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PAROCHIAL AND PLAIN SERMONS

Cardinal

By JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, B.D.
FORMERLY VICAR OF ST. MARY'S, OXFORD

IN EIGHT VOLUMES

VOL. I.

NEW IMPRESSION

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PREFACE.

THE Sermons here republished were written and preached at various periods between the years 1825 and 1843.

The first six volumes are reprinted from the six volumes of "PAROCHIAL SERMONS;" the seventh and eighth formed the fifth volume of "PLAIN SERMONS, BY CONTRIBUTORS TO THE TRACTS FOR THE TIMES," which was the contribution of its Author to that Series.

All the Sermons are reprinted from the last Editions of the several volumes, published from time to time by the Messrs. Rivington.

They made, in their day, partly through their publication, but yet more, probably, through their living effect upon those who heard them, a deep and lasting impression for good on the Communion for whose especial benefit they were

designed; they exercised an extensive influence very far beyond it; and their republication will awaken in many minds vivid and grateful recollections of their first appearance.

They met, at that time, very real and great moral, intellectual, and spiritual needs of man, —in giving depth and precision and largeness to his belief and apprehension of the mysteries of God, and seriousness and accuracy to his study and knowledge of himself, of his own nature, with its manifold powers, capacities, and responsibilities, and of his whole relation to the supernatural and unseen. They found a response in the hearts and minds and consciences of those to whom they were addressed, in marvellous proportion to the affectionate and stirring earnestness with which their Author appealed to the conscious or dormant sense of their needs, and his zealous and energetic endeavours, under God's blessing, to show, in every variety of light, how the grand central Verities of the Christian Dispensation, entrusted as the good "Deposit," to the Church, were revealed and adapted to supply them.

Many things, indeed, contained in these volumes have become, from the very readiness of their first acceptance, and from their gradual reception into the current of religious thought, so familiar, that it requires some retrospect of the time previous to their appearance to appreciate the original freshness with which they brought out the fundamental Articles of the Christian Faith, and their bearing on the formation of the Christian character; and to understand the degree in which they have acted, like leaven, on the mind and language and literature of the Church in this Country, and have marked an era in her History.

But, besides their relation to the past, it will be seen in their republication how the spirit which dictated them pierced here and there through the cloud which hung over the future, and how the Author warned us, with somewhat of prophetic forecast, of impending trials and conflicts, and of perplexities and dangers, then only dimly seen or unheeded, of which it has been reserved to the present generation to witness the nearer approach. It might seem to

have been his calling at once to warn us of them, and to provide, as best he might, words of guidance and support, and consolation and encouragement under them—an anchor of the soul in the coming storm.

They are republished in the fervent hope and belief that like good to that which, by God's blessing, they have done before, they may, by His mercy, if we be not unworthy of it, do yet again under other circumstances.

To many of this generation they will appear in much of their original freshness; and to all with the greater power and reality, from the saddening aspect of the times, and the appalling prospects before us; replete as they are with those "many secrets of religion which are not perceived till they be felt, and are not felt, but in the day of great calamity."

In conclusion it is right, though scarcely necessary to observe, that the republication of these Sermons by the Editor is not to be considered as equivalent to a re-assertion by their Author of all that they contain; inasmuch as, being printed entire and unaltered, except in the most

insignificant particulars, they cannot be free from passages which he certainly now would wish were otherwise, or would, one may be sure, desire to see altered or omitted.

But the alternative plainly lies between publishing all or nothing, and it appears more to the glory of God and for the cause of religion, to publish all, than to destroy the acceptableness of the Volumes to those for whom they were written by any omissions and alterations.

W. J. COPELAND.

FARNHAM RECTORY, ESSEX,
May 15th, 1868.

TO THE

REV. E. B. PUSEY, B.D.,

CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH,

AND REGIUS PROFESSOR OF HEBREW IN THE

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

THIS VOLUME

IS INSCRIBED,

IN AFFECTIONATE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

OF THE BLESSING

OF HIS LONG FRIENDSHIP AND EXAMPLE.

March 1st, 1834.

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SERMON I.

Holiness Necessary for Future Blessedness.

