” Are you endeavouring to imitate so exalted an example ? to forsake, not a portion of that which is offensive to the

¹ Heb. v. 9.

eye, and contrary to the word of our God, but all, every besetting sin, every uncharitable temper, every doubtful pleasure, every worldly entanglement which opposes you, or impedes you in following Jesus; making no single reserve for any favourite pleasure, or any questionable profit, but faithfully and boldly plucking them out, and casting them from you, as a free-will offering, at the command of your Redeemer? Who among us is there thus really striving to forsake all for Christ? A careful examination of our thoughts, our words, our actions, even for this single day which is passing over us, would, we fear, leave the holiest without an answer, and without excuse. Yet, my brethren, this it is to be a Christian; time can make no alteration in the requirements of that name; it is still in this sense obligatory upon all who bear the name of Christ, to forsake all, to deny themselves, to take up the cross,

and to follow Christ. What shall we then say to these things? Who is there that does not stand self-convicted before that God who seeth the heart? Who is there that will refuse to say, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Who is there that will not heartily unite in this most appropriate petition of our Church:— "Grant, O merciful God, that as thine holy apostles, leaving all that they had without delay, were obedient unto the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him; so we, forsaking all worldly and carnal affections, may evermore be ready to follow thy holy commandments, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

LECTURE II.

MATT. xiv. 29.

“ AND WHEN PETER WAS COME DOWN OUT OF THE SHIP, HE WALKED ON THE WATER, TO GO TO JESUS.”

SIMON PETER, having now become one of our Lord's constant attendants, and having been ordained one of his twelve apostles, is henceforth to be found, in every incident of importance, holding a most prominent situation among the followers of our Lord, and bearing a most distinguished part.

Is there an undertaking of peculiar hazard and danger, requiring the highest exertion of faith and the most unbounded display of courage—such, for example, as the walking upon the surface of the

troubled deep? this undaunted apostle is foremost in the attempt. Is there a doubt cast upon the devoted attachment of the followers of our Lord, and from the lips of our Lord himself, "Will ye also go away?"—this affectionate being is the first, from the full outpourings of a loving heart, to repel the imputation; "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." Is there an inquiry which could probe the faith, and accurately ascertain the degree of light and knowledge which the apostles possessed, "Whom say ye that I am?"—this supernaturally instructed disciple is the man unhesitatingly to reply, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

May the same Spirit who, upon each of these deeply interesting occasions, influenced the heart of Peter, be present with us this morning, while we endeavour profitably to consider the conduct of the apostle, under the first of these

widely differing circumstances ; and may this Divine Teacher impart to us some blessed portion of Peter's courage, of Peter's wisdom, and of Peter's love !

The incident to which I shall at present call your attention is contained in the 14th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, where we read, that after a day spent in the most laborious and fatiguing acts of beneficence and charity ; after miraculously healing the sick and feeding the fainting multitude, our Lord had withdrawn himself from the presence of his beloved disciples, to spend the greater portion of the night in secret communion with his heavenly Father. A night of fervent prayer, after a day of ceaseless labour ! What an example for us, my brethren, who are too ready to consider the smallest feelings of fatigue, even if not induced by doing the works of him who sent us, an excuse fully sufficient for the intermission or the diminution of our communion with Heaven. O ! that there

might be a larger portion of the Spirit which influenced our Divine Master shed abroad upon us his unprofitable servants! —that there might be more of that secret communion with God, that intimate and habitual intercourse with him, the dearth of which spreads such a meagreness and coldness over all the labours of us his ministers, and such a formality and deadness over the best services of you, his people! While our Lord was thus engaged on the mountains which surrounded the lake, his disciples were on board their vessel, tossed with the waves, for the wind was contrary. Many a weary hour had passed, and they were doubtless anxiously longing for the presence of their Divine master; when in the fourth watch, about three o'clock in the morning, they beheld him walking towards the vessel upon the surface of the sea. No sooner had his accents of encouragement and assurance reached their ears, “It is I, be not afraid,” than Peter answered, “Lord, if it be thou, bid

me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come; and when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus." How striking, how unprecedented an instance of courage and of faith! At a single word from the lips of his Divine Master, the undaunted apostle unhesitatingly steps upon the surface of the tempest-tossed ocean, and firmly believes that he shall find a solid footing upon those soft and yielding waters. What motive could be sufficiently powerful for such a daring? Was it the mere desire of distinguishing himself above his fellows? Was it an ambitious anxiety to place himself upon an equality with his Omnipotent Master? No, surely; these were motives which never found a momentary entertainment in Peter's bosom. Observe the language of the request; it is not merely, Enable me to walk upon the waters; give me power to perform as great a miracle as thou art thyself performing; let me do as

man has never done; but, “ Bid me come unto *thee* upon the waters,” that was the feeling which sanctified the request; Peter hears the voice of his beloved Master, and if sanctioned by one word from him, the most tremendous of the elements shall not separate them: though the winds blow a tempest around his head, he will venture through; though the waters be unfathomable beneath his feet, he will venture on. The true Christian, who has experienced the powerful influence of the love of Christ upon his own heart, is no longer surprised to find that Peter dared to walk upon the water, when he reads that it was to go to Jesus. What encouragement is there in this incident for the believer! what comfort for those who are commencing the spiritual life, and desiring to draw near with faith to the Saviour! Upon such a subject, you cannot ask more than your Redeemer will readily grant: you cannot ask too much—ye are not straitened in God, ye are straitened

only in your own selves; you cannot seek too near an access, too close an union with him in whom you believe. Imagine the greatest obstacles you *can* imagine to be between you and your God, and they sink into insignificance when compared with the opposing elements between Peter and his Lord. But you will perhaps reply, that yours are spiritual obstacles; when you would approach God, you have a fearful host of disobedient thoughts, and rebellious desires, and evil tempers, and impure passions, drawn up in battle array before you, and continually driving you far from him in whom your soul would delight, successfully opposing your every effort to approach him. Here is no sufficient reason for despair; that all-powerful voice which bid Peter come to his Divine Master, even through the opposing tempest, can call, and cheer, and encourage you, and make you more than conqueror over these most fearful adversaries of your soul.

But, perhaps, to some whom I address, there are obstacles widely different from these. You cannot draw near as you could desire to God, because your strength is perfect weakness; every resolution fails in the hour of trial; day testifies unto day, and night unto night—a sad, sad catalogue of broken determinations and successful temptations and a yielding softness of spirit, which shrinks from the attacks of your great adversary, and falls before the slightest blow in the day of battle. To you I would also say, there is comfort in this view of the power of your Redeemer. Was he, in the days of his flesh, able to fix the flowing ocean? and has he not power to fix your wandering thoughts, and to stay your wavering resolutions? Was he able to make the liquid waters solid as a pavement of adamant beneath the feet of Peter? and is there any thing too weak for him to strengthen, too yielding for him to render firm? No; be assured your very

weakness is your strength, if it but lead you to cast yourself unreservedly upon the Lord Jesus, the fountain of strength, for your support. But remember, that it was only in the power of the Lord that Peter ventured: had he attempted it in his own, he would inevitably have sunk beneath the waves. If you are really sincere in the desire of drawing nigh unto God earnest in the prayer, "Bid me come unto thee," the word of Christ will not be wanting to encourage you, the power of Christ will not be wanting to enable you to go to him, though all the weakness, and all the wickedness, of your fickle and corrupt nature, should place themselves between you.

Thus far we have seen a most instructive and beautiful exhibition of Peter's courage and faith; we are now to behold the imperfection of these very graces exhibited, and in the self-same hour, and by the self-same individual. It is

perhaps not unworthy of observation, that in sacred history we invariably find that the recorded defects of the people of God are on the side of their most conspicuous graces. Thus, the recorded sin of the father¹ of the faithful was want of faith—of the meek and gentle Moses,² that he spake unadvisedly with his lips—of the patient Job,³ that he was impatient—of the man after God's own heart, that he was sensual⁴—of the tender-hearted John,⁵ that he was vindictive—of the lion-hearted Peter,⁶ that he was cowardly. The Spirit of God has recorded these failures of the best of men, to convince us, if we are capable of conviction, that man, even in his best estate, is “deceitful upon the weights, altogether lighter than vanity itself;” and that if tried by his own merits in the balance of the sanctuary, he would, un-

¹ Gen. xii. 12, 13.

² Psalm cvi. 32, 33.

³ Job iii. 1, 2, 3.

⁴ 2 Sam. xi. 4.

⁵ Luke ix. 54.

⁶ Matt. xiv. 30.

der the most favourable circumstances, infallibly be found wanting.

Peter had not only boldly ventured on that path of miracle, but had proceeded some little distance upon it with the most perfect security; when, to our surprise and dismay, we read, that, “when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and, beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me!” What an instantaneous transition! from a boldness which had voluntarily courted an unknown danger, to a timidity which feared, where his own experience might have convinced him that it was safe. And shall we, my brethren, harshly condemn the faithful apostle for his act of faithlessness? Our Lord once said,⁷ “Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone.” So would we now say, let him who would have dared to place his foot where Peter did, condemn him for his want of courage; if you believe,

⁷ John viii. 7.

that at a single word of bidding from your Divine Master, you would unhesitatingly have taken one step with this intrepid disciple, you may be privileged to arraign him, that he advanced no further. "It was," says the Evangelist, "when he saw the wind boisterous, that he began to sink." He had, therefore, withdrawn his stedfast gaze from his Divine Master, and was faithlessly looking around upon the dark clouds, and the still darker waters. How does every word of this instructive narrative, agree with the believer's experience, and come home to the believer's heart! When is it that the Christian fails? When is it that the Christian desponds? When is it that the Christian begins to sink? Not in the hour, however great the trial or afflicting the dispensation, that the eye of faith is stedfastly fixed upon his Saviour; this is not the hour when the Christian sinks: it is when he forgets and disobeys that most important com-

mand, “ Look unto me, and be ye saved ;” when his path is overcast, and trouble and temptation so thickly surround him, that his thoughts are led to fasten themselves upon these outward difficulties, or inward trials, and thus to be withdrawn from the fountain of strength and succour. Christian brethren, this is a temptation against which, we cannot too earnestly or too constantly be upon our guard ; for it is one of the most common and most successful, with which our spiritual enemy assails us. Let nothing induce you to turn the eye of faith, even for a passing hour, from the Saviour of sinners ; while you look on him, you are safe : danger begins the moment that you cease to do so : once turn aside, because the cloud is dark, or the wind is boisterous ; give the reins to a desponding imagination ; follow out the delusive reasonings of a deceitful or a doubting heart, and the inevitable effect will be, that every moment so spent, will the

more widely separate you from Him, who alone can be your refuge, and your support. Your strength, your only strength, consists in cleaving daily, hourly, momentarily, (as the parasitic plant of a summer clings to the oak of ages,) to your Redeemer, and drawing from his unsearchable riches and his inexhaustible fulness, a sufficiency for all your poverty, and for all your need.

While we thus comment upon the apostle's faithlessness, let us not forget that it was the act of a moment, and but a moment: no sooner did he begin to sink, than he cried, "Lord, save me!" There was no faithlessness in that petition. Even at his lowest estate, the true believer is a believer still. He may begin to sink, but the cry of fear with him, will also be the cry of faith: while sinking, his eye will once more rest upon a merciful and pardoning Saviour; while falling, he will cry with the falling Psalmist, "O cast me not away from

thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me ;” and with that sinning believer he will find restoring grace, with that sinking apostle he will feel the outstretched arm.

Continuing the history, we are told that “ Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt ?” Behold the blessed effects of a single heartfelt prayer. Though beginning to sink, it was not too late ; though possessing but little faith, it was not too feeble. It was enough for our compassionate Redeemer, that it was the cry of one who had no hope but in his mercy, yet in that mercy had the most unshaken confidence. These were the wings which carried that short petition, “ Lord, save me !” directly to the heart of him, to whom it was addressed. This then is a true specimen of acceptable prayer. With such an example, and such an encouragement before us, let me urge

you to ask yourself, Are these the feelings which occupy my heart, when I raise my voice in prayer? have I ever offered one such earnest, heartfelt petition as this of Peter at the throne of grace? You have this day uttered many prayers; you have made use of a form of words truly scriptural, truly spiritual, truly applicable to all the multiplied necessities of the largest congregation; but you may have been no more benefited by these petitions, than the beggar would be enriched by walking over a golden pavement. Did you pray the prayers, even which your lips have uttered? When you repeated, "Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners," was there any feeling of misery—any real conviction that you were sinners—any heartfelt desire for mercy? When your minister, solemnly addressing himself to the omnipotent Jehovah, exclaimed, "O God, make speed to save us," and you replied, "O Lord, make haste to

help us," was this a mere formal repetition of a request in which you had no interest ; or was it an earnest expression of real feeling, warm from the heart, dictated by a sense of weakness, which you acknowledge yourselves utterly unable to remedy? Was it urged by a conviction as heartfelt as that of the drowning Peter, that if God do not help you, if Christ do not save you, you must perish, and perish everlastingly? Without these feelings, there may be many words, but there is no prayer. Prayer is simply the faithful utterance of those desires, and of those necessities, of which, even when unuttered, the heart is full. It cannot, therefore, exist without the consciousness of your own helplessness, and of your Saviour's all-sufficiency : without these feelings, hours of prayer will be unheeded ; with them, be assured, the smallest whisper that faith shall ever utter, will not return unanswered.

But we must hasten to the conclusion

of the incident, upon which we have been engaged. “When they were come into the ship, the wind ceased,” and, as St. John has added to his narration, “immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.” What the disciples had laboured to effect during the live-long night, by their own exertions, and without avail, is performed in a moment by the power and presence of their Master. Before he enters, we are told, “the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves, for the wind was contrary.” When he enters, the wind ceases and the vessel moves forward, through the still waters, to the haven where it would be. My Christian brethren, do I address any among you whose souls resemble at this hour this tempest-beaten vessel? who have ploughed your way hitherto with toil and difficulty through the dark waters of a dreary world, but have wandered widely from your course, and even now have no com-

fortable assurance, that the morning light will find you making the land of your inheritance? Here are glad tidings for you; tidings which we pray the Spirit of God to carry home to your hearts: here is One whom the winds and the sea obey, who is willing to become the inmate of your bosom, and there to take up his lasting abode, and to speed you on your way rejoicing. It is his absence that has raised the storm you cannot quell, and which has kept you, and will for ever keep you from the wished-for haven. In vain you labour to advance by your own poor and hopeless efforts: watch after watch of your short night is passing, and the shore is still far, far beyond your view. O! believe me, it is his presence which can effect, what neither man nor angel can attempt: it is his presence, though you know it not, which is all you need. Admit him freely in all his offices as Prophet, Priest, and King, into your heart, and from that

hour the tempest within, and the storm without, shall alike be hushed, and you shall be carried forward calmly, peacefully, and joyfully, through the still waters, to that haven where you would be. You shall not only see, but enter that blissful country, where Christ for ever reigns, “the King of kings and Lord of lords.”

LECTURE III.

MATT. xvi. 18.

21/3/53

“ I SAY ALSO UNTO THEE, THAT THOU ART PETER, AND UPON THIS ROCK I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH, AND THE GATES OF HELL SHALL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT.”

AT the present day, when the pretensions of the church of Rome have assumed a prominence which in this Protestant kingdom has been long denied them, it behoves every member of our national Establishment, as far as his leisure and ability will permit, to make himself master of the doctrinal subjects in dispute. I do not mean to say that he is bound to enter the dry and barren field of polemical divinity, and to lose his time and his temper in the mazes of

religious controversy ; but simply, with the Bible in his hand, and with earnest prayer for the divine teaching, to examine the great leading points of difference between the churches ; that he may not himself be “ carried away with every wind of doctrine,” and that he may be able wisely to give to others “ an answer of the hope that is in him.” We have lived so long in a state of security, that many of us are really ignorant of the chief causes which led our forefathers to separate from a church which had made “ the word of God of none effect, through their traditions.”¹ The consequence of this ignorance is, that men hesitate not to assert, that the differences between the churches, are little more than verbal differences ; not considering that such an acknowledgment, if it were true, would distinctly prove the reformed religion to be, what the

¹ Mark vii. 13.

Romanist has always pronounced it, an unjustifiable schism.

Feeling the truth of these reflections most powerfully myself, I trust you will bear with me, if, while speaking upon the words of the text, I am led to dwell upon them in a more argumentative manner than has usually been adopted in these Lectures. At the same time I shall feel it my bounden duty, as it is on all occasions my earnest desire, most scrupulously to avoid every angry and irritating consideration; and while endeavouring to speak the truth in sincerity, to endeavour equally to speak it in love; remembering that if our creed be more pure, and our church more scriptural than those from whom we differ, a double wo will be ours, if the spirit in which we differ be not more heavenly, the temper more chastened, and subdued.

Our Lord, in the chapter from which

the text is taken, had asked his disciples, saying, "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" "And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." A confession of faith which, whether we consider the period at which it was made, or the great peculiarity and fulness of it, is the most remarkable, which the pages of inspiration have presented to us. It is, indeed, impossible to convey in our own language, without tautology, all the accurate precision of the original, which might have been thus literally rendered: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the God, the living God;" marking most emphatically, that Peter not only believed, as even a heathen centurion

could confess, that Jesus Christ was the "Son of God," but that he was the only Son, of the only God of heaven and earth.

