

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 06826806 3











# NINE SERMONS,

ON THE

NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE

BY WHICH THE

Fact of our Lord's Resurrection is established;

AND

ON VARIOUS OTHER SUBJECTS.

---

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

## A DISSERTATION

ON THE PROPHECIES OF THE MESSIAH DISPERSED AMONG  
THE HEATHEN.

---

---

BY SAMUEL WORSLEY, L.L.D. F.R.S. F.A.S.,

LATE LORD BISHOP OF ST. ASAPH.

---

---

PUBLISHED BY T. & J. SWORDS, NEW-YORK, M. CAREY,  
PHILADELPHIA; AND WELLS & LILLY, BOSTON.

.....  
1816.

07

THE NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY  
**240639B**  
RELEASED  
APR 11 1968

PROPERTY OF  
THE  
NEW YORK  
LIBRARY SOCIETY



## ADVERTISEMENT.

---

THE Dissertation which stands first in the following pages was evidently written in connexion with the three Discourses on the Faith of the Samaritans, published in the second volume of Bishop Horsley's Sermons; and appears by the form of compellation to have been, like them, originally delivered from the Pulpit.

It came into the Editor's hands in loose and unconnected sheets, and these were not arranged and exami-

ned by him till long after the publication of the two first volumes of Sermons. After he had examined them, he found them to contain an unfinished Essay, which evidently had never been prepared by the Author for the press. He therefore laid it aside. But having shewn it, during his stay in London in the month of May last, to some literary friends, he was strongly advised to publish it; for though confessedly an incomplete work, yet it was deemed worthy of publication, as displaying the Bishop's thoughts on an important subject.

In this opinion he anxiously hopes the literary world in general may be

disposed to agree. But if not, let it be remembered, that the blame of publication (if there be any) rests with the Editor not the Author; for it is again repeated, that the Manuscript was not left in that state in which the latter, had he been living, would have published it: Indeed a note found in one of the pages of the Manuscript expressly states, that it was the Author's intention to have revised it.

To the Dissertation the Editor has added nine hitherto unpublished Sermons, collected and arranged from scattered and mutilated Manuscripts; but which, in his opinion, now that they are arran-

ged, display the same vigour of thought, and the same masterly powers of expounding Scripture, as characterize his Father's other Theological Works.

*Dundee, January 21, 1815.*

## CONTENTS.

---

**A DISSERTATION** on the Prophecies of the Messiah dispersed among the Heathen. *Page 13*

**Four DISCOURSES** on the nature of the Evidence by which the fact of our Lord's Resurrection is established.

### DISCOURSE I.

**ACTS, x. 40, 41.**—“*Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God.*” 95

### DISCOURSE II.

**ACTS, x. 40, 41.**—“*Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God.*” 109

## DISCOURSE III.

ACTS, x. 40, 41.—“ *Him God raised up the third day,  
 “ and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but to  
 “ witnesses chosen before of God.”* Page 126

## DISCOURSE IV.

ACTS, x. 40, 41.—“ *Him God raised up the third day,  
 “ and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but to  
 “ witnesses chosen before of God.”* 141



## FIVE SERMONS.

## SERMON I.

PSALMS, xcvii. 7.—“ *Worship him all ye Gods.”* 163

## SERMON II.

ROMANS, iv. 25.—“ *Who was delivered for our offences,  
 “ and was raised again for our justification.”* 181

## SERMON III.

MATTHEW, XX. 23.—“ *To sit on my right hand and my  
 “ left is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them  
 “ for whom it is prepared of my Father.”* Page 203

## SERMON IV.

EPHESIANS, IV. 30.—“ *And grieve not the holy spirit of  
 “ God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of re-  
 “ demption.”* 217

## SERMON V.

EPHESIANS, IV. 30.—“ *And grieve not the holy spirit of  
 “ God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of re-  
 “ demption.”* 235





A  
DISSERTATION  
ON THE  
*PROPHECIES OF THE MESSIAH*  
DISPERSED  
AMONG THE HEATHEN.



A

## DISSERTATION,

&c.

---

---

**THE** expectation of an extraordinary person who should arise in Judea, and be the instrument of great improvements in the manners and condition of mankind, was almost if not altogether universal at the time of our Saviour's birth; and had been gradually spreading and getting strength for some time before it. The fact is so notorious to all who have any knowledge of antiquity, that it is needless to attempt any proof of it. It may be assumed as a principle, which even an infidel of candour would be ashamed to deny; or if any one would deny it, I would decline all dispute with such an adversary as too ignorant to receive conviction, or too disingenuous to acknowledge what he must secretly admit.

B

If we inquire what were the general grounds of the expectation which so generally prevailed, the answer to the question is exceedingly obvious: That the ground of this expectation was probably some traditional, obscure remembrance of the original promises. But the great point is, to discover by what means this remembrance was perpetuated in the later and darker ages of idolatry, when the name of Jehovah was forgotten, and his worship neglected, except in one nation in which the knowledge and worship of the invisible Creator was miraculously preserved.

Now my conjecture is, that this was effected by a collection of very early prophecies, which were committed to writing in a very early age, and were actually existing in many parts of the world, though little known till the extirpation of Paganism, by the propagation of the Gospel. I am well aware how extravagant such an opinion may appear in this incredulous age. But I stand not in the judgment of infidels, I speak to a Christian audience. They will judge of the probability of my assertion, when I have stated the grounds on which I build it.

For the more perspicuous arrangement of my argument I shall divide it into two parts.—

First, I shall prove the fact from historical evidence, that the Gentile world in the darkest ages was in possession, not of vague and traditional, but of explicit written prophecies of Christ. When I have established the fact, and by that means shewn the immediate cause of the expectation which so generally prevailed, I shall then produce the more remote and higher cause, and prove that these written prophecies were the remains of divine oracles of the earliest ages.

*First,* For the fact that the Gentile world in the darkest ages was possessed of explicit written prophecies of Christ, I shall found the proof of it on the contents of a very extraordinary book, which was preserved at Rome under the name of the oracles of the Cumæan Sibyl, which was held in such veneration that it was deposited in a stone chest in the temple of Jupiter in the capitol, and committed to the care of two persons expressly appointed to that office. For the contents of this book I shall make no appeal to the quotations of the ancient fathers. I

am well persuaded that many of them were deceived,\* and that the verses which they produce as prophecies of Christ found in the Sibylline books, and which contain rather a minute detail of the miraculous circumstances of our Saviour's life than general predictions of his advent and his office, were scandalous forgeries. And God forbid that I should endeavour to restore the credit of an imposture that hath been long since exploded. At the same time I must observe, that though this censure be just as applied to the later fathers, yet the testimony of the earlier, of Justin Martyr in particular, and of Clements Alexandrinus, seem deserving of more credit: Not so much for the great learning and piety of those venerable writers, for with all this they were very capable of giving too easy credit to what might seem to serve their cause; but because they lived before the age of pious frauds, as they were called, commenced, and while the Sibylline books were

\* It is remarkable, however, that Celsus charged the Christians of his time with interpolating the Sibylline books. Origen challenges him to support the accusation by specific instances of the fraud, and insinuates that the most ancient copies of those books had the passages which Celsus esteemed insertions of the Christians. *Contra CELSUM*, p. 368, 369. E.

extant; so that they might easily have been confuted by the heathens, had they alledged as quotations from those books, forged predictions which appeared not in the authentic copies. Of their evidence however I shall not avail myself; for I would build my assertion on none but the most solid ground. I shall therefore take my idea of the contents of these books entirely from the testimony of heathen writers. At least I shall make no use of any assertion even of the earliest fathers; much less shall I credit any of the quotations of the later, except so far as I find them supported by the most unquestionable heathen evidence.

Among heathen writers, I believe, it would be in vain to seek for any *quotations* of particular passages from the Sibylline oracles. They never made any. For, to produce the words of the Sibylline text, would have been dangerous violation of a law, by which the publication of any part of these writings was made a capital offence. We have however such representations of the general argument of the book, and of the general purport of particular prophecies, as afford a strong presumption in favour of the opinion we have advanced, that it was composed of adulterated fragments of the patriarchal

prophecies and records, and that put it out of doubt, that of much of the prophetic part the Messiah was the specific subject.

From the general argument of the book as it is represented by heathen writers, it is very evident that it could be no forgery of heathen priestcraft; for this reason, that it was exceedingly unfavorable to that system of idolatrous superstition, which it was the great concern and interest of the heathen priesthood to propagate and support; and this was probably the true reason that the Roman Senate committed the book to the custody of two of the Augural College, and kept it from the inspection of the vulgar by the severest laws. Now this extraordinary fact, that it was little for the interests of idolatry that the contents of the Cumæan oracles should be divulged, we learn from a dispute which was keenly agitated at Rome, between the friends of Julius Cæsar and the leader of the republican party; in the course of which a member of the Augural College in the heat of argument let the secret out.

Julius Cæsar, you know, attained the height of his power within a few years before our Saviour's birth: little was wanting to his greatness but the



title of a king of which he was ambitious. The difficulty was to bring the Senate to confer it; for, without their sanction it was unsafe to assume it. One of his adherents thought of an expedient not unlikely to succeed. He produced a prophecy from the Cumæan Sibyl of a king who was to arise at this time, whose monarchy was to be universal, and whose government would be necessary and essential to the happiness of the world. The artful statesman knew, that if he could once create a general persuasion upon the credit of this prophecy, that universal monarchy was to be established, and that the state of the world required it, the difficulty would not be great to prove, that Cæsar was the person of his times best qualified to wield the sceptre.

The republican party took the alarm. Tully was at that time its chief support, and his great abilities were called forth to oppose this stratagem of the dictator's faction. In his opposition to it he brings no charge of falsification against those who alleged this prophecy. He denies not that a prophecy to this effect was actually contained in the Sibylline books, to which as a member of the Augural College he had free access, and when he allowed the existence of the prophecy, he was a better politician

than to make the application of it to Cæsar the point of controversy, and to risk the success of his opposition to the schemes of Cæsar's party upon the precarious success of that particular question. Confessing the prophecy he knew it was impolitic to attempt to apply it to any but a Roman, and applying it to a Roman it had been difficult to draw it away from Cæsar. He therefore takes another ground.— Having granted that the prophecy was fairly alleged by the opposite party from the Sibylline books, he attempts to overthrow the credit of the prophecy by a general attack on the credit of the books in which it was found. He affirms that these Sibylline oracles were no prophecies. His argument is, that in the writings of the Sibyl no marks are to be found of phrenzy or disorder, which the heathens conceived to be the necessary state of every prophet's mind while he prophesied, because the prophets of their oracular temples affected it. But these books, he says, carried such evident marks of art and study, particularly in the regular structure of the verse, as proved that it was the work of a writer who had the natural use and possession of his faculties. This statement of Tully's may be correct, but his conclusion is erroneous, at least it must appear so to us who take our notions of prophetic style from the spe-

cimens which the Bible furnishes : for the true prophets were never impeded or disturbed in the natural use and possession of their faculties by the divine impulse. Their faculties were not disturbed, but exalted and invigorated; and in the most animated of the sacred prophecies we find, beside what might be the natural character of the prophetic style, force, elevation, and sudden transition,—we find beside, an exquisite art of composition, and a wonderful regularity of versification. However, the Roman critic having proved, as he imagined from this circumstance, that these Sibylline oracles were no prophecies, concludes his whole argument with this edifying remark : “ Let us then, says he, adhere to the prudent practice of our ancestors ; let us keep the Sibyl in religious privacy ; these writings are indeed rather calculated to extinguish than to propagate superstition.” This testimony is above all exception. Tully, as an augur, had free access to the book in question. It cannot be doubted that he would improve his opportunities ; for he was a man of an exquisite taste, of much learned curiosity ; and, with these endowments, of a very religious turn of mind. It is certain therefore that he speaks upon the best information ; and he is the more to be credited, as this frank confession fell from him in the

heat of a political debate in which he took an interested part. And from this testimony we may conclude, that the ancient fathers, whatever judgment is to be passed upon their pretended quotations from the Sibylline books, were not mistaken in the general assertion, that the worship of the one true God, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and of a future retribution, were inculcated in these writings; which it seems, in Tully's judgment, (and a competent judge he was,) were proper weapons to combat idolatry: and by what weapons may error be more successfully combated than by the truth?

If the Sibylline oracles in their general tenor were unfriendly to the interests of idolatry, it is the less to be wondered, that they should contain predictions of its final extirpation: Of this I shall now produce the evidence; still relying, not upon particular quotations, but upon the general allusions of the heathen writers.

Virgil the celebrated Roman poet flourished in the court of Augustus no long time before our Saviour's birth, when the general expectation of a person to appear who should abolish both physical and moral evil, was at the highest.

Among his works still extant is a congratulatory poem addressed to a noble Roman, the poet's friend, who bore the high office of consul at the time when it was written. The occasion seems to have been the birth of some child, in whose fortunes Pollio the poet's friend was nearly interested. The compliment to Pollio is double, being partly drawn from a flattering prediction of the infant's future greatness, (for it is affirmed, that he will prove nothing less than the expected deliverer,) and partly from this circumstance, that the year of Pollio's consulate should be distinguished by the birth of such a child. Whoever should read this poem without a knowledge of the history of the times would conclude, that it was a compliment to Pollio upon the birth of his own son.

But it is a very extraordinary, but a very certain fact, that the consul had no son born in the year of his consulate, or within any short time before or after it. Nor will the history of these times furnish us with any child born within a moderate distance of Pollio's year of office, which, by its rank and connexion with his family, might seem of sufficient importance to be the subject of this congratulation, even when all possible allowance has been made

for a poet's exaggeration and a courtier's flattery. But what is most worthy of remark, and the most for my present purpose, is the description which the heathen poet gives of the extraordinary person that he expected; of his origin, his achievements, and the good consequences of his appearance; which is such, that if any illiterate person who was to hear this poem read in an exact translation, with the omission only of the names of heathen deities, and of allusion to profane mythology, which occur in a few passages,—any illiterate person who was to hear the poem read with these omissions, which would not at all affect the general sense of it, if he had not been told before that it was the composition of an heathen author, would without hesitation pronounce it to be a prophecy of the Messiah, or a poem at least upon that subject written in express imitation of the style of the Jewish prophets. The resemblance between the images of this poem and those in which the inspired prophets describe the times of the Messiah, has ever been remarked with surprise by the learned, as indeed it is much too striking to escape notice; and many attempts have been made to account for it. It has been imagined, that the poet had actually borrowed his images from the prophets. The books of the Old Testament having been translated into

the Greek language long before the days of Virgil, it has been supposed, that he might have become conversant with the sacred writings in the Greek translation.

But I see no reason to believe that these books were ever in any credit among the Romans, or that the contents of them were known at all, except to some few who were proselytes to the Jewish religion.

It has been supposed, that Herod's visit at the court of Augustus might be the means of making the Roman poet acquainted with the Hebrew bards. Herod indeed was some months at Rome, but there is little probability that the king, or any of his train, had leisure to be the poet's tutor in Hebrew learning. It is very strange that in so many attempts to account for the extraordinary fact under consideration, more attention should not have been paid to the account which the poet himself has given of it. He refers to the oracles of the Cumæan Sibyl as the source from which he drew these predictions. And in this lay the whole force of his compliment to Pollio,—*That the child whose future greatness was the object of Pollio's ambition, would prove to be*

*that personage whom the Cumæan Sibyl had announced as a deliverer of the world from physical and moral evil: For that is the sum and substance of the character according to the poet's description. Here, then, we have the clear testimony of this heathen poet, that the oracles of the Sibyl contained a prophecy, not accomplished when he wrote this congratulatory poem to his friend, but likely to be accomplished in the rising generation, of the appearance of a very extraordinary person. We know that the Jewish prophets marked the same time for the season of the Messiah's advent. From the strain of the poet's compliments we gather the particulars of the Sibylline prophecy in regard to the character which it ascribes to the person whose appearance it announced; we find that this character perfectly agrees with that of the Messiah as it is drawn by the Jewish prophets; the difference being only this, that the Jewish prophecies are more circumstantial than the Sibylline.*

The sum of the character is the same in both; in its nature unequivocal, and such as even in the general outline could not possibly belong to different persons in the same age.



The object of the Sibylline oracle, as well as the Messiah of the Jews, was to be of heavenly extraction,—the high offspring of the gods, the great seed of Jupiter. He was to strike an universal peace, and to command the whole world; and in this universal government he was to exercise his father's virtues. He was to abolish all violence and injustice, to restore the life of man to its original simplicity and innocence, and the condition of man to its original happiness. He was to abolish the causes of violent death; and all death, considered as a curse, is violent. He was to kill the serpent, and purge the vegetable kingdom of its poisons. The blessings of his reign were to reach even to the brute creation; for the beasts of the forest were to lose their savage nature, that the ox might graze in security within sight of the lion.

It is evident, therefore, that the Jewish prophecies and the Sibylline oracles announce the same person, and of consequence, that the Sibylline oracles contained a prediction of the Messiah. Nor is it to be wondered, that the images of sacred prophecy should abound in this treasure of the heathen temples, if it was composed of adulterated fragments of true pro-

phesies. The thing seems inexplicable upon any other supposition.

Thus it appears, that the *Romans at least*, in the ages of their worst idolatry, were in possession of a book which they held, though they knew not why, in religious veneration, containing explicit prophecies of Christ. An extraordinary accident recorded in history furnishes an incontestable proof that the same prophecies were extant in a very late age, in various parts of the world.

About a century before our Saviour's birth the book of the Cumæan Sibyl was destroyed by a fire which broke out in the Capitol, and consumed the temple where those writings were deposited. The Roman Senate thought it of so much importance to repair the loss, that they sent persons to make a new collection of the Sibylline oracles in different parts of Asia, in the islands of the Archipelago, in Africa, and in Sicily; for in all these parts copies, or at least fragments, of these prophecies were supposed to be preserved. The deputies after some time returned with a thousand verses, more or less, collected in different places, from which the most learned men at Rome were employed to select what they judged the

most authentic; and this collection was deposited to supply the loss of the original.

I have now established my fact, that from the first ages of profane history to the very time of our Saviour's birth, explicit predictions of him were extant in the Gentile world, in books which were ever holden in religious veneration, and which were deposited in their temples. The matter of these prophecies, and the agreement of the imagery of their language, with what we find in the prophecies of holy writ, is I think a sufficient argument of their divine original. Observe, I affirm not in general of the Sibylline books that they were divine, much less do I affirm that the Sibyls were women who had the gift of prophecy. I believe that they were fabulous personages, to whom the ignorant heathens ascribed the most ancient of their sacred books, when the true origin of them was forgotten. But the existence of these imaginary prophetesses, and the authority of the writings ascribed to them, are distinct questions. Whether these books contained prophecies of Christ is a question of fact in which the affirmative is supported by the highest historical evidence. That these prophecies, wherever they might be found, could be of no other than divine original, the matter and the style of them is in my judgment an irrefrag-

able argument; when and where these prophecies were originally delivered. to whom they were addressed, and how they came to make a part of the treasure of the heathen temples, are questions which remain to be considered.

That they were drawn from the Jewish prophecies is improbable; for the books of the Cumæan Sibyl fell into the hands of the Romans, if we may credit their historians, in a very early age, when they were an obscure inconsiderable people, without any connexions in the East, and long before any part of the Old Testament was extant in the Greek language. And yet after the first settlement of the Jews in Canaan, I am persuaded that true prophets were nowhere to be found but in the Jewish church. These prophecies then, that were current in the Gentile world in later ages, since they were neither forgeries of the heathen priests, nor founded on the Jewish prophecies, must have been derived from prophecies more ancient than the Jewish. They were fragments (mutilated perhaps and otherwise corrupted,) but they were fragments of the most ancient prophecies of the patriarchal ages. By what means fragments of the prophecies of the patriarchal ages might be preserved among idolatrous nations is the difficulty to be explained.

To clear this question it will be necessary to consider, what was the actual state of revealed religion in the interval between the first appearance of idolatry in the world and the institution of the Jewish church by Moses.

I shall show you, that though the beginning of idolatry through man's degeneracy was earlier than might have been expected, its progress through God's gracious interposition was slower than is generally believed: That for some ages after it began, the world at large enjoyed the light of revelation in a very considerable degree: That, while the corruption was gradually rising to its height, Providence was taking measures for the general restoration at the appointed season: That the gift of prophecy was vouchsafed long before the institution of the Mosaic church: That letters being in use in the East long before that epoch, the ancient prophecies were committed to writing; and that, by the mysterious operation of that Providence which directs all temporary and partial evil to everlasting and universal good, the blind superstition of idolaters was itself made the means of preserving these writings, not pure, but in a state that might serve the purpose of preparing the Gentiles for the advent of our Lord, and maintaining a religious veneration for them.

I am then to consider what was the actual state of revealed religion, between the first appearance of idolatry in the world and the institution of the Mosaic church by Moses.

*First,* It is obvious that the worship of Jehovah was originally universal, without any mixture of idolatry among the sons of Adam for some time after the creation; and that it became universal again among the descendants of Noah for some ages after the flood. It is obvious, that so long as this was universal, the *promises* would be universally remembered; both the general promises of man's redemption, and the particular promises of blessings to certain families; and when the defection to idolatry began, these particular promises would be the means of retarding its progress, and of preserving the worship of the true God in the descendants of those to whom these promises were made, for some ages at least after the revolt of the rest of mankind.

And, on the other hand, wherever the true worship kept its ground, the promises could not sink into oblivion.

Thus I conceive the promises to Abraham would for some time be remembered, not only in Isaac's

family, and in the twelve tribes of Arabians descending from Ishmael, but among the nations that arose from his sons by his second wife, Keturah; and these, if I mistake not, peopled the whole country that lay between the Arabian and the Persian Gulf, and occupied considerable tracts in Africa, and in the upper part of Asia near the Caspian Sea; and the memory of these promises, in all these nations, would for several ages keep the true religion in some degree alive. So the earlier promises to Shem contained in Noah's prophetic benediction, would be for some time remembered among his posterity; and accordingly we find from ancient history, that the Persians, the Assyrians, and the people of Mesopotamia, the offspring of Shem, through his sons Elam, Ashur, and Aram, were among the last nations that fell into any gross idolatry.

Now if we are right in these principles, (and I think they are principles in which it is impossible to be greatly in the wrong, for the memory which I suppose of blessings promised to the head of a family, with which some degree of veneration for the Deity from whom they came and by whose providence they were to be accomplished, that is, some degree of the true religion would be inseparably connected;—the memory I say of such blessings seems but a neces-

sary effect of that complacency which men naturally feel in the notion that they have a claim, or that they stand within a probable expectation of a claim to hereditary honour and distinctions;) but if we are right in the supposition of some long remembrance of the promises, and a preservation of the true religion among the descendants of the Patriarchs to whom the promises were given, the first defection from the worship of the true God could not be universal, it could only be partial. And the effect of a partial defection would be, that all the nations whose loyalty to the Sovereign Lord remained unshaken, would take measures to resist the corruption and maintain among themselves the true worship of the true God.

Something of this kind seems to have happened early in the antediluvian world. “In the days of Enos men began to call themselves by the name of Jehovah.” At this time pious men took alarm at the beginning of idolatry in the reprobate family of Cain, and formed themselves in a distinct party, and took a name of distinction to themselves as worshippers of the true God. They called themselves by the name of Jehovah as we now call ourselves by the name of Christ; and they probably made profession of the true religion by some public rites.



As human nature is in all ages much the same, something similar is likely to have happened upon the first revival of idolatry after the flood. The measures that were used for the preservation of the true religion were likely to be some one, or all of these.

If any of the nations that adhered to the true God had in these ages the use of letters (and the use of letters in the East, I am persuaded, is of much greater antiquity than is generally supposed,) they would commit to writing, and collect in books what tradition had preserved of the beginning of the world and the promises to their ancestors. These books would be committed to some public custody, and preserved as a sacred treasure.

That something of this kind was done, appears I think from fragments which still remain of ancient Eastern histories, which in certain particulars of the deluge, and in the dates which they assign to the rise of the most ancient kingdoms, are wonderfully consonant with the Mosaic records.

Again, the most interesting passages of the ancient history of the world, particularly the promises, they would put into verse, that they might more

easily be committed to memory. It would be part of the education of the youth of both sexes and of all conditions, to make them get these verses by heart. They would be set to music and sung at certain stated festivals. That this was done (that it could hardly be omitted) is highly probable, because it was the universal practice of all the nations of antiquity to record in song whatever they wished should be long remembered,—the exploits of their warriors, their lessons of morality, their precepts of religion, and their laws. They would institute public rites, in which the history of the old world and of the privileged patriarchs in particular, would be commemorated in certain enigmatical ceremonies. In these there would be allusions to the deluge, to the ark, to the raven and the dove, to Noah's intoxication, to the different behaviour of his three sons upon that occasion, to Abraham's entertainment of his three guests from heaven, to his battle with the confederate kings, to the offering of Isaac, to the exile of Hagar and her son, and other parts of patriarchal history. That something of this kind was done, appears, I think, by manifest allusions that we find to some of these particulars in the religious rites of some ancient nations, even after they became idolaters. These institutions would perhaps in the end be the means

of spreading the corruption they were intended to resist. At the first they would be simple, significant, perspicuous, and of good effect; but by degrees additions would be made to them without any attention to the original meaning, for no other purpose but to add to the gaiety and splendor of the spectacle: And these improvements of the shew would be multiplied till they destroyed the significance of the symbol, and rendered the simple and instructive rite, first inconsistent, then obscure, absurd, and unintelligible, at last perhaps lascivious and obscene.

This, however, would be the consequence of a slow and gradual corruption; and I mention it only to remark, what extreme caution should be used in introducing any thing into religious rites which may too forcibly strike the grosser senses, and by imperceptible degrees change public worship from an employment of the intellect into an amusement of the imagination. Our church, when she separated from the Roman communion, wisely retrenched the pomp and gaiety of shews and processions, while she retained every thing that was truly majestic and might serve to elevate the mind of the worshipper. Public worship should be simple without meanness,

dignified without pageantry. But this by the way. I return to my subject.—

These were the means which MEN *were likely to employ*, (I shall come afterwards to speak of means employed, as I conceive, by God himself); but these are means which men would be likely to employ to resist the progress of idolatry when it first began.

Written collections of traditional history, songs of high and holy argument, rites and shews of historical allusion: and these means could not but have a lasting and a great effect to preserve the true religion, in some considerable degree at least, among all the nations where they were practised; that is, not only among Abraham's descendants but in all the other branches of Shem's posterity. Among the Edomites, Moabites, Arabians, Assyrians, Persians, and many other people of less note, notwithstanding that many of these in later times became the worst of idolaters.