"*Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*"
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IN this text it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit to convey a chief truth of religion in a few words. It is this circumstance which makes it especially impressive; for the truth itself is declared in one form or other in every part of Scripture. It is told us again and again, that to make sinful creatures holy was the great end which our Lord had in view in taking upon Him our nature, and thus none but the holy will be accepted for His sake at the last day. The whole history of redemption, the covenant of mercy in all its parts and provisions, attests the necessity of holiness in order to salvation; as indeed even our natural conscience bears witness also. But in the text what is elsewhere implied in history, and enjoined by precept, is stated doctrinally, as a momentous and necessary fact, the result of some awful irreversible law in the nature of things, and the inscrutable determination of the Divine Will.

Now some one may ask, "Why is it that holiness is

a necessary qualification for our being received into heaven? why is it that the Bible enjoins upon us so strictly to love, fear, and obey God, to be just, honest, meek, pure in heart, forgiving, heavenly-minded, self-denying, humble, and resigned? Man is confessedly weak and corrupt; *why* then is he enjoined to be so religious, so unearthly? *why* is he required (in the strong language of Scripture) to become 'a new creature'? Since he is by nature what he is, would it not be an act of greater mercy in God to save him altogether without this holiness, which it is so difficult, yet (as it appears) so necessary for him to possess?"

Now we have no right to ask this question. Surely it is quite enough for a sinner to know, that a way has been opened through God's grace for his salvation, without being informed why that way, and not another way, was chosen by Divine Wisdom. Eternal life is "the *gift* of God." Undoubtedly He may prescribe the terms on which He will give it; and if He has determined holiness to be the way of life, it is enough; it is not for us to inquire why He has so determined.

Yet the question may be asked reverently, and with a view to enlarge our insight into our own condition and prospects; and in that case the attempt to answer it will be profitable, if it be made soberly. I proceed, therefore, to state one of the reasons, assigned in Scripture, why present holiness is necessary, as the text declares to us, for future happiness.

To be holy is, in our Church's words, to have "the true circumcision of the Spirit;" that is, to be separate from sin, to hate the works of the world, the flesh, and

the devil; to take pleasure in keeping God's commandments; to do things as He would have us do them; to live habitually as in the sight of the world to come, as if we had broken the ties of this life, and were dead already. Why cannot we be saved without possessing such a frame and temper of mind?

I answer as follows: That, even supposing a man of unholy life were suffered to enter heaven, *he would not be happy there;* so that it would be no mercy to permit him to enter.

We are apt to deceive ourselves, and to consider heaven a place like this earth; I mean, a place where every one may choose and take his *own* pleasure. We see that in this world, active men have their own enjoyments, and domestic men have theirs; men of literature, of science, of political talent, have their respective pursuits and pleasures. Hence we are led to act as if it will be the same in another world. The only difference we put between this world and the next, is that *here,* (as we know well,) men are *not always sure,* but *there,* we suppose they *will be always sure,* of obtaining what they seek after. And accordingly we conclude, that *any man,* whatever his habits, tastes, or manner of life, if *once admitted* into heaven, would be happy there. Not that we altogether deny, that some preparation is necessary for the next world; but we do not estimate its real extent and importance. We think we can reconcile ourselves to God when we will; as if nothing were required in the case of men in general, but some temporary attention, more than ordinary, to our religious duties,—some strictness, during our last sickness,

in the services of the Church, as men of business arrange their letters and papers on taking a journey or balancing an account. But an opinion like this, though commonly acted on, is refuted as soon as put into words. For heaven, it is plain from Scripture, is not a place where many different and discordant pursuits can be carried on at once, as is the case in this world. Here every man can do his *own* pleasure, but there he must do *God's* pleasure. It would be presumption to attempt to determine the employments of that eternal life which good men are to pass in God's presence, or to deny that that state which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor mind conceived, may comprise an infinite variety of pursuits and occupations. Still so far we are distinctly told, that that future life will be spent in God's *presence*, in a sense which does not apply to our present life; so that it may be best described as an endless and uninterrupted worship of the Eternal Father, Son, and Spirit. "They serve Him day and night in His temple, and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them . . . . The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters." Again, "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it[1]." These passages from St. John are sufficient to remind us of many others.