It was in reply to this confession, that "Jesus answered and said unto Peter, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Man may be powerful in imparting the knowledge of this world, which comes to nought; man may impart the *knowledge* even of spiritual truth, but in imparting faith he is utterly powerless. This is the prerogative of the Divinity himself: "Flesh and blood" never shall and never can convey it: "all thy children are taught of Thee," says the prophet, and never can the seed of saving faith be sown in the heart, but by the power of God the Holy Ghost. Our Lord having therefore pronounced him blessed, who received this precious

gift, thus continued, “ And I say also unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

It will be unnecessary for me to inform the generality of my hearers, that this is the remarkable declaration of our Lord, upon which the arrogant pretensions of the church of Rome to supremacy, and infallibility, have been founded. It is here, according to her exposition of the passage in question, that our Lord appointed Peter his vicegerent upon earth, the acknowledged head of his church, and with ample power to bequeath, and to perpetuate this astonishing authority to his successors, throughout all ages, even unto the end of time. If our Lord had really, by these words, conferred any such remarkable authority or power upon Peter, it would still remain for the Romanist to demonstrate that this authority had descended

to the *bishops of Rome*, of whom, as an old writer has well remarked, “whether they are Peter’s successors in place or no, is a question; but that they are not his successors in the truths of Christianity, is past all question.” We, however, do not believe that the words of the text, were intended to convey any such supremacy even to Peter, but that when our Lord said, “Upon this rock I will build my church,” he spoke not of Peter, but of the confession of faith, or rather the object of his confession, which Peter had just made. To this opinion one of the most eminent of the ancient fathers, St. Chrysostom, has added the full weight of his valuable testimony; for he expressly says, “Upon this rock, that is, upon the faith of his profession.” But not to enter too deeply into this inquiry, which would occupy, as it has indeed already done, volumes of controversy, I would merely offer *two* of the many arguments by which this unjusti-

fiable assumption of the church of Rome has been controverted. First, I would remind those of my hearers who consult the original language of the Scriptures of truth, that when our Lord says, "Thou art Peter, or thou art a stone," he makes use of a masculine substantive, and one usually applied by the classical writers to a fragment of a rock, or such a stone as a man can lift. When he continues the sentence, "and upon this rock," he changes the word into a feminine noun, which is always employed by the classical writers to express the solid rock itself; and he continues to refer to this feminine noun throughout the sentence. A change of expression which, to say the least, would be extremely improbable, if our Lord were speaking of the same person, or the same thing throughout.

To those of my hearers with whom this argument cannot be expected to avail, I would address one, the weight

of which may be appreciated by all. If our Lord had really thus conspicuously pointed out Peter, to the notice of the other disciples, as the acknowledged head of his church, should we not have beheld him on every future occasion recognized as their chief, by his companions? Instead of this, we do not find that in any single instance, he ever assumed such supremacy, or that it was ever offered him. Nay, so wholly unconscious do the disciples appear to have been of any such distinction, that we find them, to the very end of our Lord's residence among them, disputing "which of them should be greatest."² A point upon which there could have been no possible ground for dispute, if the sentence before us (as the Romanists explain it) had long before, and on the authority of Christ himself, for ever decided the question. I would only add upon this subject, a paraphrase of the

² Luke ix. 46.

verse under consideration, which may put it in a clear light to the English reader: 'I say unto thee, that I have rightly given unto thee, the name of Peter, which signifies a stone, for thou hast, by this confession, proved thyself a living stone in that foundation of my prophets and apostles, whereof *I myself* am the chief corner-stone, and the solid rock upon which my church shall be so surely built, that the powers of hell shall not prevail against it.'

Is it then true, my brethren, that there is a church of which not the apostle Peter, but the Lord Jesus Christ himself, is the everlasting foundation; and has it pleased a merciful God, that your lot should be cast in a land, where a living branch of that true church is planted? Bless the Lord for this above all your other mercies. Rejoice not that you are rich, or healthy, or powerful, but in this rejoice, that God has brought you within the blessed sounds of the

gospel of life, and within the pale of that church, which his own right hand has planted. But while you thus rejoice, rejoice with trembling: great are your mercies, countless are your privileges, but be assured that fully in proportion also, is your responsibility. No church however pure, no outward ordinances however perfect, no services however scriptural, can of themselves ensure salvation. You will not be saved as a congregation, but as individuals. The gates of hell cannot prevail against the church, because it is built upon the rock of Christ, but they may, and unquestionably will be found, on the last day, to prevail against many nominal members who have swelled the ranks, and filled the temples, of the purest church. The inquiry, then, for each is this: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ;"³ has this foundation been deeply laid, by the Spirit of God, in

³ 1 Cor. iii. 11.

my own soul? have I been thus turned from death unto life? and am I now, walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit? If these things be so, then indeed may we affirm that you are a true member, of the true church of the Redeemer; then we may say to you individually, what Christ has here declared of his church at large—"The gates of hell shall not prevail against" you: for it is to you that he speaks, when he says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."⁴

Our Lord having uttered his remarkable prophecy of the perpetuity of his church, thus continues to address himself to Peter—"I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and what-

⁴ John x. 27, 28.

soever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” “To bind and to loose” were terms in common usage among the Jews, “meaning simply to prohibit and to permit.” The authority therefore thus bestowed upon Peter, and the other apostles, alluded not to persons, but to doctrines; it was the power to *bind*, or to *prohibit*, such things as might be detrimental to the interests of the infant church; and we find them afterwards using this power, for example, by binding or forbidding circumcision to the believers, and the eating of things offered to idols, of things strangled, and of blood: and the power to *loose*, was the power to *allow* their followers to continue the observance of these non-essentials, the prohibition of which might have wounded the tender consciences of the new converts: and we find an example of the apostles’ use of this authority, by their allowing purification (although a remnant of the ceremonial

law) to Paul, and four other brethren, for the purpose of avoiding scandal.⁵ By “the keys of the kingdom of heaven,” is intended simply the power of first opening the doors of the new religion, through which, as the kingdom of grace here, believers were to pass to the kingdom of glory hereafter; and accordingly we find Peter, on the day of Pentecost, as regarded the Jews, and afterwards at the house of Cornelius, as respected the Gentiles, thus engaged; being on these occasions honoured as the first person, who instrumentally opened both to Jews and Gentiles, the doors of the kingdom of heaven.

Let us, however, pass from these subjects of Biblical criticism, to one of those affecting incidents, with which the life of Peter is replete, and which is well calculated to minister delight and encouragement to all who hear it. Our Lord had, as we find, recorded in the

⁵ Acts xxi. 24.

6th of St. John, throughout a long and impressive discourse, been delivering some of the deepest, and to unenlightened minds, most staggering doctrines of his gospel. He had, for the first time, taught his hearers that vital truth of the new revelation, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you;"⁶ and in reply to the suppressed murmurs, and discontent of his auditory, instead of qualifying his statements to meet their carnal apprehensions, he added the still more distasteful doctrine, "no man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."⁷

These are the humbling truths which have in all ages roused the indignation, and awakened the animosity of the natural heart; truths for which even the divine eloquence of our Lord himself, and the affectionate tenderness with which he promulgated them, could ob-

⁶ John vi. 53.

⁷ John vi. 44.

tain no favourable reception ; for we are immediately informed, “ From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.”⁸

If our Lord, when he took upon him our nature, did not disdain to partake with us of its sympathies, and its infirmities, this must have been to his feeling heart one of the most trying events of his ministry. To the common observer, indeed, “ the crown of thorns ” might seem to wound more deeply, the Roman spear to do its work more terribly, but those who know the value of immortal souls, will readily acknowledge, that the spear and the thorns could give no pang equally acute, with that inflicted by the sight of one backsliding disciple !

Truly distressing is it to the minister of peace, to drive even the most indifferent, and the most hardened from the blessed sounds of that salvation, which it is his duty, and his delight to

⁸ John vi. 66.

offer with equal freeness unto all: how much more painful is it, then, my brethren, when those who have for a time listened with pleasure, and received the word with joy, and heard it gladly, “go back and walk no more with him!” Yet even when this occurs, with such an example before his eyes, the minister of Christ will not complain—“The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord. It is enough for the disciple to be as his master, and the servant as his Lord.”⁹—If it be our painful lot, to behold those among you, who we hoped might have been “our joy and crown of rejoicing, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming,”¹ turning aside in disgust at the plainness, or in contempt at the humbling nature of those truths, which we feel it our bounden duty to impart, we will not qualify, or compromise the terms of our message; we will not alter

⁹ Matt. x. 24.

¹ 1 Thess. ii. 19.

one iota of the declarations of God, to disarm your enmity, or to conciliate your good will; neither will we condemn or reproach you for these things: we will rather “pray the Lord of the harvest, that he may send forth other labourers into his harvest,”¹ who may gather in the full sheaves where we have only gleaned the scattered ears; who may be abundantly fruitful, where we have been barren; who may, without suppressing the truths of Scripture, be enabled to present them more unexceptionably, and to enforce them more successfully. We will rest contentedly upon the promises of our God, and believe with the prophet of old, “I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain; yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.”³ “Though Israel be not gathered,” the Lord shall be glorified.

² Luke x. 2.

³ Isaiah xlix. 4.

The inspired historian, having mentioned this fact, of the departure even of "many of the disciples," immediately adds our Lord's own affecting comment upon it: "Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."⁴ How near do such little incidents as these appear to bring us to the heart of Jesus, and of him whose life we are considering! we can almost behold the affectionate Redeemer looking round upon his "little flock,"⁵ and while marking their diminished numbers, making that inquiry which must have touched the hardest heart; we can imagine we see the zealous Peter pressing forward from the circle, and almost interrupting the reproachful inquiry, eager to disclaim, for his brethren and

⁴ John vi. 67—69.

⁵ Luke xii. 32.

himself, the possibility of such an act, burning to relieve his own bosom by a voluntary confession of a faith already matured unto certainty, and a regard which, even then, had ripened into love. Who can read his answer, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life," without rejoicing that a reply so encouraging to the heart of every believer was thus elicited, and without sincerely desiring to appropriate it to himself? Be assured, brethren, that there are states of mind in which these incidents, which the careless reader of his Bible is apt to consider trifling and unimportant, come home with the most irresistible energy and power—times when we are unable to apprehend the blessed doctrines, or to apply the precious promises of Scripture; but when a single brief, and touching sentiment like this will carry balm to the wounded spirit, or suggest a prayer to the prayerless heart. Often have I

heard one of the most interesting writers of the present day declare, that at a period of his life, when his soul was powerfully tempted to “deny the Lord who bought him,” and to fall back into the mazes of infidelity from which he had even then but partially escaped, the only declaration of Scripture, upon which he could find a momentary resting-place, was that which we are now considering, that during this awful and long continued conflict, in the solitude of a sick room, a prey to pain and weakness, greatly needing those consolations which the errors of a false religion, and the heartless dogmas of scepticism, never could supply, unable to close with the blessed offers of salvation through the blood of Jesus, and yet willing to cling, as with a dying hand, to his cross, the affecting exclamation which burst continually from his lips, and alone imparted even a hope of peace, was this : —“ Lord, to whom shall I go ? thou

hast the words of eternal life." A cry of faith, faint and imperfect indeed ; so imperfect and so faint, that had man been the judge, it never would have reached the mercy-seat, and yet a cry which, presented by a merciful High Priest, entered into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth, and brought " help from the sanctuary, and strength from out of Zion." ⁶

But, my brethren, melancholy is the state of those, who leave the great question undecided till such an hour as that ; with a body weakened by suffering, and a mind impaired by disease, to have to struggle against our mighty enemy, and to seek, for the first time, a refuge from his attacks ; to be asking, " To whom shall I go ? " when you ought to be saying, " I know whom I have believed ; " ⁷ to be preparing for the conflict, when you ought to be ready to say, " I have fought the good fight, I have

⁶ Psalm xx. 2.

⁷ 2 Tim. i. 12.

kept the faith;" to be putting on the helmet, at the very hour when you ought rather to be looking for the crown.

Why will you thus delay? Why will you not now voluntarily ask the question, which your fears will then compel you to ask, "To whom shall we go?" We are now able to reply to you, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world."⁸ Our gracious Redeemer now assures you, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."⁹ Trifle not with these offers, I beseech you, my beloved brethren, as if they were for ever within your reach, and waiting your approval. It may not always be in our power thus to offer, or in yours to accept, these gracious proposals. There is a time when long indifference may have closed the ears, or habitual sin have hardened the heart against every message of a Saviour's love. There is a time when the Spirit may cease to strive

⁸ John i. 29.

⁹ John vi. 37.

with you, when he may “ laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh;”¹ when you may be given over to the waywardness of your own will, or to the undisturbed indulgence of your own indifference. If we could lead you to the bed-side of one of the many who, in this vast parish, are yearly passing from time into eternity, without any saving knowledge of him to whom they are going, such a sight would preach, far “ louder than a thousand homilies,” the urgent necessity, while in full possession of your health, and of your faculties, of seeking Him who alone “ has the words of eternal life.”

You do not know, God grant you never may know, by experience, the miseries of the chamber of sickness, when unillumined by the rays of the gospel of peace; the agonies of a dying hour, with the great work of salvation left undone. A God to go to, but no Father—a Judge,

¹ Prov. i. 26.

but no Saviour—an eternity opening before your eyes, but no heaven in which to spend it!

O! to whom shall you go at that hour, if you do not now fly to the Saviour of sinners, and find pardon for your sins, and peace for your souls?

Rest not, then, we urge you, by all the hopes and fears of a blissful or miserable eternity, rest not upon an undefined expectation of God's mercy, without having approached him through that Redeemer who is the only "way" which mercy has ordained. Be not content with any thing short of this experience of the apostle, "that you believe and are sure," that the Saviour of sinners is indeed your Saviour, that his offers are accepted, his merits pleaded, his righteousness applied, his commands obeyed by you, according to the grace which is given unto you, that all these things are truly yours, even as you "are Christ's, and Christ is God's."²

² 1 Cor. iii. 23.

LECTURE IV.

MATT. xvi. 22.

“ THEN PETER TOOK HIM, AND BEGAN TO REBUKE HIM, SAYING, BE IT FAR FROM THEE, LORD, THIS SHALL NOT BE UNTO THEE.”

So deep is the corruption of our nature, and so frequent the waywardness of our will, that we are never more liable to fall into sin, than when upon the highest pinnacle of spiritual elevation. Have we experienced much of the divine presence in the hour of prayer, we scarcely rise from our knees before some successful temptation reminds us that, notwithstanding our near approach to the mercy-seat, we are earth-born sinners still. Have we been enabled to overcome some spiritual enemy, to resist some carnal inclination,

to minister successfully to the necessities of some poorer, or more ignorant fellow-creature, a feeling of satisfaction or self-complacency too often succeeds the effort, in a manner so unexpected, and for which we are so little prepared, that we find sin has mingled with, and ruined the duty, almost before it had been concluded. Who that has ever looked attentively into his own heart will deny this? And who that does not deny it, will scruple to confess, with anguish of soul, and with a secret aspiration for penitence and pardon, “that every imagination of man’s heart is only evil continually?”¹

These reflections have naturally suggested themselves, from a review of that portion of the narrative in which we are at present engaged. In our last Lecture, we beheld Peter deserving, and receiving the approbation of his Saviour for his astonishing confession of faith, and his affecting demonstration of love. We are

¹ Gen. vi. 5.

now to see him subjected to the rebuke of his Divine Master, for an improper exhibition of that same zeal, which had lately distinguished him in so honourable a manner above his fellows. Our Lord, anxious to correct the misapprehension of his followers upon the tendency of his mission, and the nature of his kingdom, endeavoured to prepare their minds for the ignominy and suffering which shortly awaited him. "From that time forth," as we read in the 16th chapter of St. Matthew, "began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter," Peter always foremost either in good or ill, "took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be unto thee;" or, as the marginal reading gives it, "Pity thyself," O Lord, spare thyself! The affectionate heart of the

apostle could not bear the thought of such indignity and such suffering, awaiting the Master whom he loved, and his impetuous temper could not brook in silence to hear of it, although foretold by that Master himself, and declared that "thus it must be."

Upon no other occasion did our Lord so deeply resent, or so severely reprove, the transgression of an apostle. "He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

Perhaps the first feeling excited in our minds, by this reproof, is rather a feeling of dissatisfaction. We are almost tempted to complain, that the punishment was disproportioned to the offence. Our hearts plead for Peter, and we cannot bear to see him in disgrace. But, my brethren, the only method in which fairly to estimate the criminality of the advice, is to follow it out into action,

and then to mark its tremendous consequences. Our Lord checked midway in his career of suffering; that was the advantage proposed. Man's redemption unpurchased, would have been the inevitable result; the everlasting doors, unopened; and the great enemy of souls, who had overcome the first Adam, triumphing, for ever triumphing, over the broken promises, and the unsuccessful mission of the second. These were the results for which Peter, however unwittingly, was pleading. Can we be surprised, therefore, that at such a moment our Lord should recognize in the advice of his disciple, only the evil suggestions of Satan himself?

My brethren, there is a word of counsel, a word of warning, which by God's grace may be profitable to us all. What was the origin of Peter's error? It was not merely the abundance of his love for his Divine Master; this will never lead us into sin, never be imputed to us as

our guilt; never, therefore, could have drawn forth so deeply cutting a reproof. Be assured that there was more than met the ear of man in Peter's counsel; there was a root of bitterness, unseen by human eye, but clearly discerned and obviously laid open by our Lord when he said, "Thou savourest the things that be of men." That was the head and front of his offending. The fear of men, the love of men, the good opinion of men, worldliness in its most destructive form, had struck its fibres into Peter's heart: and had they not been thus at once eradicated by the great Husbandman, they would soon have taken root downwards, and borne fruit upwards, a prolific and a deadly harvest.