In what age or in what country idolatry made its first appearance we have no certain information. The suspicion, I think, may reasonably fall upon Canaan, from the curse which is so emphatically

pronounced upon him upon the occasion of his father's crime, rather than upon any other of Ham's descendants, which must have had its reason in some particular impiety in the character of Canaan himself, or of his early descendants. We have it however from the highest authority, that it prevailed in that part of Mesopotamia where the race of the Chaldeans afterwards arose, in the days of Terah the father of Abraham. For Joshua begins his last exhortation to the Israelites with reminding them, that "in old time their fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood, even Terah the father of Abraham and the father of Nachor, and they served other gods." This passage puts it out of doubt that some sort of idolatry prevailed in Terah's time in his country. But it amounts not to a certain proof that Terah or any of his ancestors were themselves idolaters; for the expression, that they served, necessarily imports no more than that they lived as subjects in countries where other gods were worshipped. In this sense it is said of the Jewish people in their dispersion, they should serve other gods; and yet the Jews in their dispersions have never been idolaters. In the sequel of this same speech the service which the fathers of the Israelites, while they dwelt beyond the flood, paid to other gods, is so expressly opposed to the wor-

ship of Jehovah now required of the Israelites, that little doubt can remain that the expression of serving other gods is to be taken here in its literal meaning,—that the ancestors of Abraham, and Abraham himself, before God's gracious call, were infected with the idolatry which in that age prevailed.

It is not to my present purpose to trace the progress of idolatry through all its different stages, it will be sufficient for me to shew, that for many ages the worship of the true God subsisted, though preposterously blended with the superstitious adoration of fictitious deities and even of images. Just as at this day in the church of Rome, the worship of the ever-blessed Trinity subsists in preposterous conjunction with the idolatrous worship of canonized men and inanimate relics.

When Abraham took up his abode in Gerar the chief city of the Philistine, Abimelech the king of Gerar became enamoured of his wife. Upon this occasion God came to Abimelech, and the motive of his coming was in mercy to Abimelech, that he might not draw destruction upon himself and upon his family by the indignity which he was upon the point of offering to Abraham's wife. From this

it has been with great probability concluded, that this Abimelech and the people which he governed were worshippers of God; for it is not likely that such tenderness should have been shown to a wicked prince and a wicked nation. Sarah's purity might have been preserved by other means. Nor does the humility and submission with which Abimelech receives the heavenly warning, nor the severity with which he expostulates with the patriarch for his unjust suspicion of him and his subjects, suit the character of one who feared not God.

Again, in the days of Isaac another Abimelech, the son or grandson of the former, in an interview with Isaac (the object of which was to compose some quarrels that had arisen between Isaac's herdsmen and his own subjects), tells Isaac that he saw certainly that Jehovah was with him. That under this conviction he solicited his friendship and his peace; and he calls Isaac the *Blessed of Jehovah*. This is the language of one who feared Jehovah and acknowledged his providence. In the days of Abraham therefore, and of Isaac, the worship of the true God was not yet extinguished among the idolaters of Palestine.

In Mesopotamia, in the same age, the family of Nachor, Abraham's brother, was not untainted with idolatry. Laban had certain images which he calls his gods, for which it should seem that his daughter Rachel entertained some degree of veneration. Yet two occasions are recorded, upon which Laban mentions the name of Jehovah, and acknowledges his providence. The first is when he receives Abraham's steward, who came as a suitor on the part of Isaac to Rebecca; the second, when he solemnly calls Jehovah to witness the reciprocal engagements of friendship between Jacob and himself at their parting.

In Egypt, the great workshop of Satan, where the molten images were cast which in later ages all the world adored,—in Egypt idolatry was in its infancy (if it had at all gotten ground) in the days of Joseph. For when Joseph was brought to Pharaoh to interpret his dream, the holy patriarch and the Egyptian king speak of God in much the same language, and with the same acknowledgment of his overruling providence.

It may be added that this dream, though perhaps the chief end of it was the elevation of Joseph and the settlement of Jacob's family in Goshen, is some



argument of a care of providence for the Egyptian people ; for by this merciful warning they were enabled to provide against the seven years of famine.

Idolatry therefore in this country was in no advanced state in Joseph's time, and the settlement of the patriarchs there, and the rank and authority that Joseph held, must have checked its growth for some considerable period.

At the time when the Israelites went out of Egypt, that country and the land of Canaan were sunk in the grossest idolatry. The name of Jehovah was forgotten, and in the public religion no traces were remaining of his worship. And yet the examples upon record of particular persons who amid the general apostacy retained some attachment to the service of the true God, afford I think an argument, that in either country this extreme degeneracy was at that time of no very ancient date.

The two Egyptian women to whom Pharaoh committed the iniquitous business of stifling the male children of the Hebrews in the birth "*feared God,*" *i. e.* they feared the true God ; for the superstitious fear of idols is never in the Scripture language called the fear of God. They feared God in that degree that they would not execute the king's com-

mand ; and that the true fear of God was the motive from which they acted, appears from the recompense they received : “ Because the midwives feared God, God dealt well with them and made their families great and prosperous.” The mixed multitude which went with Moses out of Egypt, though not genuine Israelites, were surely in some degree worshippers of the God of Israel ; for idolaters, in the proper sense of the word, would hardly have been permitted to follow the armies of the Lord. And after forty years, when the Israelites arrived at the land of Canaan, Joshua’s spies found in the town of Jericho a woman who confessed that “ Jehovah the God of Israel, he is God in heaven above and in the earth beneath.” And from this persuasion and in confident expectation of the execution of his vengeance on her guilty country, she entertained the Israelitish spies and managed their escape, for which she is commemorated by St. Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews among the eminent examples of faith.

These remains of true religion which were found in Egypt and Canaan so late as the days of Moses and Joshua are I think a proof, that a total apostasy from the invisible Creator to the worship of fictitious deities as the sole managers and masters of

this lower world, general as it was now become, had not however long prevailed in the countries where the corruptions of idolatry were of the longest standing, and may be supposed to have made the greatest advances.

And as for the idolatry of the older and the milder sort, which retaining the worship of the true God and acknowledging his providence, added a superstitious adoration of certain inferior spirits, who were supposed to have a delegated command under the controul of the Supreme over different parts of nature, from *this* even the chosen family itself was not always pure.

When the patriarch was to take up his abode at Bethel, the place where God appeared to him when he fled from Esau, which he considered as sanctified by God's immediate presence, we find him ordering his household to put away their *strange gods*; of which they had no small variety, as appears by the sacred historian's expression, that in compliance with this injunction they gave unto Jacob *all* their strange gods. These were probably the idols which Rachel brought with her from Mesopotamia, with others introduced by Judah's marriage with the daughter of a Canaanite.

Upon occasion of this removal to Bethel the patriarch reformed the worship of his family and his dependants, and took measures to prevent an immediate revival of the corruption. He put the objects of superstitious adoration out of sight, burying the idols under an oak near Shechem. But none that is conversant with the sacred history of the Israelites can doubt, that after Jacob's death his descendants contracted a new stain, and in the later years of their sojournment in Goshen were deeply infected with the idolatry which then prevailed in Egypt, to which in the desert they discovered an attachment. The molten calf they made in Horeb was surely not the first they had worshipped.

I have now considered as I proposed the general state of religion in the world before the institution of the Jewish church. I have shewn you the seductive form in which idolatry began and the slow progress that it made; which is partly to be ascribed to the means employed by pious nations in the beginning to resist the corruption, but in much greater part, as I shall hereafter shew, to the merciful providence of God. Idolatry in that malignant form which disowns the true God, and attaches itself entirely to fictitious divinities, prevailed nowhere till some short time, perhaps a century or more before the deliverance

of the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage. Idolatry in its milder form, acknowledging the Supreme Providence, and retaining the fear and worship of the true God, but adding the superstitious worship of fictitious deities, prevailed every where from the days of Abraham, his single family excepted; insomuch that after the death of Abraham and Isaac, the chosen family itself was from time to time infected.

Now it is to be observed, that paganism in this milder form was rather to be called a corrupt than a false religion; just as at this day the religion of the church of Rome is more properly corrupt than false. It is not a false religion; for the professors of it receive, with the fullest submission of the understanding to its mysteries, the whole gospel. They fear God. They trust in Christ as the Author of salvation. They worship the three Persons in the unity of the Godhead. The Roman church therefore hath not renounced the truth, but she has corrupted it; and she hath corrupted it in the very same manner, and nearly in the same degree, in which the truth of the patriarchal religion was corrupted by the first idolaters; adding to the fear and worship of God and his Son, the inferior fear and worship of deceased men, whose spirits they suppose to be invested with some

delegated authority over Christ's church on earth. Now the corruptions being so similar in kind and pretty equal in degree, the idolaters of antiquity and the papists of modern times seem much upon a footing.

Nor can I understand that these idolaters, so long as they acknowledged the providence and retained the worship of the true God, and believed in the promises to the fathers, were more separated from the church of Noah by their corruptions, than the papists now by similar corruptions, are separated from the true catholic church of Christ.

The ancient idolaters were not separated from the patriarchal church till their superstition ended in a total apostasy. The superstitions of Romanists may terminate in a similar apostasy equally complete, and then will they be equally separated from the church of Christ. And this I say not in any bitterness of zeal against those of the Roman communion, whom I maintain to be as yet a part of the great Shepherd's flock, although in danger of being lost, but merely to compare past things with present, and to show by the analogy of modern times what was the true state of religion in the world at large in the mid-

dle ages of idolatry between its first rise and its last stage of a total apostasy.

When this took place the Gentile world were cut off from all communion with the worshippers of the true God by the institution of the Jewish church, from which idolaters of every degree and denomination were excluded. But in the whole intermediate period the Gentiles were nothing less than the corrupt branch of the old patriarchal church, the church of Noah and of Shem; and the family of Abraham were nothing more than the reformed part of it. Now since a church in any state of corruption short of apostasy, through God's merciful forbearance retains the *privileges* of a church, that is, is indulged in those advantages which God of his free mercy grants to the general society of his worshippers on earth, and for this reason, that in the merciful judgment of our heavenly Father, in his pity for the infirmities of the human understanding, nothing but the apostasy of the heart extinguishes the character of a worshipper.

I shall now inquire how far the Gentile world in the middle ages between Abraham and Moses, considered as a corrupt branch of the patriarchal church, might be in the merciful care of Providence; what

means might be used on the part of God to keep up the remembrance of himself among them, by a right use of which they might have recovered the purity from which they fell, and which, though through the extreme degeneracy of mankind they prevented not a general apostacy for many ages, had a tendency however to the general restoration by raising an universal expectation of the great Restorer. And in this inquiry I shall proceed as I have done in the preceding part of my subject, by making the analogy of modern times the interpreter of ancient history.

I recur therefore to my former example, and I set out with this principle, that the church of Rome is at this day a corrupt church,—a church corrupted with idolatry; with idolatry very much the same in kind and in degree with the worst that ever prevailed among the Egyptians or the Canaanites, till within one or two centuries at the most of the time of Moses. Yet we see this corrupt, this idolatrous church of Rome, has her priests and her bishops, who, deriving in continual succession from the apostles, are true priests and true bishops, invested with the authority which by the original institutions belongs to those two orders. The priests of the corrupt church of Rome have a true authority (I speak not



of an exclusive authority in prejudice of the Protestant priesthood,) but they have their share of the common authority of priests of the church catholic to preach the word of God, although they preach other things for which they have no authority.

They have a true authority to administer the sacraments, although they have no authority to institute *new* sacraments ; and we doubt not, notwithstanding their presumption in preaching adventitious doctrines, and in obtruding supernumerary sacraments, that the *true* word preached by them, and the *true* sacraments administered, are accompanied with God's blessing and produce a salutary effect on the heart of the hearer.

Again, the bishops of this corrupt church have in common with the bishops of the Protestant and of the Greek churches, all the authority of the first successors of the apostles that may be supposed to subsist without the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit.

If they usurp rights which the inspired apostles never claimed, their *just claims* are not invalidated by those unwarrantable pretensions : They are to judge of the qualifications of those that would be

ordained: They have authority to appoint to the priest's office, and to consecrate to their own by the imposition of their hands: They are the overseers of Christ's flock. They have the power to suspend heterodox or immoral priests from the exercise of their function, and to exclude laics of scandalous lives from the sacraments: In a word, to inflict ecclesiastical censures and penalties for ecclesiastical offences. Like other magistrates they are accountable to God for any abuse of power, but still the right of government is in their hands. In their own church and over those of their own communion they have a true episcopal jurisdiction. And this is the avowed opinion of the church of England, as it must be the opinion of all who acknowledge the divine institution of the episcopal order. For when a priest who has received his orders from a bishop of the church of Rome openly abjures the errors of that church, and declares his assent to the articles of the church of England, he becomes immediately a priest in our church without any second ordination from a Protestant bishop: As a laic of that church who openly abjures its errors is admitted to our communion, without any second baptism by the hands of a Protestant priest.

Now, since in these days the church of Rome though corrupted with idolatry, has her priests and her bishops, it may seem the less strange that the ancient patriarchal church when she became corrupted with a similar idolatry in an equal degree, should have her priests and her prophets. True priests and true prophets, though not perhaps untainted with the errors of their times ; priests who offered sacrifices to the true God and had authority to accept the oblations of the laity ; prophets who were commissioned to resist the prevailing corruption and to prophesy of the great redemption. That these two orders were maintained through the wonderful mercy of God in idolatrous countries, till the degeneracy came to that extreme degree that he judged it fit to separate the apostates and to put his chosen people under the safe keeping of the law, I shall now prove from the sacred records.

And first for the priests of the patriarchal church in her corrupted state.

In the days of Abraham, a prince of a *Canaanitish* nation, Melchizedek king of Salem, was the priest of the Most High God. The Jews have indeed a vain tradition that this Melchizedek was the patriarch Shem. According to the chronology

which the Jews choose to follow, Shem might be alive at the time that Melchizedek received the tenths from Abraham. But by a truer account, which the Jews followed in more ancient times, and which was followed by all the primitive fathers of the Christian church, Shem was dead above four hundred years before Abraham was born; and if we were even to grant that he might be living in the days of Abraham, the Jews have not yet explained how he came by the kingdom which this tradition gives him in the land of Canaan. But we have it on better than rabbinical authority, on the authority of an apostle, that Melchizedek had no connexion with the family of Abraham. “He counted not his descent,” saith St. Paul, “from them.” And St. Paul’s argument, as is acutely remarked by the learned Bishop Patrick, would be equally inconclusive whether Melchizedek’s descent were counted from Abraham or Abraham’s from him. Melchizedek therefore was neither descendant nor any ancestor of Abraham. He was, as Josephus the learned historian of the Jews candidly acknowledges, a prince of Canaan.

Yet was he no self-constituted usurping priest, but a priest by divine appointment and commission, as appears by the deference which Abraham paid

him; “For consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.” This tenth of the spoils was no payment to Melchizedek in his temporal capacity as king of Salem for any assistance he had given Abraham in the battle; for he went out to meet him when he was *returning* from the slaughter of the kings. The king of Salem therefore had taken no part in the expedition; he had remained at home inactive, and went out to meet the patriarch upon his return, in the quality of God’s high-priest, to pronounce God’s blessing upon him, to bear his public testimony to Abraham as God’s chosen servant, and to declare that it was by the immediate succour of the arm of the Most High God, whose priest he was, that Abraham’s little army had overthrown the confederate kings; and the tenths being no payment for a military service, could be nothing else than a religious offering on the part of Abraham, by which he acknowledged the protection of the Most High God, and acknowledged the authority of Melchizedek’s priesthood. The divine authority of which appears again more strongly in this circumstance, that this priest Melchizedek was no less than the type of that high-priest who now standeth at God’s right hand making intercession for the sins of all man-

kind. Of his universal everlasting priesthood, the priesthood of Melchizedek was the type.

The prophet David declares the nature of Christ's priesthood, by the analogy it bears to the priesthood of Melchizedek. And from this analogy St. Paul builds his great argument for the superiority of Christ's priesthood above the Levitical. Christ is for this reason a priest for ever, because he is after the order of Melchizedek.

From all this it appears, that in the days of Abraham at least, there was a priesthood among the Canaanites of higher rank than the Levitical, and more exactly typical of the priesthood of the Son of God.

Again, in the days of Joseph we find in Egypt a Potipherah a priest of On, whose daughter Joseph married; and in the days of Moses, a Jethro a priest of Midian, whose daughter Moses married. It has been made a question concerning both these persons, whether they were priests at all. The doubt arises from the ambiguity of the Hebrew word, which is used in some parts of Scripture for a prince or magistrate. But it is to be observed, that not a single passage is to be found in the books of Moses where

it is used in these senses, except it be in these two instances. That they were both priests, was clearly the opinion of the Jews who made the first Greek translation of the Pentateuch, of the Jewish historian Josephus, and of St. Jerome.

And if they were priests at all, they were priests of the true God, the one in Egypt in the town of On in the days of Joseph, the other among the Midianites in the days of Moses. For it is hardly creditable, that Providence should have permitted either Joseph or Moses to contract an alliance by marriage with a priest of any idolatrous temple.

Thus it appears, that the true God had an order of priests in the Gentile world down to the time of the Mosaic institution. These priests were the corrupt remains of the ancient priesthood of Noah's universal church.

We have then, I think, found the priests of the patriarchal church in its corrupted state; let us now look for its prophets. This is a point still more material to establish than the existence of the priesthood, because it is the existence of true prophecies among idolatrous nations which is the chief subject of our inquiry; and true prophecies, that is,

prophecies of divine original, could not have been found among idolatrous nations, unless certain persons had lived amongst them who were gifted by the Spirit of God, and favoured with divine communications.

But of this order we have two undoubted instances,—the one in Job, the other in Balaam.

Job, by the consent of the learned of all ages, was no Israelite. He was certainly of the family of Abraham; for whatever difficulties may be raised about his particular country, none will deny that it lay in some part of that region of which the whole was occupied by Abraham's descendants. He was not however of the elected branch of the family, and was probably of that stock which became at last the worst of idolaters, the Edomites. That the country in which he lived was in his time infected with an incipient idolatry, appears from the mention that he makes of the worship of the sun and moon as a crime with which he was himself untainted; a circumstance from which he could have pretended no merit, had not the prevailing fashion of his country and his times presented a strong temptation to the crime. And as there is no mention of any other kind of idolatry in the book of Job, it is reasonable to



conclude that in his time the corruption had gone no greater length.

Now, that Job was a prophet is so universally confessed, that it is needless to dwell upon the proof of it. He was a prophet in the declining age of the patriarchal church, in the interval between **Esau**, from whom he was descended, and **Moses**, whose time he preceded; and he prophesied in an idolatrous country where the sun and moon were worshipped.

In this idolatrous country he prophesied of the **Redeemer**; and it is a circumstance that deserves particular attention, that he prophesies of the **Redeemer**, not without manifest allusion to the divinity of his nature, and express mention of the resurrection of the body as the effect of his redemption;—two articles of our creed which we are told with great confidence are modern innovations; whereas we find them not only in the Jewish prophets, but in far more ancient prophets of a more ancient church.

“I know,” saith Job, “that my **Redeemer** liveth; I know that he *now* liveth;” that is, that his nature is to live. He describes the **Redeemer**,

you see, in language much allied to that in which Jehovah describes his own nature in the conference with Moses at the bush. Jehovah describes himself by his uncaused existence; Job describes the Redeemer by a life inseparable from his essence. "I know that in the latter days this ever-living Redeemer shall stand upon the earth. He shall take up his residence among men in an embodied form; God shall be manifested in the flesh to destroy the works of the Devil: He shall stand upon the earth in the latter days; in the last period of the world's existence;" which implies that this standing of the Redeemer upon the earth will close the great scheme of Providence for man's restoration; "And although he shall not stand upon the earth before the latter days, yet I know that he is MY Redeemer; that my death, which must take place many ages before his appearance, will not exclude me from my share in his redemption. For though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Though nothing will be then remaining of my external person, though the form of this body will have been long destroyed, the organization of its constituent parts demolished, and its very substance dissipated, the softer part become the food of worms bred in its own putrefaction, the solid bones moulded into powder;

“notwithstanding this ruin of my outward fabric,  
 “the immortal principle within me shall not only  
 “survive, but its decayed mansion will be restored.  
 “It will be reunited to a body, of which the organs  
 “will not only connect it with the external world,  
 “but serve to cement its union with its Maker.  
 “For in my flesh, with the corporeal eye, with the  
 “eye of the immortal body which I shall then as-  
 “sume, I shall see the divine Majesty in the person  
 “of the glorified Redeemer.”

Such was the tenor of Job’s prophecies, of a prophet of the Gentiles ; and such was the light which God granted to the Gentile world in the first stage of its corruption. And that this light was not withdrawn till the corruption attained its height we learn from the second instance, the Aramæan prophet Balaam.

What might be the exact degree of the degeneracy in Balaam’s country, I cannot take upon me to determine. But the bordering nation, the Moabites, were addicted to that gross idolatry which made homicide and prostitution an essential part of its religious rites. From the extreme depravity of the times, and from the wickedness of Balaam’s own character, it has been doubted whether he was pro-

perly a prophet. It has been imagined that he might be a sorcerer, who practised some wicked arts of magical divination, and owed his fame to the casual success of some of his predictions ; that those remarkable prophecies which he delivered when Balak called him to curse the Israelites, were the result of an *extraordinary* impulse upon his mind upon that particular occasion, and no more prove that the gift of prophecy was a permanent endowment of his mind, as it was in Job and the Jewish prophets, than the speaking of his ass upon the same occasion proves that the animal had a permanent use of the faculty of speech.

The difficulty of conceiving that true prophets should be found in an idolatrous nation, if I mistake not, I have already removed by the analogy which I have shewn to subsist between ancient and modern corruptions. The difficulty of conceiving that the gift of prophecy should be imparted to a wicked character, will be much softened, if not entirely removed, if we recollect the confessed crimes of some of the Jewish prophets, and the confessed indiscretions of some persons who shared in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit in the primitive churches. And if once we admit, as the evidence of plain fact compels us to admit, that the gift of pro-

phesy is not always in proportion to the moral worth of the character, we must confess it to be a question which is beyond the ability of human reason to decide, in what proportion they must necessarily correspond, or with what degree of depravity in the moral character the prophetic talent may be incompatible. Balaam's impiety at last ran to the length of open rebellion against God; for he suggested to the king of Moab, as the only means by which the fortunes of the Israelites could be injured, the infernal stratagem of enticing them to take a part in that idolatry for which, by the tenor of his own predictions, the Moabites were destined to destruction. But this apostasy of Balaam's was subsequent to the prophecies that he delivered to Balak, and was the effect of the temptation which the occasion presented, the offer of riches and preferment in Balak's court. It is probable indeed that his heart had never been right with God, or these objects could not have laid hold of him so forcibly. But this, for any thing that appears from the sacred history, might be his first act of open impiety and rebellion; and the conclusion, that in the former part of his life he had been too bad a man to be honoured with the prophetic gift, is precarious. The circumstances of the story are of far more weight than any reasoning built upon such preca-

rious principles as man's notion of the manner in which the divine gift should be distributed; and from the circumstances of the story it appears, that he was a true prophet of the true God. When Balak's messengers first came to him, he speaks the language of one who had the fear of God habitually upon his mind. He disclaims all power of his own to bless or curse, to take any step in the business but under God's express direction and permission. He must have God's leave to go to Balak; and when he comes to Balak, he must take heed to speak what Jehovah puts into his mouth. Although Balak would give him his house full of silver and gold, he could not transgress the word of Jehovah his God, to do less or more. This was his language in the *ordinary* state of his mind, when he was under no prophetic impulse; and it is remarkable that he speaks of God in the same terms which were afterwards in use among the Jewish prophets; "Jehovah *my God*," "Jehovah, the God whose prophet am I." In ecstasy he expresses the same sentiments in a more figured language. He describes his own faculty of prediction in images the most exactly expressive of the prophetic gifts and the prophetic office; expressive of no singular unexampled impulse upon this occasion, but of fre-

quent and habitual intercourse with the Most High God, by voice and visions, in dream and in trance.

It is very remarkable, that in the strain of these predictions there is no indication of that violent constraint which some have imagined upon the mind of the speaker, or that he was more a necessary agent than any other prophet under the divine impulse. In every instance of prophecy by divine inspiration, thoughts and images were presented to the prophet's mind by the inspiring Spirit, which no meditation or study of his own could have suggested; and therefore the mind of the man under this influence might properly be considered as a machine in the hand of God. Yet the will of the man in this, as in every instance in which man acts under the control of Providence, seems to have been the spring by which the machine was put in motion.

And though in conceiving the prophecy the man was passive, in uttering it he was a free and voluntary agent; which appears from this circumstance, that the prophet had it in his choice to dissemble and prevaricate, to utter smooth things and to prophecy deceits. And this was Balaam's situation when he tells Balak's messengers that he cannot go beyond the word of Jehovah his God; that what God should

put in his mouth, *that* he must speak. It is not that his organs of speech were not upon these occasions in his own command, that they were determined by some other principle than his own will to the utterance of certain words which might convey certain thoughts, but that he had no power of uttering true predictions, of pronouncing either blessing or curse that might prove effectual, otherwise than as he spake in conformity to the divine motions; and the alacrity and ardour of his prophetic strains indicate a satisfaction and complacency of his own mind in uttering its conceptions.

There is one passage in his second song, which as it lies in the English Bibles may seem to contradict this assertion: “Behold I have received commandment to bless, and he hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it.” Which may seem to say, that if he *could*, he would have reversed the blessing. But the original, according to the reading of the best manuscripts, expresses a very different sentiment: “Behold, to bless was I brought hither, (*brought*, not by Balak’s invitation but by God,) to bless was I brought hither. I will bless, and I will not decline it.” And the same sense appears in the Greek translation of the Septuagint; and accordingly he pronounces his blessing without reserve or



reluctance. He discovers no unwillingness to paint the prosperity of the Jewish nation in the highest colours, no concern for the calamities that awaited their enemies; and in his last effusions his mind seems to enjoy the great scene that was before him, of the happiness and glory of the Messiah's reign, and the final extermination of idolaters.

Another circumstance to be remarked is, that no traces of idolatrous superstition or magical enchantment appear in the rites which were used upon this occasion. We read indeed, that after the third sacrifice "he went not as at other times to seek enchantments." Some have taken alarm at the word *enchantments*, taking it in a bad sense. No conclusion can be drawn from a passage so obscure, as all who are versed in the Hebrew language must confess this to be in the original. The words which are rendered "as at other times," seem not to allude as these English words should do, to something that had been Balaam's ordinary practice upon *former* occasions, but to what he had done before upon *this* occasion. "He went not as from time to time before," or "he went not as he had done once and again, to seek enchantments." What these enchantments might be which he went to seek, since it cannot be determined by the mere force of the

word *enchantments*, may be best conjectured by considering what Balaam had done once and again upon the present occasion.