Heaven then is not like this world; I will say what

[1] Rev. vii. 15. 17; xxi. 23. 24.

it is much more like,—*a church*. For in a place of public worship no language of this world is heard; there are no schemes brought forward for temporal objects, great or small; no information how to strengthen our worldly interests, extend our influence, or establish our credit. These things indeed may be right in their way, so that we do not set our hearts upon them; still (I repeat), it is certain that we hear nothing of them in a church. Here we hear solely and entirely of *God*. We praise Him, worship Him, sing to Him, thank Him, confess to Him, give ourselves up to Him, and ask His blessing. And *therefore*, a church is like heaven; viz. because both in the one and the other, there is one single sovereign subject—religion—brought before us.

Supposing, then, instead of it being said that no irreligious man could serve and attend on God in heaven (or see Him, as the text expresses it), we were told that no irreligious man could worship, or spiritually see Him in church; should we not at once perceive the meaning of the doctrine? viz. that, were a man to come hither, who had suffered his mind to grow up in its own way, as nature or chance determined, without any deliberate habitual effort after truth and purity, he would find no real pleasure here, but would soon get weary of the place; because, in this house of God, he would hear only of that one subject which he cared little or nothing about, and nothing at all of those things which excited his hopes and fears, his sympathies and energies. If then a man without religion (supposing it possible) were admitted into heaven, doubtless he would sustain a great disappointment. Before, indeed, he fancied that he could

be happy there; but when he arrived there, he would find no discourse but that which he had shunned on earth, no pursuits but those he had disliked or despised, nothing which bound him to aught *else* in the universe, and made him feel at home, nothing which he could enter into and rest upon. He would perceive himself to be an isolated being, cut away by Supreme Power from those objects which were still entwined around his heart. Nay, he would be in the presence of that Supreme Power, whom he never on earth could bring himself steadily to think upon, and whom now he regarded only as the destroyer of all that was precious and dear to him. Ah! he could not *bear* the face of the Living God; the Holy God would be no object of joy to him. "Let us alone! What have we to do with thee?" is the sole thought and desire of unclean souls, even while they acknowledge His majesty. None but the holy can look upon the Holy One; without holiness no man can endure to see the Lord.

When, then, we think to take part in the joys of heaven without holiness, we are as inconsiderate as if we supposed we could take an interest in the worship of Christians here below without possessing it in our measure. A careless, a sensual, an unbelieving mind, a mind destitute of the love and fear of God, with narrow views and earthly aims, a low standard of duty, and a benighted conscience, a mind contented with itself, and unresigned to God's will, would feel as little pleasure, at the last day, at the words, "Enter into the joy of thy Lord," as it does now at the words, "Let us pray." Nay, much less, because, while we are in a church, we

may turn our thoughts to other subjects, and contrive to forget that God is looking on us; but that will not be possible in heaven.

We see, then, that holiness, or inward separation from the world, is necessary to our admission into heaven, because heaven is *not* heaven, is not a place of happiness *except* to the holy. There are bodily indispositions which affect the taste, so that the sweetest flavours become ungrateful to the palate; and indispositions which impair the sight, tinging the fair face of nature with some sickly hue. In like manner, there is a moral malady which disorders the inward sight and taste; and no man labouring under it is in a condition to enjoy what Scripture calls "the fulness of joy in God's presence, and pleasures at His right hand for evermore."

Nay, I will venture to say more than this;—it is fearful, but it is right to say it;—that if we wished to imagine a punishment for an unholy, reprobate soul, we perhaps could not fancy a greater than to *summon it to heaven*. Heaven would be hell to an irreligious man. We know how unhappy we are apt to feel at present, when alone in the midst of strangers, or of men of different tastes and habits from ourselves. How miserable, for example, would it be to have to live in a foreign land, among a people whose faces we never saw before, and whose language we could not learn. And this is but a faint illustration of the loneliness of a man of earthly dispositions and tastes, thrust into the society of saints and angels. How forlorn would he wander through the courts of heaven! He would find no one like himself; he would see in every direction the marks

of God's holiness, and these would make him shudder. He would feel himself always in His presence. He could no longer turn his thoughts another way, as he does now, when conscience reproaches him. He would know that the Eternal Eye was ever upon him ; and that Eye of holiness, which is joy and life to holy creatures, would seem to him an Eye of wrath and punishment. God cannot change His nature. Holy He must ever be. But while He is holy, no unholy soul can be happy in heaven. Fire does not inflame iron, but it inflames straw. It would cease to be fire if it did not. And so heaven itself would be fire to those, who would fain escape across the great gulf from the torments of hell. The finger of Lazarus would but increase their thirst. The very "heaven that is over their head" will be "brass" to them.