Peter had dreamed so long of a temporal kingdom, of earthly grandeur and promotion, that the painful sounds of suffering and death grated harshly upon his ears; and while urging his Master to escape them, it is too probable that

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or he + etc. in the text

some little hope was lingering in his bosom, that what was evaded by the master, would not be required of the disciple; that if these sufferings, and degradations, were put away from Christ, they would not be prepared for Peter. Our Lord, therefore, has left this pointed reproof of one of the dearest of his followers, for ever upon record, that no future believer may indulge a hope that he shall be held guiltless where Peter was rebuked; that if from worldly considerations, you be led to compromise the honour of God, to prefer in your own case, or to recommend in the case of others, the soft and easy path of safety in preference to the sterner and more rugged walk of duty, whatever be the alleged or the real motive, which dictates such a choice, you are from that moment "an offence," an adversary to him whom you profess to follow.

How important a consideration to every one among us! Where is the

believer, whom Satan does not, at some period of the spiritual course, ply with temptations similar to this? To the more advanced Christian, it may not, perhaps, be a frequent method of successful assault; but to the younger of my hearers, I would particularly apply the case in question. Is there no friend without, no faithless counsellor within, who, when he beholds you really determined by God's grace, to do, or to suffer, all that the revealed word of God demands, is apt to whisper in your ear, "This be far from thee," this cannot be required of thee? Or when you clearly distinguish, from the light of the divine word, that the religion which you profess has ever been, and is intended ever to be, a self-denying religion; when you see around you practices and habits which you are convinced are utterly inconsistent with the principles of the Gospel of Christ; and when you endeavour, by God's grace, to separate

from these things, and to walk more worthy of the vocation wherewith he has called you, do you never receive counsel such as this—do you never hear the insidious voice, perhaps from your own friends, perhaps from your own family, ‘Pity thyself, spare thyself;’ ‘Be not righteous over-much?’ Is this language not utterly unknown to you, my brethren? Then be assured, by whomsoever spoken, that it is the language of an adversary, the voice of Satan, an injury to your souls, “an offence” to your Saviour. Be warned by the words of Christ himself, that whatever would keep you back from an unshrinking fulfilment of all God’s commandments, from an entire devotedness to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, even with the cross upon your shoulders, upon the path of painful duty, stands self-condemned by these words of your Redeemer; for such advice “savoureth not the things which be of God, but

the things which be of men." This is the test, to which we would urge you to bring every counsel you receive, every advice which may be offered, "to the law and to the testimony ; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

Whatever savours of the things which be of men, that is to say, whatever rule of conduct has for its foundation, the desire of propitiating the favour, or averting the opposition of men ; whatever is founded upon the ungodly, though, alas ! too fashionable doctrine of expediency, or worldly policy, with no reference to the will, or the honour, or the glory of God, is unscriptural, unholy, and unsafe. It may, for a time, have fewer crosses, and less anxieties : you may congratulate yourself, upon your wisdom and your prudence ; but be assured, that the end will be bitterness and vexation of spirit. Better, infinitely better, to take up at once the cross, to

bear the opprobrium, to become, if needful, a bye-word and a reproach, than, by a constant succession of timid, temporizing efforts, always shrinking from the confession of your real feelings, always attributing your refusal of sinful enjoyments to any motive but the true one, to suffer the men of this world, as David says, “foolishly to think that you are even such an one as themselves;” or worse than this, to remain so long “halting between two opinions,” that when at last the book of life be opened, you shall too late discover, that your name is not enrolled therein; that you have never been decidedly with the Saviour, and that therefore he has pronounced you to be against him; that as you have not suffered with him, so neither shall you be glorified together.

The course of the history, in which we are engaged, has now brought us to one of the most beautiful incidents in the life of our Lord—his transfiguration; the

particulars of which astonishing event, are thus related: "It came to pass that Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John." All the disciples were not to be thus highly favoured. Our Lord selected these three; and if we inquire why these, in preference to the remainder, it was doubtless, because as they alone were soon to be the witnesses of his dreadful agony in the garden, the most touching proof of the reality, and infirmity of the manhood of Christ, they supereminently required this strongest evidence of the truth of his divinity.

Jesus, then, taking Peter, James, and John, "went up into a mountain to pray;" yes, great and unquestionable as was the inherent power of our divine Saviour, every mighty work which he performed on earth, was ushered in by PRAYER. Was he to be announced at his baptism as the beloved Son? we are told it was "while Jesus was PRAYING that the heavens opened and the Holy Ghost

descended.” Was he about to ordain his apostles? “ he continued all night in prayer to God.” Did he intend to spend the day in preaching? we read, that, “ rising up a great while before day, he departed into a solitary place, and there PRAYED.” Did he design to encourage the falling apostle? “ I have PRAYED for thee, that thy faith fail not.” Did he seek consolation for himself? “ being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly.” Thus was it also in the instance we are considering. “ As he PRAYED, the fashion of his countenance altered, and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.”

You will observe, it was “ as he PRAYED.” O! my brethren, how wonderfully does God honour prayer! Not a blessing does he promise, except in answer to humble, fervent, faithful prayer. He who had appointed that all these glories should be manifested, to exalt the Saviour in the eyes of his people, ap-

pointed also that even he, the eternal Son himself, should for our sakes ask for them.

What can you then expect to receive at the hands of God unasked for? Not even a continuance of temporal mercies, of the garments which wax old, or of the bread which perisheth: and if not of this poor pittance, which our heavenly Father bestows on you, in common with the beasts that perish, still less can you expect to receive, unsought, the bread of life, the garment of salvation. Be assured then of this, my beloved brethren, that if you ever hope to be the object of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, it is by prayer that you must seek it; never do his blessed influences so fill, and renovate, and spiritualize the soul, as in the hour of prayer; never are you so closely assimilated to that glorified state which awaits you, as when you are enabled to draw near in secret communion to the mercy-seat, and, raised for

a time above earth, and its concerns, feel, and speak, and think, almost in the language and the thoughts of heaven.

“ And behold there talked with him, two men, which were Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory.”

It was not enough that our Lord, thus transformed and glorified, presented himself before his disciples ; he also called into his presence, these two of the most eminent of his departed servants—Moses, who had long since gone the way of all flesh, and seen corruption ; and Elijah, who had passed out of time into eternity, but never tasted death. Could a more convincing proof have been offered, that Christ was the King of quick and dead, and that “ all live to him,” than, that while thus sitting as a sovereign, in his robes of state, he should receive this splendid embassy from the land of spirits ? Could a more instructive spectacle, a more satisfying evidence of the possibility of the general resurrection,

and the general judgment, have been presented to the eyes of the astonished disciples, than these two most appropriate representatives of those, who in the graves shall one day hear the voice of Christ, and shall come forth, and of those who shall be alive at his coming, and shall meet the Lord in the air, and receive their appointed sentence?

Truly it was a sight, which had it only passed before the eyes of the apostles with a momentary brilliancy, and disappeared, would have well repaid for years of earthly trouble; but there is something still untold—this supernatural visit did not pass in silence: the disciples not only saw these bright ones, but heard the heavenly music of their voice.

And upon what subject did they descant? what could be of sufficient interest to engage the tongues of these spirits of just men made perfect?

Did they converse upon the greatness of the Saviour's majesty, or the glories

of his kingdom ; upon the blessed company they had left, or the holy and happy service in which eternity, to them begun, was rolling on its blissful way ? Nothing of all this engaged these holy visitants. “ They spake,” says the evangelist, “ of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.”

Doubtless, for the merciful purpose, of reconciling the minds of the apostles to that tremendous scene, of which they were so shortly to become the painful witnesses. These heavenly visitors desired to know nothing, to speak of nothing, during their short return to earth, but “ Jesus Christ, and him crucified !” How wonderful a tribute to this unutterably high and holy subject ! “ To the Jews, a stumbling-block, to the Greeks, foolishness ;” to the nominal Christian, weariness ; but to the church of the first-born assembled in heaven, the one great subject which engages every tongue, brightens every eye, fills

every heart. And shall we, my brethren, discard this sacred theme, this mystery of mysteries, which immortal angels desire to look into, and glorified saints rejoice to speak upon! Lamentable is it for the church of God, lamentable for those who preach and those who hear, when the pride of worldly wisdom raises them above these humbling truths, and when a system of cold morality, assumes the place of this theme of heavenly love. And lamentable is it also, my Christian brethren, when any subject, be it what it may, usurps the place of this one momentous truth; aye, even when the elevating subject of Christ glorified obtains an undue pre-eminence, above the saving subject of "Christ crucified," a theme of which eternity itself shall not grow tired; for even among the spectacles of heaven, we read of "the Lamb *as it had been slain*;" even among the songs of heaven, we hear the reiterated chorus, "Thou wast *slain*, and

hast redeemed us to God by thy *blood* ;” even there is the recollection of the cross of Christ which adds unspeakably to the lustre of his crown.

Continuing the narrative, we find that no sooner did the disciples behold this splendid company, than “ Simon Peter said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here.” Yes, even the natural heart can appreciate this ; it is good to be present during a vision of glory, far better than to hear of suffering humiliation, and death. “ If thou wilt, let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias.” St. Luke adds to this account of it, that Peter said this, “ not knowing what he said.” Surely he could not have known what he said, when he thus proposed that the citizens of heaven should once more become “ strangers and pilgrims upon earth :” he could not have known what he said, when he offered a temporary tabernacle of man’s erecting, as a resi-

dence for those who dwelt within the walls of that "city, whose builder and maker is God." Here, then, again the zealous Peter "spake unadvisedly with his lips;" for be ye sure, my brethren, that there is not one resident in the courts above, who would return to earth for the most glorious of worldly portions, or even for the dearest of earthly friends. The language of the lowest saint in that blessed place unquestionably is, "I would rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God," than to dwell in the proudest palaces, or rule the richest kingdoms upon earth. When, in some moment of deep and heartfelt regret for those who have gone before us to their rest, we are tempted, and who is not so tempted? almost to desire that our departed friends might again revisit us, might again "take sweet counsel together, and go up with us to the house of God as friends," or unite their voices to ours in prayer and praise, and once more take up a

temporary abode in earthly tabernacles, we indeed “know not what we say.”— “It is good for us to be here :” blessed for us, who are at present “living by faith, not by sight,” to enjoy these imperfect communications with our God, to be “upon the Mount,” and approach as near to heaven, as this state of imperfection will admit; but what would even the highest of these enjoyments be to those blessed spirits, who now see God’s face in righteousness, and know, even as they are known? O! if you hope that you have one friend, one relative in those blissful scenes, instead of unavailing regrets for their absence, or desires for their return, be more unceasingly earnest, more devotedly persevering, in following them, even as they followed Christ; always bearing in mind the consolatory assurance, that you may go to them, though they cannot return to you. Wait but a little while, and the services of the heavenly temple, will be open to

yourselves, and you shall again unite with those you love, in praises which shall not weary, and in a worship which shall never cease.

But we must briefly conclude this instructive subject: "While Peter yet spake, behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him. And when the voice was passed, Jesus was found alone." How glorious a testimony from God himself, to the pre-eminence of the "beloved Son!" Moses and Elias are overshadowed by the bright cloud, and vanish from the sight, but Christ remains! The law, and the prophets, yield to the far clearer, and more glorious dispensation of the Gospel.

The veil which had long been drawn over this great truth, is for ever thrown aside, and Jesus stands confessed "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords!"

"Hear ye him," was the death-note

of the old dispensations, as they passed into oblivion.

“Hear ye him,” is the inspiring cry of the church militant, as she goes on her way warring and travailing upon earth.

“Hear ye him,” will form a portion of the chorus of the church triumphant, when, having “overcome by the blood of the Lamb,” she shall sit down an honoured and a glorious bride, at the everlasting table of the Lord.

How can we, then, your fellow-labourers, and “helpers of your joy,” leave a more hallowed sound upon your ears? what more valuable admonition, can we pray the blessed Spirit of God, to carry home to your hearts, than these words of the great Jehovah himself, “This is my beloved Son, *hear ye him?*”

That you may so hear that adorable Redeemer, as to believe, receive, and obey him, may God of his infinite mercy grant!

LECTURE V.

MATT. xix. 27.

‘ THEN ANSWERED PETER, AND SAID UNTO HIM, BEHOLD, WE HAVE FORSAKEN ALL, AND FOLLOWED THEE; WHAT SHALL WE HAVE THEREFORE?’

AN abundance of this world's goods has been in all ages among the greatest impediments to a consistent following of the Lord Jesus Christ. Seldom in the days of his earthly sojourn, do we read that the rich, or the mighty, or the noble, were called into his kingdom. “Have any of the rulers believed in him?” was the triumphant inquiry by which, in the earliest infancy of the Gospel, its followers were shamed into silence. It was to the poor especially that the Gospel was preached; it was from the

ranks of the poor and the destitute that many were chosen, “rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom;” and while the Saviour of the world was despised by the great and rejected by the wealthy, he daily partook of the poor man’s fare, lodged in the poor man’s dwelling, and selected from the poor man’s kindred, the companions of his ministry, and the promulgators of his Gospel.

In the 19th chapter of St. Matthew, we have an interesting account of our Lord’s conversation with a young and wealthy ruler, who appeared desirous of embracing the new religion; he was contented patiently to listen to our Lord’s injunction, “Keep the commandments,” because he vainly flattered himself that his character was unimpeachable; but no sooner did he hear the words, “Sell what thou hast and follow me,” than we are told, “he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” Then said Jesus unto his disciples,

“ Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.” You who are labouring unremittingly to “join house to house, and lay field to field,” without a thought or a desire beyond the attainment of these perishable possessions, learn from the lips of your Redeemer the true nature of the work in which you are engaged. You are merely assisting the great enemy of your souls, in forging those golden chains, with which he binds you to his cruel service. Difficult as the work of salvation unquestionably is, to every fallen child of Adam; to the rich, and to the man “hastening to be rich,” the difficulty is infinitely increased: with a profusion of the gifts of God, the ungrateful heart of man becomes, in general, strangely alienated from the heavenly Giver: with an earnest desire after wealth, comes an increasing indifference to spiritual duties and spiritual privileges; with an attain-

ment of wealth, comes frequently a sordid selfishness, deadness of heart to God, coldness to the brethren. Few Christians perish from the cutting winds of adversity, many wither and fall away beneath the burning sun of prosperity. Intimately was he acquainted with the human heart, who looking around upon the splendid mansion of his friend, and remarking the exulting expression of his countenance, exclaimed, "Aye, these are the things that make a death-bed terrible?"

Simon Peter, who was present at the interview, upon which we have been commenting, no sooner witnessed the departure of the young man, and heard our Lord's instructive warning, than, as we read, he answered and said unto Jesus, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee: what shall we have therefore?"

If it be, and who will deny it? a most difficult achievement to forsake all

for Christ, this inquiry of Peter will convince us, that it is even yet more difficult to do it, with simplicity of purpose, and singleness of heart—to suffer no intermingling of unworthy motives, to influence us, in the great work of dedicating ourselves to God. In reference to this, watch over yourselves, my brethren, with a most jealous eye, upon every step of the Christian course; analyze carefully your motives, scrutinize your intentions, see that “the recompense of the reward,” especially of the temporal reward, hold not too prominent a station in your hearts; if you be poor, see that your religious duties be not to recommend you to the rich; if young, that they be not to attract the notice, or the praise of men. Whatever be your station, whatever be your age, let your prayer and your effort be, to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, in all godly sincerity, with a single eye to his glory, and an utter disregard of

every thing compared with the one attainment, which alone is worthy of you, the approbation of your God.

How greatly do we all need these cautions; for, alas! how prone we are, to sully every effort, in the cause of Christ, by the mixture of unholy motives, and to desecrate every offering, by an undue estimation of its worth. Observe even Peter, the warm-hearted, the spiritually-minded Peter, unable to restrain those natural feelings, which would make a merit, of the smallest act of self-denial for the Lord's sake. "Behold!"—an exclamation of astonishment—"we have left all, and followed thee." We should imagine, that the man who could speak thus, had come from palaces of cedar, and laid crowns and sceptres at the feet of Jesus! Who would believe, that a paltry fishing-boat and its mended nets, were the all of which he predicates so largely? Yet this is constantly the manner in which men speak

of sacrifices for the sake of Christ. However trifling, however valueless, some questionable pleasure, some unjust or unholy profit, if relinquished at the command of God, how is it magnified into importance, amid the littlenesses of our obedience! But turn we from the demand of Peter, to the astonishing reply of his indulgent Master: "Verily, I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Observe, my brethren, how immensely disproportionate, will be the rewards of heaven, to all the self-denials and services of earth! Instead of the forsaken fishing-boats upon the sea of Galilee, thrones of glory, in the eternal kingdom! instead of the seat of the publican, an assessorship with Christ! Who could have anticipated such a reply to the inquiry, "What shall we have

therefore?" We can imagine, that the heart of Peter, must have sunk within him, under a sense of utter unworthiness, when he heard of such an unspeakably splendid return, for so poor, and pitiful an offering.