Now once and again after each of the first sacrifices he retired to a solitary place. And what sought he in this retirement? What he sought may be divined by what he met with. He met God, and God put a word in his mouth; and this the third time Balaam did not. He staid with Balak and the Moabitic chiefs in the place where the third sacrifice had been performed, patiently waiting the event, with his face toward the wilderness, where the Israelite army lay encamped. These enchantments, therefore, which once and again he went to seek, and which the third time he sought not, were as it should seem no idolatrous or magical enchantments, but either some stated rites of invocation of the inspiring spirit which he practised in retirement, or, as I rather think, some sensible signs by which, in the early ages of the world, God was pleased to communicate with his prophets; some voice or vision. His preparatory rite was, that in each place where he took his station he directed the king of Moab to make seven altars, and to offer seven bullocks and seven rams. In this there is nothing of idolatry, but every circumstance is characteristic of a solemn

sacrifice to the true God. The altars were raised expressly for the particular purpose of this sacrifice. He used no altar that was ready made, lest it should have been profaned by offerings to the idols of the country. And being raised in a hurry upon the spot, they could not be durable or stately erections of wormanship and art, (such altars as the Israelites were permitted to erect) but simple mounds of earth, or heaps of unpolished stone, which could not long remain after they had served the present solemn business, to be afterwards profaned by idolatrous sacrifices.

Some have suspected something of idolatrous superstition in the number of the altars and of the victims. On the contrary I am persuaded, that the choice of the number *seven* was a solemn and significant appropriation of the offerings to the Supreme God the Maker of the world. The last business in the book of Job, when the great argument between Job and his friends is brought to a conclusion, is a solemn sacrifice, not devised by Job or any of his friends, but prescribed by the *express voice of God*. And this sacrifice like Balaan's consists of seven bullocks and of seven rams. It should seem therefore, that in the earliest ages it was a characteristic rite of the pure patriarchal worship to sacri-

fice on occasions of great solemnity by sevens. The key to this rite is the institution of the Sabbath. The observance of the seventh day was the sacrament of the ancient church; of that church, which was more ancient than the Jewish; of that priesthood, which was more dignified than Aaron's; of the church of Adam before the flood; of the church of Noah after it. For the same reason that the seventh day was sanctified, the victims bled by sevens; and to sacrifice seven rams or seven bullocks at a time, was to declare that the offering was made to that God who created the world in six days, and to whose service the seventh day was therefore consecrated. Upon the same principle it was that much of the Jewish ritual was governed by the number seven. The golden candlestick had seven branches supporting seven burning lamps. When atonement was to be made for the sin of a priest or of the congregation, the vail was to be sprinkled seven times with the blood of the offering, and the mercy-seat was to be sprinkled seven times on the great day of annual expiation. The festivals of the Jews were celebrated each for seven days successively, and among the extraordinary sacrifices of each day were seven or twice seven lambs. When the ark of the covenant was brought from the house of Obed-Edom to Jerusalem, the sacrifice

on that great occasion was seven bullocks and seven rams. Perhaps in a much later age than Balaam's the number of his altars and his victims would have afforded no certain character of a pure worship; for in the later ages of idolatry we find a superstitious veneration for the number seven among the heathens. But thus it is with all ceremonies, that their significance depends upon the interpretation which custom makes of them. And the interpretation of the same ceremony will be different, according to the different state of opinions in different countries and at different times. Hence what was originally an act of pure devotion, may become in later times a superstitious rite. The stone which Jacob erected at Bethel became afterwards an occasion of idolatry. So to offer animals by sevens was no longer an appropriation of the sacrifice to the invisible Creator, when it could no longer be understood to allude to that particular circumstance in the creation, that it was finished in six days. And to this no allusion could be understood where the circumstance itself was not remembered. But this hinders not but that in the days of Balaam, who lived within a century of Job, the same ceremonies had the same meaning in Balaam's worship as in Job's; and that the number of his altars and his victims was a circumstance which in that age gave

a public character to his sacrifice, by which Balak and his princes, and the confederate armies of Moab and Midian, might understand that it was offered in contempt of their idols, and in honour of the God who rested from the business of creation on the seventh day.

Now, when all these circumstances are put together; the age of Balaam, that he lived within a century after Job; his country, which was in the neighbourhood of Job's,—part at least of a tract which was occupied by descendants of Abraham or by collateral branches of the family; his open acknowledgment of Jehovah as his God; that both in his ordinary state of mind and under the divine impulse, he refers his prophetic talent to the inspiration of Jehovah; that he disclaims any power of his own to bless or to curse, otherwise than as the interpreter of the counsels of Heaven; that he practises no magical enchantments, but offers sacrifices to God after the patriarchal rites; that in uttering his predictions he appears not to have been more a necessary agent than every other prophet: when to all these circumstances we add, that he uttered a true prophecy, a prophecy extending, if I read its meaning aright, from his own time to the Messiah's second advent; a prophecy which in every part

which relates to times which are now gone by, hath been fulfilled with wonderful exactness, and in other parts which relate to ages yet to come, harmonizes with the predictions of the Jewish prophets and of the Apocalypse ;—can a doubt remain, that the man who to all secondary characters of a prophet added this great character, that by a divine impulse, as is confessed, he delivered a prophecy of things too distant to fall within any man's natural foresight ; a prophecy which the world hath seen in part accomplished, and which in its other parts resembles other prophecies not yet accomplished, but confessedly divine ; a prophecy, which for the variety of its composition in its various parts, for the aptness, the beauty, the majesty, the horror of its images, may compare with the most animated effusions of the Hebrew bards ; can a doubt remain whether this man, with all the imperfections of his private character, was a true prophet ?

I am not ignorant that Origen and other divines of ancient and modern times have been unwilling to acknowledge his pretensions. If their authority should seem to outweigh the evidence drawn from the particulars of his story, I have a greater authority to produce against them, the authority of an inspired apostle. “The dumb ass,” saith St. Peter,

alluding to Balaam's story, "the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbad the madness of the *prophet*;" acknowledging him you see for a prophet, though, for the folly of loving the wages of unrighteousness, he calls him mad.

Balaam therefore was a prophet; for with the evidence of facts and the authority of an inspired apostle on our side, we will be confident in the assertion, though Origen and Calvin be against us. Balaam was a prophet. He lived in an age of gross idolatry, and prophesied to idolaters. In him, as I conceive, the prophetic order without the pale of the Mosaic church, which was now formed, was extinguished; for I find no traces in history, sacred or profane, of a true prophet out of Israel after the death of Balaam. He fell you know in the general carnage of the Midianites, and was himself among the first instances of God's vengeance on apostates. It is probable therefore that the prophecies which he delivered at Shittim were the last that were addressed to the old patriarchal church, now corrupt in the extreme, and on the verge of dissolution. It is remarkable that this church should be admonished by the last words of her last prophet of the impending vengeance, as the Jewish church by a greater prophet within a few years of her dissolution was



admonished of *her* fate. It is remarkable that this last call of God to that apostatizing church should be the first occasion, upon record at least, upon which the Messiah is described in images of terror, as a warlike prince reducing the world by conquest, and putting his vanquished enemies to the sword. With these predictions of the Messiah, (predictions which by all expositors, Jews as well as Christian, by Rabbis of later times as well as by the more candid and more knowing Jews of earlier ages, are understood of the Messiah), with these predictions Balaam intermixes many brief but eloquent assertions of the first principles of natural religion:— The omnipotence of the Deity, his universal providence, and the immutability of his counsels. And, to be a standing monument of these great truths, he leaves a very general but very exact prediction, of the fortunes of the empires and kingdoms that were at that time the most considerable, and of those that in succeeding ages were successively to arise and perish in their turns. And his images bear all the analogy to those of later prophets, of Daniel in particular, and the sublime author of the Apocalypse, which the language of a general sketch can bear to that of a minute detail; and the names and epithets which he applies to the Supreme Being are the very same which are used by Moses, Job, and the

inspired writers of the Jews ; namely, *God*, the *Almighty*, the *Most High*, and *Jehovah* ; which is a proof, that gross as the corruptions of idolatry were now become, the patriarchal religion was not sufficiently forgotten, for its language to be grown obsolete.

In this Balaam set the sun of prophecy in the horizon of the Gentile world, and yet a total night came not. For some ages a twilight glimmered in their sky, which gradually decayed and became at last almost insensible, but began to brighten again during the captivity of the Jews under the Babylonian monarchs, and from that period continued to gather strength, till at length the morning star took its station over the stable at Bethlehem. The sun of righteousness arose to set no more, and the light again was clear and universal.

You will recollect what I advanced as a probable conjecture in a former part of these disquisitions, that upon the first appearance of idolatry, when the uninfected part of mankind would be taking all means to check the progress of the contagion, the traditional history of the creation, the deluge, and the promises to the first patriarchs, which at that time would probably be pretty perfect, would be

committed to writing. We may assert, I think, with more certainty, that the prophecies of Job and Balaam, and of other prophets of that period, if any other existed, (and many might, although their works and their very names have been long since forgotten;) it is more certain, I say, of the prophecies of these ages, that they would be committed to writing, than of the earlier traditions. For that letters were older than the beginnings of idolatry cannot be proved, though in my opinion it is more probable than the contrary. Whereas it is certain, not only that the Israelites had letters before the law, but that books and writing were in use in the days of Job in that part of the country where Job and Balaam lived; and if in use in the days of Job, certainly not out of use in the later days of Balaam. For although religion in these ages was upon the decline, arts and sciences were in a stage of progress and advancement.—That Balaam's prophecies, at Shittim in particular, were committed to writing among the Moabites and the Midianites, is, I think, incontestable. For to the Moabites and the Midianites they were delivered, not within hearing of the Israelites. And how did Moses, who heard them not, come by the knowledge of them, unless it were that they were committed to writing, and that the books of the Moabites or the Midianites fell into the con-

queror's hands? Moses, it is true, was an inspired writer, which may seem to some to account sufficiently for his knowledge of every thing he relates.

But God, even in the more immediate interpositions of his providence, acts by natural means and second causes, so far as natural means and second causes may be made to serve the purpose. The influence, therefore, of the inspiring Spirit on the mind of an historian, can be nothing more than to secure him from mistake and falsity, by strengthening his memory, and by maintaining in his heart a religious love and reverence for truth, that he may be incapable of omission through forgetfulness, and may be invincibly fortified against all temptations to forge, conceal, disguise, or prevaricate. That inspiration ever was the means of conveying the first knowledge of facts to an historian's mind, is a very unreasonable supposition. It is to suppose an unnecessary miracle. For a miracle is always unnecessary where natural means might serve the purpose. And the supposition of an unnecessary miracle is always an unreasonable, and indeed a dangerous supposition. Unreasonable, because no evidence can prove it, and no plausible argument can be alleged for it; dangerous, because it leads

to an unlimited and pernicious credulity. We conclude, therefore, that Balaam's prophecies at Shittim were committed to writing by the people to whom they were delivered, because they are recorded by the inspired historian, to whom they were *not* delivered, who could not by any other means have come to the knowledge of them, and who, by virtue of his inspiration, was incapable of the dishonest act of forging facts of which he had no knowledge. But further, it appears from another inspired writer of the Jewish church, that other authentic accounts of Balaam's prophecies at Shittim, besides that which Moses had transmitted, was current among the Jews in a very late age, which contained some particulars which Moses, as foreign to the subject of his history, has omitted. Moses has preserved the public predictions which related to the fortunes of the Israelites and their adversaries in all ages, and to the universally interesting subject of the Messiah.

These other accounts contained the particulars of a private conference between Balaam and Balak, in which the idolatrous king inquires of God's prophet, in what way *he* the king might make expiation for his offences. "Remember, O my people," saith the prophet Micah, "what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered

“him, from Shittim unto Gilgal.” And then he relates the conference. The word *remember* evidently refers the Israelites of Micah’s time to some account of this conference which they might remember, which they ought to have holden in remembrance. Which account, in the judgment of Micah, who thus solemnly appeals to it, was authentic, and we must believe it to be authentic upon the credit of Micah’s inspiration. Now what could this be but some written records of the prophecies at Shittim transmitted from the times of Balaam, which must have come to the Isrealites, as the other account came to them, from the original books of the Moabites ?

Balaam’s prophecies at Shittim therefore were committed to writing among the people to whom they were first delivered. If these prophecies, why not earlier prophecies of Balaam’s ? For that these were not the first and only prophecies, appears from the reputation he held as a prophet when the war between Balak and the Israelites broke out.

If Balaam’s prophecies, why not those of earlier prophets ? The idolatry of the age in which they lived would not prevent it ; for idolatry is always superstitious, and superstition would receive without distinction whatever went under the name of a pro-

phesy, especially if the style in which it was conceived might at all suit with its pretensions. Accordingly we find, that idolaters were not at all deficient in their veneration for the true prophets. It was rather their error, that without distinguishing between the true prophet and the false, they entertained an extravagant respect for both, ascribing to them not only a foresight, but a command of futurity. This unreasonable belief in the prophet, not as the messenger, but as the assessor of the gods, sharing their power rather than declaring their will, was itself a branch of idolatry, even when the true prophet was the object of it. But the consequence of this superstition would be, that all prophecies, true and false, would be promiscuously recorded. At first perhaps while idolatry, in Shem's family at least, was the crime of individuals only, and the true worship of God had the support of the civil magistrate; (and in the country where Job and Balaam lived, the first public defection must have taken place in the interval between Job and Balaam; for in Job's time the first and mildest species of idolatry, the worship of the sun and moon, was an iniquity punished by the judge). While this state of things continued prophecies would be added from time to time, as they were delivered, to those earlier collections of sacred history, which, if our conjecture be admitted that

they existed, would probably be in the custody of the priests.

If no collections of history of the antiquity we have supposed existed, the first prophecies that were committed to writing would form a sacred volume, which unquestionably would be committed to the care of the priests, whose office it would be to add to it from time to time any later prophecies that might seem of sufficient importance to be registered in the archives of the church; for this is agreeable to what we find to have been in later ages the universal practice of all nations.

Among all nations certain books, from the supposed authenticity of early records and pretended oracles which they contain, have been holden in religious veneration; and these have ever been preserved in the temples under the care of the priests, who from time to time have added such new matter as to themselves and the civil rulers might seem of sufficient moment to challenge a place in these sacred registers. We have an instance of this practice among God's people; for when Joshua, some little time before his death, by his last pathetic exhortation to the general assembly of the tribes of Israel, had brought the people to a solemn renewal of their



vows of obedience to Jehovah, he wrote the story of the whole transaction in the book of the law of God. He *added* this narrative to the sacred volume of the law, which, by Moses's express command, was deposited in the sanctuary on one side of the ark of the covenant. Now, while the priests and the magistrates were themselves free from any idolatrous taint, the sacred books in their custody would suffer no wilful corruption. But when the keepers of these books became themselves infected with idolatrous superstition, they would not lose their veneration for writings which had long been esteemed divine, nor would they be so hardy as to destroy any part of the original deposit, or even to make any considerable alterations in the text, however unfavourable it might be to the new system in the interests of which they were now engaged. The contrariety would not be perceived, nor would such measures be taken to abolish it. Priestcraft indeed is politic and daring, but simple superstition is both timid and indiscreet. Priestcraft was the growth of later ages, and the consequence of a further corruption. For priestcraft, which is a cunning management of the superstitions of the people for the temporal advantage of the priesthood, supposes a priesthood itself free of superstition, and was never known in the world till the Gentile priests of

*sincere* idolaters (if the expression may be allowed) became infidels. Simple superstition was the first stage of the corruption among priests, no less than laics; and simple superstition hath no freedom in the pursuit of ends, no determination in the choice of means, but is the slave of fear and habit.

Habit therefore previously formed would for some time preserve a respect for the records of the ancient church, when the pure religion was forsaken. And while this habit operated, fear would prevent any corruptions of them by wilful mutilation, changes, or erasures. They would be liable however to a corruption of another kind. The priests receiving false oracles with no less veneration than the true, and zealous for the credit of superstitious rites of worship, would make large additions of fable to the historic part, and of feigned predictions of impostors to the prophetic. Still the original true history and true prophecy would be preserved, and, blended with the false, would, from age to age, while the corruption lasted, be carefully laid up under the care of the priests, and make a part of the treasures of the heathen temples.

Nor is the strange mixture of sense and absurdity, of rational religion and impious superstition, which

appear in the lives and opinions of the wiser heathens, to be traced with equal probability to any other source.

The purest morals in the ordinary life, joined with obscene and impious rites of worship; a just notion of the moral attributes of the Deity, accompanied with a belief in the subordinate power of impure and cruel dæmons; a clear understanding of the nature of the human mind as an immaterial substance and a voluntary agent, connected with a persuasion of the influence of the stars on the affairs of men, not only in the revolutions and commotions of empires, but on the private fortunes of every individual. These were the inconsistencies, not only of the popular creed and the popular practice, but of the creed and of the practice of the wisest and the best of their philosophers. Socrates himself, pure as his morality and sublime as his theology were, so far as the supreme God was their object, worshipped the gods of his country according to the established rites.\*

Now, how may we account for these contradictions in the opinions, and these inconsistencies in

\* That he died a martyr to the doctrine of the unity of the divine substance, is a vulgar error.

the conduct of wise and conscientious men? For such, it must be confessed, many of the heathen philosophers were, notwithstanding the abuse which is sometimes so liberally bestowed upon them by ignorant declaimers. Whence was it, that the same men should practise rational devotion in the closet, and come abroad to join in a rank superstition? That they should form themselves to the general habits of sobriety and temperance, and yet occasionally partake of the indecent liberties of a Greek festival? Unless it was that they found the principles of true religion and the rites of an idolatrous worship established on what appeared to them the same authority, upon the credit of their sacred books, in which both were alike inculcated; books, to which they could not but allow some authority, at the same time that they had no certain means of distinguishing the authentic part from later and corrupt additions. Be that as it may, whether this might be the true source of that inconsistency of principle and practice, which was so striking in the lives of virtuous heathens, and is really a phenomenon in the history of mankind, (which I mention, only because it affords a collateral argument for the truth of perhaps the only supposition by which it may be satisfactorily explained; the existence of such books as I have described, composed of fable joined with

true history, and of false prophecies of great antiquity added to more ancient predictions of God's true prophets), will hardly bear a doubt. Since it is the necessary consequence of principles which cannot reasonably be disputed, that in early ages the worshippers of the true God would use all means to preserve the memory of the first revelations, and that the first idolaters retaining a blind veneration for these ancient collections, when they no longer knew the real importance of them, would not be less careful to preserve the false oracles in which they equally believed. If such books existed, it cannot bear a doubt that they made the ground-work of all the idolatrous worship of later ages, and together with the corruption, were the means of perpetuating some disguised and obscure remembrance of true prophecies. So wonderfully hath Providence overruled the follies and the crimes of men, rendering them the instruments of his own purpose, and the means of general and lasting good. It was to the remains of these books which I have shewn you to have been in fact the corrupted and mutilated records of the patriarchal church, that the Greek philosophers were probably indebted for those fragments of the patriarchal creed, from which they drew the just notions that we find scattered in their writings, of the immortality of the soul, a future retri-

bution, the unity of the divine substance, and even of the trinity of persons. For of this the sages of the Pythagorean and Platonic schools had some obscure and distorted apprehensions. And to no other source can we refer the expectation that prevailed in the heathen world at large, of a great personage to arise in some part of the East for the general advantage of mankind.

And in this I think you will now agree with me, if you bear in mind the fact that I set out with proving from historical evidence, that certain books which were preserved as a sacred treasure in the heathen temples, contained explicit prophecies of Christ; which are more likely to have been ancient prophecies preserved in the manner I have described, though not without a mixture of corruption, for which too I have accounted, than the involuntary effusions of the impostors of later ages, occasionally uttering true predictions under a compulsive influence of the divine Spirit: an opinion which, I am persuaded, would never have been adopted, had not the severe notions that too long prevailed of an original reprobation of the greater part of mankind, made men unwilling to believe that heathens could be in possession of the smallest particle of true prophecy, and of course cut off all inquiry after the means by which

it might be conveyed to them. Beside that, in all questions of difficulty, as this must be confessed to be, men are apt rather to consult their ease, by taking up with the first plausible solution their invention may devise, than to submit to the labour of an accurate investigation of facts, and a circumspect deduction of consequences. The fact, however, that books were preserved in the heathen temples which contained true prophecies of Christ, rests, as I have shown you, upon the highest historical evidence. Nor does it rest alone upon the contents of those books which were preserved at Rome under the name of the Oracles of the Cumæan Sibyl; the same perhaps might be established by another work, which was of no less authority in the East, where it passed for the work of Hystaspes, a Persian Magus of high antiquity. I forbear however to exhaust your patience by pushing the inquiry any farther, and shall now dismiss the subject by cautioning you, not to take alarm at the names of a Sibyl or a Magus. I assert, not that any of the fabled Sibyls of the old mythology uttered true prophecies, but that some of the prophecies which were ascribed to Sibyls were true prophecies, which the ignorant heathens ascribed to those fabulous personages, when the true origin of them was forgotten. For Hystaspes, I will not too confidently assert that he was

not the compiler of the writings which were current under his name ; but I conceive he was only the compiler from originals of high authority. And a Magus, in the old sense of the word, had nothing in common with the impostors that are now called magicians. The Magi were wise men who applied themselves to the study of nature and religion. The religion of the Persians in the latest age that can be given to Hystaspes, if it was at all tainted with idolatry, was only tainted in the first degree. And even in much later times Eastern Magi were the first worshippers of Mary's holy Child ; which should remove any prejudice the name of a Magus might create.



**FOUR DISCOURSES**  
**ON THE**  
**NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE**  
**BY WHICH THE FACT**  
**OF OUR LORD'S RESURRECTION**  
**IS ESTABLISHED.**



## SERMON I.

---

ACTS, x. 40, 41.

*“ Him God raised up the third day, and shewed  
“ him openly; not to all the people, but to wit-  
“ nesses chosen before of God.”*

THE prop and pillar of the Christian's hope, (which being once removed the entire building would give way), is the great event which we at this season commemorate, the resurrection of our Lord; insomuch that the evidence of that fact may properly be considered as the seal of his pretensions, and of the expectation of his followers. If, notwithstanding the pure and holy life which Jesus led, the sublimity of the doctrine which he taught, and the natural excellence of the duties which he enjoined; if after all the miracles which he per-

formed, he was at last forsaken of the God to whose service his life had been devoted, if his soul at last was left in hell, and the Holy One of God was suffered like a common man, to become the prey of worms and putrefaction, then truly is our preaching vain, and your faith is vain. It is to no purpose that we exhort you to sacrifice present interest to future hopes; to renounce the gratifications of sense for those promised enjoyments in the presence of God; to rely on his atonement for the pardon of involuntary offences; and to trust to a continual supply of the Holy Spirit, proportioned to the temptations which the world presents. It is to no purpose that ye submit to a life of mortification and constraint, of warfare with the world and of conflict with the sensual appetite: It is to no purpose that ye stand in jeopardy every hour, in painful apprehension of the wiles of the great deceiver, the treachery of your own unguarded hearts, and the sallies of unconquered appetites. “If Christ be not risen from the dead,” all promises that are made to you in his name are vain, and the contempt of the present world is folly. If Christ be not risen from the dead, the consequence must either be, that he was an *impostor*, and that his whole doctrine was a fraud; or if the purity of his life might still screen him from so foul an imputation, and the truth

of his pretensions be supposed consistent with a failure of his predictions in the most important article, you would only have in him a discouraging example of how little estimation in the sight of God is the utmost height of virtue to which human nature can attain. If neither the unspotted sanctity of our Saviour's character, nor his intimate union with the first principle of life itself, could give him a deliverance from the bonds of death, what hope for us who have neither claim nor plea but what is founded on the value of the Redeemer's sufferings; no union with God but what we enjoy as the disciples and worshippers of his incarnate Son. But, beloved, "Christ is *risen* from the dead, and become the "first fruits of them that slept." His *resurrection* was the accomplishment both of the ancient prophecies and of his own prediction; a declaration on the part of God that the great atonement was accepted; an attestation to the truth of our Saviour's doctrine and of his high pretensions; a confirmation of the hopes of his followers, which renders it no less unreasonable, as the case stands, to doubt of the ultimate completion of his largest promises, than it would have been to hope, had his promises been actually found to fail in so principal an instance. We have reason therefore to be thankful, that in the first preaching of the gospel, Providence ordained

that a fact of such importance should be accompanied with irresistible evidence. Nor can we better employ the present season, which the Church devotes to the commemoration of this great event, than in considering how complete the evidence of the fact is, notwithstanding the cavils that may be raised against it. For this reason I have chosen for my text a passage of holy writ, in which, as it stands at least in our English Bibles, the evidence is set forth to the least advantage.

The proof of the fact arises, we are told, from the testimony of those, who, from the time of our Lord's first entrance on his ministry, had been his constant attendants. Their report was, that the sepulchre in which his body had been laid, was found empty on the third morning from the day of his crucifixion, notwithstanding the precaution which the Jews had taken to set sentinels to prevent a fraudulent removal of the body by his disciples;—that his resurrection was declared by angels to certain of his female attendants, who, for the purpose of embalming his body, made an early visit to the sepulchre;—that he appeared to these women on their return to the city, and that same evening came unexpectedly upon the eleven apostles as they sat at meat;—that for forty days after this he appeared

from time to time to the apostles, sometimes partaking of their meals, discoursing with them upon the propagation of the gospel, and shewing himself alive by many infallible proofs.

The credibility of evidence in all cases arises from the number, the information, and the veracity of the the witnesses. The *number* of the witnesses in the present case, if we reckon only the eleven apostles, (and many more might be reckoned,) was far greater than has ever been deemed sufficient to establish a fact in a court of justice in the most intricate and weighty causes. Their *information* upon the general point in question, “that our Lord was seen alive “after his crucifixion,” was the most complete that can be imagined:—THEY could not be mistaken in his person, who had so long and so constantly attended him. The *veracity* of a witness is to be measured, not simply by the probity of his disposition and his habits of sincerity, but by the motives which circumstances may present to him to adhere to the truth, or to deviate from it. No man loves falsehood for its own sake: no man therefore deliberately propogates a lie, but for the sake of some advantage to himself; and the advantage which a man pursues by falsehood, must always be something in the present world: His ease and security, or the advance-

ment of his fortune. For no one who looks forward to a future state, thinks that his interest there may be served by falsehood. It always therefore heightens the credit of a witness, if he is materially a sufferer by the testimony which he gives, when he could not suffer either in fortune, ease, or reputation, by a contrary testimony. The apostles asserted our Lord's resurrection to their own loss, and at the hazard of their lives. To have denied his resurrection, at least to have disproved it, which the apostles might easily have done had the thing been a fiction; to have rendered it in any high degree questionable, which any of the apostles might have done, had not the guilt of falsehood and prevarication seemed to them a greater evil than any sufferings which the powers of this world could inflict, had been the certain road to wealth and honours.