And now I have partly explained why it is that holiness is prescribed to us as the condition on our part for our admission into heaven. It seems to be necessary from the very nature of things. We do not see how it could be otherwise. Now then I will mention two important truths which seem to follow from what has been said.

1. If a certain character of mind, a certain state of the heart and affections, be necessary for entering heaven, our *actions* will avail for our salvation, chiefly as they tend to produce or evidence this frame of mind. Good works (as they are called) are required, not as if they had any thing of merit in them, not as if they could of themselves turn away God's anger for our sins, or purchase heaven for us, but because they are the means,

under God's grace, of strengthening and showing forth that holy principle which God implants in the heart, and without which (as the text tells us) we cannot see Him. The more numerous are our acts of charity, self-denial, and forbearance, of course the more will our minds be schooled into a charitable, self-denying, and forbearing temper. The more frequent are our prayers, the more humble, patient, and religious are our daily deeds, this communion with God, these holy works, will be the means of making our hearts holy, and of preparing us for the future presence of God. Outward acts, done on principle, create inward habits. I repeat, the separate acts of obedience to the will of God, good works as they are called, are of service to us, as gradually severing us from this world of sense, and impressing our hearts with a heavenly character.

It is plain, then, what works are *not* of service to our salvation;—all those which either have no effect upon the heart to change it, or which have a bad effect. What then must be said of those who think it an easy thing to please God, and to recommend themselves to Him; who do a few scanty services, call these the walk of faith, and are satisfied with them? Such men, it is too evident, instead of being themselves profited by their acts, such as they are, of benevolence, honesty, or justice, may be (I might even say) injured by them. For these very acts, even though good in themselves, are made to foster in these persons a bad spirit, a corrupt state of heart; viz. self-love, self-conceit, self-reliance, instead of tending to turn them from this world to the Father of spirits. In like manner, the mere outward acts of coming

to church, and saying prayers, which are, of course, duties imperative upon all of us, are really serviceable to those only who do them in a heavenward spirit. Because such men only use these good deeds to the improvement of the heart; whereas even the most exact outward devotion avails not a man, if it does not improve it.

2. But observe what follows from this. If holiness be not merely the doing a certain number of good actions, but is an inward character which follows, under God's grace, from doing them, how far distant from that holiness are the multitude of men! They are not yet even obedient in outward deeds, which is the first step towards possessing it. They have even to learn to practise good works, as the means of changing their hearts, which is the end. It follows at once, even though Scripture did not plainly tell us so, that no one is able to prepare himself for heaven, that is, make himself holy, in a short time;—at least we do not see how it is possible; and this, viewed merely as a deduction of the reason, is a serious thought. Yet, alas! as there are persons who think to be saved by a few scanty performances, so there are others who suppose they may be saved all at once by a sudden and easily acquired faith. Most men who are living in neglect of God, silence their consciences, when troublesome, with the promise of repenting some future day. How often are they thus led on till death surprises them! But we will suppose they *do* begin to repent when that future day comes. Nay, we will even suppose that Almighty God were to forgive them, and to admit them into His holy heaven. Well, but is nothing more requisite? are they in a fit

state to *do Him service in heaven?* is not this the very point I have been so insisting on, that they are *not* in a fit state? has it not been shown that, even if admitted there without a change of heart, they would find no pleasure in heaven? and is a change of heart wrought in a day? Which of our tastes or likings can we change at our will in a moment? Not the most superficial. Can we then at a word change the whole frame and character of our minds? Is not holiness the result of many patient, repeated efforts after obedience, gradually working on us, and first modifying and then changing our hearts? We dare not, of course, set bounds to God's mercy and power in cases of repentance late in life, even where He has revealed to us the general rule of His moral governance; yet, surely, it is our duty ever to keep steadily before us, and act upon, those general truths which His Holy Word has declared. His Holy Word in various ways warns us, that, as no one will find happiness in heaven, who is not holy, so no one can learn to be so, in a short time, and when he will. It implies it in the text, which names a qualification, which we know in matter of fact does ordinarily take time to gain. It propounds it clearly, though in figure, in the parable of the wedding garment, in which inward sanctification is made a condition distinct from our acceptance of the proffer of mercy, and not negligently to be passed over in our thoughts as if a necessary consequence of it; and in that of the ten virgins, which shows us that we must meet the bridegroom with the oil of holiness, and that it takes time to procure it. And it solemnly assures us in St. Paul's

Epistles, that it is possible so to presume on Divine grace, as to let slip the accepted time, and be sealed even before the end of life to a reprobate mind [1].