O! my brethren, I trust that the heart of every one among you, responds to this feeling; reflect only for a moment, and it cannot be otherwise. When you have forsaken all for God, what have you sacrificed?—Some paltry gratification, which perishes in the using. When you have given up your whole soul and body to him, what have you bestowed?—A poor, unworthy, blemished offering, which after all, was not your own, but his who had already bought it with a most costly price. When you have done all for him, what are you at your best estate?—"Unprofitable servants, who have done what was your duty to do."¹ Are you not ashamed to be for

¹ Luke xvii. 10.

ever talking of merits, and rewards, as if the Most High were your debtor; as if he were actually enriched by a few indifferent prayers, or an occasional act of self-denial, obedience, or charity? Does it never occur to you that the condescension, and forbearance of God, are infinitely more exercised, by the acceptance of such imperfect services, than your obedience is magnified by the performance of them; and that your debt of gratitude to God is therefore obviously increased, instead of cancelled, by such payments as these? We cannot picture to ourselves an individual, we cannot conceive the state in which that man's heart must be, who can believe that standing before the judgment-seat of Christ, a pardoned sinner, he shall demand repayment for his sufferings, and his services, and his charities upon earth: nay, we cannot imagine one who, when he shall be most graciously reminded of these things by our Lord, shall not rather

ask, with feelings of unaffected surprise, “ Lord, when saw I thee an hungred and fed thee, naked and clothed thee, a stranger and took thee in ? ”² Surely then, instead of demanding, What shall we have ? the inquiry of a grateful heart will be, What shall we do ? How can we more promote the honour and glory of God ? How can we more devote ourselves, our time, and our substance, to him who is “ not only able, but willing to do abundantly for us, above all that we can ask or think ? ”³

But while we feel it thus a duty, to discountenance an over-anxious estimation of our own imperfect offerings, it is truly encouraging to observe in the passage before us, that our gracious Redeemer is not unmindful of them. No sooner has he revealed the paramount degrees of blessedness awaiting his disciples, than clearly to demonstrate that his rewards should be as numerous as

² Matt. xxv. 37.

³ Eph. iii. 20.

his servants, and that in the dispensation of his gifts none should be forgotten, he immediately adds, "Verily, I say unto you, there is no man," marking that the blessing he is about to promise should not be limited to the apostles, "there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time; houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions, and in the world to come eternal life." If then you seek assurance of your reward, behold it here; but observe that it is at the same time coupled with the assurance of suffering. A real, heartfelt reception of the Gospel of Christ may, and often does, bring with it, even at the present day, a species of persecution—the jeer, the taunt, the private sarcasm, the public ridicule: it may be accompanied

by the coldness of worldly friends, or the loss of the good opinion of those you love ; it may separate the wife from the husband, the child from the parent, not as the necessary consequence of the Gospel of peace, but, as the apostle expresses it, of “ the carnal heart, which is enmity against God.”⁴ Our Lord well knew, that these would in all ages be amongst the most painful trials of his followers ; and therefore he left on record this blessed assurance of a proportionate reward, and observe how admirably adapted to the necessities of his people.

We will imagine a case which we trust is not common at present, but which we fear is at no time positively unknown. Your devotion to the commands of your Redeemer, your desire “ to live godly in Christ Jesus,”⁵ no longer “ to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the

⁴ Rom. viii. 7.

⁵ 2 Tim. iii. 12.

renewing of your mind,"⁶ has alienated from you the affections of your natural counsellors and friends ; the members of your own family look coldly upon you ; where you were accustomed to meet with kindness, you encounter reproach, and in the bitterness of your first feeling of anguish, you are ready almost to ask, how can even a Saviour recompense me for these things? It is in this state of mind that you will learn to appreciate the beautiful compensation of the promise. It is here, on earth, and in these tender relationships, that you have suffered thus acutely for the sake of Christ ; then, independently of your purchased reward hereafter ; independently of the real joys which even here, the Saviour's felt, and acknowledged presence, will bestow, you shall be abundantly recompensed. For every relative you have lost, for every friend you have estranged from you, " you shall receive," says our

⁶ Rom. xii. 2.

Lord, “an hundred-fold now in this present time, brethren, and sisters, and mothers.” Those who bear the Saviour’s image, and love the Saviour’s name, love also the Saviour’s people, and will be to you, even while on earth, more affectionate, more valuable, more endeared, than the nearest earthly relative, uninfluenced by these spiritual feelings, could have ever been. These are “the brethren, and sisters, and mothers,” who shall never fail you, but having gladdened your path by the endearments of Christian friendship here below, shall be united to you yet more closely, when you shall together “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of your Father.”⁷

The next incident, to which I shall desire your attention, in the life of him, upon whose history we are commenting, is one of the deepest interest to every believer; one in which, we shall find Peter himself not so much a speaker, as

⁷ Matt. xiii. 43.

a hearer, sitting at the feet of his Divine Master, and making an inquiry upon a subject, which has in all ages deeply engaged the thoughts, and attentions of the true church of Christ; but perhaps at no one period since that inquiry was made, so universally as at the present. We are informed, in the 24th chapter of St. Matthew, that the disciples, filled with admiration at the architectural magnificence of the temple, had called the attention of our Lord to its beauties, and in reply, that he had forewarned them that the time was coming, when “there should not be left one stone upon another, which should not be thrown down.” The inspired historian then continues: “As Jesus sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” The reply to the former of these inquiries, “When

shall these things be ?” occupies the first twenty-eight verses of the chapter, clearly foretelling that tremendous visitation, which the pages of history have since so faithfully verified. Our Lord then answers the latter question, “What is the sign of thy coming?” in these words: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days,”—a tribulation, be it remembered, which, though it commenced with the destruction of Jerusalem, has not even yet run the whole of its terrific course—“the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken, and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

The mind in its present state of imperfection, much as it cannot but desire

to see the day of the Son of man, shrinks from the scrutiny of such a vision. That we shall all one day behold, face to face, the Saviour of whom we now speak, and hear, and read, and think; that we shall see with our own eyes the print of the nails, and the mark of the Roman spear; that we shall indeed look upon him, “whom having not seen, we love,” is as certain as the promises of God can render it—a certainty to which the heart of the true believer turns with “joy unspeakable and full of glory;”⁸ and never does he say, “thy kingdom come,” without rejoicing that Time is winging on his way his rapid flight, and hastening the wheels of his chariot. Most naturally then did Peter ask, “What shall be the sign of thy coming?” Most naturally does the church, as if with one voice and one heart, reiterate the inquiry. Upon such a subject we would not presume to dogmatize; great injury

⁸ 1 Pet. i. 8.

has been already done to the cause of truth, and to the minds of inquiring Christians, by an attempt to speak plainly and positively, where God himself has intentionally spoken obscurely. We doubt not that “the day of the Lord,”⁹ come when it may, “shall,” to the many, “so come as a thief in the night;” and that, therefore, when the world in general, is least anticipating it, there is the greatest probability of its arrival. But of this also we feel assured, that as no great event, no remarkable revolution has ever happened in the history of the world without having been distinctly foreseen by many reflecting, thoughtful, penetrating intellects; so no great event has happened, or ever will happen, in the church of Christ, which will not have been “looked for and hastened unto” by many among his prepared and expecting people.

We would say therefore to you, with

⁹ 1 Thess. v. 2.

reference to this great event, what our Lord has said unto all, “WATCH,” “for ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.”¹ The book of prophecy is in your hands; the remarkable events of the days in which our lot is cast, are forming a rapid commentary upon the most ambiguous of its pages. Suffer not these things, to be without their practical influence upon your hearts. Fix an humble eye upon the signs of the times; search the Scriptures of truth with reference to the return of your Redeemer, which, from the continual allusions to it in the writings of the New Testament, was never intended to be overlooked; and although it is our firm conviction that you will not find sufficient evidence to attach you to any of the numerous theories at present rife, we believe you will find sufficient, fully sufficient, to make you seriously thoughtful, sufficient to make you “seek” more

¹ 1 Thess. v. 4.

earnestly “those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God,”² and more ardently to long, and more faithfully to look, for “the coming of the Son of man.”

In conclusion, let me endeavour briefly, but practically, to apply this portion of the subject. Are you, my brethren, waiting for the coming of your Lord? Have you ever considered it a Christian's duty to make this inquiry? Do you really believe that he shall come? And are you anxiously expecting that solemn event? As Christians you assuredly are; you read it in your Bibles, you acknowledge it in your creeds. Let me then ask, how are you evincing by your life and conversation, that this is indeed an article of your faith, an object of your hope?

Observe for a moment the manner in which we act under similar circumstances in the common affairs of life. The friend you most love has gone to some far distant

² Col. iii. 1.

clime, but he has promised to return ; you believe his promise, the time is fixed, and is unquestionably certain, but he has not mentioned to you the day. During the interval, in what manner do you conduct yourselves ? As the term of his long absence wears away, does he not engross every thought, and occupy every feeling, and form a prominent part in every arrangement ? You recollect every thing which used to afford him pleasure, and you prepare it for his reception ; you remember every thing that gave him pain, and you most cautiously, most scrupulously avoid it ; you think no sacrifice too great, no recollection too minute, if it may but enable you to minister to his delight, and to gratify him on his arrival. Your heart is so occupied with his promised return, that it is far less delightful to you to associate with others, than to think of and remember him. Every morning sees you at the throne of grace, praying that another sun may not set

before your anticipations have been realized, and you are not, you cannot be satisfied with any thing short of the fulfilment of this prayer.

Now, my Christian brethren, I would ask you to apply this to the state of your minds with respect to the promised return of your Lord? Do you know any thing of such feelings as these? Do you in any respect so feel, and so think, and so act, with regard to his arrival? If not, what further proof do we require that either you do not believe him, or you do not love him as you ought? If you believed him, you would live as those who were expecting his coming; if you loved him, you would live as those who longed for it. In every act of your life there would be a reference to this wished-for event. In your most sorrowing hours, you would "weep as though you wept not;"³ and in your most joyful hours, "rejoice as though you rejoiced not;" in

³ 1 Cor. vii. 30.

your busiest hours, you would “buy as though you possessed not;” and every day and every hour, you would “use this world as not abusing it.” You would be careful to allow yourselves in no posture of mind, in no indulgence of tempers, in no occupations or amusements, in which you would blush to be found by your Lord.

You acknowledge, you cannot but acknowledge, that all this is perfectly true if applied to the return of any earthly friend: what argument then will you use to prove that it does not and ought not to be applicable to the return of that “friend who sticketh closer than a brother?”⁴ Will you say that you have no such love for him, who so loved you as to give himself for you; that the Bible requires no such love, that his people have never felt such love, that you cannot be expected to desire his presence with the same feelings with which you desire

⁴ Prov. xviii. 24.

the presence of those you love on earth. So saying, you would only demonstrate that at least one of the signs of our Lord's return is sufficiently visible—"the love of many shall wax cold."⁵ It was not so with the holy men of old; it was not so with David, for he expressly said, "there is none upon earth whom I desire in comparison of thee." Although the mutual love between him, and Jonathan, was, as he himself expresses it, "wonderful, passing the love of women," it was as nothing, and less than nothing, in comparison of his love to God. In this love, be assured, every true child of God, in every age, has partaken; in this desire for the Saviour's return, his true people have in all ages united; in this anxiety to keep themselves unspotted from the world against his wished-for coming, all his redeemed servants sympathize. Try then the state of your spiritual affections by this test; observe what would be the effect upon

⁵ Matt. xxiv. 12.

your heart, and mind, and expectations, if you were assured that the day of the Lord was even now about to dawn upon you ; if the reply to your inquiry, “ What is the sign of thy coming ? ” were to be, “ Behold, I come quickly, ”⁶ would it sound the knell of your departing pleasures, of all in which your hearts, and minds, and thoughts are now engaged ; or could you really welcome it as the fulfilment of every prayer, the completion of every hope ? Could you reply from your heart, “ even so come, Lord Jesus, ”⁷ this is the hour which I have prayed for, hoped for, lived for, “ even so come, come quickly. ”

This, and this alone, is the reply of those who, with their loins girded and their lamps burning, are waiting for the return of their Lord. This, then, be assured, is the reply of all those who shall go in with him to the wedding, and shall sit down for ever at the marriage

⁶ Rev. xxii. 20.

⁷ Ibid.

supper of the Lamb. That it may, therefore, before the bright advancing sign of the Son of man shall be seen in the heavens, before he shall come to you, or you shall depart to him, be the heartfelt reply of every soul here present, may God of his infinite mercy grant!

LECTURE VI.

JOHN xiii. 8.

“ PETER SAITH UNTO HIM, THOU SHALT NEVER WASH MY FEET, JESUS ANSWERED HIM, IF I WASH THEE NOT, THOU HAST NO PART WITH ME.”

IT is one of the striking peculiarities of the method of teaching adopted by our Divine Master, that the truths which it was the object of his life to promulgate, were not elaborately preached in a series of continuous discourses, but rather incidentally touched upon in some striking apothegm, or shadowed forth under some significant symbol. Thus, it was while sitting upon Jacob's well, that our Lord so beautifully discoursed upon “that well of water which springeth up into everlasting life.”¹ It was while looking

¹ John iv. 14.

upon the "fields white already to the harvest,"² that he so strikingly alluded to that eternal harvest, when both "he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together." It was when the people followed him for the bread that perisheth, that he delivered one of the most instructive of his discourses upon "the living bread which came down from heaven."³ It was at the feast of tabernacles, while beholding the Jewish ceremony of pouring forth the water of Siloam, "in the last day, that great day of the feast, that Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."⁴

In the incident with which the present Lecture commences, we shall find an additional and peculiarly beautiful testimony of the truth of this remark, while we behold our Lord, by one of the most significant actions of his life, illus-

² John iv. 35, 36.

³ John vi. 51.

⁴ John vii. 37.

trating one of the most important doctrines of his Gospel. We are told in the 13th of St. John, that at the supper which took place before the feast of the passover, or rather at the antepast, for it is evident that it occurred upon the same evening, “ Jesus laid aside his garments, and took a towel and girded himself. After that he poured water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter, and Peter,” whose love for his divine Master could but ill bear to behold him so servilely employed, “ said unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus said, What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.” At present you behold only the act itself, mysterious and unaccountable; hereafter you shall be fully satisfied of its wise and merciful intention.

My Christian brethren, surely for our

sakes this was written ; for us and for our children. For will not your own experience justify me in saying, that the Lord has dealt thus upon many, and most important occasions with yourselves ? How many an act of your gracious Redeemer, many a dark and mysterious providence in your lives, which was once utterly unintelligible, is even now made clear and satisfactory ! You have, for instance, been visited with unexpected adversity ; your situation in life is changed from affluence to poverty ; or your trials have been of a different nature—you have been bereaved of those dear relatives, and friends, with whom your tenderest affections were bound up ; and this, perhaps, at a time when they were most valuable, most useful, most endeared. Some of you, I doubt not, have lived to see, that these were acts of wisdom, and of mercy ; and some, perhaps, though fully reconciled to the blow, and prostrated in the dust before

the chastening visitation, and able to say with the Shunammite of old,⁵ "It is well," cannot *yet* discern that it was love which held the rod; to you, my afflicted brethren, your gracious Redeemer at this day speaks as he here spoke to Peter, "What I do thou knowest not *now*, but thou shalt know hereafter." As years roll on, if you are a child of God, you will look back not only with contentment, but even with gratitude, upon those dark and trying dispensations; in many instances it will, I doubt not, be vouchsafed to you even here to distinguish that God has done all things wisely and mercifully, and that some of your most painful trials have been among your choicest blessings. But should this not be given to you, should you be doomed to pass not only through this pilgrimage state, but even out of it, in utter ignorance of the motive of many of your severest chastenings, rest your

⁵ 2 Kings iv. 26.

hearts in their most troubled hours upon this gracious declaration of your Lord, "THOU SHALT KNOW HEREAFTER." His intentions will not be for ever thus hidden from his children. In infancy the child takes much from his father upon trust; as he grows up, it is the parent's delight to explain to him every act and every word. So will your heavenly Father also deal with you. All shall one day be made plain to you, and you shall see that He who "never willingly afflicts or grieves the children of men," has not laid upon you one cross, has not inflicted one pang, which he could with safety to your best interests, or to his own glory, have ventured to withhold. Surely it will bring an increase, even to the joys at God's right hand, to trace out the paths by which he carried you thither, although you may behold them covered with thorns, and moistened with your tears.

But we must return to the incident

before us. Peter, unconvinced and unsatisfied by our Lord's explanation, suffered the natural impetuosity of his temper to render him even more pe-remptory than before. "He saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Here is at once the key to the mystery before us: Jesus literally washes the disciples' feet, to signify to them most impressively that they need him, spiritually to wash and purify their hearts.

My brethren, a more important declaration was never made by the Saviour of the world than that with which he here addresses you. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." You may be the members of the visible church of Christ, you may bear the name of Christ, you may be baptized with a Christian baptism, and attend upon Christian ordinances; but if, in the sense here alluded to, you have not been

washed by Christ, that is, cleansed from the guilt of your sins by his blood, and purified from the power of them by his Spirit, you have no part in his atoning sacrifice now, you will have no place in his kingdom hereafter. Most solemnly would I urge this consideration upon your consciences, as one of the most deeply important that can engage them. Thousands are living in grievous error upon this point, and I dare not hope, that none of you are among the number. If there be but one, then let me obtain his serious attention while I thus address him. You believe that you are safe, because you are externally a member of a truly scriptural church, and a regular attendant upon her valuable services. As the handmaid of Christ your church is invaluable, and she is well able, under the divine blessing, instrumentally, to guide your path, and to support your footsteps, from the time when she first receives you into her fold, “ a child of

God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven," until the hour when she speaks her parting benediction, and returns her "hearty thanks" to him, in whom you have believed, that he has taken you to himself. But if you put her in the place of your Redeemer, if you are seeking that at the hands of the servant which the Master, and the Master only, can supply, you will find too late, that although like "the mixed multitude,"⁶ who went up with the true Israel of God out of the land of their captivity, you may have swelled the ranks and echoed the prayers of his people, you have neither part, nor lot, in the purchased inheritance.