To the charms of wealth and honours the apostles were not insensible. It was evidently the hopes of becoming the first ministers of the first monarch upon earth which at first attached the sons of Zebedee to their master's service. The twelve were thrown into a consternation by our Lord's reflection on the inconsistency of the love of riches and the pursuit of heaven; conscious, no doubt, that they were not exempt from the desire of riches although not born to



the expectation of them; and Simon Peter discovered a great anxiety to know what valuable acquisitions he was to make in our Lord's service, in consideration of the old crazy boat and tattered nets (his all, he called them) which he had left upon the Galilean lake to follow Christ. Nor were the apostles regardless of suffering and danger. Their desertion of our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane shewed them by no means unconcerned about the safety of their own persons. Not therefore to insist on the probity of the apostles, (which appears in many circumstances of the evangelical history), their *veracity*, by the circumstances in which they were placed, is, I maintain, rendered unquestionable. They persevered in an asseveration which exposed them to the highest indignities and to the cruellest persecution; to the loss of fame, of property, of liberty, and life, when a denial or recantation might have secured to them the most liberal rewards and the most honourable distinctions which the favour of princes and statesmen could bestow. In every circumstance, therefore, for the *numbers*, the *information*, and the *veracity* of the witnesses, no testimony could surpass in its degree of credibility that which was borne by the apostles to the fact of our Lord's resurrection.

It is a very singular circumstance in this testimony, that it is such as no length of time can diminish. It is founded upon the universal principles of human nature, upon maxims which are the same in all ages, and operate with equal strength in all mankind, under all the varieties of temper and habit of constitution. So long as it shall be contrary to the first principles of the human mind to delight in falsehood for its own sake ; so long as it shall be true that no man willingly propagates a lie to his own detriment and to no purpose ; so long it will be certain that the apostles were serious and sincere in the assertion of our Lord's resurrection. So long as it shall be absurd to suppose that twelve men could all be deceived in the person of a friend with whom they had all lived three years, so long it will be certain that the apostles were competent to judge of the truth and reality of the fact which they asserted. So long as it shall be in the nature of man for his own interest and ease to be dearer than that of another to himself, so long it will be an absurdity to suppose, that twelve men should persevere for years in the joint attestation of a lie, to the great detriment of every individual of the conspiracy, and without any joint or separate advantage, when any of them had it in his power, by a discovery of the fraud, to advance *his own fame and fortune* by the sacri-

fice of nothing more dear to him than the reputation of the rest; and so long will it be incredible that the story of our Lord's resurrection was a fiction which the twelve men (to mention no greater number,) with unparalleled fortitude, and with equal folly, conspired to support. So long therefore as the evangelical history shall be preserved entire; that is, so long as the historical books of the New Testament shall be extant in the world, so long the credibility of the apostles' testimony will remain whole and unimpaired. As this circumstance, to have in itself the principle of permanency, never happened to human testimony in any other instance, this preservation of the form and integrity of the apostolic evidence, amidst all the storms and wrecks which human science, like all things human, hath in the course of ages undergone, is, like the preservation of the Jewish nation, something of a standing miracle. It shews, in the original propagation of the gospel, that contrivance and forecast in the plan, that power in the execution, which are far beyond the natural abilities of the human mind, and declares that the whole work and counsel was of God.

It may seem perhaps that the veracity of the apostles, in the report of our Lord's resurrection, is too hastily concluded from the hardships which they in-

curred by their constancy in the asseveration. Wealth and power are not the only objects to which men will sacrifice their ease, their fortunes, and their lives. That personal consequence which is acquired by bold and arduous undertakings, and the fame which follows them in after ages, are sought by some as the highest good; and as this ambition is incident to the most generous and the most active minds, it is in this pursuit that we see men the most ready to encounter danger and renounce enjoyment. The honour of being long remembered as the founders of a sect might, with men of a certain turn of mind, be a motive to endure all the hardships which the apostles underwent. It must be confessed, that men will sacrifice much to rescue their memories from oblivion, and that the fame of being the first teachers of a new philosophy or a new religion, will, by its singularity, be preferred to any other by minds of a particular complexion.—But of all men that ever lived, the apostles were perhaps the least likely to be touched with this ambition. Their birth was mean, their occupation laborious, their highest attainments were probably no more than to be able to repeat the ten commandments, and to have learned by rote some of the first principles of the Jewish faith. Such men were likely to be strangers to the pride of learning, and the ambition of invention and

discovery. At least, that twelve men of their condition should be found in any one country, at any one time, inflamed with this passion in the degree in which they must all have been, if it was the principle which produced their unanimity and firmness in the propagation of a fiction at all hazards; that but one of the twelve should prove false to so strange a combination; that he in a fit of despair and remorse, the effect of his treachery, should hang himself, and dying by his own hand, not die without evident signs of God's anger pursuing him in his last moments;—all this seems a much greater improbability than the extraordinary fact which is supported by their testimony. It might seem less extravagant to suppose, that the sanguine hopes which they had conceived, of the advancement of their own fortunes in the kingdom of that temporal Messiah which they had expected in our Lord, together with his promise of rising on the third day after the death which he foretold he was to suffer, (to which promise, however, as well as to the prediction of his death, the fact seems to be they had given little attention :) It might, I say, be less extravagant to suppose, that this repeated promise of our Lord's, together with their own hopes of advancement in his temporal kingdom, might make them after his death an easy prey to the art of some new

imposter, who might take advantage of some general resemblance in himself to the person and features of the blessed Jesus, to personate their crucified master. This might seem a supposition less extravagant than the former, *that the apostles were supported in the asseveration of a falsehood by an ambition seldom incident to men of low birth and mean attainments.* But the fact is, that the evangelical history equally excludes the one and the other supposition. If there was any thing of fraud and delusion in the story of our Lord's resurrection, it is very evident the apostles must have had a principal share in the contrivance; if his resurrection was a fiction, the body was conveyed away in the night.

The report of his resurrection was spread early in the next morning by some of his female disciples; their tale was presently confirmed, not indeed in the whole, but in some collateral and secondary circumstances, by the testimonies of St. Peter and St. John. Some few hours after, Peter vouches that he had seen our Saviour. In the afternoon two of the disciples bring the news to the apostles, that they had met with him in their way to a village in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem; and they relate, that they had no sooner recognized his person than he suddenly disappeared. Their tale was hardly finished

when Jesus in person salutes the company. From this time ten of the eleven apostles are loud in the assertion of his recovery from the grave; and, a week after, the eleventh is cured of his affected incredulity, and joins in the report of his associates. The apostles, either separately or in company, converse with him repeatedly. He tells them that all power is given him in heaven and in earth; he formally invests them with a commission to preach the gospel to the whole world, and to form a universal church, open to all nations; at last he leads them out to Bethany, and there, in the act of bestowing on them a solemn benediction, he was raised from the earth and carried to heaven in their sight. Of the four writers who have transmitted this story, two, Matthew and John, were apostles. The other two, Mark and Luke, by the consent of all antiquity, wrote under the inspection of apostles,—Mark under the direction of St. Peter, Luke of St. Paul. The credit therefore of the apostles is pledged for the particulars of the narrative; and whether we consider the story in itself, or the writers of the story, it is evident, that if it was at all a fiction the apostles had a principal share in the fabrication of it. But since the apostles had no motive to fabricate the lie, or to persevere in the propagation of it, since the force of temptation drew the other way, that is, to

induce them to deny the fact, or desist at least from the avowal of it; that is, since their veracity in this particular instance at least is unquestionable, it follows, that if their report was a fiction, it was not of their invention; and yet it has been shewn, that in the invention they must have had a principal part. A fiction not coined by them, and of which they were still the coiners, is surely the fiction of a fiction, the dream of a distempered brain. So that if any human testimony ever attained the certainty of demonstration, it is in this instance of our Lord's resurrection; which is established with far greater certainty by the evidence of the apostles, than any other fact in the whole compass of history, sacred or profane. Thus complete and perfect is the testimony of the twelve apostles to the matter in question. But a greater testimony is yet behind.

Let it be supposed that the apostles, to avoid the infamy of having been themselves deceived, might conspire to propagate the delusion, and either fabricated the story of our Lord's resurrection with all its circumstances, or entered into the views of some new deceiver who had the resolution to personate Jesus after his crucifixion. Whence then was it that this deceit obtained the testimony of the Holy Spirit? The concurrent testimony of the apostles



themselves and the Holy Spirit, form the evidence of our Lord's resurrection. "He shall testify of me," said our Lord before he suffered, "and ye also shall bear witness." That notable miracles were done by the apostles in the name of the Lord Jesus, was so manifest to all them that dwelt in Jerusalem, that the bitterest enemies of their doctrine could not deny it; nor was it ever denied by the infidels of antiquity. On the contrary, their attempt to account for it by the power of magic, is a confession of the fact; and while the fact is confessed, the conclusion from the fact is obvious and inevitable. To refer the miracles, which were wrought in confirmation of a doctrine which went to the extirpation of every corruption in morals and in worship, and to the establishment of a practical religion of good works springing from an active faith, to the spirit of delusion, is a subterfuge for infidelity which that spirit only could suggest.

I have now briefly, indeed, and in a summary way, but more particularly than I thought to do, laid before you the irrefragable and permanent nature of the testimony by which the fact of our Lord's resurrection is supported. It is my intention to discuss a certain objection to this evidence, as the evidence is stated in my text, which must be allow-

ed to be very plausible in the first appearance of it. I mean to shew, that it is the necessary consequence of certain circumstances, which indispensably require that the evidence of the resurrection should be just what it is ; insomuch that the proof would be rather weakened than improved by any attempt to complete it in the part in which it is supposed to be deficient. But this I shall reserve for future discourses. Meanwhile you will remember, that the entire evidence of our Lord's resurrection consists of two parts ; the testimony of the apostles, and the testimony of the Spirit. The testimony of the apostles is the most complete that human testimony ever was ; the testimony of the Spirit is unexceptionable. The fact therefore is established. So certain as it is that Christ died, so certain it is that he is risen. He died for our sins, he is risen for our justification. And remember, that the only purpose for which Christ died and rose again was, that we, enlightened by his doctrine, edified by his example, encouraged with the certain hope of mercy, animated by the prospect of eternal glory, " may rise from the death " of sin unto the life of righteousness."

## SERMON II.

---

ACTS x. 40, 41.

*“ Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him  
“ openly ; not to all the people, but unto witnesses  
“ chosen before of God.”*

**THE** return of the season devoted by the church to the solemn commemoration of our Lord's glorious resurrection seemed to admonish us, that we should direct our attention to the *evidence* by which the merciful providence of God was pleased to confirm so extraordinary a fact. The entire evidence consists of two branches : It is in part *human*, and in part *divine*. The attestation of the apostles to the fact makes the human part of the evidence ; the testimony of the Spirit in the miraculous powers

exercised by the apostles was divine. The human part is what is chiefly to be examined ; for the credibility of *that* being once established, the force of the testimony of the Spirit is obvious and irresistible : For, provided the fact be once established, that such miracles were performed by the apostles, these miracles were manifestly the “*witness of God*” which he bore to his own Son. The historical evidence of the fact lies in the testimony of the apostles themselves, and in the concession of their adversaries. The *human testimony*, therefore, the testimony of the apostles, is to us, who were not eye witnesses of the miracles which they performed, the ground-work of the whole evidence.

In my last discourse I explained to you, in a summary way, that the credibility of this testimony arises from the *number*, the *information*, and the *veracity* of the witnesses. *Their number*, more than is required by any law to establish a fact in a court of justice ; *their information* infallible, if an infallible knowledge of their Master’s person was the result of an attendance upon him for three years ; *their veracity*, by the circumstances in which they were placed, is rendered unquestionable : So that in this singular instance, if in any, the evidence of testimony emulates the certainty of mathematical

demonstration. I shewed you, that the testimony of the apostles to the fact of our Lord's resurrection is not more extraordinary in the degree than in the permanency of the credibility which belongs to it. It is not only so constituted that it must have been satisfactory and irrefragable at the time when it was delivered, but so immutable are the principles on which the credit of it stands, that by no length of time can it suffer diminution. What it was to the contemporaries of the apostles, the same it is to us now in the end of the eighteenth century; and so long as the historical books of the New Testament shall be extant in the world, (and to suppose that a time shall come when they shall be no longer extant, were, I think, to mistrust our Master's gracious promise); so long as these books then shall be extant, so long the testimony of the apostles shall preserve its original credibility.

Another circumstance must be mentioned, not less extraordinary than the permanent nature of the testimony, which may be called the *popularity of the evidence*. It is not always the case that a proof built on true principles and sound in every part, which, when it is narrowly examined, must of consequence be satisfactory to men of knowledge and discernment, is of a sort to be easily and gene-

rally understood. For the most part, perhaps, the proof of fact is a thing more remote from popular apprehension than scientific demonstration: For the connexion of an argument is what every one naturally and necessarily perceives; but between a fact and the testimony of the witnesses who affirm it, there is indeed no physical and necessary connexion. A witness may speak rashly, without a sufficient knowledge of the fact which he pretends to assert, or he may speak falsely, contrary to his knowledge. Thus the folly and the vices of men have rendered it for the most part very difficult to perceive, how the certainty of a fact arises from the attestations given to it; and to appreciate the credibility of historical evidence is become a task for the highest and most improved abilities; requiring a certain dexterity and acuteness of the mind in detecting great fallacies, and in reconciling seeming inconsistencies, which is seldom to be acquired in any considerable degree but by a practical familiarity with the habits of the world, joined to an accurate and philosophical study of mankind. And accordingly we see, that men of the slowest apprehension, if they have had but a sufficient degree of experience to make them jealous of being imposed upon, are always the most averse to believe extraordinary narrations. But in the case before us, no

extraordinary penetration is requisite to perceive the *infallibility of the evidence*. Every man has experienced the certainty with which he distinguishes the person and the features of a friend. Every one knows how dearly he loves himself; with what reluctance he would sacrifice his ease and expose his person in any project, from which he expected no return of profit or enjoyment. And with this experience and these feelings, every one is qualified to sit in judgment upon the fact of our Lord's resurrection, and to decide upon the evidence. And in this circumstance, no less than in the permanent nature of the evidence, we may see, and we have reason to adore the hand of Providence. For to what can we ascribe it but to the over-ruling providence of God, that while the proof of historic facts is, for the most part, of the most intricate and embarrassed nature, the most extraordinary event which history records should be accompanied with a proof as universally perspicuous as the fact itself is interesting? Every man born into the world is interested in the event which has opened to us all the gate of heaven. And the evidence which accompanies the fact is such, that every man born into the world is in a capacity to derive conviction from it.

Notwithstanding, however, the solidity and the general perspicuity of the proof considered in itself, it may seem to lie open to *a considerable objection*. Many objections have indeed been brought against it. Some have been taken from the varieties with which the four evangelists relate the first declaration of the event by the angels to the Galilean women at the sepulchre. These I consider as cavils rather than objections. Every attentive reader of the gospel knows, that the female followers of our Lord were numerous. He will easily discover, that these numerous female followers had made an appointment to meet at the sepulchre at an early hour of the first day of the week, for the purpose of embalming the body; a business which the intervention of the Sabbath had obliged them to postpone. He will easily imagine that these women would be lodged in different parts of the city, and of consequence would come to the sepulchre in several parties and by different paths; that they arrived all early, but not exactly at the same time. He will perceive, that the detachments of the heavenly squadron, the angels who attended on this great occasion, to whom the business was committed of frightening the Roman sentinels from their station, of opening the sepulchre for the admission of the women, and of announcing the resurrection, became



visible and invisible at pleasure, and appeared to the women of the different parties, as they successively arrived, in different forms, and accosted them in different words ; and in this way the first evidences of the fact were multiplied, which had been single, had the women all arrived in a body at the same instant, and seen all the same vision.\* Each evangelist, it may be supposed, has confined himself to that part of the story which he had at the first

---

\* The company which saw what is related by St. Matthew, (of which company Mary Magdalene, although mentioned by the evangelist, was not I think included,) went by a path which led to the front of the sepulchre, and came within sight of it early enough to be witnesses to the descent of the angel, the flight of the guard, and the removal of the stone. While these things passed, Mary Magdalene with her party were coming by another path which led round the back part of the sepulchre, and came not within sight of the entrance of the sepulchre till the first party had left it. They therefore no sooner came within sight than they saw that the stone was removed, and Mary Magdalene immediately ran back to inform Peter and John of her suspicions. The rest of the women of that party proceeded to the sepulchre, entered it, and were assured of our Lord's resurrection by the angel, whom they found within the tomb in the manner related by St. Mark. Presently after these women had left the sepulchre, Peter and John arrived, followed by Mary Magdalene: for she hastened

hand from the women who had first fallen in his way, and each woman related what she herself had seen and heard, which was different from what had been seen and heard by the women of another company. These few simple observations, as they reconcile the narratives of the several evangelists with each other, and the particulars of each narrative with the general fact in which they all consent, dissipate any objections that may be raised from the varieties of their story. The objection which I purpose to consider, in the first face of it is far more specious. It seems to arise spontaneously from the state of the evidence which is given in the text, and thus throwing itself in the way of every one who reads the Bible, or who hears it read, it seems to be a stumbling-block in the way of the believer, which it is our duty, if God shall give us the

---

back to the sepulchre when she apprised the apostles of her fears. After Mary Magdalene, waiting at the sepulchre, had seen our Lord, and was gone away to carry his message to the apostles. Luke's women arrive, and are informed by two angels within the tomb. In the interval between our Lord's appearance at the sepulchre to Mary Magdalene, and the arrival of Luke's party, he appeared to St. Matthew's party, who were yet upon the way back to the city. For that the appearance to Mary Magdalene was the first, St. Mark testifies.

ability, to remove. “Him hath God raised up, and  
 “shewed him openly; not to all the people, but to  
 “witnesses *chosen* before of God.”

The *selection* of witnesses carries, it may be said, no very fair appearance. Jesus was seen alive after his crucifixion, but he was seen, it should appear, by those only who had been his early associates, who had been employed by him to travel over the country as his heralds, proclaiming him as the long expected Messiah, who by the event of his public and ignominious end were involved in general contempt and ridicule. Why was he not shewn to all the people, if the identity of his person would stand the test of a public exhibition? Was it not more likely, that the Jewish people would be sooner convinced by his own public appearance, than by the report of those who had long been considered as the first victims of his imposture, or the sworn accomplices of his fraud? The most incredulous of his enemies had declared they would believe in him, if they might but see him descend from the cross. Would they not much more have believed had they seen him on the third day arisen from the grave? Were the Jewish people kindly treated when they were punished for their infidelity, of which they might have been cured, had the evidence been af-

forded them which in so extraordinary a case they might reasonably demand? In such a case, the CHOICE of witnesses brings a suspicion on their whole testimony; a surmise that they were chosen, not of God, but of themselves and their confederates. Perhaps they preferred persecution, with the fame attending it, to security accompanied with contempt; and they pretended a selection of themselves to be witnesses on the part of heaven, to give the better colour to the lie which they were determined at all hazards to maintain.

This imperfection, as it may seem, in the proof of our Lord's resurrection, was not overlooked by the infidels of antiquity. It was urged in one of the first written attacks upon Christianity; and Origen, whose elaborate confutation of that able adversary is still extant, allows that the objection is not contemptible. The fact which creates the whole difficulty (that Jesus was not seen in public after his interment), seems indeed confessed in the text, and confirmed in general by the evangelical history. Nevertheless, this fact is not to be admitted without some limitation. We read in St. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, of a certain appearance of our Lord to more than five hundred brethren at once. So large a company is not likely to have

been assembled in a house, nor is it likely that they met by accident; the assembly must have been called together for some express purpose; and what purpose so likely as to receive the satisfaction which was absolutely afforded them, of beholding with their own eyes their crucified Lord restored to life? Nor is it to be supposed, that an object of the human size and form could be seen distinctly by five hundred persons all at once, but by day-light. Here then is one appearance of our Lord, in which no circumstance of privacy could be pretended. It was by day-light; in the open air. Notice had been given of the time and place of the appearance. The notice which drew together so numerous an assembly, at a distance from the capital, or any populous town, must have been very public; and from a sight to which five hundred brethren were admitted, it is not easy to conceive that any who were not brethren, if they were pleased to repair to the appointed place, at the appointed time, could be excluded. Indeed, if this appearance of the five hundred recorded by St. Paul, was the same with that on the Galilean hill recorded by St. Matthew, which is the opinion of the most learned critics and divines, and is highly probable, because the appearance on the Galilean hill was an appearance at a set time and place, as that to the five hun-

dred must have been ; if these, I say, were one and the same appearance, it is certain that our Lord was seen upon this occasion by some who were not brethren. For St. Matthew relates, that when Christ was seen and worshipped on the Galilean hill, "some doubted." Not some of the eleven who are mentioned in the preceding verse, for the eleven doubted not. Thomas was the last of the eleven to believe, yet Thomas ceased to doubt upon our Lord's second appearance in the evening assembly, on the Sunday se'enight after his resurrection. Nor is it likely that doubters should be included by St. Paul in the number of those whom he dignified with the appellation of brethren. This appearance therefore in Galilee was public, not to the disciples only, but to a promiscuous multitude of disciples and of doubtful unbelieving Jews. The assertion therefore of my text, that Christ, raised from the dead, was not shewn openly to all the people, is to be understood with some limitation. Once he certainly was shewn openly, perhaps not oftener than once ; and if once or twice more, still his appearance was not public compared with the unreserved manner of his conversation with the world during his triennial ministry. He resorted not daily to the temple ; he preached to no multitudes in the fields ; he performed no public miracles ; he held no public dispu-

tations ; he was present at no weddings ; he ate not with publicans and sinners. They were only his *chosen* witnesses to whom ocular proof was *repeatedly* given that he was indeed alive again. In a general way of speaking, it is to be confessed that he was not shewn openly to *all* the people. But what if the assertion were true in the utmost sense in which the adversary would wish it to be accepted? What if it were granted, that the pretended appearances after the interment were not public in any single instance? It will follow that our Lord, if he was really alive again, was not seen by many : What of that? Is it a necessary consequence that he was not seen by some? Is there no evidence of the many who saw him not, and have therefore nothing positive to say upon the question, to overpower the explicit assertions of those who depose to the fact of repeated appearances? It will hardly be pretended that the bare fact, that he was not seen by the many, amounts in itself to a proof, that the story of his resurrection was a fiction.

But it is supposed, I apprehend, that had the resurrection been real, public appearances would have heightened the proof of it ; and that, on the other hand, if the thing was a fiction, the concealment of the person who was made to pass for Jesus

among the credulous disciples, was a means of preventing a detection of the fraud. And it is thought unreasonable to suppose, that the belief of so extraordinary a thing should be required of the world on the part of heaven, without the highest proof that could be given, or without a fair submission of the evidence to the strictest scrutiny. The objection, therefore, is this, that the proof which is produced of the fact is less than might have been procured had the thing averred been a reality, and that, such as it is, it was not submitted at the time to the examination of the public. In my next discourse I shall endeavour to shew you, that the objection is of a sort to deserve less attention than you may at first imagine, even if what it presumes were true, that the frequency of public appearances would have been a means of heightening the evidence of fact on the one hand, or of detecting an imposition on the other. *Secondly*, I shall shew you that both these presumptions are indeed erroneous: That an open conversation with the world would neither have added to the proof of a real resurrection, nor contributed to the detection of a counterfeit. And after all I shall shew you, that frequent public exhibitions of the person after the resurrection, if they could have heightened the proof of the fact, had been on other accounts improper. Insomuch, that what the



story might have gained in credit by an addition of testimony, it would have lost in another way, by an impropriety and inconsistency which might have been charged upon the conduct of our Lord.

Meanwhile, if it should occur to you to wonder that Jesus, after his resurrection, should not be shewn openly, but to chosen witnesses, remember, that by the fundamental maxims of the doctrine which Jesus preached, it is the privilege of the "*pure in heart,*" and of them only, to see God. In some sense, indeed, God is seen by all mankind, and by the whole rational creation. God is seen by all men in his works, in the fabric and the motions of the material world. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work." The very Devils see him in his judgments: Wise men see him in his providential government of human actions, in the rise and fall of states and empires: The pious believer sees him with the eye of faith, in the miraculous support and preservation of his church from the attacks of open enemies, the treachery of false friends, and the intemperate or the lukewarm zeal of its weaker members. He sees him with the intellectual eye, discerning, in part at least, his glorious perfections; and they, and only they, who thus see him now,

shall at last literally see the majesty of the Godhead in the person of their glorified Lord. By the lost world Jesus shall be seen no more, except as he hath been seen by the unbelieving Jews, in judgment, when he comes to execute vengeance on them who know not God and obey not the gospel ; but if any man keep his saying, he shall be admitted to his presence, “ that where his Saviour is, there he “ may be also.”

## SERMON III.

---

ACTS X. 40, 41.

*“ Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him  
“ openly ; not to all the people, but unto witnesses  
“ chosen before of God.”*

IN my first discourse upon this text I endeavoured to explain to you the credibility of the testimony which was borne by the apostles to the fact of our Lord's resurrection ; its original credibility at the time when it was delivered ; its undiminished credibility in all succeeding times ; and the universality of the proof, not only as it must subsist to all ages, but as it is accommodated to all capacities.

In a second discourse, I stated some of the principal objections which our adversaries have raised

to elude the force of this invincible proof. I shewed you the futility of those which are taken from a pretended disagreement of the evangelists, in their relation of the manner in which the discovery was made to the women who visited the sepulchre on the Sunday morning. I shewed you, that the whole force of these objections rests on a very improbable supposition, which has not the least countenance in the circumstances of the story, that the numerous female followers of our Lord went all in one body to the sepulchre, that they all arrived at least in the same instant of time, and all saw the same vision. Admit only that the women went in different parties, that they arrived some a little earlier some a little later, and that the attending angels shewed themselves to the different companies in different forms, and accosted them in different words, and you will find no disagreement of the four evangelists, no differences in their relation which should affect the credit of their testimony to the general fact. Their several narrations harmonize as different parts of one story, each relating the particular part which he could best attest.

I engaged in a more particular discussion of an objection, in the first face of it far more specious, founded on the acknowledged concealment of the

person of Jesus after his resurrection. Forty days elapsed before he took leave of this sublunary world by an ascension to heaven in the sight of his apostles. In the interval he was seen repeatedly by them and by other disciples; but it seems to be acknowledged in the text, that he was not shewn openly to all the people.

I shewed you, that the assertion that he was not publicly seen is to be understood with certain limitations. That once at least our Lord was shewn openly to as many as thought proper to repair to an appointed place. The circumstances of this appearance will not admit of the supposition that any were excluded from the sight, unless the body in which he was seen by the five hundred was, upon this occasion, visible only to the brethren. A supposition in itself not absurd, perhaps not improbable, were it not set aside by St. Matthew's testimony, that he was actually seen by some at least who were not brethren, by some who doubted while the eleven worshipped. He was therefore, upon this occasion, visible to all without distinction.