I wish to speak to you, my brethren, not as if aliens from God's mercies, but as partakers of His gracious covenant in Christ; and for this reason in especial peril, since those only can incur the sin of making void His covenant, who have the privilege of it. Yet neither on the other hand do I speak to you as wilful and obstinate sinners, exposed to the imminent risk of forfeiting, or the chance of having forfeited, your hope of heaven. But I fear there are those, who, if they dealt faithfully with their consciences, would be obliged to own that they had not made the service of God their first and great concern; that their obedience, so to call it, has been a matter of course, in which the heart has had no part; that they have acted uprightly in worldly matters chiefly for the sake of their worldly interest. I fear there are those, who, whatever be their sense of religion, still have such misgivings about themselves, as lead them to make resolve to obey God more exactly some future day, such misgivings as convict them of sin, though not enough to bring home to them its heinousness or its peril. Such men are trifling with the appointed season of mercy. To obtain the gift of holiness is the work of *a life*. No man will ever be perfect here, so sinful is our nature. Thus, in putting off the day of repentance, these men are reserving for a few chance years, when strength and vigour are gone, that WORK for which a *whole* life would not be enough. That work is great and

[1] Heb. vi. 4—6; x. 26—29. Vide also 2 Pet. ii. 20. 22.

arduous beyond expression. There is much of sin remaining even in the best of men, and "if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear[1]?" Their doom may be fixed any moment; and though this thought should not make a man despair to-day, yet it should ever make him tremble for to-morrow.

Perhaps, however, others may say:—"We know something of the power of religion—we love it in a measure—we have many right thoughts—we come to church to pray; this is a proof that we are prepared for heaven:—we are safe, and what has been said does not apply to us." But be not you, my brethren, in the number of these. One principal test of our being true servants of God is our wishing to serve Him better; and be quite sure that a man who is contented with his own proficiency in Christian holiness, is at best in a dark state, or rather in great peril. If we are really imbued with the grace of holiness, we shall abhor sin as something base, irrational, and polluting. Many men, it is true, are contented with partial and indistinct views of religion, and mixed motives. Be you content with nothing short of perfection; exert yourselves day by day to grow in knowledge and grace; that, if so be, you may at length attain to the presence of Almighty God.

Lastly; while we thus labour to mould our hearts after the pattern of the holiness of our Heavenly Father, it is our comfort to know, what I have already implied, that we are not left to ourselves, but that the Holy

[1] 1 Pet. iv. 18.

Ghost is graciously present with us, and enables us to triumph over, and to change our own minds. It is a comfort and encouragement, while it is an anxious and awful thing, to know that God works in and through us [1]. We are the instruments, but we are only the instruments, of our own salvation. Let no one say that I discourage him, and propose to him a task beyond his strength. All of us have the gifts of grace pledged to us from our youth up. We know this well; but we do not use our privilege. We form mean ideas of the difficulty, and in consequence never enter into the greatness of the gifts given us to meet it. Then afterwards, if perchance we gain a deeper insight into the work we have to do, we think God a hard master, who commands much from a sinful race. Narrow, indeed, is the way of life, but infinite is His love and power who is with the Church, in Christ's place, to guide us along it.

[1] Phil. ii. 12, 13.

SERMON II.

The Immortality of the Soul.

"*What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*"—MATT. xvi. 26.