"If I wash thee not," are the words of our Lord. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin:"⁷ be assured that he has not "washed you from your sins in his own blood,"⁸ unless you have gone to Him with a truly penitent heart, humbly con-

⁶ Exod. xii. 38. ⁷ 1 John i. 7. ⁸ Rev. i. 5.

fessing your sins, earnestly desiring pardon, and entirely depending upon the merits of his sacrifice, and intercession, to reconcile you to God. Now, we would solemnly ask you, has any such transaction as this ever passed between God and your soul? Have you ever been led to see the guilt and the heinousness of sin, to feel the plague of a corrupt heart, and to pray for its removal? Have you ever been thus made the subject of the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Christ, and of the transforming, renewing influences of his Spirit? I do not say, can you remember the day, can you name the hour, when such a change was effected? There may be, we are well aware, much enthusiasm upon this subject, but O! let not the enthusiasm of others, be a cloke for your coldness and indifference. If such a change as this, have ever taken place in your heart, you must be sensible of it. It is too momentous ever to be forgotten. “A man,” says Archdeacon

Paley,⁹ who assuredly was no enthusiast, “might as easily forget his escape from a shipwreck.” Be not satisfied then until you have ascertained this great truth with regard to your own soul; search narrowly, probe deeply, see whether there be “in you an evil heart of unbelief,”¹ or whether you have scriptural grounds for believing that the “blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel,”² has been applied to your conscience, and that you have thus been washed by Christ; for remember, that if not, the word of Christ himself is passed, that “you have no part with him.”

Peter, now convinced, by the declaration which we have been considering, of the great importance of this symbolical action of our Lord, “said unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but my hands and my head.” His prayer, now that he was enabled to

⁹ See Paley’s Sermon on the Doctrine of Conversion.

¹ Heb. iii. 12.

² Heb. xii. 24.

understand the spiritual meaning of the act in which our Lord was engaged, resembled the prayer of David,³ “ Lord, wash me throughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sins.” “ Jesus saith unto him, He that is washed, (or as it might have been rendered, ‘ he that is bathed,’) needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.” He who has just come from the bath, although his feet may be soiled by the dust upon which he has trodden, is, in other respects, clean every whit; or, applying this to ourselves, you who have been made the subjects of the cleansing efficacy of the blood of the “ Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,”⁴ “ Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”⁵ You therefore need not to be again thus washed, again justified; but we beseech you, rest not upon any former act of pardon, let not the high privilege

³ Ps. li. 2.⁴ Rev. xiii. 8.⁵ 1 Cor. vi. 11.

of having been forgiven all trespasses, make you indifferent to your continual short-comings and sins ; be assured that you do still unquestionably need the daily, hourly application of the blood of Christ, for the cleansing of that pollution, which is contracted at every footstep in this world of sin ; you therefore faithfully, humbly, and penitently, must also continually resort to “the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness,”⁶ “that the God of peace may sanctify you wholly, and that your whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁷

Our Lord having performed the significant action, upon which we have been speaking, and again taken his place at the table, and enlarged upon the great Christian duty of humility, so obviously taught us by that astonishing instance of it, which he had just exhibited, proceeds thus to address his assembled disciples ;

⁶ Zech. xiii. 1.

⁷ 1 Thess. v. 23.

“ Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.” “ Then,” says the inspired historian, “ the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples whom Jesus loved; Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake.” He who is here alluded to, as the disciple whom Jesus loved, was, as we find from the twenty-first chapter of his Gospel, St. John: he it was to whom, as possessing so high a place in the intimacy and affection of our Lord, even “ leaning upon his bosom,” Simon Peter applied himself to obtain an answer to his question.

My brethren, would you inquire any thing at the hands of God? do you earnestly desire instruction and guidance? then seek an interest in the prayers of those who are admitted to the closest communion with God; they can ask for you, many things that you, through ignorance

or inability, cannot ask for yourselves; for, “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”^s Above all, be sure that you make every inquiry, present every petition, through the intercession of that Friend who is nearest to the throne of grace, even through the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father; all that he asks for you will assuredly be obtained; for, if “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,” the effectual fervent prayer of a perfect Mediator must be irresistible.

“He then,” continues the historian, “lying on Jesus’ bosom, said, Lord, who is it?” How beautiful is this union of the closest intimacy, and the most profound respect! St. John, though permitted to lean upon his Saviour’s bosom, remembered still the immeasurable distance there must ever be between them. “*Lord, who is it?*” At

^s James v. 16.

those moments when you are admitted to the nearest union that created, finite beings can ever know, with him who is uncreate and eternal, beware of the slightest approach to familiarity : in all your inquiries, in all your prayers, while they breathe the spirit of a child, and are dictated by the confiding love of a son, forget not the reverence due to a father : remember that God himself has said, “ If I be a father, where is mine honour ? If I be a master, where is my fear ? ”⁹

Our Lord having, in answer to Peter's inquiry, distinctly pointed out the traitor, thus began, as we learn from the parallel passage in St. Luke's Gospel, to caution Peter himself against his approaching danger : “ Simon, Simon, behold Satan, hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat : but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not : and when thou art converted,” when thou

⁹ Malachi i. 6.

hast recovered from the fall which I foretel, “strengthen thy brethren.” How awful a warning was this to Peter! your great adversary “desires to have you:” at the same time how encouraging!—he does but “*desire:*” as the lion chained, he rages open-mouthed; but there is a limit which he cannot pass.

My Christian brethren, you stand at the present hour in the same danger that Peter stood; you have the same adversary, and he is still filled with the same determined animosity, still actuated by the same dreadful desire to sift out from you all that is valuable, and to leave only the “chaff, which shall be burned with unquenchable fire.”¹ Eighteen hundred years, of too successful enterprise against the souls of men, are not likely to have weakened his strength, or diminished his cunning; he is still the same indefatigable oppo-

¹ Matt. iii. 12.

ment who ruined Judas, and who almost triumphed over Peter ; and he is at this moment urging all his efforts of cunning and strength, and all his inexhaustible resources of trial and temptation, against the soul of every individual who names the name of Christ. He is incessantly striving for the ruin of each, even of the youngest, the poorest, the most inconsiderable among you, and is desiring your soul as anxiously, as unceasingly, as if it were the only prize upon this world's surface worthy of his efforts. May we not then, ought we not, as those who have the charge over you in the Lord, seriously to ask you, Against such an enemy, where is your resource ? what is your strength ? You will not find it in your own resolutions—you need not seek it in your own heart. There is no armour of earthly temper which is proof against his fiery darts, no weapon that you can form against him, which shall prosper. He who was too cunning for

Solomon, too strong for Samson, will not be baffled by your wisdom, or subdued by your strength. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you,”² is the declaration of God’s own word ; but resist him, in the power of your own might, and he will laugh you to scorn. It is from the armoury of heaven alone, that weapons can be brought, fitted for this spiritual warfare. Do you, then, seek them there ? Does every day behold you earnestly imploring, through the merits of the Redeemer, arms from on high to enable you to fight the good fight ? It is through the prayer of your ever blessed Intercessor that you can alone find grace equal to your need ; it is from the power of the Spirit that you will alone obtain strength equal to your day. “ I have prayed for thee ” — there is your refuge. “ When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against

² James iv. 7.

him”³—there is your strength: leave these aids unsought, and the event is already certain, your defeat is inevitable: seek them constantly, faithfully, fervently, and we do not say you will be invulnerable, but we do not hesitate to say you will be invincible—“kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.”⁴

Happy had it been for Peter, if, thus warned, thus counselled, by the awful declaration that there was an enemy full of power, and full of cunning, watching for his halting, and striving for his ruin, he had instantly acknowledged his weakness, and betaken himself to the strong for strength. There was time for reflection, time for self-searching, time for prayer. Had he instantly cast himself at the feet of Jesus, and poured out the heartfelt acknowledgments of his own utter incapacity to struggle with the approaching enemy, he would, doubtless,

³ Isaiah lix. 19.

⁴ 1 Pet. i. 5.

have been saved from the hour of temptation ; the shield of celestial temper, would have been thrown over him, and the fiery darts of the wicked one, would have fallen harmless at his feet. But, alas ! the warning voice, although it was the voice of his Master and his God, sounded but in vain. “ Peter said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee both into prison and to death.” Then his Divine Master, clearly perceiving the evidences of that “ haughty spirit which goeth before a fall,”⁵ thus distinctly and solemnly foretold his approaching sin : “ I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.” Peter, unsubdued, unsoftened, hurried forward by the tempter, who plies his efforts with such rapidity, that when we have once entered upon the treacherous deep, wave follows wave in incalculably quick succession—“ Peter said unto him,

⁵ Prov. xvi. 8.

Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee ;” thus putting the final seal to the sentence which now became irrevocable. O ! my brethren, “ let him ” among you “ that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.”⁶ Peter firmly believed that he could die for Christ, and yet he lived to deny, and to abjure him. At this moment, then, how can the most sincere, most faithful, most confident among you, be more secure ? Every thing of stability which belongs to the creature, vanishes before the tremendous onset of the powers of darkness. You possess nothing in which Peter was deficient ; how then can you expect to stand, where Peter fell ? Your heart is devoted to your Redeemer—and was not Peter’s ? your conscience acquits you of any premeditated intention to deny him—and did not Peter’s ? your confidence urges you to declare, that worlds should not tempt you to such an

⁶ 1 Cor. x. 12.

act—and what was the language of Peter? Alas! it is indeed only the hour of trial which reveals us to ourselves; and that hour shows us, that at our best estate we are nothing, and less than nothing, and vanity. You may now scoff at the probability of danger; you may imagine your rock so strong, that it shall never be removed; but you will find a season, when your solicitations to sin will be urgent, and its pretences plausible, and its opportunities easy, and the hopes of recovery or concealment probable, and the sin itself unusually fascinating; in such an hour, if you are trusting to your own strength, you will assuredly fall. There is not that sin, even to the betrayal of your friend, and the denial of your God, to which, in an hour of presumptuous confidence, the natural heart may not be seduced.

My younger brethren, yours is the age, and yours the state of Christian feeling, when men are most confident of

their stability, and therefore when they are most liable to fall. It is to you, then, we would particularly apply this example. Avoid every thing approaching to self-confidence, and let the constant desire of your heart, and effort of your life be, to maintain a humble, lowly, self-distrusting, prayerful walk with God: be assured it is not any grace already received, it is not any resolution made, it is not any experience obtained, which can keep you from falling, if you are walking carelessly, or confidently: at the same time, be ye equally assured, that it is not any temptation, not all your spiritual enemies, however numerous, or however powerful, who shall prevail against you, if you are depending simply upon your God; then, indeed, you shall “never perish, neither shall any man pluck you out of his hand.”⁷ While, therefore, you are thus simple in your trust, and earnest in

⁷ John x. 28.

your watchfulness, you are safe ; it is the separating these things, which the unerring word of God has for ever united, which will be your ruin. “ If you look to stand in the faith of the sons of God,” says the judicious Hooker,⁸ “ you must hourly, continually be providing and setting yourselves to strive. It was not the meaning of our Lord and Saviour in saying, ‘ Father, keep them in thy name, that you should be careless to keep yourselves. To your own safety, your own sedulity is required. And then, blessed for ever and ever be that mother’s child, whose faith had made him the child of God. The earth may shake, the pillars of the world may tremble under us, the countenance of the heavens may be appalled, the sun may lose his light, the moon her beauty, the stars their glory ; but concerning the man that trusteth in God—what is there

⁸ See the whole of this beautiful and well-known passage, Hooker’s Works, fol. edit. 1622, p. 550.

in the world that shall change his heart, overthrow his faith, alter his affections towards God, or the affection of God to him? If I be of this note, who shall make a separation between me and my God? * * * I know in whom I have believed; I am not ignorant whose precious blood has been shed for me: I have a Shepherd full of kindness, full of care, and full of power: unto him I commit myself: his own finger has engraven this sentence on the tables of my heart—‘Satan hath desired to winnow thee like wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.’ Therefore the assurance of my hope I will labour to keep as a jewel unto the end; and by labour, through the gracious mediation of His prayer, I shall keep it.”

LECTURE VII.

MARK xiv. 37.

“ HE COMETH AND FINDETH THEM SLEEPING, AND SAITH UNTO PETER, SIMON, SLEEPEST THOU? COULDEST NOT THOU WATCH ONE HOUR?”

“ CEASE ye from man,”¹ is one of those divine injunctions, which, although presented to us in the word of God, and daily and hourly impressed upon us by the providences of God, is most difficult of reception and arduous in practice. Our lot is cast for the present among weak, imperfect sinning mortals like ourselves, and we feel it to be one of the happiest circumstances of that lot, that as we are all blest with the same sympathies, and partakers of the same sorrows and the same joys, these sor-

¹ Isaiah ii. 22.

rows are divided, and these joys are multiplied, when in the union of Christian fellowship, we suffer, or rejoice, together. But as every virtue has some nearly related vice, so every happiness in our present state of imperfection has some kindred sorrow for ever at its side ; the very sweetnesses of human friendship, are too often preparing us for the bitterness of disappointment ; and the staff upon which we delight to lean, only supports us for a time, that it may gradually crumble into dust beneath our weight, or suddenly break and pierce us while it fails us.

We are now entering upon a scene in which the weakness of human friendship, the utter helplessness of human friends, the necessity in our hour of need of ceasing from man, and resting our souls upon the rock of ages, will be loudly taught us by the frailty, and infirmity, even of the warm-hearted Peter himself.

Immediately after those events which were brought before you in the last discourse, Jesus “went forth with his disciples into a place called Gethsemane, over the brook Cedron, where was a garden into which he entered and his disciples: and Jesus saith unto them, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder; and he taketh with him Peter, James, and John.”

The same disciples who had been witnesses of his transfiguration and his glory, were now to be the witnesses of his humiliation and his suffering. James and John had but a short time before boldly asserted, that they were able to be baptized with Christ’s baptism of suffering, and to drink of his cup of sorrow. Peter had just declared that he was ready to go with him, even to prison, and to death. Of all his disciples, none had so confidently courted the conflict, none, therefore, had less reason to complain that they were now placed in the

front row of the battle, and made a spectacle to men and angels of the weakness of man's best determinations, and the infirmity of the strongest faith.

Then, continues the evangelist, "Jesus began to be sore amazed and very heavy." This was the period of our Lord's greatest suffering, and acutest agony. The horrors of the cross were not to be compared with the terrors of the garden; in the former his bodily sufferings were predominant, but here, his mental agonies.

That evil spirit, who, after the temptation in the wilderness, had "departed from him for a season," now returned with tenfold greater virulence, to grapple with him in his hour of weakness, and, if it were possible, to frustrate for ever, the one great purpose of his mission.

Doubtless, when our Lord entered the garden, he could discern those hosts of spiritual enemies, who, unseen to mortal eye, unknown to mortal apprehension, were thronging the midnight air, waiting

the appointed time when they might struggle, hand to hand, with the second Adam, as they had once, alas! too successfully, assailed the first. That time had now arrived. "This is your hour," said our Lord to the conspirators, "and the power of darkness."

Every description which the evangelists give, of the state of mind in which our Lord entered upon the conflict, prove the tremendous nature of the assault, and the vivid and perfect anticipation of its terrors, which possessed the mind of the meek and lowly Jesus.

Thus the expression employed by St. Matthew, signifies literally, that Jesus was "surrounded" with grief; that of St. Mark, that he began to be "exceedingly astonished, and to be overwhelmed with anguish;" that of St. John, that his soul was in the greatest "perturbation." Then it was that our blessed Lord, in his human nature, almost overpowered by what should come upon him, about to

pour out his soul, “ with strong crying and tears,”² before the throne of his heavenly Father, anxious at such an hour, to secure every aid to which suffering mortality can fly for refuge, expected to derive something of support and consolation, from human sympathy, and human friendship. For we read, that he said to the three disciples, whom he had selected as, of all his dear companions, the dearest to his heart, “ My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death ; tarry ye here and watch with me.”

What an entreaty was this from the Lord of life to his poor helpless creatures ! “ Watch with me : ” at once the highest duty, and the sublimest privilege, ever offered to created beings ! To be thus, as it were, united to the Saviour in his last conflict ; while he alone fought the battle with those powers of darkness, from which mere mortality would have shrunk defeated, and dismayed, to be

² Hebrews v. 7.

permitted to watch, and to pray with him, to strengthen his failing hands, to cheer his fainting spirit, freely to offer all at least of those poor services, which man could offer at such an hour, and in such a contest! Thus, as Aaron and Hur of old, held up the arms of the exhausted Moses, that Israel might triumph over Amalek, so were those beloved disciples now required to hold up the arms, and aid the prayers of their fainting Master. Surely one such hour in Gethsemane, would not have been too dearly purchased by a participation in Calvary itself.

And now, were we strictly to confine ourselves to the history of him upon whose life we are commenting, we should tarry with Peter at the gate of the garden, and await the return of Jesus; but, my Christian brethren, however deeply we may be interested in Peter, we cannot but be far more deeply interested in Peter's Lord. Let us, then, for a few moments, follow the Lamb of God into

the inmost recesses of the garden ; let us behold his sufferings and his agony ; let us listen to his reiterated prayer ; so shall we, under the divine blessing, derive a more profitable lesson from the Master, than the disciple could ever teach us.