Of any other public exhibition of the person no trace is to be found in the history of the forty days. And if we might suppose it to have been once or

twice repeated, still his appearance was not public compared with what it had been during his triennial ministry. Nothing like an open familiar conversation with the world can be pretended or indeed supposed. It must be confessed, with a certain limitation, that he was not shewn openly to all the people. To the rulers of the people he was never shewn at all. His single public appearance was not in the metropolis or its vicinity, but in a remote corner of Galilee, where his friends and followers were the most numerous, and his enemies in the least credit. Insomuch, that even in this instance there was something of a selection of spectators; and the candid believer, by the evidence of the gospel history itself, is reduced to a concession, (a concession, however, in which he will find cause to glory), that whatever reality there may be in the story of his resurrection, Jesus ever after it shunned the public eye.

It is imagined by the adversary, that had the resurrection been real, public appearances would have heightened the proof of it; and that, on the other hand, if the thing was a fiction, concealment of the person was a means of preventing a ready detection of the fraud. And he thinks it unreasonable to suppose, that the belief of a thing so extra-

ordinary should be required of the world on the part of heaven, without the highest proof that could be given, or without a fair submission of the evidence, such as it might be, to the severest scrutiny. The sum of the objection then is this, that the proof which is produced of the fact is less than might have been given had the thing averred been a reality, and that, such as it is, it was not fairly submitted at the time to the examination of the public.

I come now to shew you, as I engaged to do, *first*, that the objection is really of a sort to deserve little attention, even if what it presumes were true, that the frequency of public appearances would have heightened proof on the one hand, or facilitated the detection of fraud on the other.

*Secondly*, That the objection is erroneous in both these suppositions.

And when I shall have thus overturned the objection, I shall shew you, that without any regard to what the proof of the fact might have gained by the frequency of public appearances, or what it might lose by the want of them, other considerations rendered it improper and indecent, that our Lord arisen from the grave should renew his open conversation

with the world in general. So that, be the force of the objection what it may, if there be any truth in our Saviour's high pretensions, any thing of reality in the evangelical scheme of redemption, his resurrection, be it ever so much a fact, must in the nature of the thing be obnoxious to this objection. That Christ should rise from the dead, and that risen he should converse openly and familiarly with the world in the manner in which he did before his passion, these two things are incompatible ; so that if both appeared as facts upon the sacred records, the proof which it is supposed might have accrued to the resurrection from the frequency of public appearances, would have been overpowered by the general incoherence of the story.

*First*, I say, the objection, were the assumptions true on which it rests, would be of little weight. The reality of a fact is always to be measured by the positive proof on one side or the other, which is really extant in the world. If no proof is found but what is in itself imperfect, as when the witnesses seem too few, or their reports contradictory, the fact is questionable. But if any proof exists in itself unexceptionable, the thing is not to be questioned for the mere want of other proofs, which men living at a distance from the time and the scene of



the business, may imagine it might have had. Men are very apt to lose sight of this principle. They are apt to amuse themselves with a display of their sagacity, (for such they think it), in alleging the proof that might have been, when their penetration would be better shewn in a fair examination of what is actually extant. They are not aware, that in thus opposing proof which is not, to that which is, they are really weighing a shadow against a substance; and that the highest argument of a weak mind, (an imputation which they most dread), is not to feel the force of present evidence. Thus it is, that "professing themselves wise they become fools." This is an answer which will apply on every occasion, when men resist the conviction of a proof in which they can discover no fallacy or imperfection, upon a pretence that some collateral proof of the same fact, which would have been more satisfactory, is wanting. An objection of this sort is always frivolous, even when it is true that the required proof, had it been extant, would have been more satisfactory than any that is found, provided what is found be in itself a just proof, true in its principles, coherent in its parts, and fair in its conclusions.

But, *secondly*, I affirm, that in the particular case before us, the required proof which is supposed to be wanting, had it been given, would have been no addition to the evidence of the thing in question. If our Lord really rose from the grave, as we believe he did, the evidence of the fact would not have been heightened by repeated public appearances to the Jewish people. It is evident, that to have seen him ever so often after his resurrection, would have qualified no one to be a witness of the fact, who had not such a previous knowledge of his person as might enable him to perceive and attest its identity. Perhaps we may insist upon another circumstance, that every one pretending to avouch the resurrection, should have been an eye-witness of the crucifixion. For the fact to be attested is, that this same man “was dead and is alive again.” But in the innumerable multitude that was assembled to behold the tragic scene on Calvary, how many may be supposed to have had such a view of the divine Sufferer as might bring them acquainted with his person? The far greater part not only saw him at a distance, but in the tumult which would attend the dismal spectacle, they would never get a steady view: They would now and then catch a momentary glimpse of a part only of his person, which they would lose again before any distinct impression

could be made. Those who saw the whole transaction from the most advantageous stations would see the cheeks pale, the features convulsed, the whole body distorted with the torture of the punishment. Those who saw the very beginning of this horrid business, who saw Jesus before he was fastened to the cross, would see him exhausted with the mental agony in the garden, worn down with the fatigue of his long examination, and with the pain of those preparatory inflictions, which, by the Roman law, by the terms of which he suffered, were the constant prelude to a capital execution, and in this instance had not been spared. Nor would the spectators be sufficiently composed, agitated as they all would be, some with the horror of the scene, some with pity of his sufferings, some with joy for the success of their infernal machinations, under one or another of these various emotions, none would be sufficiently composed to observe and remark the peculiarities of his person. Insomuch, that of those who saw him now for the first time, few, perhaps, had he ever been seen by them again, would have known him from either of the malefactors who were made the companions of his agonies.

It may seem, perhaps, that at the time of our Saviour's crucifixion his person must have been gene-

rally well known among the Jews, when, for a longer time than three years, he had sustained the public character of a teacher and a prophet. He had been much resorted to for the fame of his doctrine and for the benefit of his miracles, as well as for an opinion which, to the moment of his apprehension, prevailed among the common people, that he would prove the long expected deliverer of the nation. It may be presumed, therefore, that many who saw him expire on the cross were previously well acquainted with his person. But if it be considered, that during the whole period of his ministry he was constantly in motion, travelling from place to place; that the multitudes that followed him whenever he appeared in public were for the most part numerous, to the amount of several thousands, it will seem improbable that the number of those could be great, who had the good fortune to get a distinct sight of him oftener than once in the whole course of his triennial ministry. Of consequence, it is improbable that many beside his constant followers knew him well enough to identify his person. They who had not this *distinct* knowledge of his person, however frequent the public appearances had been after the resurrection, were not qualified to be *witnesses* of the fact even to themselves. The conviction that the person whom they now saw alive

was the same person who had been put to death, they must have owed to the attestations of those who knew him better than they. And the few who might be the best acquainted with his person still were not qualified to be *witnesses of his resurrection to the world, unless their knowledge of the person was itself a fact of public notoriety*. For to establish the credit of a witness, it is not sufficient that he be really competent to judge for himself of the reality of the fact which he takes it upon him to attest, but his competency in the matter must be a thing generally known and understood. Now this *was* the case of the apostles. It is a notorious fact, that they could not be incompetent in the knowledge of their Master's person presented to their senses. But the same thing, although it might have been equally true, could not be equally manifest of any who had pretended to join in their attestation, from a knowledge of his person acquired in accidental interviews, of which the reality was known only to themselves. Their testimony would rather have discredited the cause than heightened the evidence; as in all cases, the depositions of witnesses suspected of incompetency have no effect but to create a prejudice against the fact which they assert, and to diminish the force of better testimony,

which, left to itself, would have produced conviction.

It appears, therefore, upon a nice discussion of the question, that the evidence which we actually have of our Lord's resurrection, in the testimony of the *chosen witnesses*, is indeed the greatest of which the fact is naturally capable. No other could have been transmitted as original testimony to posterity, no other could have been satisfactory to the public at the time. The demand of frequent public exhibitions of the person is the demand of folly; not perceiving the distinction between a just proof, by which a fact may be established, and those vague reports which every one adopts and no one owns, which serve only to multiply doubt and to propagate uncertainty. Public appearances could have added nothing to the testimony of the chosen witnesses. By destroying the precision of the story, they might have diminished the efficacy of its proper evidence. The conviction to be derived from them would have been appropriated to the few who had a distinct knowledge of our Saviour's person, and the whole benefit of their conviction would have been confined to themselves. If it should seem that such persons had a right to the evidence of their own senses, because they were qualified to receive it, the principle

perhaps might be doubted, for the testimony of the apostles was of no less force with respect to these persons than to the rest of the world; and I cannot see that any man in any case has a right to more than proof. Yet it may be presumed, that a provision was mercifully made for their particular conviction, by the appearance in Galilee. It is remarkable at least, that the province where our Saviour's person must have been the most generally known, was chosen for the scene of the single public exhibition. The testimony of sense was, by this choice of the place of appearance, made as general as a single appearance could make it; and more perhaps was not to be done for the satisfaction of individuals, without hazarding the credit of the public evidence.

For the same reasons for which frequent public appearances would not have heightened the evidence of the fact, if the resurrection was real, they would have contributed nothing to the detection of the fallacy, had it been a fiction. Those to whom the living person had been unknown were as ill qualified to deny as to affirm the identity; and any whose knowledge of the person had been so acquired as not to be notorious to the public, however they might decide upon the fact for themselves, their

testimony on either side was insignificant. At the same time, an appearance in Galilee, the province where the family of the real Jesus lived, where the whole of his own life had been passed before the commencement of his ministry, and the greater part of it afterwards; where he performed his first miracles, and delivered his first discourses; a public appearance in this part of the country, at a set time and place, was a step on which an impostor hardly would have risked his credit.

Thus it appears, that the objection to the fact of our Lord's resurrection, arising from the concealment of his person, specious as at first it seems, rests upon no solid foundation. The fact being of such a nature, that however unreserved the exhibition of the person had been, its evidence must still have rested on the testimony of chosen witnesses, which, notwithstanding any frequency of public appearances, would still have been the single proof. For to the perfection of this proof taken by itself, the certainty of the fact must still have been proportional. Had it been imperfect, public appearances could not have supplied the deficiency. Perfect as it is, its validity is nothing weakened by the mere absence of insignificant attestations.



There were, perhaps, among the enemies of our Lord, some who were well acquainted with his person. Such were many of the Pharisees with whom he disputed, the chief priests before whom he was examined, Herod and his courtiers, Pontius Pilate, and the great officers of his train. It may be imagined that many, if not all of these, would have been converted by repeated public appearances after the resurrection. Their attestations would certainly have carried considerable weight; and infidelity may dream, that it is a suspicious circumstance that the method was not taken which might have procured so important an addition to the evidence, and to any but an impostor must have ensured success. The truth is, that all this evidence would have consisted in the testimony of particular persons; and any testimony of particular persons which the frequency of public appearances might have procured, would still have been the evidence of chosen witnesses. To ask, therefore, why the evidence of the Pharisees or the priests, of Herod or the Roman governor, was not secured, is only to ask, why the chosen witnesses were not other than they are? Or why the number was not multiplied? It might be sufficient to reply, that the number was more than sufficient, that the persons chosen, for their competency and veracity, were unexceptionable. But a special

reason will appear, why the rulers of the Jews were not admitted to the honour of bearing witness to him whom they had crucified and slain, when I come to allege the particular considerations which, without regard to what the proof of the fact might have gained by the frequency of public appearances, or what it may have lost by the want of them, rendered it improper that our Lord, arisen from the grave, should resume his open conversation with the world. Improper in that degree, that in the same sense in which we say of God that he cannot be unjust or cannot lie, it may be said of Christ that he could not, after his resurrection, be openly conspicuous to all the people.

## SERMON IV.

---

ACTS, x. 40, 41.

*“ Him God raised up the third day, and shewed  
“ him openly; not to all the people, but unto  
“ witnesses chosen before of God.”*

**WE** are still upon the propriety of a *selection* of witnesses to attest the fact of our Lord's resurrection. In my last discourse I discussed the objection which may be brought against the fact, from the acknowledged concealment of the person. The whole force of the objection rests on an assumption, that the frequency of public appearances, on the one hand, would have heightened the evidence of the fact if it were real; on the other, would have been a means of detecting the fallacy had it been a fiction. I

have shewn you that the objection is of a sort to deserve little attention, were the assumption true : Because the reality of a fact is always to be measured by the positive proof, on one side or the other, which is really extant in the world ; which is never to be set aside by the mere absence of another proof, which men, living at a distance from the time and scene of the transaction, may imagine might have been had. For this indeed, were to make the caprice of men the standard of historic truth.

I shewed you farther, that the assumption on which the objection is built is false in both its branches : That the frequency of public appearances would have been no means of heightening evidence or of detecting fallacy. It is essentially necessary to the proof of any fact by testimony, that the *witnesses should be chosen*. Witnesses must be chosen who are competent to the knowledge of the thing which they attest, and whose competency is itself a fact of public notoriety. In the case in question witnesses were to be chosen who had a distinct knowledge of the person of Jesus before his passion; and of whom it was publicly known that they had this previous knowledge of the person. I shewed you that this was likely to be the case of very few

among the Jews, except our Lord's constant followers, and certain leading persons in the faction of his persecutors. A particular reason why the latter were excluded from the honour of bearing their testimony to him whom they had persecuted and slain, will presently appear; for I come now to the last part of the task in which I am engaged, which is to shew you, that, without any regard to what the proof of the fact might have gained by the frequency of public appearances, or what it might lose by the want of them, other considerations rendered it improper and indecent that our Lord, arisen from the grave, should renew his open conversation with the unbelieving world;—improper in that degree, that in the same sense in which we say of God that he cannot be unjust and cannot lie, it may be said of Christ that he *could not*, after his resurrection, be universally and ordinarily conspicuous to all the people. And this indeed is the only answer which Origen thought it worth while to give to the objection brought against the fact of the resurrection from the concealment of our Saviour's person. He is at no pains to shew, what he wanted not acuteness to discern, or eloquence to persuade, that the evidence of the fact could not have been heightened by any frequency of public appearances; but, as if he would allow the advantage resulting

from them to the proof to be any thing the adversary might be pleased to suppose, he rests his reply on the sole consideration of an unseemliness in the thing required, constituting what may be called a moral impossibility.

To understand this, it will be necessary to consider the manner of our Lord's appearance to his disciples after his resurrection. We shall find, even in his interviews with them, no trace of that easy familiarity of intercourse which obtained between them before his death, when he condescended to lead his whole life in their society, as a man living with his equals. Had the history of his previous life been as mysteriously obscure, as that of the forty days between the resurrection and ascension is in many circumstances; had his previous habits been as studiously reserved, proof would indeed have been wanting that he had ever sustained the condition of a mortal man, and the error of the Docetæ, who taught that he was a man in appearance only, might have been universal. But the truth is, that the scheme of redemption required, that before the passion the form of the servant should be predominant in the Redeemer's appearance; that after his resurrection the form of God should be conspicuous. Accordingly, throughout

his previous life his manners were grave but unreserved, serious rather than severe; his deportment highly dignified, but unassuming; and the whole course and method of his life was unconcealed, and it appears to have been the life of a man in every circumstance. He had a home at Capernaum, where he lived with his mother and her family, except when the stated festivals called him to Jerusalem, or the business of his ministry induced him to visit other towns. When he travelled about the country to propagate his doctrine and to heal those that were vexed of the Devil, the evangelical history, for the most part, informs us whence he set out and whither he went; and with as much accuracy as can be expected in such compendious commentaries as the gospels are, we are informed of the time of his departure from one place and of his arrival at another. We can, for the most part, trace the road by which he passed; we can mark the towns and villages which he touched in his way; and in many instances we are told, that in such a place he was entertained at the house of such a person. Upon these journies he was attended by the twelve and other disciples, and except upon one or two very extraordinary occasions, he travelled along with them, and just as they did. Upon some occasions his own body was the subject of his miraculous

power. In its natural constitution, however, it was plainly the mortal body of a man. It suffered from inanition, from fatigue and external violence, and needed the refection of food, of rest, and sleep : It was confined by its gravity to the earth's surface : It was translated from one place to another by a successive motion through the intermediate space : And if in a few instances, and upon some very extraordinary occasions, it was exempted from the action of mechanical powers, and divested of its physical qualities and relations,—as when, to escape from the malice of a rabble, he made himself invisible, and when he walked upon a stormy sea ; these were the only instances of our Lord's miraculous powers in his own person, which no more indicate a preternatural constitution of his body, than his other miracles indicate a preternatural constitution of the bodies on which they were performed. That he walked upon the sea is no more a sign of an uncommon constitution of his own body, which sunk not, than of the water which sustained it. In every circumstance therefore of his life, before his passion, the blessed Jesus appears a mortal man. An example of virtue he indeed exhibited, which never other man attained. But the example was of human virtues ; of piety, of temperance, of benevolence, and of whatever in the life of man is laudable. Before



his resurrection it was in power only, and in knowledge, that he shewed himself divine.

After his resurrection the change is wonderful. Insomuch that, except in certain actions which were done to give his disciples proof that they saw in him their crucified Lord arisen from the grave, he seems to have done nothing like a common man. Whatever was natural to him before, seems now miraculous; what was before miraculous is now natural.

The change first appears in the manner of his resurrection. It is evident that he had left the sepulchre before it was opened. An angel, indeed, was sent to roll away the stone, but this was not to let the Lord out, but to let the women in. For no sooner was the thing done than the angel said to the women, "He is not here, he is risen; come and see the place where the Lord lay." St. Matthew's women saw the whole process of the opening of the sepulchre, for they were there before it was opened. They felt the earthquake;—they saw the angel of the Lord descend from heaven;—they saw him roll away the vast stone which stopped the mouth of the sepulchre, and, with a threatening aspect, seat himself upon it;—they saw the sentinels fall down petrified with fear. Had the Lord been

waiting within the tomb for the removal of the stone, whence was it that they saw him not walk out? If he had a body to be confined, he had a body to be actually visible; and it is not to be supposed, that with or without the heavenly guard which now attended him, he was in fear of being taken by the sentinels and put a second time to death, that for his security he should render himself invisible. But he was already gone. The huge stone, which would have barred their entrance, had been no bar to his escape.

With the manner of leaving the sepulchre, his appearances, first to the women, afterwards to the apostles, correspond. They were for the most part unforeseen and sudden; nor less suddenly he disappeared. He was found in company without coming in, he was missing again without going away. He joined, indeed, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, like a traveller passing the same way; and he walked along with them, in order to prepare them by his conversation for the evidence which they were to receive of his resurrection. But no sooner was the discovery made, by a peculiar attitude which he assumed in the breaking of bread, than he disappeared instantaneously. The same evening he presented himself to the apostles, at a

late hour, assembled in a room with the doors shut; that is, fast made up with bolts and bars, for fear of a visit from the unbelieving Jews, their persecutors. To him who had departed from the unopened sepulchre it was no difficulty to enter the barricadoed chamber. From all these circumstances it is evident that his body had undergone its change. The corruptible had put on incorruption. It was no longer the body of a man in its mortal state; it was the body of a man raised to life and immortality, which was now mysteriously united to divinity. And as it was by miracle that, before his death, he walked upon the sea, it was now by miracle that, for the conviction of the apostles, he shewed in his person the marks of his sufferings.

Consonant with this exaltation of his human nature was the change in the manner of his life. He was repeatedly seen by the disciples after his resurrection; and so seen as to give them many infallible proofs that he was the very Jesus who had suffered on the cross. But he lived not with them in familiar habits. His time, for the forty days preceding his ascension, was not spent in their society. They knew not his goings out and comings in. Where he lodged on the evening of his resurrection, after his visit to the apostles, we read not; nor

were the apostles themselves better informed than we. To Thomas, who was absent when our Lord appeared, the report of the rest was in these words, “*We have seen the Lord.*” That was all they had to say: They had seen him, and he was gone. They pretend not to direct Thomas to any place where he might find him and enjoy the same sight. None of them could now say to Thomas as Nathaniel once said to Philip, “Come and see.” On the journey from Jerusalem to Galilee he was not their companion,—he went before them. How he went we are not informed. The way is not described: The places are not mentioned through which he passed: Their names are not recorded who accompanied him on the road, or who entertained him. The disciples were commanded to repair to Galilee. They were not told to seek him at Capernaum, his former residence, or to inquire for him at his mother’s house. They were to assemble at a certain hill. Thither they repaired; they met him there; and there they worshipped him. The place of his abode for any single night of all the forty days is nowhere mentioned; nor, from the most diligent examination of the story, is any place of his abode on earth to be assigned. The conclusion seems to be, that on earth he had no longer any local residence, his body requiring neither food for its subsis-

tence, nor a lodging for its shelter and repose : He was become the inhabitant of another region, from which he came occasionally to converse with his disciples. His visible ascension, at the expiration of the forty days, being not the necessary means of his removal, but a token to the disciples that this was his last visit ; an evidence to them that the heavens had now received him, and that he was to be seen no more on earth with the corporeal eye till the restitution of all things.

I might have been less particular in the detail of circumstances which lead to this conclusion, had it appeared in our English Bibles, as it does in the original, that St. Peter roundly asserts the very same thing in the words of my text, “ Him God raised up the third day,” says St. Peter, “ and shewed him openly,” as our English Bibles have it, “ not to all the people.” But here is a manifest contradiction. Not to be shewn to all the people is not to be shewn openly. To be shewn openly therefore not to all the people, is to be shewn and not to be shewn at the same time. The literal meaning of the Greek words is this,\* “ Him God

---

\* Et dedit eum manifestum fieri.—*Vulg.* Et dedit eum ut conspicietur aperte.—TREMELL ex Syr. Fecitque ut is conspicuus fieret.—BEZA.

“raised up the third day, and gave him to be “visible.” Not openly visible; no such thing is said; it is the very thing denied: But “he gave him to be visible.” Jesus was no longer in a state to be naturally visible to any man. His body was indeed risen, but it was become that body which St. Paul describes in the fifteenth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians, which having no sympathy with the gross bodies of this earthly sphere, nor any place among them, must be indiscernible to the human organs, till they shall have undergone a similar refinement. The divinity united to the blessed Jesus produced in a short space that change in him, which in other men, according to the mysterious physics of St. Paul, must be the effect of a slower process. The divinity united to him having raised him on the third day from the grave, in a body incorruptible and invisible, gave him to become visible occasionally, not to all the people, but to his chosen witnesses; to those who were chosen to the privilege of beholding God face to face in the person of his Son, of attesting the fact of Christ’s resurrection, and of publishing through the world the glad tidings of the general redemption.

Thus, you see, every appearance of our Lord to the apostles after his resurrection, was in truth an appearance of the great God, the Maker of heaven and earth, to mortal man. The conferences, though frequent, seem to have been short, and upon each occasion mixed with that condescension which was necessary to give the disciples sensible evidence of the reality of the resurrection. We discover much of a reserved dignity in his deportment; a tone of high authority prevails in his language, and something profoundly mysterious in his actions. His familiar conversation with the world before his passion was a principal branch of his humiliation; and his humiliation was an essential part of those sufferings by which the guilt of man was expiated. But the atonement being once made, the form of a servant was to be removed; Christ was to reassume his glory, and to be seen no more but as the only begotten of the Father.

2

Would you now ask, why Jesus after his resurrection was not rendered visible to all the people? Will you not rather stand aghast at the impiety of the question? Ask, why God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? Ask, why he who conversed with Abraham as a man talketh with his friend, conversed not but in judgment with the vile inhabi-

tants of Sodom? Ask, why Moses only of all the congregation was allowed to enter the thick darkness where God was? The appearances to the apostles after the resurrection, were of the same kind with the appearances in the earliest ages to the patriarchs and the chosen rulers of the Jewish nation. He who, to converse with Abraham, veiled his glory in a traveller's disguise; he who appeared to Joshua under the walls of Jericho in the habit of a warrior, with his sword ready drawn for the attack; he who was seen by Gideon and Manoah in the human form; the same shewed himself at the sepulchre to Mary Magdalen in the form of a gardener, to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus as a wayfaring man, to the eleven separately, or altogether, in various forms at various times; upon every occasion, in the manner of his appearance manifesting his exaltation, and yet finding means to afford them satisfactory proofs that he was the same Jesus who had died.

It is true, that in those earlier ages the ever blessed Son of God appeared in a body assumed, it is probable, for each particular occasion, whereas his appearances after the resurrection were in that permanent body to which, after Mary's conception, he was inseparably united. But this circumstance



may hardly be supposed to make any material difference. The difference, whatever it may seem, was overlooked by St. Paul,\* who, in the 15th chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians, enumerating the principal appearances after the resurrection, closes the catalogue with the appearance to himself which wrought his conversion. The mention of this, as the last in order, shews that he considered it as of the same kind with all the rest. But this appearance to St. Paul was an appearance of the Lord in glory. It was no less an appearance of God, in the form of God, than that to Moses at the bush.

---

\* The argument drawn, in this paragraph, from the appearance to St. Paul, may seem in some degree precarious. Because it may be thought uncertain, whether the appearance mentioned 1 Cor. xv. 8. be that on the road to Damascus, or the vision afterwards in the temple. This latter was a vision to the apostle in a trance. It appears not certainly that Jesus was in this instance seen in the human form; but the CONTRARY appears not. However, as the apostle saw this vision in a trance, it seems more reasonable to understand what is said 1 Cor. xv. 8. of the appearance on the road to Damascus, when the apostle was in no trance. For what men see entranced is generally deemed less real than what they see in their natural state, and less fit to be alleged in evidence or argument.

St. Paul saw nothing but that tremendous light, which struck himself and his companions to the ground. He saw not the man Jesus, he saw only the light—the token of the divine presence; and from the midst of that light he heard the voice of Jesus speaking. Yet this appearance, in which the human form of Jesus was not rendered visible, is mentioned as the last instance in which Jesus was seen after his resurrection; which proves, that all the rest in which the human form was seen, were considered by the apostles as, equally with this, manifestations of the Deity.

This circumstance, the confessed divinity of the person who appeared, was the obstacle to public appearances. The Jewish nation, in the rejection of our Lord, had filled the measure of its guilt. They were cast off. God no longer held his visible residence among them; and henceforward he was to be found only in the Christian church. Our Saviour had accordingly publicly warned the Jews, when he was led to crucifixion, that "*they should see him no more*" till they should be prepared to acknowledge his authority. He had privately told the apostles that "*they should see him again, but the world should see him no more.*" In conformity with these predictions of his own, and with the whole plan of

revelation, his single public appearance after the resurrection was not at Jerusalem, but in a remote corner of Galilee, which was in some degree a selection of spectators. It is remarkable, that Ananias tells St. Paul that God had *chosen* him to see the Just One. In short, from every circumstance of the story of the forty days which intervened between our Lord's resurrection and his visible ascension, from the assertion of my text, and from the intimations of other passages of Scripture, it is evident, that our Lord, arisen from the grave, could not be shewn openly to all the people: He could not resume his familiar conversation with the world; because they who may be admitted to this immediate communion with the Deity, must be persons distinguished by their godly dispositions from the mass of the corrupt world, and chosen by God himself to so high a privilege.