I SUPPOSE there is no tolerably informed Christian but considers he has a correct notion of the difference between our religion and the paganism which it supplanted. Every one, if asked what it is we have gained by the Gospel, will promptly answer, that we have gained the knowledge of our immortality, of our having souls which will live for ever; that the heathen did not know this, but that Christ taught it, and that His disciples know it. Every one will say, and say truly, that this was the great and solemn doctrine which gave the Gospel a claim to be heard when first preached, which arrested the thoughtless multitudes, who were busied in the pleasures and pursuits of this life, awed them with the vision of the life to come, and sobered them till they turned to God with a true heart. It will be said, and said truly, that this doctrine of a future life was the doctrine which broke the power and the fascination of paganism. The poor benighted heathen were engaged in all the frivolities and absurdities of a false ritual,

which had obscured the light of nature. They knew God, but they forsook Him for the inventions of men; they made protectors and guardians for themselves; and had "gods many and lords many[1]." They had their profane worship, their gaudy processions, their indulgent creed, their easy observances, their sensual festivities, their childish extravagances, such as might suitably be the religion of beings who were to live for seventy or eighty years, and then die once for all, never to live again. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," was their doctrine and their rule of life. "To-morrow we die;"—this the Holy Apostles admitted. They taught so far *as* the heathen; "To-morrow we die;" but then they added, "And after death *the judgment;*"—judgment upon the eternal soul, which lives in spite of the death of the body. And this was the truth, which awakened men to the necessity of having a better and deeper religion than that which had spread over the earth, when Christ came,—which so wrought upon them that they left that old false worship of theirs, and it fell. Yes! though throned in all the power of the world, a sight such as eye had never before seen, though supported by the great and the many, the magnificence of kings, and the stubbornness of people, it fell. Its ruins remain scattered over the face of the earth; the shattered works of its great upholder, that fierce enemy of God, the Pagan Roman Empire. Those ruins are found even among themselves, and show how marvellously great was its power, and therefore how much more powerful was that which broke its power; and this was the doctrine

[1] 1 Cor. viii. 5.

of the immortality of the soul. So entire is the revolution which is produced among men, wherever this high truth is really received.

I have said that every one of us is able fluently to speak of this doctrine, and is aware that the knowledge of it forms the fundamental difference between our state and that of the heathen. And yet, in spite of our being able to speak about it and our "form of knowledge[1]" (as St. Paul terms it), there seems scarcely room to doubt, that the greater number of those who are called Christians in no true sense realize it in their own minds at all. Indeed, it is a very difficult thing to bring home to us, and to feel, that we have souls; and there cannot be a more fatal mistake than to suppose we see what the doctrine means, as soon as we can use the words which signify it. So great a thing is it to understand that we have souls, that the knowing it, taken in connexion with its results, is all one with *being serious*, i. e. truly religious. To discern our immortality is necessarily connected with fear and trembling and repentance, in the case of every Christian. Who is there but would be sobered by an actual sight of the flames of hell fire and the souls therein hopelessly enclosed? Would not all his thoughts be drawn to that awful sight, so that he would stand still gazing fixedly upon it, and forgetting every thing else; seeing nothing else, hearing nothing, engrossed with the contemplation of it; and when the sight was withdrawn, still having it fixed in his memory, so that he would be henceforth dead to the pleasures and employments of this world, considered in

[1] Rom. ii. 20.

themselves, thinking of them only in their reference to that fearful vision? This would be the overpowering effect of such a disclosure, whether it actually led a man to repentance or not. And thus absorbed in the thought of the life to come are they who really and heartily receive the words of Christ and His Apostles. Yet to this state of mind, and therefore to this true knowledge, the multitude of men called Christians are certainly strangers; a thick veil is drawn over their eyes; and in spite of their being able to talk of the doctrine, they are as if they never had heard of it. They go on just as the heathen did of old: they eat, they drink; or they amuse themselves in vanities, and live in the world, without fear and without sorrow, just as if God had not declared that their conduct in this life would decide their destiny in the next; just as if they either had no souls, or had nothing or little to do with the saving of them, which was the creed of the heathen.

Now let us consider what it is to bring home to ourselves that we have souls, and in what the especial difficulty of it lies; for this may be of use to us in our attempt to realize that awful truth.

We are from our birth apparently dependent on things about us. We see and feel that we could not live or go forward without the aid of man. To a child this world is every thing: he seems to himself a part of this world,—a part of this world, in the same sense in which a branch is part of a tree; he has little notion of his own separate and independent existence: that is, he has no just idea he has a soul. And if he goes through life with his notions unchanged, he has no just notion, even to the

end of life, that he has a soul. He views himself merely in his connexion with this world, which is his all; he looks to this world for his good, as to an idol; and when he tries to look beyond this life, he is able to discern nothing in prospect, because he has no idea of any thing, nor can fancy any thing, *but* this life. And if he is obliged to fancy something, he fancies this life over again; just as the heathen, when they reflected on those traditions of another life, which were floating among them, could but fancy the happiness of the blessed to consist in the enjoyment of the sun, and the sky, and the earth, as before, only as if these were to be more splendid than they are now.