Behold, then, the Lord Jesus, having withdrawn about a stone's throw from his disciples, prepares alone to encounter the spirits of evil ; and yet he is not alone, for his Father is with him.³

Listen to the first words, which, after he has fallen upon the ground, in deepest anguish of spirit, burst from his lips : “ He said, “ O, my Father.” Surely, never before, throughout the eternity of his existence, had these words been prompted by such feeling, as now filled, and oppressed his bosom !

How blessed was it for our Lord, how blessed is it for us his children, that in our utmost extremity we have still a Father. Human counsellors may for-

³ See John xvi. 32.

sake, earthly aids may fail us in the day of trial; companionless and friendless we may be—*orphans* we can never be; we have a Father always near, always powerful, always desirous to hear, and willing to answer the cry of his children. “If it be possible,” continues our suffering Redeemer, “let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.” “And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground.” This was but the beginning of sorrows; and yet even here behold the tremendous penalty of sin. See the Son of God crushed even to the earth, beneath the weight of man’s accumulated guilt; bleeding at every pore, from inward agony; writhing beneath the terrible attack of the tempter, and praying, earnestly praying, that if the great work for which he now was struggling, could be effected with less of suffering, his hour of agony might be short-

ened, and this most bitter cup be taken from his lips.

My Christian brethren, “is this nothing to you, all ye that pass by?”⁴ Have you no personal interest in this appalling scene? Know you not the cause of the tremendous conflict, which that garden witnessed? the reason that this man, who “knew no sin,”⁵ knew so much suffering?—Alas! this is what it cost, to redeem our souls! It was now, that the Lord of life “was wounded for our transgressions;”⁶ he was bearing the penalty, which we had fully merited; he was now agonizing beneath the wrath of God, submitting to the assaults of the tempter, oppressed by the sins of the whole world, suffering, the innocent for the guilty, that he might bring us to God.

We beseech you, brethren, when you next dwell in imagination upon the delights of some favourite sin, think of its

⁴ Lam. i. 12. ⁵ 2 Cor. v. 21. ⁶ Isa. liii. 5.

effects as you behold them here. Let your answer to the tempter be, “Get thee behind me, Satan,”—I am no longer deceived by the specious beauty of the exterior; I have now seen sin, in all its undisguised, and terrible deformity; I have seen its fearful effects in the garden of Gethsemane: and I desire, by the help of my God, never again to look with a momentary complacency, or to enter into a momentary alliance with that enemy, to ransom me from whom, my adorable Redeemer thus prayed, and agonized, and bled.

It was in the very midst of these, his acutest sufferings, that our blessed Saviour bethought himself of the friends, whom he had left at a little distance, to comfort him by their watching, and to strengthen him by their petitions: and, as we are told, Jesus, seeking that solace which he now so greatly needed, rose up from prayer and came to his disciples. What then must have been the feelings

of bitterness, which wrung the deeply-sensitive and affectionate heart of our Lord, when he discovered his followers not watching with anxiety, not praying with fervency, but “sleeping for sorrow.”

What a picture of the slothfulness and indifference of fallen man! how distressing an evidence of the carnal security even of the apostles! Much may no doubt be spoken in extenuation: they were borne down by grief; they had been long watching; the midnight air was damp and cold; but when we have said all, a fearful reckoning will still remain.

Upon this, however, it best becomes us to be silent; our own watchings are too drowsily performed, our own prayers too faithlessly offered, to permit us to raise our voices against these sleeping disciples; let us rather observe, and imitate the meekness of our perfect Master, who never yet has “broken the bruised reed, or quenched the smoking flax.”⁷ Jesus

⁷ Matt. xii. 20.

said unto them, more in sorrow than in anger, “Why sleep ye?” and then, as if almost overlooking the neglect of the others, in the still greater delinquency of Peter, he turned to him and said, “Simon, sleepest thou? Coudest not thou watch one hour?” Thou hast offered to die with me—canst not thou watch with me? St. Mark assures us, “They wist not what to answer him.”

Do we not grieve for human nature?—do we not grieve for Peter?—do we not grieve for ourselves, while witnessing such a scene? He who had before so loudly professed, to be now so guiltily silent; he who had for his own convenience or emolument watched through so many a lonely night in his fishing-boat upon the sea of Galilee, to be now unable to watch a single hour with his suffering Master.

My Christian brethren, weep not for Peter, but for yourselves and for your children. It is not Peter's likeness alone

which we are now portraying; look closely, and you will find some striking features of your own. Have you not all made great professions of service to your Lord? Have you not all virtually declared, that you would be “Christ’s faithful soldiers and servants unto your lives’ end;”⁸ do you not constantly renew this dedication to him of all you are, and all you have, in the sacrament of his supper, the military oath which ought to bind you to your leader? Should he then visit you in person, as he has declared he will—should he be present with you now in spirit, as he has declared he is, how would he find you occupied? As regards the service of the Lord Jesus, are you watching, or are you sleeping? O! if your hearts return a faithful answer, how many must reply, that although their professions have been as loud as Peter’s, their watching has been as careless, and their sleep as sound.

⁸ Baptismal Service.

Let us enter yet a little more closely into this important, this heart-searching subject ; let us solemnly inquire of every one among you, have you ever really watched one hour with Christ ? Did you ever spend an hour in secret communion with him, or in serious meditation upon all that he has done and suffered for you ? Perhaps you will think this too long a period to have been thus engaged ? Then let us again inquire—have you never watched one hour with the world ? Do you think an hour too long when spent upon its worthless services ; nay, are there not some of you, who do not think a whole night too long to be spent in the temples of sin, or in the retreats of folly ? But when you are called upon to watch and pray, you are wearied, utterly wearied, before one little hour has run its course. Would that our Lord could make the same excuse for you which he so mercifully offered for his sleeping disciples ! “ The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Would that of every one

here present, we might truly say—whatever be the weakness of your corrupt nature, there is a heart still right with God, a spirit which indeed is willing, which hates the bondage of the world; and most unwillingly submits to its degrading trammels! which courts not voluntarily its sinful pleasures, but when overtaken by the noxious torpor which they shed around them, struggles against that sleep of death, and rouses itself, and seeks earnestly more grace, that it may be enabled to shake off its slumbers, and work out its salvation, while it is day.

You best know, my brethren, whether there be such a heart in you, whether yours is the spirit which loves the world, or which sighs that it is so restrained and fettered down to earth, by the poor tenement of clay in which it dwells, and longs, ardently, constantly longs, for the hour when it shall breathe a purer atmosphere, and live amid the joys at God's right hand.

Three times did the Lord thus visit

his disciples ; three times did he, after all his kindnesses and all his warnings, find them sleeping ; and twice did he retire from them in utter disappointment, to weep, and pray, and agonize alone.

No human fellowship, no mortal aid was extended to him in these hours of suffering. “ Of all whom God had given him he had lost none ;”⁹ yet not one individual could he find sufficiently wakeful, sufficiently interested, sufficiently affectionate, to watch and pray with him one hour ; no single being into whose bosom he could pour the tide of his anguish, save into the bosom of his God. Well did the pious psalmist say,¹ “ Put not your trust in princes, nor in any child of men, for there is no help in them.”

At the strongest, man is too weak ; at the wealthiest, too poor ; at the firmest, too fickle for your support ; to-day

⁹ John xviii. 9.

¹ Psalm cxlvi. 3.

making protestations of fidelity, to-morrow demonstrating their utter emptiness and insufficiency. “Cease ye from man;”² seek that friend who neither slumbers nor sleeps, whose “gifts and callings are without repentance,”³ whose friendship knows no change, whose love knows no decay, and who has himself declared, whatever be your danger or your sorrow, “Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.”⁴

It was when our Lord was thus destitute of human succour, that, as the apostle to the Hebrews assures us, “He was heard in that he feared;”⁵ “for there appeared an angel from heaven strengthening him.”⁶ The messenger of God rejoiced to perform the office, which man, ungrateful man, neglected.

And does not the child of God experience this at the present hour? When

² Isaiah ii. 22. ³ Rom. xi. 29. ⁴ Isaiah lxxv. 24.

⁵ Heb. v. 7.

⁶ Luke xxii. 43.

the heart of the proud is closed against you, and the face of the rich is turned away from the poor man, the throne of grace is still open to you, the Lord does not refuse to lift up the light of his countenance upon you: and when no word of kindness, no voice of sympathy is heard from man, many are the messages of tenderness and love which your heavenly Father conveys into your drooping hearts, by those invisible agents whose delight it is to “minister unto such as shall be heirs of salvation.”⁷

Jesus cometh unto Peter and his companions “the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now and take your rest; it is enough, the hour is come, behold the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.” Twice had he roused them from their slumbers, and enforced upon them the pressing dangers of their situation, and the urgent necessity of instant, fervent, prayer; adding, “Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation;”

⁷ Heb. i. 14.

ye have neither watched nor prayed for me, O! neglect not to do it for yourselves. But at his third visit, how different was the language of their divine Master: "Sleep on now, and take your rest;" the time for prayer, the time for watching has run out; those precious moments in which you might have gathered strength for the coming conflict, have been irretrievably wasted; the hours which I have spent in agony, you have passed in sleep; it matters little now whether you wake or sleep; your desertion is certain, your fall is inevitable.

My brethren, let these words of solemn import sink into your souls. Many have been your warnings; many have been your awakening calls; often while sunk in lethargy, and indifference, have the words of your Saviour been urged upon you by the voice of his ministering servants, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."⁸

⁸ Eph. v. 14.

You cannot deny the frequency, the urgency of these calls; but are there none among you who will confess that no sooner have you heard them, than you have again composed yourselves to sleep, forgotten all that has been promised, all that has been threatened, until another warning, or another threatening, has broken in upon your slumbers, only again to leave you, when its short-lived impression has died away, in apathy and indifference?

The great Jehovah himself has said, “My Spirit shall not always strive with men.”⁹

Be warned, then, we implore you, before warnings themselves are rendered nugatory. Believe that the Lord is this day expostulating with you, is this day solemnly inquiring, “why sleep ye?” is this day urging upon you the necessity, the instant necessity, of watchfulness and prayer, that you may be brought home

⁹ Gen. vi. 3.

to God through the sufferings and death of his dear Son. Are you still determined upon postponement, still dreaming of delay, and looking forward to “a more convenient season”¹ than the present? Then it is our duty, our deeply painful duty, to declare to you *that*, which if you thus persevere must be the inevitable result; upon you will be passed this awful sentence: “Sleep on now, and take your rest;” it is enough; mercy can no longer plead for you, justice now must have her perfect work. The neglected warnings, the promises despised, the convictions slighted, the wasted hours, the unheeded agony of your Redeemer, all cry aloud for justice—grace offered and contemned is now withdrawn; the word preached shall not profit you; it may still reach your ear, but its awakening power shall be for ever taken from it, it shall not penetrate your heart. Those heavenly sounds

¹ Acts xxiv. 25.

which come with healing on their wings to others, shall fall with withering blight on you. To others “ a savour of life unto life,”² to you “ a savour of death unto death.” Who can imagine a more awful, a more pitiable lot ! You may live to behold, as time rolls on, many whom you know, some whom you love, called by the joyful sound of the Gospel, justified, sanctified, and in God’s good time for ever glorified ; while you remain unchanged, unedified, unblest, a sad, and fearful monument, of warnings too often, and too long neglected. The sleep in which you voluntarily indulged, vainly thinking that you might at your good pleasure rouse yourself, now become habitual, judicial, confirmed ; no waking interval, no cessation to your slumbers, until they shall be broken by the last trumpet of the archangel, and you shall be summoned into those regions of sorrow from which sleep will be for ever banished ;

² 2 Cor. ii. 16.

where there will be no eye that slumbers, no heart that rests throughout a dark and cheerless eternity ; where their “ worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.”³

³ Mark ix. 44.

LECTURE VIII.

LUKE xxii. 61.

“AND THE LORD TURNED AND LOOKED UPON PETER.
AND PETER REMEMBERED THE WORD OF THE LORD,
HOW HE HAD SAID UNTO HIM, BEFORE THE COCK
CROW THOU SHALT DENY ME THRICE.”

THE incident to which we are now to request your attention, is perhaps the most painful, and the most improving, in the biography we are reviewing—Peter’s denial of his Divine Master! So entirely is this distressing event identified with Peter’s memory, that although we may find many persons who are ignorant of the striking, and beautiful instances of zeal, and of courage, of fidelity, and of love, with which his history is replete, we shall scarcely

find an individual, however unversed in sacred lore, who does not well remember Peter's denial, and all its attendant circumstances of cowardice and ingratitude, of duplicity and profaneness. Here, then, is one valuable lesson imparted at the very outset—the imperishable nature of every act, and thought, and word of sin. Eighteen hundred years have passed away since this admirable apostle fought the good fight, kept the faith, witnessed a good confession, and received the crown of martyrdom; yet does this single act of apostacy and sin keep its place upon the Christian records, and hang as a dark cloud over the brightness of his memory. Would that it might please the Spirit of God to fix this humiliating fact in your recollection, that you may never enter upon the smallest act of transgression, without bearing in mind, that all you are doing, you are doing for eternity! The memory of every criminal pleasure,

of every guilty indulgence is immortal ; no power on earth can teach you to forget it ; long after your course of sin shall be concluded, and your head laid in the dust, and your virtues, the virtues of the natural man, passed into oblivion ; the act of dishonesty, of duplicity, of unchastity, or of unkindness, of which, perhaps, you thought but little in the committal, shall be spoken of among men, shall be remembered before God. Every deed of sin is engraven, as with the point of a diamond, upon the everlasting tablets, and although the ceaseless flood of time is for ever passing over them, it cannot obliterate a single syllable of recorded evil. O ! were it not for the cleansing efficacy of the blood of the Lamb, shed for every penitent believer, how could the holiest among us bear to contemplate this awful truth ?

“ Simon Peter,” says the evangelist, “ followed Jesus afar off unto the high

priest's palace, and so did another disciple; that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest; but Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter." Here was the commencement of Peter's sin. Had not our Lord most solemnly warned him, that this night he should deny his Master?—was it therefore wise, was it even justifiable, that he should thus cast himself into the very furnace of temptation? It is in vain, my brethren, that you commence every morning of your life with that most necessary petition, "Lead us not into temptation,"¹ if, before the sun has set, you willingly throw yourselves into it; nay, if at the very moment you utter it, your heart acknowledges that you do not in sincerity, desire to be kept from its allurements—that in fact you love the

¹ Matt. vi. 13.

temptation, while you hope to escape the sin: such prayers rise not above the cloudy atmosphere of earth; they never reach the mercy-seat of God.

But again, had not our Lord, in reference to these very trials, and these very sufferings, which were awaiting himself, distinctly declared unto Peter, “Thou canst not follow me now?” Why then was he not content with the gracious promise, “Thou shalt follow me afterwards?” Why did he not wait till that appointed time, when he should be providentially called to sufferings, and to death, and being thus called, would have been certain to receive grace equal to his day? Alas! the time when these reflections might have sunk deep into his heart with most powerful effect, and have arisen to the throne of grace in all-availing prayer, had been slumbered fruitlessly away; he had not watched, he had not prayed, he had neglected to² “put on

² Eph. vi. 11.

the whole armour of God," and he was now about to cast himself unarmed "upon the thick bosses of the bucklers"³ of his spiritual enemies. Who that knows the strength of Satan, and the weakness of unassisted man, can doubt for a single moment that defeat, and shame, and ruin, were the inevitable result?

Very profitable is it to the Christian, to mark, step by step, the manner in which the powers of darkness advanced to the unequal conflict; how they favoured the approach of their intended victim, and shielded him from the attacks of other opponents, that "the fiery darts of the wicked one"⁴ might be pointed with a surer aim, and strike with a more deadly effect. No opposition was made by the conspirators, to his following his Divine Master; no active adherent of the chief priests, and elders, drove him back; notwithstanding his act of violence to the servant of the high priest, he is per-

³ Job xv. 26.

⁴ Eph. vi. 16.

mitted to arrive perfectly unmolested at the gates of the palace ; there, however, an unexpected impediment did arise, and we are for a moment induced to hope, that he may still escape that scene of temptation. The gates of the palace are locked ; his entrance, therefore, appears impossible ; nothing seems left for him but to return to his companions, and betake himself, as they had done, to a place of safety. Alas ! not so, does Satan suffer himself to be deprived of his expected prey ; a friend is found, even in the high priest's palace, to open the door, and bring in Peter.

Thus it is invariably, upon the commencement of every course of sin ; the indefatigable enemy of your souls, removes all obstructions, levels all opposition ; if you will but walk with him upon forbidden paths, he will take care that, for a time at least, they shall be both smooth and flowery ; if you but condescend to stand at the door of forbidden

pleasures, never will he permit you to be kept waiting; if you but entertain the guilty inclination, Satan himself will produce the favourable opportunity, and sooner than you should be disappointed, he will find for you, as he did for Peter, some friend, whose offices of intended kindness, shall open a way for your present desires, and your future ruin.

“ And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them, and warmed himself at the fire, and sat with the servants to see the end.”

Observe in this, the continuation of Peter's delinquency. Had he not thus voluntarily intermingled with the avowed enemies of his Lord, there would have been no danger; for there would have been no opportunity of denying him. His entrance into the palace might be, perhaps, excused, from the supposition that it was from fervent love to his Divine Master, and with a zealous desire,

at all hazards, to rescue, or to serve him ; but his quietly taking his seat among the servants of the high priest, and waiting like them, at the hall fire, “ to see the end,” is perfectly inexcusable.