Hence we are taught the universal importance of the precept so often inculcated upon the Israelites under the law, and adopted by St. Peter as a general maxim of the Christian's duty, "Be ye holy, for I, Jehovah, your God, am holy." If the want of holiness excluded the mass of the Jewish people from that sight of God, in the person of our Lord, which was granted to the apostles and other believers

here on earth, and from the benefits which that sight might have conveyed to them,—the testimony of their own senses to the truth of our Lord's pretensions, and the certainty thence arising of the salvation of the faithful; much more shall the want of holiness finally exclude from the sight of God in heaven, and from that fulness of joy which shall be the portion of those who shall be admitted to his presence. To see the Godhead in the person of our Lord, is proposed to the Christian's hope as the highest privilege of the saints that shall overcome. The physical capacity of this vision, is placed by St. John in a resemblance and sympathy that the glorified bodies of the saints shall bear to the body of our Lord in glory. "We know," says St. John, "that when he shall appear we shall be like him;" we must be like him, "because we shall see him "as he is." St. Paul speaks with no less confidence of the resemblance we shall bear to him. "Our Lord Jesus Christ," he says, "shall change "our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto "his glorious body, according to the workings "whereby he is able to subdue all things to him- "self." Or, as the passage might more properly be rendered, "Who shall cause the fashion of our "body of humiliation to be made like unto his body "of glory, according to the energy of his power of

“subduing all things to himself.” This transformation of the bodies of the faithful, by the power of our Lord, requires a previous transformation of the mind to a resemblance of him, by faith in his word, by reliance on his atonement, by conformity to his precepts, and imitation of his example. For he that hath this hope in him, of being transformed into the likeness of his Lord, of seeing him as he now is, and of standing for ever in his presence; he that hath this hope “purifieth himself as he is pure.”



**FIVE SERMONS.**





## SERMON I.

---

---

PSALMS, xcvi. 7.

*“Worship him all ye gods.”*

IT should be a rule with every one who would read the Holy Scriptures with advantage and improvement, to compare every text, which may seem either important for the doctrine it may contain, or remarkable for the turn of the expression, with the parallel passages in other parts of holy writ; that is, with the passages in which the subject-matter is the same, the sense equivalent, or the turn of the expression similar. These parallel passages are easily found by the marginal references in the Bibles of the larger form. It were to be wished, indeed, that no Bibles were printed without the mar-

gin. It is to be hoped that the objection obviously arising from the necessary augmentation in the price of the book, may sometime or other be removed by the charity of religious associations. The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge could not more effectually serve the purpose of their pious institution, than by applying some part of their funds to the printing of Bibles, in other respects in an ordinary way, for the use of the poor, but with a full margin. Meanwhile those who can afford to purchase the larger Bibles should be diligent in the improvement of the means with which Providence has furnished them. Particular diligence should be used in comparing the parallel texts of the Old and the New Testaments. When you read the Old Testament, if you perceive by the margin that any particular passage is cited in the New, turn to that passage of the New to which the margin refers, that you may see in what manner, in what sense, and to what purpose, the words of the more ancient are alleged by the later writer, who, in many instances, may be supposed to have received clearer light upon the same subject: On the other hand, when in the New Testament you meet with citations from the Old, always consult the original writer, that you may have the satisfaction of judging for yourselves, how far the passage alleged makes for the argument

which it is brought to support. In doing this you will imitate the example of the godly Jews of Berea, which is recorded with approbation in the Acts of the Apostles, who, when Paul and Silas reasoned with them out of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, clearly setting before them the prophecies concerning the Messiah, and the accomplishment of those prophecies in Jesus, whom they preached, “searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so.” These Berean Jews compared the parallel passages of St. Paul’s oral doctrine with the written Scriptures of the Old Testament. And *we now* should with equal diligence compare the written doctrine of St. Paul, and of his fellow labourers, with the writings of the Old Testament. It is incredible to any one, who has not in some degree made the experiment, what a proficiency may be made in that knowledge which maketh wise unto salvation, by studying the Scriptures in this manner, without any other commentary or exposition than what the different parts of the sacred volume mutually furnish for each other. I will not scruple to assert, that the most illiterate Christian, if he can but read his English Bible, and will take the pains to read it in this manner, will not only attain all that practical knowledge which is necessary to his salvation, but, by God’s blessing, he will become learn-

ed in every thing relating to his religion in such degree, that he will not be liable to be misled, either by the refined arguments or by the false assertions of those who endeavour to ingraft their own opinion upon the oracles of God. He may safely be ignorant of all philosophy except what is to be learned from the sacred books; which indeed contain the highest philosophy adapted to the lowest apprehensions. He may safely remain ignorant of all history, except so much of the history of the first ages of the Jewish and of the Christian church as is to be gathered from the canonical books of the Old and New Testament. Let him study these in the manner I recommend, and let him never cease to pray for the illumination of that Spirit by which these books were dictated; and the whole compass of abstruse philosophy and recondite history shall furnish no argument with which the perverse will of man shall be able to shake this learned Christian's faith. The Bible thus studied will indeed prove to be what we Protestants esteem it, a certain and sufficient rule of faith and practice, a helmet of salvation, which alone may quench the fiery darts of the wicked. My text, I trust, will prove a striking instance of the truth of these assertions.

If, in argument with any of the false teachers of the present day, I were to allege this text of the Psalmist in proof of our Lord's divinity, my antagonist would probably reply, that our Lord is not once mentioned in the psalm; that the subject of the psalm is an assertion of the proper divinity of Jehovah, the God of the Israelites, as distinguished from the imaginary deities which the heathen worshipped. This psalm therefore, which proposes Jehovah, the God of the Israelites, as the sole object of worship to men and angels, is alleged, he would say, to no purpose, in justification of worship paid to another person. And to any one who might know nothing more of the true sense of this passage than may appear in the words taken by themselves, my adversary might seem to have the better of the argument. I think I should seem to myself to stand confuted, if I knew no more of the meaning of my text, or rather of the inspired song of which it makes a part, than an inattentive reader might collect from a hasty view of its general purport. But observe the references in the margin of the Bible, and you will find that a parallel passage occurs in the epistle to the Hebrews, in the first chapter at the sixth verse. Turn to this passage of the epistle, and there you will find this text of the Psalmist cited by St. Paul to this very purpose, namely, to prove that adoration

is due from the blessed angels of God to the only begotten Son; for thus he reasons: "When he bringeth in the First Begotten into the world he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." The only passage in the Old Testament, as the Hebrew text now stands, is this seventh verse of the ninety-seventh psalm. The words of the Psalmist indeed are these "Worship him all ye gods." The apostle, that he might clearly exclude a plurality of gods, while he asserts the Godhead of the Son, thinks proper to explain the Psalmist's words, by substituting "all the angels of God" for "all the gods." But it is very evident that the First Begotten was, in the apostle's judgment, the object of worship propounded by the Psalmist, otherwise these words of the Psalmist, in which he calls upon the angels to worship Jehovah, were alleged to no purpose in proof of the Son's natural preeminence above the angels. For either the Son is the object of worship intended by the Psalmist, or the Son himself is to bear a part in the worship so universally enjoined.

But further, the collation of the Psalmist's text with the apostle's citation, will not only enable the unlearned Christian to discover a sense of the Psalmist's words not very obvious in the words them-

selves, but it will also give him certain, although summary information, upon a point of ecclesiastical antiquity of great importance, upon which the illiterate cannot be informed by any other means. In the late attempts to revive the Ebionæan heresy, much stress has been laid by the leaders of the impious confederacy, upon the opinions of the primitive church of Jerusalem. They tell you with great confidence, that the Redeemer was never worshipped, nor his divinity acknowledged, by the members of that church. The assertion has indeed no other foundation but the ignorance of those who make it, who confound a miserable sect, which separated from the church of Jerusalem, with the church itself. But how is the truth of the fact to be proved to the illiterate Christian, unread in the history of the primitive ages? who yet must feel some alarm and disquietude when he is told, that he has been catechized in a faith never held by those first and best Christians, the converts of the apostles, among whom James, the brother of our Lord, was bishop. Holy writ, if he is diligent in consulting it, will relieve his scruples and remove his doubts, not only upon the principal matter in dispute, but upon this particular historical question. It must be obvious to every understanding, that when any passage of the Old Testament is cited by writers of the New, in con-

firmation of any particular doctrine, without any disquisition concerning the sense of the citation, or any attempt to fix a particular sense upon it which may suit the writer's purpose; it must be evident, I say, that a text thus cited, without any solicitude to settle its true meaning, was generally understood at the time by those to whom the argument was addressed. For a text alleged in any sense not generally admitted, could be no proof to those who should be inclined to call in question the sense imposed. The Hebrews, therefore, to whom the apostle produces this text of the Psalmist in proof of the high dignity of the Redeemer's nature, agreed with the apostle concerning the sense of the Psalmist's words. They well understood that the Psalmist calls upon the angels to worship the only begotten Son. And who were these Hebrews? The very name imports that they were Jews by birth: They were indeed the Jewish converts settled in Palestine. And since the epistle was written during St. Paul's first imprisonment at Rome, which might easily be made to appear from the epistle itself, and St. Paul's first imprisonment at Rome ended about the thirtieth year after our Lord's ascension, they were no other than the *first race* of Jewish Christians, who agreed with St. Paul that the Redeemer is the object of worship propounded to the angels by the Psalmist.



And thus by this plain remark, and by the authority of the sacred books, the unlearned Christian may settle his own mind, and put to shame and silence the disturbers of his faith.

But this is not the whole of the information which the unlearned Christian may draw from the Psalmist's text compared with the apostle's citation. The apostle cites the Psalmist's words as spoken when the First Begotten was introduced into the world, that is to say, to mankind; for the word in the original literally signifies not the universe, for in that world the First Begotten ever was from its first formation, but this globe which is inhabited by men, to which the First Begotten was in these later ages introduced by the promulgation of the gospel. Now, since the occasion upon which these words were spoken was an introduction of the First Begotten into the world, if these words are nowhere to be found but in the ninety-seventh psalm, it follows that this ninety-seventh psalm is that introduction of the First Begotten into the world of which the apostle speaks.—Hence the unlearned Christian may derive this useful information, that the true subject of the ninety-seventh psalm, as it was understood by St. Paul and by the church of Jerusalem, to which this epistle is addressed, within thirty years

after our Lord's ascension, when that church must have been entirely composed of our Lord's own followers and the immediate converts of the apostles, was not, as it might seem to any one not deeply versed in the prophetic language, an assertion of God's natural dominion over the universe, but a prophecy of the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom by the preaching of the gospel, and the general conversion of idolaters to the service of the true God. The First Begotten is the Lord, or rather the Jehovah, for that is the word used in the original, whose kingdom is proclaimed as an occasion of joy and thanksgiving to the whole world.

And that this was no arbitrary interpretation of the psalm, imagined by enthusiasts, or invented by impostors, to make the sacred oracles accord with their own conceits or with their own designs, will appear by a closer inspection of the psalm itself, which cannot be consistently expounded of any other king or of any other kingdom.

That Jehovah's kingdom in some sense or other is the subject of this divine song, cannot be made a question, for thus it opens—"Jehovah reigneth." The psalm therefore must be understood either of God's natural kingdom over his whole creation; or

his particular kingdom over the Jews, his chosen people; or of that kingdom which is called in the New Testament the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of Christ. For of any other kingdom of God besides these three, man never heard or read. God's peculiar kingdom over the Jews cannot be the subject of this psalm, because *all nations* of the earth are called upon to rejoice in the acknowledgment of this great truth, "Jehovah reigneth, let the earth rejoice; let the many isles be glad thereof." The many isles are the various regions of the habitable world: For the word *isles* in the Old Testament denotes a region circumscribed by certain boundaries, though not surrounded by the sea; as appears by the use of it in the tenth chapter of Genesis at the fifth verse, where the sacred writer says of the sons of Japheth, mentioned in the three preceding verses, "By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided," though all the sons of Japheth had their settlements either in the Asiatic or the European continent. The same consideration, that Jehovah's kingdom is mentioned as a subject of general thanksgiving, proves that God's universal dominion over his whole creation cannot be the kingdom in the prophet's mind: For in this kingdom a great majority of the ancient world, the idolaters, were considered, not as subjects who

might rejoice in the glory of their Monarch, but as rebels who had every thing to fear from his just resentment. God's government of the world was to them no cause of joy, otherwise than as the erection of Christ's kingdom, which was to be the means of their deliverance, was a part of the general scheme of Providence. It remains therefore, that Christ's kingdom is that kingdom of Jehovah which the inspired poet celebrates as the occasion of universal joy. And this will further appear by the sequel of the song. After four verses, in which the transcendent glory, the irresistible power, and inscrutable perfection of the Lord, who to the joy of all nations reigneth, are painted in poetical images, taken partly from the awful scene on Sinai which accompanied the delivery of the law, partly from other manifestations of God's presence with the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness; he proceeds, in the sixth verse, "The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory." We read in the nineteenth psalm, that "the heavens declare the glory of God." And the glory of God, the power and the intelligence of the Creator, is indeed visibly declared in the fabric of the material world. But I cannot see how the structure of the heavens can demonstrate the *righteousness* of God. Wisdom and power may be displayed in the con-

trivance of an inanimate machine ; but righteousness cannot appear in the arrangement of the parts, or the direction of the motions of lifeless matter. The heavens therefore, in their external structure, cannot declare their Maker's righteousness : But the heavens, in another sense, attested the righteousness of Christ, when the voice from heaven declared him the beloved Son of God, in whom the Father was well pleased ; and when the preternatural darkness of the sun at the crucifixion, and other agonies of nature, drew that confession from the heathen centurion who attended the execution, that the suffering Jesus was the Son of God ; " And all the people " see his glory." It is much to be regretted that our translators, over studious of the purity of their English style, have, through the whole Bible, neglected a distinction constantly observed in the original, between *people* in the singular and *peoples* in the plural. The word *people*, in the singular, for the most part denotes God's chosen people, the Jewish nation, unless any other particular people happen to be the subject of discourse. But *peoples*, in the plural, is put for all the other races of mankind, as distinct from the chosen people. The word here is in the plural form, " And all the peoples see his " glory." But when, or in what sense did any of the peoples, the idolatrous nations, see the glory of

God? Literally they never saw his glory. The effulgence of the Shechinah never was displayed to them, except when it blazed forth upon the Egyptians to strike them with a panic; or when the towering pillar of flame, which marshalled the Israelites in the wilderness, was seen by the inhabitants of Palestine and Arabia as a threatening meteor in their sky. Intellectually no idolaters ever saw the glory of God, for they never acknowledged his power and Godhead: had they thus seen his glory, they had ceased to be idolaters. But *all the peoples*, upon the preaching of the gospel, saw the glory of Christ. They saw it literally in the miracles performed by his apostles; they saw it spiritually when they perceived the purity of his precepts, when they acknowledged the truth of his doctrine, when they embraced the profession of Christianity, and owned Christ for their Saviour and their God. The Psalmist goes on, "Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: Worship him all ye gods." In the original this verse has not at all the form of a malediction, which it has acquired in our translation from the use of the strong word *confounded*. "*Let them be ashamed.*" This is the utmost that the Psalmist says. The prayer that they may be ashamed of their folly and repent of it, is very different from an

imprecation of confusion. But in truth the Psalmist rather seems to speak prophetically, without any thing either of prayer or imprecation—"they shall be ashamed." Having seen the glory of Christ they shall be ashamed of the idols, which in the times of their ignorance they worshipped. In the eighth and ninth verses, looking forward to the times when the fulness of the Gentiles shall be come in, and the remnant of Israel shall turn to the Lord, he describes the daughters of Judah as rejoicing at the news of the mercy extended to the Gentile world, and exulting in the universal extent of Jehovah's kingdom, and the general acknowledgment of his Godhead. In the tenth verse, having the sufferings, as it should seem, in view, which the first preachers were destined to endure, he exhorts those who love Jehovah to adhere at all hazards to their duty, in the assurance that their powerful Lord, on whom they have fixed their love, "preserveth the souls of his saints, and delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked." "Light," he adds, "is sown for the righteous;" or, to render the words more strictly, "Light is shed over the Just One, and gladness upon the upright of heart." The *just* and the *just one* are two different words; the one a collective noun expressing a multitude, the other expressive of a single person. These two words are unfortu-

nately confounded in our English Bibles. The Just One is, I think, in many passages of the Psalms, of which I take this to be one, an appellation which exclusively belongs to Christ in his human character.\* Light or splendor is an easy image for a condition of prosperity and grandeur. "Light is shed over the Just One, the man Christ Jesus, who is now exalted at the right hand of God." And light, if I mistake not, is without any metaphor literally shed over him. By virtue of his union to the Second Person of the Godhead, this Just One, the man Christ, is now so taken into glory that he is become an inhabitant of the Shechinah, dwelling bodily in the centre of that insufferable light; in which situation he shewed himself before he suffered, to the three apostles on the Mount, to animate their faith, and after his ascension to the unconverted Saul, to check his persecuting zeal upon his journey to Damascus. Thus light, the light of God's own glory is shed over the Just One, over the glorified person of our Lord. And this light

---

\* Psalm xxxiv. 19. "Great are the troubles of the Just One, but Jehovah delivereth him out of all." And again, 21. "God shall slay the ungodly, and they that hate the Just One shall be made desolate."



thus shed on him is a source of gladness to all the upright in heart. “Rejoice in Jehovah therefore, ye righteous, rejoice in him by whom ye are yourselves united to the first principle of goodness, being, power, happiness, and glory; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.”

Thus by a brief, but I hope a perspicuous exposition of this whole psalm, I have shewn you, that every part of it easily applies to the subject of the Messiah’s ascension to his kingdom, and that many parts of it cannot be expounded of any other kingdom of God. This psalm is indeed one of five psalms, from the ninety-sixth to the hundredth inclusive, which, if they are not all parts of one entire poem, at least all relate to the same subject, “the introduction of the First Begotten to the world.” Christ is the Jehovah whose dominion is proclaimed; who is declared to be the God whom men and angels are bound to serve and worship. Such is he who for our deliverance condescended to assume our nature, and upon this day was born of a pure virgin. For thus it seems the matter stood in the counsels of Eternal Wisdom: It behoved him “to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining unto God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”



## SERMON II.

---

ROMANS, iv. 25.

*“ Who was delivered for our offences, and was  
“ raised again for our justification.”*

**THE** manner in which the apostle connects in these remarkable words, both the sufferings of Christ with the sins of men, and the resurrection of Christ with the absolution of the sinners, deserves a deep consideration, and leads, if I mistake not, to conclusions of the highest moment in speculation and in practice. The apostle not only speaks of the sins of men as the cause or occasion of our Lord's death, but he speaks of the justification of men as equally the cause or occasion of his resurrection. For

the elucidation and improvement of this doctrine, I shall treat the subject in the following order:—

*First*, Taking the first clause of my text by itself, I shall inquire in what sense it may seem to be implied in these expressions, “delivered for our offences,” that the sins of mankind were the cause or occasion of Christ’s sufferings?

I shall in the *next* place shew, that if aught of ambiguity may seem to adhere to these expressions, it is entirely removed by the similarity of connexion which is alleged in the two clauses taken jointly, between the sins of men with the death of Christ on the one hand, and the justification of men with the resurrection of Christ on the other. I shall shew you, that the similarity of these connexions,—men sinned therefore Christ died, men are justified therefore Christ was raised again,—necessarily leads to the particular notion of Christ’s death as an expiatory sacrifice in the most literal meaning of which the words are capable; that it leads to this notion of Christ’s death in particular, because it excludes all other notions of it.

And, *lastly*, I shall point out the important consequences that follow from this great article of our

faith,—that Christ's blood was spilt for the expiation of the sins of the penitent.

Now, for the sense in which it may seem to be asserted that the sins of men were the cause or the occasion of our Lord's bitter sufferings and ignominious death; since his death, with all the circumstances of pain and ignominy which attended it, was brought about by the malice of his enemies, it may seem that in this sense the sins of men were literally the causes of his sufferings. But the apostle says, that he was delivered for "our offences." The expression "our offences" is general, and cannot be expounded of the particular sins of our Lord's personal enemies; of the malice of the Pharisees, who procured his death; of the perfidy of Judas who betrayed him; of the injustice of Pilate, who against his own conscience, and in defiance of the divine warnings condemned him; of the cruelty of the Jewish populace, who derided him in his agonies. Of any or of all of these particular sins of the persons concerned, as contrivers, as directors, as instruments, or as gratified spectators in the horrid business of his death, the apostle's expression "our offences" is too general to be understood. It can only be expounded of the sins of all us men, or at least of all us Christians.

Nor is it agreeable to the usual cast of the Scripture language, that the persons immediately concerned in procuring and in executing the unjust sentence upon our Lord, should be spoken of as the original agents or causes in the dreadful business of his death. They were only instruments in the hand of a higher cause. They were the instruments which Providence employed to bring about the counsels of his own wisdom. This is implied in the words of my text, "He was delivered for our offences." These words, "he was delivered," refer to a purpose and design of God's over-ruling providence, by which the Redeemer was delivered over to the pains which he endured. The unbelieving Jews, the false traitor, the unrighteous judge, the unfeeling executioner, the insulting rabble, were but the instruments of that purpose, which in some way or other had a general respect to "our offences;" that is, to the offences of all us men, or in the most limited sense in which the words can be taken, of all that portion of mankind which should hereafter be brought to the knowledge and worship of that God who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, and by faith in the crucified Redeemer should become admissible to a share in those benefits, whatever they may be, in order to which the sufferings of the Son of God were ordained.

If the single service which Christ rendered to mankind was in the character of a teacher of religion; if men were not otherwise to be reclaimed from their vices, than by the discovery which our Lord hath made of the different conditions of the righteous and the wicked in a future life; if by this discovery every man once brought to a belief of the doctrine might be reclaimed in such degree as to merit by his future conduct, not only a free pardon of his past offences, but a share of those good things which "God hath prepared for them that love him;" if our Lord's doctrine might of itself in this way be a remedy for the sins of men, and his sufferings and death were necessary only for the confirmation of his doctrine,—the sins of men might, figuratively and indirectly, be said to be the occasion of his death; his doctrine being the means of their reformation, and his death the means of establishing his doctrine. But if the case really be, that nothing future can undo the past; that the guilt of past crimes cannot be done away by future innocence; if after we have done all that is commanded us, we are still to say, "we are unprofitable servants;" if we have incurred guilt without so much as the ability of meriting reward; if all that is commanded us, which were it done would not amount to merit, be still more than ever is performed; if the utmost

height of human virtue consists in a perpetual conflict with appetites which are never totally subdued, in an endeavour after a perfection which never is attained; if the case be, that “if we say,” that is, if we who believe, if we Christians say, “that we “have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth “is not in us;” if nevertheless the faith and veracity of God himself is pledged, “if we confess our sins, “to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all “unrighteousness;” if it be the “blood of Christ “which cleanseth us from sin;” if the benefit of his death be in some degree extended to those who are unacquainted with his doctrine, who by consequence are not within the reach of any influence that may be ascribed to his instruction, “for Christ is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but “also for the sins of the whole world;”—it is evident that the Redeemer’s death must have been otherwise available to the expiation of the sins of men than by its remote effect upon the manners of mankind, by the confirmation which it affords of the truth of the Christian revelation.

Indeed, were it only as a proof of doctrine, or as an example of patient suffering, that the death of Christ had been serviceable to mankind, similar benefits would be in some degree to be ascribed to the



sufferings of many of our Lord's first disciples. And yet, though the early martyrs were in the common acceptation of the word just men, who suffered unjustly for the service of God and for the good of man, and in the cause of the true religion, yet it is never said of them that they suffered "the just for the unjust that they might bring us to God."

We read not, that we have access to the Father through the blood of St. Peter or St. Paul; and yet, if the expiatory virtue of our Saviour's death consisted merely in what it contributed towards the reformation of mankind by giving evidence and effect to his doctrine, it would be injustice to St. Peter and St. Paul, and all the other martyrs whose deaths contributed in the same remote way to the same effect, to deny them a share in the business of expiation. St. Paul indeed, in the first chapter of his epistle to the Colossians, speaking of his own sufferings, says, that "he was filling up in his own flesh that which was behind of the afflictions of Christ." But in this passage he is speaking of the church under the image of Christ's body. By the afflictions of Christ which he speaks of as unfinished, he means the afflictions of the church; and he speaks of his own sufferings, not as supplying any supposed

deficiency of our Lord's sufferings, but as filling up the appointed measure of the afflictions of the church, and laying the foundation of its future prosperity and peace. Of the proper sufferings of our Lord in his own person, the apostles every where speak a very different language; describing them as the means by which the apostles themselves, no less than other Christians, were each individually reconciled to God, and admitted to the hope of future glory. "In him we have redemption, through his blood the forgiveness of sins." "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." "My blood is shed for you," said our Lord himself to the apostles, "and for many, for the remission of sins." Expressions of the like import so frequently occur in the sacred writings, the notion of the blood of Christ as the matter of an expiatory sacrifice is so strenuously inculcated, that it is not easy to conceive that nothing more is meant than to describe, in figurative expressions, the great importance of our Lord's death as a proof his doctrine, when a similar importance might be ascribed to the deaths of other preachers, to which the same figure never is applied. It should rather seem, that the blood of Christ had some direct and proper efficacy to expiate the guilt of men, independent of any remote effect upon their actions.

That this is really the case appears with the highest evidence from that view of the mystery of redemption, which my text in the second clause more particularly sets forth, in which the resurrection of Christ is connected with our justification in the same manner, as in the first clause his death is connected with our sins. As our Lord's death was in the scheme of Providence the consequence of our sins, so by the same scheme of Providence his resurrection was the consequence of our justification.

The English expressions, it must be confessed, are in themselves in some degree ambiguous. That he rose again "for our justification," may be either an assertion that the justification of man naturally brought on the event of our Lord's resurrection, or that their justification is some future benefit, which the event of Christ's resurrection shall in due season surely bring about; and the latter may seem the more obvious sense of the expression. But that this is not the true exposition, even of the English words, evidently appears when the two clauses are considered in connexion: For as the death of Christ had no tendency to produce those offences for which he was delivered, but on the contrary our offences were the reason of his humiliation; (and it were unreasonable to suppose that similar expressions

should be used in opposite senses in different parts of the same sentence,) our justification, for which Christ rose, must be something which in the order of things led to the Redeemer's resurrection. The original words are without ambiguity, and clearly represent our Lord's resurrection as an event which took place in consequence of man's justification, in the same manner as his death took place in consequence of man's sins.