To understand that we have souls, is to feel our separation from things visible, our independence of them, our distinct existence in ourselves, our individuality, our power of acting for ourselves this way or that way, our accountableness for what we do. These are the great truths which lie wrapped up indeed even in a child's mind, and which God's grace can unfold there in spite of the influence of the external world; but at first this outward world prevails. We look off from self to the things around us, and forget ourselves in them. Such is our state,—a depending for support on the reeds which are no stay, and overlooking our real strength,—at the time when God begins His process of reclaiming us to a truer view of our place in His great system of providence. And when He visits us, then in a little while there is a stirring within us. The unprofitableness and feebleness of the things of this world are forced upon our minds; they promise but cannot

perform, they disappoint us. Or, if they do perform what they promise, still (so it is) they do not satisfy us. We still crave for something, we do not well know what; but we are sure it is something which the world has not given us. And then its changes are so many, so sudden, so silent, so continual. It never leaves changing; it goes on to change, till we are quite sick at heart:—then it is that our reliance on it is broken. It is plain we cannot continue to depend upon it, unless we keep pace with it, and go on changing too; but this we cannot do. We feel that, while it changes, we are one and the same; and thus, under God's blessing, we come to have some glimpse of the meaning of our independence of things temporal, and our immortality. And should it so happen that misfortunes come upon us, (as they often do,) then still more are we led to understand the nothingness of this world; then still more are we led to distrust it, and are weaned from the love of it, till at length it floats before our eyes merely as some idle veil, which, notwithstanding its many tints, cannot hide the view of what is beyond it;—and we begin, by degrees, to perceive that there are but two beings in the whole universe, our own soul, and the God who made it.

Sublime, unlooked-for doctrine, yet most true! To every one of us there are but two beings in the whole world, himself and God; for, as to this outward scene, its pleasures and pursuits, its honours and cares, its contrivances, its personages, its kingdoms, its multitude of busy slaves, what are they to us? nothing—no more than a show:—"The world passeth away and the lust thereof." And as to those others nearer to us, who are

not to be classed with the vain world, I mean our friends and relations, whom we are right in loving, these, too, after all, are nothing to us here. They cannot really help or profit us; we see them, and they act upon us, only (as it were) at a distance, through the medium of sense; they cannot get at our souls; they cannot enter into our thoughts, or really be companions to us. In the next world it will, through God's mercy, be otherwise; but here we enjoy, not their presence, but the anticipation of what one day shall be; so that, after all, they vanish before the clear vision we have, first, of our own existence, next of the presence of the great God in us, and over us, as our Governor and Judge, who dwells in us by our conscience, which is His representative.

And now consider what a revolution will take place in the mind that is not utterly reprobate, in proportion as it realizes this relation between itself and the most high God. We never in this life can fully understand what is meant by our living for ever, but we can understand what is meant by this world's *not* living for ever, by its dying never to rise again. And learning this, we learn that we owe it no service, no allegiance; it has no claim over us, and can do us no material good nor harm. On the other hand, the law of God written on our hearts bids us serve Him, and partly tells us how to serve Him, and Scripture completes the precepts which nature began. And both Scripture and conscience tell us we are answerable for what we do, and that God is a righteous Judge; and, above all, our Saviour, as our visible Lord God, takes the place of the

world as the Only-begotten of the Father, having shown Himself openly, that we may not say that God is hidden. And thus a man is drawn forward by all manner of powerful influences to turn from things temporal to things eternal, to deny himself, to take up his cross and follow Christ. For there are Christ's awful threats and warnings to make him serious, His precepts to attract and elevate him, His promises to cheer him, His gracious deeds and sufferings to humble him to the dust, and to bind his heart once and for ever in gratitude to Him who is so surpassing in mercy. All these things act upon him; and, as truly as St. Matthew rose from the receipt of custom when Christ called, heedless what by-standers would say of him, so they who, through grace, obey the secret voice of God, move onward contrary to the world's way, and careless what mankind may say of them, as understanding that they have souls, which is the one thing they have to care about.