There is something almost more distressing in the sight of Peter, thus selfishly engaged at such a time, and in such a place, than in Peter subdued by fears, from which the boldest might have shrunk, and acting the denier and the recreant.

But, my brethren, much as there is to humble, there is nothing in all this to astonish those who know the deep depravity of our fallen nature. This is the usual process of temptation : you enter upon some questionable path of morals or of conduct ; you intermingle with the men of the world, the servants of pleasure and vanity, the avowed or concealed enemies of your Divine Master ; and what is the result ? Coldness of heart, and deadness of feeling towards a

suffering Redeemer are speedily super-induced ; you become as totally different a person in the society of the men of the world from what you have ever been, while living in close communion with your God, as Peter amid the high-priest's servants, differed from Peter at the paschal supper. Your own comfort, your own ease, your own pleasures, are soon preferred to Christ ; and being thus gradually alienated from him you once have loved, your affections are seared, your heart is hardened, and your conscience is ultimately prepared, for the still greater sin of denying and abjuring him. If you would be safe, there must be no compromise, no temporizing : you must not consider how you shall act when in the company of the ungodly ; you must resolve that you shall not be found in such company ; you must say, with David, “ I will not know a wicked person ; ”⁵ the language of Jacob must

⁵ Psalm ci. 4.

be the firm resolution of your heart ; “ O my soul, come not thou into their secret ; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united ; ”⁶ with Caleb, you must determine, at all hazards and costs to “ follow the Lord FULLY,”⁷ and the event will be, that you will be kept in the hour of temptation, and will know by blessed experience, that “ peace of God which passeth all understanding.”⁸

It was while Peter was thus seated among the servants in the hall, that, as we read, “ a damsel came unto him,” saying, “ Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee ; ” but he denied before them all, saying, “ I know not what thou sayest.” Observe carefully, my brethren, the tendency of this first reply of Peter ; it was not a direct and positive denial ; Peter, when accused of having been with Jesus of Galilee, had not yet attained sufficient hardihood to declare that he never was

⁶ Gen. xlix. 6.

⁷ Numb. xiv. 24.

⁸ Phil. iv. 7.

with the Saviour, that he knows not the man—but he rather trusts, that an equivocating answer will be sufficient to secure his safety, and yet enable him to escape the guilt of a more distinct and absolute falsehood. “I know not what thou sayest,” I do not distinctly hear, I do not quite understand the charge. Alas! is not this the manner in which too many even at the present hour, endeavour to satisfy their own consciences, and at the same time to keep well with the world; not quite to deny their Lord, but so to escape from sinful compliances, that, while they evade the guilt of the committal, they may also evade the danger or the ridicule of the refusal. It is this misplaced ingenuity, brethren, which, while it deceives your friends, injures the cause of your Redeemer, grieves his Holy Spirit, and does not clear your own souls. The straight path, is the only safe path for the Christian, for it is the only path which leads to life; every other,

after all its windings and all its turnings, infallibly leads down to the chambers of death.

Peter had scarcely time to congratulate himself upon the success of his evasion, when another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth; and again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the man." Observe how the sin darkens as it proceeds; it is no longer an equivocation; by whatever name it might have been before denominated, it is now an absolute and undeniable falsehood: "I do not know the man:" a falsehood, backed by perjury, strengthened by an oath. Who could believe that the man who is thus solemnly swearing, that he does not even know our gracious Redeemer, was the same who, but a short time since, had uttered that most affecting declaration: "Lord, to whom shall we go, thou hast the words of eternal life?" Had Judas de-

clared, " I know not the man," we should have been ready to reply, ' Truth, for thou hast never known him ;' but, when Peter makes the same declaration, pity and regret stifle every word of condemnation.

Doubly painful to a Christian are the transgressions of a child of God, when, beholding what he is, we remember what he has been. When we see those among you who " have tasted that the Lord is gracious,"⁹ who have sat at their Father's table and eaten at their Father's board, content to feed with the prodigal " upon the husks which the swine did eat ;"¹ when we behold you who have once loved the service of your God, and the name of your Redeemer, again turning aside to folly, leaving the " paths of pleasantness and peace," and denying, by your lives and conversations, the Lord who bought you ; then it is that we cannot but take up the lamentation

⁹ 1 Pet. ii. 3.

¹ Luke xv. 16.

of the prophet ;² “ O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.” We can pray for others, but we cannot but weep for you. When we behold you listening unmoved, to truths which once had power to awaken your conscience and to melt your heart ; when we see you join in the scoff, and the ridicule, against those with whom you once rejoiced to mingle ; when we find you no longer loving the name of Jesus as “ the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely ;”³ no longer anxiously striving to fulfil the least of his commandments ; O, with what painful emphasis do those words of the apostle come home to our hearts : “ It is IMPOSSIBLE⁴ for those who were once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy

² Jer. ix. 1.

³ Cant. v. 10.

⁴ Marking its extreme difficulty.

Ghost, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”⁵

But the measure of Peter’s iniquity was not yet full. “After a while, came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely, thou art also one of this man’s disciples, for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man.” Here was the completion of Peter’s guilt; the disgraceful act of the denial repeated the third time, and now accompanied by horrible oaths, and imprecations. Ought we not, before such an example passes from our memories, earnestly to pray, “Lead us not into temptation,”⁶ and permit us not, O Lord, to lead ourselves thither; since Peter fell, who can be safe? Lord, “hold thou up our goings, that our footsteps slip not.”⁷

“Immediately, while he yet spake,”

⁵ Heb. vi. 4.

⁶ Matt. vi. 13.

⁷ Psalm xvii. 5.

continues St. Luke, "the cock crew." Surely no malefactor condemned to suffer for the violated laws of his country, ever heard his last hour strike upon the prison bell, with half the agony of feeling, with which that cock-crowing rang upon the ears of Peter! Still was there a sight which smote far deeper than that sound: "The Lord turned and looked upon Peter." Who can pourtray the silent eloquence of that last look? What volumes must it have spoken to the heart of the fallen apostle! Could he behold that well-known countenance, and again repeat, "I know not the man?" Could he see his divine Master "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb,"⁸ and again break forth into oaths and imprecations? Could he bear the reproach of that meek eye, and yet remain in the guilty scene amidst these enemies of his Saviour, and of his own soul? No! that single glance was all that was required to send home

⁸ Isaiah liii, 7.

the arrow of conviction and repentance to his bosom ; he instantly remembered the word that the Lord had spoken, and he “ went out and wept bitterly.”

Blessed be God that such an act of sovereign grace, and pardoning mercy, has been bequeathed to us ; that as we have witnessed Peter’s fall, the fruit of his own presumption, we are enabled also to witness Peter’s recovery, the fruit of his Saviour’s love. It was that single look of his Redeemer which brought back the erring sheep to the fold of the good Shepherd. Have you, my brethren, and who has not ? in thought, or word, or deed, by your worldliness or pride, by your unchastity or uncharitableness, virtually denied a spiritual and humble, a pure and merciful Saviour ? Then, while you receive the solemn warning, receive also the blessed encouragement of the scene before you. The Lord, amidst all his sufferings, took not his thoughts of mercy for a single moment from his sin-

ning disciple. Be assured he has not taken his merciful regards from you ; he is still looking wistfully and affectionately for your return. He did not wait, until Peter looked on him with an eye of penitence, before he looked on Peter with an eye of pity. He does not wait until you repent, he freely offers his “ preventing grace”⁹ to enable you to repent. He does not content himself with calling home his wandering sheep, but he seeks those that are lost ; and when he has found them, he carries them home “ on his shoulders rejoicing.” Can you really believe this without saying from your heart, “ Draw me, and I will run after thee ;”¹ “ Turn thou us, good Lord, and so shall we be turned ?” If I address any whose heart convicts him that by life and conversation he has denied him whose name he bears, (and remember that every forbidden act is unquestionably an act of denial,) to him I would

⁹ See the Tenth Article of our Church.

¹ Cant. i. 4.

most affectionately say,—let this be your immediate resource ; fix your thoughts, and your heart, earnestly and steadily upon your Redeemer, for he, and he alone, has both the power and the will, to restore your soul, and to reconcile you to your heavenly Father. Let this be your instant, fervent prayer—Lord, “ look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.”² Your wanderings cannot have been too wide, your sins too heinous, your denials too repeated or too aggravated, to hinder the effect of that look of power, that look of guidance, that look of love : through the influence of divine grace, it will not only speak to your heart, but change your heart, and bring you, in penitence and contrition, back to the fold, from which you have wandered.

Observe, in conclusion, the immediate effects of Peter’s repentance : “ he went out and wept bitterly.” He no longer

² Psalm cxix. 132.

remained among the enemies of his Lord ; he instantly forsook a scene of so much temptation, and to him of so much sin. We are not again told that he continued “ warming himself in the high priest’s palace,” or “ waiting to see the end.” That single glance of power from the eye of his Redeemer, had driven Satan from his prey, and dissolved the chains which he had wound about his captive ; the “ snare was broken, and he was delivered.”³

My beloved brethren, if you are really in earnest in your penitence, this also will be your course ; you will immediately, and for ever, forsake those scenes, and those habits, and those companions, who have induced you to deny your Lord : cost what it may, of ease, or pleasure, or comfort, like Peter, you will instantly go out from them ; worlds would not tempt you back, to tread that path of danger from which, by the preventing grace of God, you have been so mercifully extri-

³ Psalm cxxiv. 7.

cated. But although the first proof, this was not the only proof of Peter's penitence. "He went out and wept bitterly;" not in expiation of his sin, for all the tears which sinning, suffering mortality has ever shed, are utterly unavailing to wash away the faintest trace of guilt; he wept from very bitterness, from anguish of soul that he had so deeply offended One, so gracious and so merciful. He was assured of his forgiveness, for that look had told him that no anger lingered in that pure and perfect bosom. But did this thought arrest his tears? No; it was this, which bade them doubly flow; he could hear his Master say, 'You have denied me and disgraced me; the tongue of my friend has wounded me far more deeply than all the thorns and nails of my enemies ever can; I freely forgive you, I have prayed for you, and this moment demonstrates that I have not prayed in vain; you have escaped the destroyer; go, and sin no more.'

My Christian brethren, our Lord now

speaks to you, as his silent glance then spoke to Peter. He offers you a free and full forgiveness, deeply as you have wounded him, if you will but “look on him whom you have pierced, and mourn because of him;”⁴ if you will now, like Peter, forsake your sins and deeply deplore them, you shall hear of them again no more for ever. But let not the assurance of the Saviour’s pardon diminish the tide of the sinner’s tears; this is the mourning upon which your Lord has pronounced a blessing; this is the short-lived sorrow which ushers in, the everlasting joy: be willing with a broken and a contrite heart, now “to go forth weeping, bearing precious seed,”⁵ and the word of your God is pledged to you, “that you shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you.”

⁴ Zech. xii. 10.

⁵ Ps. cxxvi. 6.

LECTURE IX.

JOHN XXI. 18.

“VERILY, VERILY, I SAY UNTO THEE, WHEN THOU WAST YOUNG, THOU GIRDEDST THYSELF, AND WALKEDST WHITHER THOU WoulDEST; BUT WHEN THOU SHALT BE OLD, THOU SHALT STRETCH OUT THY HANDS, AND ANOTHER SHALL GIRD THEE, AND CARRY THEE WHITHER THOU WoulDEST NOT.”

AT the close of the last Lecture, we beheld Peter fully convinced of the guilt of his distressing act of cowardice and apostacy, and going forth, in the bitterness of his anguish, to pour into the bosom of his heavenly Father, the confessions of a broken and contrite heart. Who can describe the feelings of this affectionate disciple, during the whole of the dreadful day which succeeded the act of his denial? that day which saw the meek and perfect

Saviour nailed to the cross, a spectacle to men and angels, of the infinity of the love of God, and of the depravity of man. If the cries of the infuriated populace, "Crucify him, crucify him!" the imprecations of the priests and elders, the wild mockery of the licentious soldiery, were able to penetrate the place of Peter's retirement, how must every sound have added tenfold anguish, to his bitter lamentations; how often must he have felt, while hearing these dreadful sufferings of his Divine Master—"I have added to the sorrows of this man of grief; I have at least implanted one sting in that heart, at which all the fiery darts of Satan now are levelled; I, who have "eaten bread with him, have lifted up my heel against him." How deep must have been the compunction, how overwhelming the sorrow, which such reflections would produce in such a heart as Peter's!

No evangelist has mentioned the name of Peter in the narrative of that day of

sorrows. The beloved disciple John, took his station beneath the cross of his suffering Master ; the virgin mother was present at that hour, and realized the prophecy, “ A sword shall pierce through thine own heart also.” The women who came from Galilee were within sight of that sad scene ; but of Peter, the zealous, forward Peter, there is no mention. He would not again, expose himself to his spiritual enemies ; he would no longer, trust himself to his own courage, or his own fidelity ; doubtless, those hours were spent in sorrows, which the world could never know, and in heart-felt communings with his God, which the world could not understand. A veil, therefore, has been drawn across those sacred hours by all the evangelists. It is enough to know, that Peter’s tears, and prayers, went up as a memorial before God, and that that gracious Being, who, while hanging on the accursed tree, could bestow the rewards

and inheritances of Paradise, could not but plead successfully with his heavenly Father, for the returning sinner, upon whom, even in the very hour of his fall, Christ himself had looked with pardoning love.

“ Very early in the morning,” says St. Mark, “ the first day of the week,” Mary Magdalene, and the other women, came unto the sepulchre, so little expecting the great and glorious event which had occurred, that they brought sweet spices to preserve that body from decay, which had already risen triumphant over death and the grave, and, according to prophecy, “ seen no corruption.”¹

It was at this visit to the sepulchre, that an angel from heaven appeared to them, and thus announced the fact, for which they were so utterly unprepared : “ Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified—he is risen ; he is not here.”

Time would fail me were I to dwell

¹ Acts ii. 37.

upon the great and wondrous truth which was thus proclaimed; the seal of all which had preceded it; the entire accomplishment of the prophecies and the types; the complete demonstration to mankind that God the Father, had fully accepted the ransom, which God the Son, had so freely offered. As soon as he had exclaimed with dying lips, "It is finished,"² the great work of redemption is complete, he went down into the grave, not as its victim, but as its Lord, "conquering and to conquer,"³ that he might set his foot upon the serpent's head, even in the very heart of his own dominions. Had Christ remained, within the noisome walls of the sepulchre, it might fairly have been declared that he had been unable to discharge, the infinite weight of debt, which sinning man had contracted; that he had been foiled in those labours of love, and that the last great cry upon the cross, instead of being, as it truly

² John xix. 30.

³ Rev. vi. 2.

was, the conqueror's shout of victory, was merely the death-cry of a suffering, defeated impostor. The very fact, therefore, that death could not hold him; that over him, Satan and the grave possessed no power; that at his own free will, he was able to shake from him those chains which mere mortality could not have escaped, established for ever these most blessed truths—that the power of death was broken; the might of Satan crushed; the work of redemption finished; and—blessed, thrice blessed consideration!—"the garments of salvation"⁴ fully prepared and freely offered to every believing penitent "who names the name of Christ, and departs from iniquity."⁵

It is not, however, so much with these elevating subjects, with the great truth announced by the angel at the sepulchre, that we are at present engaged, as with the merciful manner in which that truth

⁴ Isaiah lxi. 10.

⁵ 2 Tim. ii. 19.

was proclaimed : “ Go, tell his disciples and Peter, that he is risen from the dead.” How singularly striking is this message of the heavenly minister ! We should not have been surprised had he said, ‘ Go, tell his disciples and John,’ whom our Lord so dearly loved, or his sorrowing mother, or the affectionate Mary ; but that Peter, the erring, fallen Peter, should have been selected as of all the little company of believers the most deeply interested in this great truth, the only individual, to whom an express message should be transmitted, is indeed a most remarkable and most affecting instance of that “ love which beareth all things, endureth all things,”⁶ and even under the deepest provocations “ never faileth.” He who best knows the heart of man, well knew that Peter’s heart was bleeding at that hour, from the effects of his late transgression ; and he also knew, that no balm could be applied so

⁶ 1 Cor. xiii. 7, 8.

truly healing and consolatory, as one word of kindness and love from his risen Master; therefore did our Lord select the sinning, repenting, broken-hearted Peter, as the only individual to whom he sent a particular announcement, that as he had died for his sins, he had now risen for his justification.

My brethren, if you have ever felt the weight of unforgiven sin, or “the plague of your own hearts,”⁷ the misery, I might almost say, the agony, and the anguish, of having offended God, grieved his Holy Spirit, denied by your words or actions the Lord your Redeemer, you will be able to appreciate the blessedness of that short message, that single word of kindness, “Tell PETER that I am risen;” you will yourselves have felt that there is no such cure for a spirit wounded by transgression, a heart broken by the consciousness of sin, as one word of forgiveness from your Redeemer and

⁷ 1 Kings viii. 38.

your God. I would fain believe that there are many among you, who, having themselves experienced the blessedness of such an act of mercy, can deeply sympathize with Peter; you who have prayed in the words of the Psalmist, "Lord, pardon my sin, for it is great;"⁸ and have heard from the lips of your offended Maker, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins;"⁹ you who, when you deserved and expected only words of wrath, have found promises of mercy, and words of love, carried home by the Spirit of God to your grieving hearts; you, and you only, can tell what must have been the joy of Peter, at finding himself still the object of the affectionate recollection of his Lord, at learning that he was still remembered by name as one who was written in the Lamb's book of life.