It follows therefore, that our justification is a thing totally distinct from the final salvation of the godly. It is some part of the wonderful business of redemption which was to be finished before our Lord, consistently with the scheme of his great undertaking, could rise from the dead. It is something annexed to no condition on the part of man, a benefit freely and generally bestowed, without any regard to any previous effect of the evangelical doctrine upon the lives of individuals. Now this is easily explained, if the death of Christ was literally an atonement for the sins of the penitent; but in any other view of the scheme of redemption it is inexplicable.

Christ in his original nature, as the uncreated Word, the ever-living Image of the Father, was

incapable of sin as he was far above all infirmity and imperfection. It were the height of impiety to imagine that it was for any sins of his own in a pre-existent state, that he was delivered over to a condition of weakness and mortality. Christ in assuming our mortal nature contracted nothing of the general pollution. The miraculous manner of his entrance into human life, excluded the possibility of his being touched with that contagion. He died not therefore for any share belonging to himself of the universal corruption. Christ in the form of a servant was subject to temptation, but still not liable to actual sin. He died not therefore for his own sins: He died as the proxy of guilty man. As he died not therefore for any delinquency of his own, there was nothing to detain his soul in hell or his body in the grave; nothing to protract his continuance in the condition of a dead man, that is, of an executed criminal, when once the atonement for our sins was made, and the justice of our offended God was satisfied. So soon as the expiation was complete, justice required that the Redeemer's sufferings should terminate, and his resurrection to life and glory was the immediate consequence. Our justification, you will observe, is quite a distinct thing from the final absolution of good men in the general judgment. Every man's final doom will

depend upon the diligence which he uses in the present life, to improve under the means and motives for improvement which the gospel furnishes. Our justification is the grace "in which we now stand." It is that general act of mercy which was previously necessary on the part of God, to render the attainment of salvation possible to those who had once been wilfully rebellious, and to the last continue liable to the surprises of temptation. It is that act of mercy which conveys to all true penitents a free pardon of all sins committed before conversion, and a free pardon of the sins of incurable infirmity after conversion. This act of mercy is the immediate benefit of Christ's death; it hath no respect to any merits of the individuals to whom it is applied; its very foundation is, that all are concluded under sin; it embraces all without distinction, and is procured by the sole merit of our Lord's atonement. If the purpose of the Redeemer's death was to procure this mercy, it is evident, that when he had endured what was necessary to procure it, the purpose of his death was answered, and his resurrection could not but ensue. In any other view of the scheme of redemption, it is not easy to understand what that justification of man should be, of which the apostle speaks in the text as requisite in the order of things to the Re-

deemer's resurrection. If any one imagines, that the pardon of sin in the present life with that tolerance of man's infirmity, the promise of which under the gospel is the great motive to renewed obedience;—If any one imagines, that this double act of mercy, freely remitting past guilt, and accepting a sincere instead of a perfect obedience, proceeds from the pure benignity of God the Father, in consideration of the sinner's own repentance, and without regard to the virtue of any atonement, he will find it difficult to assign a reason why the grant of the pardon upon these terms should follow rather than precede the death of Christ. He will find it difficult to explain, upon what principle our justification should be an intermediate event between the death of Christ and his resurrection, rather than between his nativity and his baptism; or upon what principle indeed it should be connected with any particular circumstance in the life of Christ, more than with any imaginable circumstance in the life of any other man,—of Pontius Pilate for instance, or Gamaliel. The text therefore is one remarkable passage out of a great number, which exhibits such a view of the scheme of redemption which is incapable of any rational exposition, if the notion of Christ's death as an actual atonement for the sins of men be rejected.

This doctrine of an atonement, by which the repenting sinner may recover as it were his lost character of innocence, and by which the involuntary deficiencies are supplied of his renewed obedience, is so full of comfort to the godly, so soothing to the natural fears of the awakened sinner's conscience, that it may be deemed a dreadful indication of the great obduracy of men, that a discovery of a scheme of mercy, which might have been expected to have been the great recommendation of the gospel to a world lost and dead in trespasses and sins, the means of procuring it an easy and favourable reception, should itself have been made the ground of cavil and objection. And it is a still worse symptom of the hardened hearts of men, if, among those who profess themselves disciples of a crucified Saviour, any may be found who allow no real efficacy to that "blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel." Let us rather charitably hope, that this misbelief and contradiction have arisen from some misapprehension of the Scripture doctrine, and that the real doctrine of our Lord's atonement has all the while had no opponents. Those who speak of the wrath of God as appeased by Christ's sufferings, speak, it must be confessed, a figurative language. The Scriptures speak figuratively when they ascribe wrath to God.



The divine nature is insusceptible of the perturbations of passion; and when it is said that God is angry, it is a figure which conveys this useful warning to mankind, that God will be determined by his wisdom, and by his providential care of his creation, to deal with the wicked as a prince in anger deals with rebellious subjects. It is an extension of the figure when it is said, that God's wrath is by any means appeased. It is a figure therefore, if it be said that God's wrath is appeased by the sufferings of Christ. It is not to be supposed that the sins of men excite in God any appetite of vengeance, which could not be diverted from its purpose of punishment till it had found its gratification in the sufferings of a righteous person. This indeed were a view of our redemption founded on a false and unworthy notion of the divine character. But nothing hinders but that the sufferings of Christ, which could only in a figurative sense be an appeasement or satisfaction of God's *wrath*, might be in the most literal meaning of the words, a satisfaction to his *justice*. It is easy to understand that the interests of God's government, the peace and order of the great kingdom over which he rules the whole world of moral agents, might require that his disapprobation of sin should be solemnly declared and testified in his manner of forgiving it: It is easy to understand, that the exac-

tion of vicarious sufferings on the part of him who undertook to be the intercessor for a rebellious race, amounted to such a declaration. These sufferings, by which the end of punishment might be answered, being once sustained, it is easy to perceive, that the same principle of wisdom, the same providential care of his creation which must have determined the Deity to inflict punishment, had no atonement been made, would now determine him to spare. Thus, to speak figuratively, his anger was appeased, but his justice was literally satisfied; and the sins of men no longer calling for punishment when the ends of punishment were secured, were literally expiated. The person sustaining the sufferings in consideration of which the guilt of others may, consistently with the principles of good policy, be remitted, was in the literal sense of the word, so literally as no other victim ever was, a sacrifice, and his blood shed for the remission of sin, was literally the *matter* of the expiation.

It now only remains that I point out to you, as distinctly as the time will permit, the important lessons to be drawn from this view of the scheme of man's redemption.

*First* then, we learn from it that sin must be something far more hateful in its nature, something of a deeper malignity than is generally understood. It could be no inconsiderable evil that could require such a remedy as the humiliation of the second Person in the Godhead. It is not to be supposed, that any light cause would move the merciful Father of the universe to expose even an innocent man to unmerited sufferings. What must be the enormity of that guilt, which God's mercy could not pardon till the only begotten Son of God had undergone its punishment? How great must be the load of crime, which could find no adequate atonement till the Son of God descended from the bosom of the Father, clothed himself with flesh, and being found in fashion as a man, submitted to a life of hardship and contempt, to a death of ignominy and pain?

Again, we learn that the good or ill conduct of man is a thing of far more importance and concern in the moral system than is generally imagined. Man's deviation from his duty was a disorder, it seems, in the moral system of the universe, for which nothing less than divine wisdom could devise a remedy,—the remedy devised nothing less than divine love and power could apply. Man's disobedience

was in the moral world, what it would be in the natural if a planet were to wander from its orbit, or the constellations to start from their appointed seats. It was an evil for which the regular constitution of the world had no cure, which nothing but the immediate interposition of Providence could repair.

We learn still further, that as the malignity of sin is so great, and the importance of man's conduct so considerable, the danger of a life of wilful sin must be much more formidable than imagination is apt to paint it. The weight of punishment naturally due to sin must bear some just proportion to its intrinsic malignity, and to the extent of the mischiefs which arise from it. Its punishment must also bear some just proportion to the price which has been paid for our redemption. Terrible must have been the punishment which was bought off at so great a price as the blood of the Son of God; and terrible must be the punishment which still awaits us, if "we count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing;" and forfeit the benefit of that atonement.

Another lesson to be drawn from the doctrine of our redemption is, that man, notwithstanding his present degeneracy, notwithstanding the misery and

weakness of his present condition, the depravity of his passions, and the imbecility of his reason, hath nevertheless a capacity of high improvement in intellect and moral worth. For it cannot reasonably be supposed, that so much should be done for the deliverance of a creature from the consequence of its own guilt, of whom it was not understood that it had the capacity of being rendered, by the discipline applied in some future stage at least of its existence, in some degree worthy of its Maker's care and love. The scheme of man's redemption originated, we are told, from God's love of man. In man in his fallen state there is nothing which the divine love could make its object. But the divine intellect contemplates every part of its creation in the whole extent of its existence; and that future worth of man to which he shall be raised by the divine mercy, is such as moved the divine love to the work of his redemption. For to say that God had loved a creature which should be unfit to be loved in the whole of its existence, were to magnify the mercy of God at the expense of his wisdom.

But since all improvement of the intellectual nature must in some degree be owing to its own exertions to the purpose of self-improvement, the prospect of the great attainments which the grace

of God puts within our reach, ought to excite us to the utmost diligence “to make our calling and “election sure;” as, on the other hand, the prospect of the danger which threatens the perverse, the careless, and the secure, should keep us in a state of constant watchfulness against the temptations of the world, the surprises of passion, and the allurements of sense. The Christian should remember, that the utmost he can do or suffer for himself, by a denial of his appetites, and a resistance of temptation, or even by exposing himself to the scorn and persecution of the world, is far less than hath been done or suffered for him. And what has *he* to expect from a merciful, but withal a wise and righteous Judge, who thinks it hard to mortify those passions in himself for which the Lord of life made his life an offering.

Who ever thinks without just indignation and abhorrence of the Jewish Rulers, who in the phrenzy of envy and resentment—envy of our Lord’s credit with the people, and resentment of his just and affectionate rebukes,—spilt his righteous blood? Let us rather turn the edge of our resentment against those enemies which, while they are harboured in our own bosoms, “war against our souls,” and were, more truly than the Jews, the murderers

of our Lord. Shall the Christian be enamoured of the pomp and glory of the world when he considers, that for the crimes of man's ambition the Son of God was humbled? Shall he give himself up to those covetous desires of the world, which were the occasion that his Lord lived an outcast from its comforts? Will the disciples of the holy Jesus submit to be the slaves of those base appetites of the flesh, which were indeed the nails which pierced his Master's hands and feet? Will he in any situation be intimidated by the enmity of the world, or abashed by its censures, when he reflects how his Lord endured the cross and despised the shame? Hard, no doubt, is the conflict which the Christian must sustain with the power of the enemy and with his own passions. Hard to flesh and blood is the conflict; but powerful is the succour given, and high is the reward proposed. For thus saith the true and faithful Witness, the Original of the creation of God, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit down with me in my throne, even as also I overcame and am sitten down with my Father in his throne." Now, unto him that loved us, and hath washed us from our sins in his own blood; to him that liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore; to him who hath disarmed sin of its strength,

and death of its sting; to the only begotten Son, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one only God, be glory and dominion, praise and thanksgiving, henceforth and forever more.



## SERMON III.

---

---

MATTHEW, XX. 23.

*“ To sit on my right hand and my left is not mine  
“ to give, but it shall be given to them for whom  
“ it is prepared of my Father.”*

THESE, you know, were the concluding words of our blessed Lord's reply to the mother of Zebedee's children, when she came with a petition to him for her two sons, that they might be the next persons to himself in honour and authority in his new kingdom, sitting the one on his right hand, the other on his left. It was surely with great truth he told them “ they knew not what they asked.” At the time when their petition was preferred, they had probably little apprehension what that kingdom was to be in which they solicited promotion; and were not at all aware that their request went to any thing

higher, or that it could indeed go to any higher thing than the first situations in the king of Israel's court. He told them that they sought a pre-eminence not easily attained, to be earned only by a patient endurance of unmerited sufferings for the service of mankind and the propagation of the true religion; and he asks them in enigmatical language, whether they were prepared to follow his example? It is of the nature of ambition to overlook all difficulties, and to submit to any hardships for the attainment of its ends. Two miserable fishermen of the Galilean lake, raised to the near prospect as they thought of wealth and grandeur, thought no conditions hard by which they might become the favourites and ministers of a king; nor perhaps did they understand in what extent it was ordained that they must suffer, before they could be permitted to enjoy. They answered, that they were prepared for all difficulties. Our blessed Lord, continuing his enigmatical language, (for although their ambition was to be repressed, it was but too evident that their faith was not yet ripened to bear a clear prospect of the hardships which they had to undergo,) tells them, "that they shall drink indeed of his cup, and be baptized with the baptism with which himself should be baptized." Expressions upon which at the time they would probably put some flattering inter-

pretation, understanding them only as a general declaration that they were to share their Master's fortunes. "But to sit," says he, upon my right hand and my left is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father."

These last words deserve particular attention. There can be no question that the kingdom of which our Saviour speaks is his future kingdom, and "to sit upon his right hand and his left," in the sense which in his own private thoughts he put upon the words when he used them, denotes a situation of distinguished happiness and glory in the future life. This is evident from the means which he points out for the attainment of this promotion. His question to the apostles implies, that what they ignorantly sought was unattainable, except to those only who should have the fortitude to drink of *his* cup and to be baptized with *his* baptism. *His* cup was the cup of suffering; *his* baptism the baptism of a violent and ignominious death. But the only promotion to which this cup and this baptism can ever lead, must be a situation of glory in the life to come. This life is to be thrown away in the acquisition. The next therefore must necessarily be the season when the reversion is to take effect. Our Lord therefore

speaks of the distinctions of the blessed in the future life, when he says, that “to sit on his right hand and his left is not his to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of the Father.”

It must therefore strike every attentive reader, that our Lord in these very remarkable words seems to disclaim all property in the rewards and honours of the future life, and all discretionary power in the distribution of them. They are not mine, he says. Not being mine, I have no right to give them away; and as I have no right, so neither have I authority for the distribution of them: The whole business is indeed already done: There are certain persons for whom these things are prepared, and to them, and them only they shall be given. This declaration is the more extraordinary, not only as it is inconsistent with our general notions of the Son of God to suppose that there should be any thing not absolutely in his disposal, (for all things that the Father hath are his,) but because it is the clear doctrine of the Scriptures, that the general judgment is particularly committed to his management; that he is the appointed Judge who is to decide upon every man's merit; and is to assign to every individual the particular proportion of reward or punishment, happiness or

suffering, glory or shame, that may be due to his good or ill deservings in the present life. This business is allotted to the Son, not as peculiarly his in his original divine character, like the business of creation, but as proper to his assumed character of the incarnate God. "The Father judgeth no man, but he hath committed all judgment to the Son." And judgment is committed to him for this especial reason, that he is the Son of man. "God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world by the man whom he hath ordained, even the man Christ Jesus." To recite all the texts in which the general judgment is described as a business in which Christ, as the Christ, shall have the whole direction would, be an endless task. I shall produce only one more: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am sitten down with my Father in his throne." In these words our Saviour expressly claims that very power which he seems to disclaim in the words of my text.

Much of this difficulty arises from an inaccuracy in our English translation. The Greek words might be more exactly rendered thus: "To sit upon my right hand and my left is not mine to give, except to those for whom it hath been prepared

“of my Father.” Our Saviour therefore, in these words, disclaims not the authority which the Holy Scriptures constantly ascribe to him, and which, in the epistle to the church of Laodicea, in the book of Revelations, he claims for himself in the most peremptory terms. He disdains not the authority of making the final distribution of reward and punishment, and of appointing to situations of distinction in his future kingdom. But yet he speaks as if in the management of this business he were tied down to certain rules prescribed by the Almighty Father, from which he would not be at liberty to depart. But in this manner of speaking there is nothing but what is conformable to the usual language of holy writ. The Son is everywhere spoken of as giving effect to the original purposes of the paternal mind, by his immediate action upon the external world, with which the Father otherwise than through the agency of the Son, holds as it were no intercourse. Not that the purposes and counsels of the Father are not equally the purposes and counsels of the Son, or that the Son acts without original authority by a mere delegated power; but that this notion of the Father’s purpose executed by the Son, is the best idea that can be conveyed to the human mind of the manner in which God governs his creation. And beyond this it becomes us

not to be curious to inquire. But upon another point we may be permitted to be more inquisitive, because it touches our interests more nearly. Our Saviour's words intimate, that the business of the future judgment is already settled; that the particular situations of the future life are allotted to particular persons; and that his office, when he shall come to execute judgment, will only be to see that each individual is put in possession of the office and the station, which by the wise counsels of Providence hath been long ago set apart for him. "To sit upon my right hand and my left is not mine to give, except to those for whom it is prepared of my Father." It should seem therefore that the first stations in Christ's future kingdom are appropriated to particular persons who must enjoy them. If the first, why not the second stations? If the second, why not the third? And thus it will follow, that every station in Christ's future kingdom from the highest to the lowest is appropriated, and of consequence, that the condition of every individual is irresistibly determined by a decree, which was passed upon him ages before he was brought into existence.

St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans has been thought to teach the same doctrine. And if this doctrine were to be found clearly asserted in the

apostle's writings, this discouraging interpretation of our Lord's declaration would seem but too certain. The fact is, that St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans represents the degeneracy of mankind as so great in consequence of the fall, that if God had been pleased to make an arbitrary selection of certain persons to be admitted to mercy upon their repentance, and had consigned the rest of the race to the natural punishment of their guilt, the proceeding could not have been taxed either with cruelty or injustice. But he affirms, that God hath actually dealt with mankind in a far milder and more equitable way, admitting all without exception who are willing to repent to repentance, and all who do repent to the benefit of our Lord's atonement; inviting all men to accept the proffered mercy; bearing with repeated provocation and affront; and leaving none but the hardened and incorrigible exposed to final wrath and punishment. This being the true representation of God's dealings with mankind, the happiness of the future life being open to all men upon the condition of faith, repentance, and amendment, the degrees of that happiness will unquestionably be proportioned to the proficiency that each man shall have made in the emendation of his heart and his manners by the rules of the gospel. Those therefore for whom it is prepared to sit upon our Lord's



right hand and his left, cannot be any certain persons *unconditionally predestined* to situations of glory in the life to come.

I say they cannot be any certain persons unconditionally predestined after this manner: John the son of Zebedee to this office, James the son of Zebedee to that, Peter to a third; whatever the conduct of John, James or Peter, in their apostolical ministry in the present life may have been. It is certain that God's foreknowledge hath from the beginning extended, not only to the minutest actions of the life of every man who ever was to live, but even to the most secret motives from which each man's actions were to spring; to his thoughts, his wishes, his fears, his likings and aversions. God therefore had from all eternity as exact a knowledge of every man's character, as true an estimation of his good or ill deserts, as can be had when the man shall have lived to finish the career of virtue or of vice which God hath ever foreseen that he would run. This foreknowledge of every man's character cannot but be accompanied with a foreknowledge of the particular lot of happiness or misery which it will be fit he should receive. And since to perceive what is fit, and to resolve that what is fit shall be, must be one act, or if not absolutely one, they must

be inseparable acts in the divine mind, it should seem indeed that every man's final doom in consequence of an exact view of his future life, must have been eternally determined. But this is only to say, that the world, with its whole consequence of events, has ever been present to the Creator's mind. And however difficult the thing may be for the human apprehension, this predetermination of all things, which is implied in this idea of the divine omniscience, leaves men no less morally free, and makes their future doom no less subject to the contingency of their own actions, than if nothing were foreseen, nothing decreed in consequence of foreknowledge. The foreknowledge of an action, and the purpose of reward or punishment arising from that foreknowledge, being no more a cause of the action to which reward or punishment will be due, than the knowledge of any past action, and the resolution of certain measures to be taken in consequence of it, are causes of the action which gave rise to the resolution; the knowledge of a fact, whether the thing known be past or future, being quite a distinct thing from the causes that produce it. Neither the foreknowledge therefore of the Deity, though perfect and infallible, nor any predestination of individuals to happiness or misery which may necessarily result from that foreknowledge, however unaccountable

the thing may seem, is any impediment to human liberty ; nor is any man's doom decreed unless it be upon a foresight of his life and character. Nor is it prepared for Peter and Paul to sit upon Christ's right hand and his left in preference to John or James, who may be more deserving. It is no such arbitrary arrangement which our Lord disclaims any discretionary power to put by. The irreversible arrangement which he alleges as a bar against any partial operation of his own particular affections, is an arrangement founded on the eternal maxims of justice, in favour not of certain persons, but of persons of a certain character and description ; of persons who will be found distinguished by particular attainments of holiness, by the fruits of a true and lively faith, by an extraordinary proficiency in the habits of true piety, charity, and temperance. His declaration is no renunciation of his property in the rewards to be bestowed, or of his authority for the distribution of them ; but it is a very forcible and striking declaration of the absolute impartiality with which the business of the last judgment will be conducted. The Son of God when he assumed our mortal nature became so truly man, that we may be allowed to say, that he formed like other men his particular friendships and attachments ; as appeared strongly in the case of Lazarus and in some other

instances. One of the brothers for whom the request was made which occasioned the declaration in my text was his favourite disciple, in such a degree as to excite the envy of the rest. But he tells them, that in the distribution of the glories of his future kingdom no private feelings which may belong to him as a man will be allowed to operate. That justice, the Creator's justice, tempered indeed with mercy, with general and equitable mercy, but unbribed by favour and affection, will hold its firm and even course. So that every man will be placed in the situation to which his comparative merit shall entitle him, without any preference in favour even of those who were chosen by our Lord to be his earliest associates and his most familiar friends. The lesson to be drawn from this explicit declaration of our Lord is the necessity of an actual repentance on the one hand, and the certainty of acceptance on the other, if this necessary work is once accomplished. Our Lord's declaration that every man will at last find himself in the station which eternal justice has ordained that he shall hold, cuts off all hope but what is founded on an active and sincere repentance: on such a repentance as may entitle to the benefit of the Redeemer's expiation, which is ever to be kept in view; for without that our Saviour's declaration would render every man altogether hopeless. On

the other hand, this declaration holds out to the sincere penitent the most animating hope. If the highest stations in the future life are reserved for the apostles, it is because the apostles will be found to have excelled all other Christians in the love of God and the duties of the Christian life. Should two persons appear at the great judgment more worthy than the sons of Zebedee to sit upon Christ's right hand and his left, (the supposition is perhaps extravagant, and otherwise than as a mere supposition to illustrate a point of doctrine it is unwarrantable :) should two such person appear, the sons of Zebedee will not be permitted to take place of them. Such being the equity with which the future retribution will be administered, there is evidently no hope for sinners but in a true repentance, and for a true repentance there will be no disappointment in its glorious hope. Nor let any one be discouraged from the work of repentance by any enormities of his past life. Confirmed habits of sin heighten the difficulty of repentance, but such are the riches of God's mercy that they exclude not from the benefits of it. This our Lord was pleased to testify in the choice that he made of his first associates, who, with the exception perhaps of two or three who had been previously tutored in the Baptist's school, had been persons of irregular irreligious lives ; and yet these

we know are they who hereafter shall be seated on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. “Be ye zealous therefore and repent;” “for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

## SERMON IV.

---

EPHESIANS, iv. 30.

*“And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby  
“ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.”*

A SEAL has been in use from the earliest antiquity to authenticate writings of importance both in public and private transactions. When the prophet Jeremiah purchased by God's command his uncle Hananeel's estate, the conveyance of the property was by deeds that were signed and sealed; and the letters which Jezebel issued for Naboth's destruction were sealed with Ahab's seal. In allusion to this practice whatever may seem to justify a claim to any particular privilege, commission, or authority, or to afford a confirmation of a promise that is hereafter to take effect, is by an easy figure called a seal. Thus St. Paul calls the Corinthian

church the seal of his apostleship; “The seal of  
 “mine apostleship are ye in the Lord.” The blessing of God which crowned my labours among you with such success, as to reclaim you from the idolatry and the debaucheries to which idolaters are addicted, is a certain evidence that God sent me to perform that work which his providence hath brought to so happy an effect. By the same figure he calls circumcision the seal of Abraham’s righteousness of faith. It was the appointed mark and standing memorial of the promises which were made to Abraham, in consideration of that righteousness of faith which Abraham had exercised before those promises were given or this rite was appointed. It was an evidence of the acceptance of this righteousness in the person of Abraham; and by consequence, since there can be no respect of persons with the all-righteous God, since the qualities that he accepted in Abraham he must equally accept in every other person in whom they may be equally conspicuous, this seal of Abraham’s righteousness was a general seal of the righteousness of faith. It was an evidence to every one who should in after times become acquainted with the patriarch’s history, that righteousness would be imputed to all who should walk in the steps of Abraham’s faith, which he had being uncircumcised. And again, by the same figure the



apostle in the text calls the gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost the seal of the Christian's hopes: "Grieve not the holy spirit of God, by whom ye are sealed to the day of redemption." The same image occurs frequently in his writings. Thus in the first chapter of this same epistle he says, "In whom," *i. e.* in Christ, "having believed, ye have been sealed with the holy spirit of promise." And in the second to the Corinthians, "It is God that hath sealed us and given the earnest of his spirit in our hearts."

In all these passages the seal of the Holy Spirit is to be understood of those gifts and graces which the Scriptures teach us to ascribe to his immediate operation. And taken in the utmost latitude, as including both the miraculous gifts which were peculiar to the primitive ages, and the general sanctifying influence on the heart of every true believer, the Spirit may on various accounts be justly called the seal of our final redemption; inasmuch as it is that which gives the utmost certainty to our hopes of future bliss and glory, which any thing antecedent to the actual possession can afford.