⁸ Psalm xxv. 11.

⁹ Isaiah xliii. 25.

Pleasing is it to behold in the Gospel of this day,¹ the natural ardour with which Peter ran to visit the empty sepulchre; and not content with merely looking upon these vestiges of him, who for so short a time had made the grave his bed, enters at once into the cavern, that his own eyes might see, and his own hands handle, all that now remained on earth of one so doubly dear to him.

But we may not dwell upon these things; we must hasten forward to the consideration of the last meeting which sacred history has bequeathed to us, of the penitent apostle, and his risen Saviour; that interview in which our Lord so tenderly reproved, and at the same time so affectionately instructed Peter, in his future conduct, and so plainly predicted his future fate.

Peter and the rest of his disciples had departed unto Galilee, in pursuance of our Lord's declaration, that he would

¹ Preached on Easter Sunday.

manifest himself to them there. While waiting for this promised interview, so forgetful, do they appear to have been, of all those brilliant prospects of temporal glory, in which they had lately indulged, that they are actually returned to their original occupation, and are to be found once more engaged with their boats and their nets. What an astonishing instance of humility in men, to whom the word of their Lord was pledged, that “in the regeneration, they should sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” While engaged in the laborious occupation to which we have alluded, our Lord appeared to them standing on the shore, and having made himself known to them by a miracle, we are informed that that disciple whom Jesus loved said unto Peter, “It is the Lord.”

What a moment of extreme anxiety must not this have been to the penitent apostle! He had, as we have seen, re-

ceived a message of kindness from his forgiving Master ; he was conscious, that his repentance was earnest and sincere ; still it was natural, that he should feel that there was a most painful uncertainty, as to the manner in which he should now be received. My brethren, so to feel was truly in the course of nature, but it was not in the course of grace ; it is a weak faith, which hesitates to cast itself upon the infinite compassion of its God, when seeking him through “ the way, the truth, and the life,”² which he has ordained. Such was not Peter’s faith ; his heart does not appear for a single moment, to have harboured the remotest doubt of his acceptance. No sooner did he hear that it was the Lord, than without an instant’s hesitation, an instant’s misgiving, “ girding his fisher’s coat around him,” “ he cast himself into the sea, and swam to the shore,” that he might be the first to throw himself at the

.² John xvi. 6.

feet of his indulgent Master. How beautiful an instance, of the actings of a truly scriptural faith! Would that it might be realized, in the experience of every individual whom we now address, and in our own soul! Does the revealed word of God assure you that, as a reconciled penitent, your transgressions are blotted out, your sins are forgiven? Then be assured, that you are not honouring your Lord and Saviour, if you do not live up to your high and holy privileges; if you still keep at a distance from him; still tremble with a slavish fear; still follow him afar off, and with a sinking heart. This was not the spirit, which influenced Peter. He knew that his Lord had looked upon him in mercy; he knew that he had deeply grieved and bitterly wept for sin; he knew that he should meet with a kind and merciful reception. These were with him matters of positive knowledge, not of faint and uncertain hope; and, therefore, in the

fullest dependence upon the infinity of his Master's love, he burst through the opposing element, to cast himself at his feet. Men, in their wisdom, may call this presumption ; but be assured it goes by a far different name, in the courts of heaven. Never is God more highly honoured, than when you most implicitly depend, humbly and scripturally, upon that covenanted love, which is the brightest attribute of his all-perfect character ; when you rely the most entirely, build the most largely, upon the simple declarations of his promises in Christ Jesus ; and whatever have been your sins, your denials, or your wanderings, having truly lamented and forsaken them, you draw near, cleansed in the blood of Jesus, and cast yourselves with the most childlike confidence, into the arms of his mercy.

But tenderly as our Lord dealt with his penitent and humbled disciple, it was necessary, for the sake of others as

well as for the correction of Peter himself, that he should manifest before his brethren the present state of his feelings as regarded that Saviour, whom he had so lately and so disgracefully renounced. Three times had he publicly denied his Master, and, therefore, three times must he as publicly declare his renewed feelings of gratitude and love. “So when they had dined,” says the evangelist, “Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?” Thou hast once said, “though all men should be offended because of thee, yet will not I.” Dost thou still assert this dangerous pre-eminence? Peter saith unto him, “Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.” He does not again hazard a reply, as to the relative strength of his affections: I know that I love thee, but I dare not now venture to affirm, that I love thee more than these. Again the painful question was repeated, “Simon, son of

Jonas, lovest thou me?" "He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." Yet a third time, is the inquiry urged upon him; then, as we read, "Peter was grieved because he said unto him a third time, Lovest thou me?" He replied, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee; Jesus saith unto him"—prove the reality of thy love by the active sincerity of thy obedience—"Feed my sheep."

Invaluable to the Christian is this brief narrative, because it sets before him in the plainest and most engaging manner, the method in which our blessed Redeemer accosts not Peter alone, but every truly penitent believer.

Consider, my brethren, the application of it to yourselves. The Lord, from the throne of his glory, has beheld your denials and your sins; he has also, in many instances, we trust, beheld your penitence and your tears; and he now asks you all individually, the penitent

and the impenitent, " Lovest thou me ?" Here is the great test of your repentance ; here is the proof whether you have " been accepted in the beloved ;"³ for to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much.

How will you then answer the inquiry ? Carefully examine your own hearts, and ascertain whether you possess this feeling of grateful, fervent, active love to the Redeemer ; without which there can be no pardon, no saving union with God the Son, no relationship to God the Father ; for as our Lord himself most unequivocally declared to the Jews, " If God were your Father, ye would love ME."⁴ If you have been, as too many are, in the habit of considering all love to Christ as bordering upon enthusiasm or fanaticism, or originating not in the sober revelations of God, but in the heated imaginations of visionary men, how will you reply to this ? Three times do you find your Lord eliciting the

³ Eph. i. 6.

⁴ John viii. 42.

state of Peter's mind by this single inquiry, "Lovest thou me?" Is it not then our bounden duty, as the ministers of Christ, often and earnestly to inquire of you, 'Do you indeed love the Lord Jesus Christ?'

If you do not, he has himself assured you that you are not a child of God: if you are not a child of God, you are not ripening for that blissful eternity which will be spent by his children in the many mansions of their Father's house: if you are not a child of God, you must be a child of Satan, for there are but two families into which all the inhabitants of the earth are divided; and if your title be not clearly made out to the one, you must indisputably be enrolled in the other. Are you then conscious of this love to a crucified Saviour? Can you really say with Peter, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee?" Can you even say, 'Thou knowest that I desire to love thee?' "If

ye love me, keep my commandments,"⁵ is a proof which Christ himself has offered of this important fact. Look, therefore, into your hearts for the good tree; look into your lives for its invariable fruits. They will not, they cannot be wanting, if the living germ be within; if they be not there, it is sufficient to demonstrate that the principle is absent, that the constraining love of Christ is not shed abroad in your hearts, by the Spirit which he alone can give unto you.

Time warns me, that we must bring this instructive narrative to a conclusion: "Verily, verily," said our Lord to Peter, "when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old thou shalt stretch forth thine hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. Follow me."

How fully this admirable apostle obeyed the injunction, the last he

⁵ John xvi. 15.

ever received⁶ from the lips of his Divine Master, every account which has been transmitted to us, most abundantly establishes. Next to St. Paul, there was no apostle who, by the value of his writings, the variety of his labours, the exemplary holiness and usefulness of his life, so closely followed the footsteps of his Lord, as Simon Peter. There was no apostle who appeared from this hour so remarkably, by the power of divine grace, to have overcome the natural frailties of his temper and disposition, as St. Peter. He had, as we have seen, before been so much the victim of a faithless timidity, that he had denied his Master, from the fear of the high-priest's servants. He now, in the presence of assembled multitudes, at the peril of his life, unhesitatingly declared, " Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God had made that same Jesus whom ye have cruci-

⁶ See John xxi. 22.

fied, both Lord and Christ.”⁷ He had before defended himself, almost with rudeness, when his Divine Master had predicted his denial and desertion. In after ages, he humbly and silently permitted Paul “to withstand him to the face.”⁸ Those were among the unquestionable evidences of his love to his Lord : he became humble, meek, loving, and obedient ; inferior to no one in every good and perfect work, in labours of love, in the conversion of souls.

Years pass away, and we are warned by the history before us, that there is no escape from man’s last enemy ; that although we may live long, and labour usefully, and glorify our Redeemer unceasingly, by thought, word, and deed, there is no total reprieve from that sentence, which sin, the sin of Adam, the sin of our own souls, has passed upon us all—“The wages of sin is death.”⁹

“When thou art old,” said our Lord,

⁷ Acts ii. 36. ⁸ Gal. ii. 11. ⁹ Rom. vi. 23.

“ thou shalt stretch forth thy hand, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.” How literally fulfilled, the eldest historian of the Church of Christ has sufficiently attested, since he relates, that about thirty years after the death of his Divine Master, the aged Peter suffered martyrdom at Rome ; requesting as the only favour which he would demand at the hands of men, that he might be crucified with his head downwards, from a feeling of the most unfeigned humility, that the fate endured by the Lord Jesus, was too honourable for his frail and sinning servant. It is also related, and we mention it to mark the spirit which influenced his latest breath, that Peter first followed his wife to the stake, and that the last words of encouragement with which he cheered her departing spirit were, “ Remember the Lord.”

Such was the close of the life of that eminent apostle upon whose history we

have been commenting—a most painful, degrading, dreadful death. How widely different from the calm and placid scene from which the spirit of the patriarch, whose life we last year reviewed, was permitted to take its peaceful flight! We behold the venerable Jacob lying on his bed, a bed indeed of death, but scarcely either of sickness or of pain; surrounded by his children and his grandchildren, beloved, revered, and respected: every effort which the most affectionate attention could make to smooth his dying pillow, every word which he spoke treasured up in the hearts of those around him, and bequeathed to the church of Christ to the latest posterity; and at last his placid spirit gently loosened from its earthly resting-place, and wafted into the bosom of his God, without an effort or a pang.

We behold, on the contrary, the aged Peter, fastened to the cross amid the rabble rout of pagan multitudes; his

head hanging in the dust ; his hands and feet transfixed with nails ; his whole frame convulsed with agony ; his dying testimony given to the winds, or heard only to be the scoff and jeer of his unfeeling enemies ; no pitying friend to wipe his brow, to quench his burning thirst, or to suggest one word of consolation to his departing spirit ; and when the tortured body could endure no longer, the soul torn from its earthly tabernacle, by that rude wrench at which humanity shudders ! How widely different were the ends of these, the beloved children of the same Father, the redeemed servants of the same Saviour ! and yet are we sure that Peter, amid the horrors of the cross, was as effectually supported, as entirely comforted by the felt presence of his Divine Master, as Jacob upon his bed of down.

Christian brethren, what must be the power of that principle of faith in a crucified Redeemer, which can thus sustain

and comfort frail mortality, “when the flesh and the heart faileth?” What must be the might of that Saviour, who can, under the most terrific circumstances, thus for his believing children draw the sting of man’s last enemy? We would pray, if it be the will of your heavenly Father, that death may so gently approach every individual whom we now address, that you may not hear the rustling of his wings, until you find him at your side: but you must have seen from the example before you, that he may also come, even to the dearest disciple of your Lord, in a far different manner, armed with terrors at which the strongest heart must quail. Do you not then desire a protector who can, under every imaginable circumstance, vanquish this formidable enemy, and hold you harmless from his most dangerous assaults? Such a protector, such a saviour, such a friend, is this day offered you. Cast yourselves unre-

servedly upon him. Seek in him your “righteousness, sanctification, and redemption;”¹ deny yourselves; take up your cross and follow him, and he will be to you, all that he ever was to Peter—your guide in health, your joy in sickness, your hope in death; for he has promised to walk with you through that dark valley; with his rod and his staff, to comfort you, to struggle for you, to fight for you, to vanquish for you, until you shall be proclaimed “more than conquerors through him that loved you,”² and shall ascend with Peter to the unspeakable joys at God’s right hand.

¹ 1 Cor. i. 30.

² Rom. viii. 37.

THE END.

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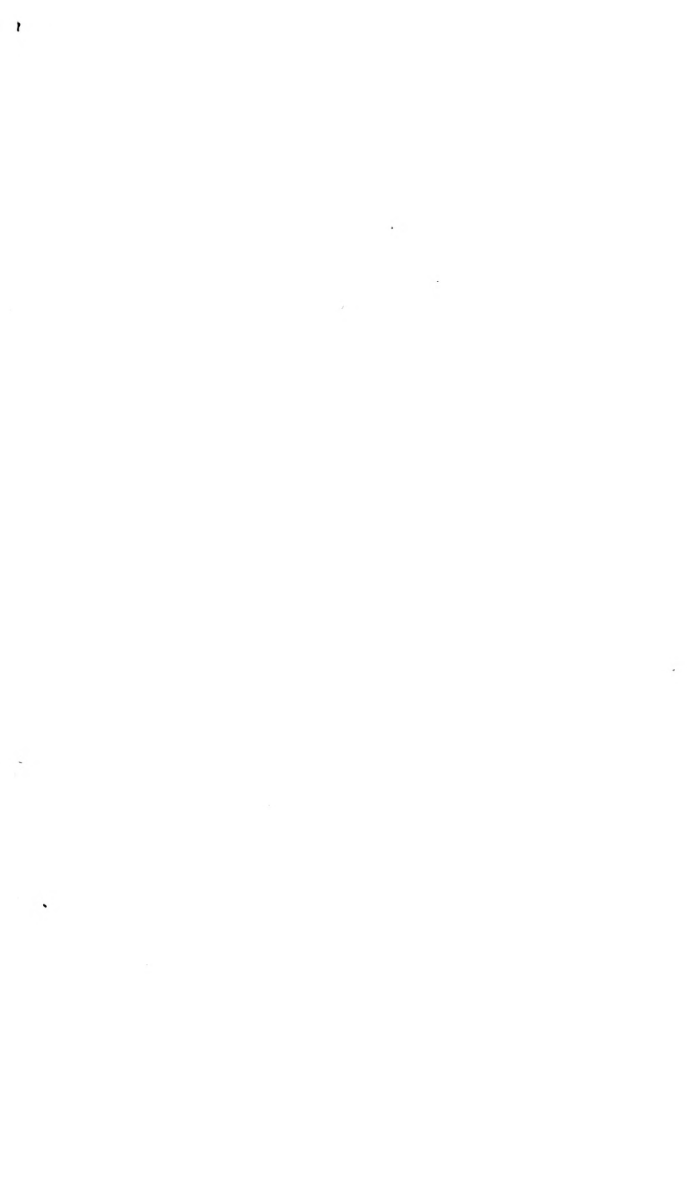
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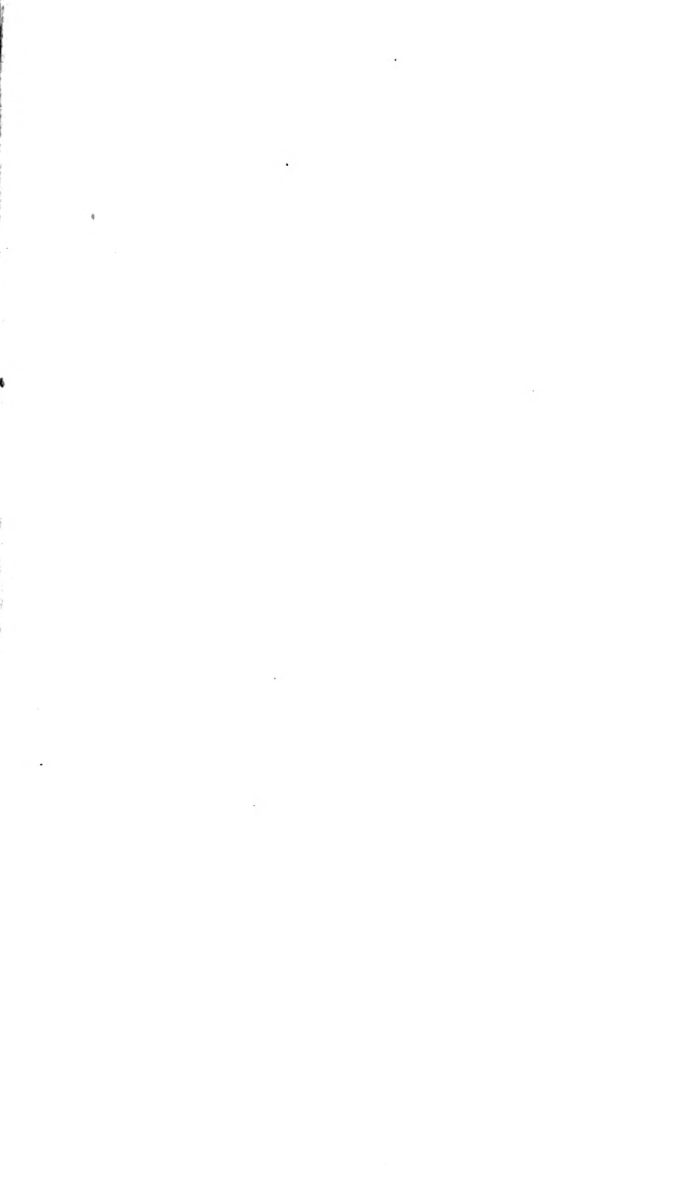
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