In the *first* place, the visible descent of the Holy Spirit on the first Christians, and the extraordinary

powers which they displayed in consequence of it, were the proper seal of the general truth of Christianity. These gifts had been predicted by the earliest prophets as a part of the blessings of the Messiah's reign, to be enjoyed under the covenant which he should establish. "It shall come to pass," says Joel, "that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit." John the Baptist, when he declared himself to be the promised forerunner of the Messiah, and announced his speedy advent, places the great superiority of his character and office in this circumstance,—that he should fulfil these ancient predictions by baptizing his disciples with the fire of the Holy Ghost. Alluding as I conceive in that expression, both to the active nature of that holy principle which the Christian baptism conveys into the converted heart, and to the form in which the Almighty Spirit made his visible descent upon the first Christians. Christ himself promised his disciples, that "when he should leave them to return to the Father, he would send them another Comforter to abide with them for ever; even the spirit of truth, who should lead them into

“all truth;” give them just views of that scheme of mercy which they were to publish to the world; a right understanding of the ancient prophecies; a discernment of their true completion in the person of Christ and the establishment of his religion; bring all things to their remembrance which Christ had told them; and supply them, without previous study or meditation of their own, with a ready and commanding eloquence, when they should be called to make the apology of the Christian faith before kings and rulers. But this Comforter, he told them, could not come before his own departure; and this was agreeable to ancient prophecy. David in the sixty-eighth psalm, predicting according to St. Paul’s interpretation of the passage these miraculous gifts of the Spirit, speaks of them as subsequent to the Messiah’s ascension: “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men.” What these gifts should be is declared in the conclusion of the verse,—“that the Lord God may dwell among them.” This dwelling of God must signify something more than God’s residence in the Jewish sanctuary; for whatever might be in the mind of the prophet, the prophetic spirit looked forward to later times. It cannot signify the Son’s dwelling among men when he came to preach the doctrine of life, and to pay the

forfeit of their crimes, because it is described as subsequent to his ascension. It can signify therefore no other dwelling of God than the residence of the Holy Spirit in the Christian church. I must not pass over this passage of the Psalmist without remarking, that the original word which is rendered Lord is *Jah*, one of the proper names of God, of the same etymology and import with the name Jehovah; of which indeed some have thought it only an abbreviation. I have upon former occasions explained to you, that the name Jehovah is in various passages of the holy prophets applied to the Messiah. You have here an instance of a name of the same kind equally proper to the Deity applied to the Holy Spirit, provided we are right in the application of this last clause to him. Concerning the former part, "the ascending on high and the receiving of gifts for men," there can be no doubt. We have the apostle's authority for applying it to Christ's ascension, and the gifts afterwards imparted by the Spirit. The application of the concluding clause I confess is not equally certain, because it makes no part of the apostle's quotation; and the great obscurity of the grammatical construction in the original throws something of uncertainty upon the meaning. In the sense which our English translators have expressed, the words evidently respect the Holy Spirit. And

in this sense the Jews of the second century seem to have acquiesced.\* These predictions of the ancient prophets and the Baptist, and these promises of our Lord were largely and exactly verified in the event. After frequent appearances to his disciples, within the space of forty days after his resurrection Jesus took a solemn leave, and ascended on high as David had foretold, having commanded the apostles to “wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father.” They were not disobedient to our Lord’s injunction; and their waiting was not long, nor was it fruitless. For when the day of Pentecost was come, that is the fiftieth day from the festival of the Passover on which our Lord had suffered, and by consequence the eighth or ninth only after his ascension, the apostles being assembled, suddenly the sound of a blast rushing with violence through the air filled the house where they were sitting. The sound was immediately succeeded by the ap-

\* For the words were rendered to the same effect by Aquila. Honbigant, upon the authority of the Syriac, proposes a violent alteration of the present reading, for which however I find no authority in Dr. Kennicot’s Collection of Various Readings.

pearance of parted tongues of fire, (fire from the first institution of the law, if not indeed from earlier ages, had been the peculiar symbol of God's immediate presence,) settling upon each of them. The immediate effect was what our Saviour had foretold; and more indeed than might at first appear in the words in which his promise had upon any occasion been conveyed. He had promised them a ready utterance in the defence of the Christian doctrine: But they find themselves suddenly endued with the power of utterance in a variety of languages which they had never learned. Jerusalem was at this time, as it always was during the festivals of the Passover and the Pentecost, crowded with strangers from every quarter of the world. The sacred historian mentions by name not fewer than fifteen countries, of which the natives with astonishment confessed that they heard the wonders of God declared, each in the proper language of the country where he had been born. The testimony of these impartial foreigners was a sufficient confutation of that base insinuation,—that the speakers were filled with new wine. This seems indeed to have been the illiberal surmise of the meanest only of the rabble of Jerusalem, who, understanding none of the languages in which the apostles spake, imagined that they were uttering a jargon, and that the whole transaction was either an

imposture, or as they rather believed, a drunken frolic. But we have the testimony of those who were the only competent judges of the fact, that nothing of the levity or incoherence of drunkenness appeared either in the matter or the manner of these extraordinary discourses. The matter was the wonderful works of God, the great mystery of godliness displayed in man's redemption. And upon this abstruse and weighty subject each speaker delivered himself with perspicuity and propriety in the language that he used; though this was probably the first occasion in his life on which he had either used it himself or heard it spoken. For of the fifteen languages which the sacred text enumerates, many, I believe I might have said the greater part, were as little known in Judea in the time of the apostles, as the languages of China and Japan are at this day in Europe. Our Saviour had also promised, that the Holy Spirit should lead his disciples into all truth: Accordingly the immediate illumination of the understanding upon his visible descent was not less remarkable than the new powers of elocution. To the very last moment of our Lord's continuance on earth, the apostles cherished the fond expectation of a temporal kingdom to be immediately established: "Lord wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" was the last question that they asked

just before Christ ascended. After the descent of the Holy Spirit we find no traces of this prejudice remaining. The charge of intoxication drew from St. Peter an apology, very remarkable for the brevity and the perspicuous arrangement of the unstudied argument, as well as for the commanding strain of manly rhetoric in which it is conveyed. In this speech the apostle discovers a clear insight into the sense of prophecies, which till this hour it is certain he had never understood. He insists on the spiritual nature of the kingdom to which he now understands his Lord to be exalted at God's right hand; he proves it by prophetic passages of the Psalms; and he insists upon the present miracle as an instance of his power. "Being exalted," says he; "to the right hand of God, and having received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father, he has poured out that which ye now see and hear." I would remark by the way, that these last words, "ye see and hear," deserve attention. Something extraordinary it seems was publicly seen, as well as heard, by the multitude upon this occasion. But we read of nothing that was visible but the appearance of the fiery tongues. This appearance therefore was not a private one, confined to the chamber where the apostles were sitting when the Holy Spirit came upon them, but it continued visible on the



head of each when they came abroad to speak to the multitude. So that the appearance of this glorious light, the token of God's immediate presence, no less than the consistence and propriety of the discourses that were delivered, refuted the base charge of intoxication.

Thus the visible descent of the Holy Ghost upon the day of Pentecost, as it was a completion of the earliest prophecies, and a verification of the Baptist's prediction and of our Saviour's promises, is a seal of the general truth of the Christian doctrine. And as the private hopes of every Christian depend upon the general truth of the revelation, the Holy Spirit thus sealing the doctrine, in some sense "seals every true believer to the day of redemption."

But again,—This visible descent of the Holy Spirit was in itself, without any reference to former prophecies and promises, a seal of the general truth of Christianity, as it was a token of the merit of Christ's atonement, and the efficacy of his intercession with the Father, "the Author of every good and perfect gift." "I will pray the Father," said Jesus to his disciples, "and he shall give you another Comforter." The coming of that other Comforter is a certain argument that Christ's intercession

has prevailed, and a sure ground of hope that it shall equally prevail for all the purposes for which it shall be exerted. Again,—if we consider the Comforter as sent immediately to the church by Christ himself, which is the Scripture doctrine, his visible descent was an instance of that power which Christ exercises at the right hand of God for the welfare and preservation of his church. In this light therefore, as a token of the Father's acceptance of Christ's atonement, and of the power exercised by Christ in his exalted state, the visible descent of the Holy Ghost was a seal of the Christian doctrine. And the hope of every believer being built on the acceptance of that meritorious sacrifice, and on Christ's power to raise the dead bodies of his servants from the grave, and transform them to the likeness of his own; whatever is in the nature of the thing, a certain sign of almighty power exercised by Christ, and of the merit of his sacrifice, is a seal of every believer's hope of his own final redemption.

As the visible descent of the Holy Ghost, and the powers which were conveyed by it to the first Christians, made the proper seal of the Christian doctrine, so the power of imparting these extraordinary endowments in certain due proportions to other Chris-

tians, was the seal of the apostolical office and authority. That the apostles were exclusively possessed of this extraordinary privilege is evident from the history of the first converts of Samaria. The gospel was preached to them by Philip the deacon, who baptized his converts of both sexes. And when the apostles, who as yet resided at Jerusalem, heard of Philip's success in Samaria, they sent thither Peter and John; who seem to have been deputed for the express purpose of communicating the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. For when they were come down they prayed for them, "that they might receive the Holy Ghost: For as yet he was fallen upon none of them." And after these prayers the two apostles "laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost." That the gifts conveyed to these Samaritan converts by the imposition of the hands of the apostles were of the miraculous kind, is evident in the *first* place from this general consideration, that the persons who received these gifts had already been baptized by Philip; and the ordinary gifts of the Spirit, those moral influences by which every believer must be regenerated in order to his being saved, are conferred in baptism. The same thing is further evident from the particulars of the story. Simon the sorcerer was of the number of Philip's converts:

“When Simon *saw* that the Holy Spirit was given  
 “by the imposition of the apostles’ hands, he offered  
 “them money, saying, Give *me* also this power,  
 “that on whomsoever I may lay my hands he may  
 “receive the Holy Ghost.” It is evident, that the  
 Holy Ghost which was given upon this occasion by  
 the apostles was some sensible gift of a very extraor-  
 dinary and notorious kind, which Simon saw; and  
 he vainly and impiously imagined, that the power of  
 conferring it might be of great use to him in carry-  
 ing on his trade of magical delusion. The power  
 therefore of imparting these miraculous gifts was  
 the peculiar seal of the apostolical office, and some  
 share of them seems to have been the constant effect  
 of the imposition of their hands. The gift that seems  
 to have been the most generally bestowed is that of  
 tongues. For when St. Paul laid his hands upon  
 the Ephesian converts of Apollos, the effect was,  
 that the Holy Ghost came upon them in his sensible  
 operations, and they “spake with tongues and pro-  
 phesied;” that is, they celebrated the praises of  
 God and of Christ. And in the first epistle to the  
 Corinthians the apostle making a distinct and orderly  
 enumeration of the miraculous gifts, places that of  
 tongues last, as among great things the least con-  
 siderable. Indeed it appears from that epistle, that  
 it was possessed and exercised by many in the Co-

rinthian church, who had little discretion in the use of it. This therefore seems to have been of the extraordinary gifts the most common. And the conceit of some learned men, who have imagined that this gift was not one of the standing powers of the primitive church in the apostolic age, but a particular miracle that accompanied the first descent of the Holy Ghost upon the day of Pentecost, and his subsequent descent on the family of Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, and that it was never heard of but in these two instances; this conceit of some learned men who lived about the beginning of the Reformation, is vain, and destitute of all foundation. But to return:—The Holy Spirit by the power with which he invested the apostles of communicating his extraordinary gifts to their converts in due proportion, according to the exigencies of the church and the merits of the persons on whom their hands were laid, sealed their authority. And as the true believer's hopes rest on the authority of the apostles to preach Christ's religion, the Holy Spirit thus sealing their authority, seals all those who embrace and practise the faith they taught "to the day of redemption."

The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were also a visible mark of God's acceptance of the Gentile

converts, and a particular seal of *them* “to the day  
“of redemption.”

But the seal of which the apostle speaks in my text I rather take to be the ordinary influence of the Holy Ghost than any or all of the miraculous endowments. This may be inferred with certainty from the parallel passage in the second epistle to the Corinthians, where he says, that God has sealed us by “giving the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” Many of the passions of the mind,—anger, fear, joy, grief, surprise, and others,—when they rise to any considerable height, have a sensible effect on the motion of the blood, to accelerate or retard its circulation, to collect and confine it in the heart, or to drive it to the external surface of the body. Hence the effect of these passions on the body is particularly felt in the region of the heart, which was therefore the part first thought of for the seat of the soul. Afterwards when men came to understand that the brain is the immediate organ of sensation, they refined, and allotted distinct seats\* to the understanding, the manly passions, and the appetites; placing

---

\* PLATO in the *Timæus*.

the first in the brain, the second in the heart, and the last in the liver. Hence in all languages, and with all writers sacred and profane, the heart is used figuratively to denote the moral qualities and dispositions of the mind. And this expression, “the Holy Spirit in our hearts,” can signify no other thing than his ordinary influences on these moral qualities and dispositions in every true believer. These influences, the apostle asserts, are to every Christian the seal of his redemption. And this, which is the doctrine most immediately arising from my text, I purpose hereafter to discuss: Imploring the assistance of that Spirit who is with the faithful to the end of the world, to give me the power to declare, and you to apprehend, this great and interesting, but difficult and mysterious branch of the doctrine of redemption.





## SERMON V.

---

---

EPHESIANS, iv. 30.

*“And grieve not the holy spirit of God, whereby ye  
“are sealed unto the day of redemption.”*

IN my last discourse upon these words of the apostle I told you, that the seal of the Spirit, in this and all other passages where the same image may occur, is to be understood of those gifts and graces which the Scriptures teach us to ascribe to the immediate operation of the holy spirit of God. And taking the expression in its most extensive meaning, as comprehending the miraculous as well as what are called the ordinary influences, I shewed you, that those miraculous powers which subsisted in the primitive ages may with great propriety be esteemed a seal of every private Christian's hope; inasmuch as they were the seal of the general truth of the

Christian doctrine ; the seal of Christ's power ; the seal of the efficacy of his intercession and the merit of his sacrifice ; the seal of the authority of the apostles to establish that new religion by the terms of which we hope for mercy ; and the seal of the acceptance of the Gentile converts, who enjoyed their share of these extraordinary endowments so long as they subsisted at all in the Christian church.

I come now to treat a doctrine which, if I mistake not, is a source of greater and more general comfort, and is the doctrine more immediately arising from the text, that the ordinary influences of the Holy Spirit on the mind of every true believer, are to every individual of that description a particular seal of his personal interest in the glorious promises of the gospel. A doctrine full of the truest consolation and the highest joy, but very liable to be misunderstood. Great difficulties have indeed been raised in it by those who have unskilfully maintained and those who have rashly denied it. It is to be treated therefore with accuracy and caution ; and we must rely on the assistance of that Spirit who, we trust, is in this and in all ages with the faithful teacher and diligent hearer of the word, to conduct us to the truth in this important but difficult disquisition.

The proposition which we apprehend to be implied in the text, and which is inculcated in innumerable passages of holy writ is this, that the ordinary influences of the Holy Spirit on the heart of every true believer are to every such person an earnest of his final salvation. These influences are an immediate action of the holy spirit of God upon the mind of man, by which he is brought to will and enabled to do according to God's pleasure; to master the importunity of appetite; to curb the impetuosity of passion; to resist the temptations of the world; to baffle the wiles of the Devil; to deny himself; to take up his cross and follow his crucified Lord through the strait and thorny paths of virtue to the peaceful seats of endless bliss and glory. It is the doctrine of the Scriptures, that a strength conveyed from God into the Christian's mind renders him sufficient for these great performances. And the text, assuming this doctrine as a confessed and certain truth, teaches him to conclude, that God's enabling him to do what without God's assistance could not be done, is a certain argument of God's merciful design to promote him to that happiness hereafter, for which the habits of a religious temper here are the natural preparative. And admitting the premises, the conclusion seems obvious and inevitable. It was wisely said by the philosophers of old, that

Nature does nothing in vain. It was said wisely, because the whole of nature is conducted by the continual providence of the Being who created it. In what are called the operations of nature God is the first and sovereign agent. And a wise being cannot act but to some end; nor can it be but that infinite power must attain the ends to which it exerted. The maxim therefore, that Nature never acts in vain is true; but the truth of it rests upon the wisdom and power of God, who made and governs nature. And it is improperly alleged as itself a first principle of science, of original and intrinsic evidence, since it is only a consequence from a higher and more general principle, "that God never acts in vain." This principle obtains universally in the moral no less than the material world. No act of the Deity can be without an end: And when God enables the believer to become that character which shall be the object of his mercy in a future life, the only end to which this action can be directed is, to bring the person on whom it is performed to that state of future happiness in which this character fits him to be placed. So that if the principle be true, that without a constant action of God's spirit on the mind of man no man can persevere in a life of virtue and religion, the Christian who finds himself empowered to lead this life cannot err in his conclusion,

that God's power is at present exerted upon himself in his own person for his final preservation.

But here it may be reasonably be asked, by what sensible evidence any private Christian may be assured that he is himself a sharer in these sanctifying influences of the Spirit? For when they are mentioned as the seal of his future hopes, there seems to be an appeal to something, of which there is a sensible perception as an evidence of the reality of those things which are not yet become the objects of perception and sense. As the seal affixed to a declaratory deed is a sensible mark and token of the internal purposes and invisible resolutions of the human mind, the sensible evidence of the action of God's spirit on his own the Christian must look for in the integrity of his own principles and the innocence of his life. It may be said of the Holy Spirit what Christ has said of other spirits, "by his fruits ye shall know him." "The fruit of the Spirit is LOVE:" Love of God, from a just sense of his perfections, which render him no less the object of rational love than of holy fear; love of man, as created in the image of God; a more especial love of Christians, as brethren and members of Christ. "JOY:" A mind untroubled and serene amidst all the discouragements and vexations of the world;

a full satisfaction and entire complacency in the ability of a holy life. “**PEACE:**” A disposition and endeavour to live peaceably with all men, not only by avoiding what might justly provoke their enmity and ill-will, but by a studious cultivation of the friendship of mankind by all means which may be consistent with the purity of our own conduct, and with the interests of that religion which we are called upon at all hazards to profess and to maintain. “**LONG-SUFFERING:**” A patient endurance of the evil qualities and evil practices of men, even when they create particular disturbance and molestation to ourselves, founded on an equitable attention to that natural infirmity and corruption from which none of us are entirely exempted; a temper more inclined to bear than to retaliate much unprovoked injury and undeserved reproach, esteeming injury and reproach a lighter evil of the two than the restless spirit of contention and revenge. “**GENTLENESS, GOODNESS, FAITH, MEEKNESS, TEMPERANCE:**” These are the fruits by which the spirit of God is known. But every man’s own conscience must decide whether these fruits are ripened to any perfection in his heart; whether these are the ruling principles of his conduct. If his conscience is void of offence towards God and towards man: If he makes it the business of this life to prepare for his future

existence: If he uses the present world without abusing it: If he is patient in affliction, not elated in prosperity; mild in power, content in servitude; liberal in wealth, honest in poverty; fervent in devotion, temperate in pleasure: If he rates not the present world above its real worth, and sets his chief affection on eternity:—This propriety of conduct in the various situations of life; this holy habit of the soul turning from the things that are seen and looking forward to the things invisible, is the undoubted work of God's holy spirit. It is therefore an instance of mercy extended in the present life to the person on whom the effect is wrought, and the surest earnest of the greater mercies promised in the life to come. For God being immutable in his nature and his attributes, and uniform in the methods of his government, the experience of his present goodness is the firmest ground of future hope. But of the reality of that improved state of sentiment and manners from which the merciful interposition of God's spirit is inferred, every man's own spirit, that is, his conscience is the judge; and the judgment of conscience must be taken from the sensible effects of godly dispositions and a holy life.

But is this all? Is the believer's assurance of his sanctification nothing more at last than an inference

of his own mind from the favourable testimony of his conscience? This is indeed the case. Yet this assurance is no inconsiderable thing; for the inference is certain and infallible. “Beloved,” says St. John, “if our hearts condemn us not then have we confidence towards God.” And the rule by which the heart must judge is this: “He that practiseth righteousness is righteous, in like manner as he, that is, as Christ is righteous.” And “every one that practiseth righteousness is born of him.” And to the same purpose our Lord himself: “If any one love me he will keep my word: And the Father will love him; and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.” Thus you see, he that keeps Christ’s commandments is in the love of Christ and of the Father: He that doeth righteousness is born of God: He that is absolved by his conscience may be confident God absolves him. And yet St. Paul assures us, that he “who has not the spirit of Christ is none of his.” And St. John, that the evidence that we are in his love and under the protection of his providence is, “that he has given us of his own spirit.” In these texts the very same things are denied of him who shall be without the Spirit, which in those before alleged, are affirmed of him whose conscience shall be pure. Evidently therefore the connexion is necessary and



constant between a good life and a regenerate mind, and where there is a conscience void of offence there is the sanctifying Spirit of the Lord.

Many, it is true, pretend to something more than this, and speak of the action of the Holy Ghost upon their minds as something of which they have an immediate and distinct perception independent of the testimony of conscience; and they describe it as something that they know by what they feel to be the internal operation of the Spirit. This is indeed a bewitching doctrine which may easily steal upon the unwary, upon men of a sanguine temper and a weak judgment, because it seems to open a new source of comfort. But this persuasion is not of him that calleth us. It is visionary and vain. We have the express declaration of him who alone has a perfect understanding of man's nature and of God's, and who alone therefore understands the manner in which the divine Spirit acts on man's; we have the express declaration of him who sends the Spirit into the hearts of his disciples, that its operation is no otherwise to be perceived than in its effects. He compares it to the cause of those currents of the atmosphere of which the effects are manifest and notorious, though the first efficient is what no sense discerns, and the manner of its operation what no

philosophy can explain : “The wind bloweth where  
 “ it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but  
 “ canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth.  
 “ So is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

Those who, unmindful of this declaration of our Lord, stand for a perception of the Spirit independent of conscience, it is to be supposed are little aware that no greater certainty of the Spirit's operation would arise from the feelings they describe, were it real, than conscience may afford without it. For of the reality of this feeling, could we suppose it real, conscience still must be the judge, because conscience is the seat of all internal perception. Conscience is the faculty whereby the mind in every moment of its existence perceives itself, with every thing that either naturally belongs, or for the present time is incident to its being and condition ; its present thoughts, its present designs, its present hopes, fears, likings, and aversions : Of these or any other circumstances of its present state ; of any thing itself may do, or of any thing which may be done to it, the mind can have no feeling but by this faculty. Whatever may excite or impress the feeling, conscience is the place, if the expression may be allowed, where it must be felt. A perception therefore of the mind. of any thing done to itself

distinct from the perceptions of the conscience, is no less an absurdity in the very first conception, than an object that should be seen without meeting the eye, or a sound that should be heard without striking on the ear. It is something to be internally perceived otherwise than by the faculty of internal perception. And it is in vain to allege God's power for the production of such feelings, because no power can effect impossibilities. If therefore that internal feeling to which enthusiasts pretend were real, it would indeed be a new matter of employment for the conscience; but it would add nothing to the security of our present condition, or to the certainty of our distant hopes. For consider how the case stands without these feelings. Conscience attesting that the life is innocent and the heart sincere, faith draws the conclusion that this upright heart and blameless conduct is the work of the holy spirit of God. And thus in the sensible effect of a reformed life and regenerate mind, it discovers a token of God's present favour. Consider on the other hand, how far the case will be altered by the supposition of an internal feeling of the Holy Spirit's influence. All that could be felt would be the effect, an impression on the mind. This impression the conscience alone could feel. That this impression felt in the conscience should be from God's spirit

rather than from any other agent, would still be a conclusion to be made by faith. And by what sign or token could faith discern between the divine Spirit and another, but by those good works which the divine Spirit claims as his proper and his constant fruits? You see therefore that the accession of these pretended internal feelings would neither change the ground nor improve the certainty of the Christian's hope. The ground of his hope would remain what it has been shewn to be without them,—the conclusions of faith from the testimony of conscience. Only this difference is to be observed between the fictitious and the real case, that no internal feeling, other than the consciousness of good qualities and holy habits and dispositions, could be interpreted by a true and unenlightened faith as a part of the Spirit's sanctifying influence. Because the express doctrine of the gospel being what it is, it is no less the part of a true faith to disbelieve the reality of any immediate perception of the mysterious intercourse between God's spirit and the human soul, than to embrace with all thankfulness the belief of a constant unperceived communion. For the one is denied by the very same authority by which the other is asserted. And to disbelieve what Christ hath denied no less than to believe what he

hath affirmed, is an essential part of the faith in Christ.

If I have delivered myself with the perspicuity at which I have aimed, you will be sensible that we neither abolish nor weaken the testimony of the Spirit by bringing it to rest upon the testimony of conscience. This does by no means reduce the hopes of the Christian to what they might be if the testimony of the Spirit were removed. To perceive this the more clearly, make the supposition for a moment, that the doctrine of the gospel being in all other points exactly what it is, this article of the Spirit's general and ordinary influence had been kept entirely out of sight; there is no absurdity in supposing, that God might have acted just as we are taught he does upon the hearts of the faithful, although man had never been made acquainted with this wonderful part of the scheme of his salvation. And notwithstanding his ignorance in this particular the good Christian would still have found in the favourable testimony of his conscience, a solid ground of future hope. But this hope, though perhaps not less firm, must have been by many degrees less vigorous and animating than that which he now derives from the belief of the Holy Spirit's constant operation on his heart. For on the supposition of

his ignorance upon this point, his conclusion concerning his own future condition must have been drawn from a persuasion of the truth of God's general promises to all persons of that reformed character which he might understand to be his own. Whereas with the knowledge that he actually enjoys, his hopes are built on a personal experience of God's present goodness. You see therefore what gratitude we owe to God, both for the unspeakable gift and for the clear knowledge of it which he has given us; which renders it to every Christian in the present life the private and personal seal of his future expectations.

It remains for me briefly to remind you, that the effect of a seal in any civil contract is to fasten the conditions of the covenant upon both parties. And thus it is to be understood, that the seal of the Spirit, as it confirms the promises on the part of God, and renders them in some measure personal to every one who finds the impression of this seal in the testimony of his conscience, so it confirms the obligation to a holy life, and renders it personal on the part of the Christian. There is a general obligation upon all mankind to a strict discharge of the duties of religion as far as they are made known to them, arising from their intrinsic fitness and propriety, and from

the common relation in which all men stand to God as their Creator and Preserver. There is a more particular obligation upon Christians to observe the injunctions of their Lord, arising from the particular benefits and blessings of the Christian covenant, from the clear discovery of future rewards and punishments, and from the wonderful manifestation of the riches of God's mercy, who gave his Son to die for us while we were enemies. But there is besides these general obligations,—besides the obligation upon all *men* to their natural duties, upon all *Christians* to the public injunctions of their Lord,—there is, I say, besides, upon every true Christian who has tasted of the heavenly gift, and been made partaker of the Holy Ghost; who experiences in the improvement of his own mind and manners the present powers of the world to come; upon every such person there is a special and personal obligation to cleanse himself from all impurity of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God. Especially to listen with a vigilant and interested attention to the private admonitions of his own conscience, which is indeed nothing less than the voice of God within him. For as it is certain, on the one hand, that no man has any testimony from the Spirit of his present sanctification, no assurance of his final salvation but what is conveyed to him through the

conscience; so it is equally certain, on the other, that every good suggestion of the conscience proceeds from the spirit of God. And whoever stifles these suggestions, whoever is not diligent to consult this internal monitor, or reluctantly and imperfectly obeys him, grieves the Spirit whose oracle he is. And the danger is, that the Spirit will be quenched, that those assistances will be withdrawn which negligence and perverseness render ineffectual and useless. For God's grace is given to help the infirmities of the upright and sincere, but it will not forcibly reclaim the refractory or the thoughtless. "Give therefore all diligence to make your calling and election sure:" For this shall effectually secure "your admission into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To whom," &c.

FINIS.

---

Joseph Rakestraw, Printer,  
Philadelphia.