I am well aware that there are indiscreet teachers gone forth into the world, who use language such as I have used, but mean something very different. Such are they who deny the grace of baptism, and think that a man is converted to God all at once. But I have no need now to mention the difference between their teaching and that of Scripture. Whatever their peculiar errors are, so far as they say that we are by nature blind and sinful, and must, through God's grace, and our own endeavours, learn that we have souls and rise to a new life, severing ourselves from the world that is, and walking by faith in what is unseen and future, so far they say true, for they speak the words of Scripture;

which says, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil; wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is[1]."

Let us, then, seriously question ourselves, and beg of God grace to do so honestly, whether we are loosened from the world; or whether, living as dependent on it, and not on the Eternal Author of our being, we are in fact taking our portion with this perishing outward scene, and ignorant of our having souls. I know very well that such thoughts are distasteful to the minds of men in general. Doubtless many a one there is, who, on hearing doctrines such as I have been insisting on, says in his heart, that religion is thus made gloomy and repulsive; that he would attend to a teacher who spoke in a less severe way; and that in fact Christianity was not intended to be a dark burdensome law, but a religion of cheerfulness and joy. This is what young people think, though they do not express it in this argumentative form. They view a strict life as something offensive and hateful; they turn from the notion of it. And then, as they get older and see more of the world, they learn to defend their opinion, and express it more or less in the way in which I have just put it. They hate and oppose the truth, as it were upon principle; and the more they are told that they have souls, the more resolved they are to live as if they had not souls. But let us take it as a clear point from the first, and not to be

[1] Eph. v. 14—17.

disputed, that religion must ever be difficult to those who neglect it. All things that we have to learn are difficult at first; and our duties to God, and to man for His sake, are peculiarly difficult, because they call upon us to take up a new life, and quit the love of this world for the next. It cannot be avoided; we must fear and be in sorrow, before we can rejoice. The Gospel must be a burden before it comforts and brings us peace. No one can have his heart cut away from the natural objects of its love, without pain during the process and throbbings afterwards. This is plain from the nature of the case; and, however true it be, that this or that teacher may be harsh and repulsive, yet he cannot materially alter things. Religion is in itself at first a weariness to the worldly mind, and it requires an effort and a self-denial in every one who honestly determines to be religious.

But there are other persons who are far more hopeful than those I have been speaking of, who, when they hear repentance and newness of life urged on them, are frightened at the thought of the greatness of the work; they are disheartened at being told to do so much. Now let it be well understood, that to realize our own individual accountableness and immortality, of which I have been speaking, is not required of them all at once. I never said a person was not in a hopeful way who did not thus fully discern the world's vanity and the worth of his soul. But a man is truly in a very desperate way who does not wish, who does not try, to discern and feel all this. I want a man on the one hand to confess his immortality with his lips, and on the other, to live as if

he tried to understand his own words, and then he is in the way of salvation; he is in the way towards heaven, even though he has not yet fully emancipated himself from the fetters of this world. Indeed none of us (of course) are entirely loosened from this world. We all use words, in speaking of our duties, higher and fuller than we really understand. No one entirely realizes what is meant by his having a soul; even the best of men is but in a state of progress towards the simple truth; and the most weak and ignorant of those who seek after it cannot but be in progress. And therefore no one need be alarmed at hearing that he has much to do before he arrives at a right view of his own condition in God's sight, i. e. at *faith;* for we all have much to do, and the great point is, are we willing to do it?

Oh that there were such an heart in us, to put aside this visible world, to desire to look at it as a mere screen between us and God, and to think of Him who has entered in beyond the veil, and who is watching us, trying us, yes, and blessing, and influencing, and encouraging us towards good, day by day! Yet, alas, how do we suffer the mere varying circumstances of every day to sway us! How difficult it is to remain firm and in one mind under the seductions or terrors of the world! We feel variously according to the place, time, and people we are with. We are serious on Sunday, and we sin deliberately on Monday. We rise in the morning with remorse at our offences and resolutions of amendment, yet before night we have transgressed again. The mere change of society puts us into a new frame of mind; nor do we sufficiently understand this great weakness of

ours, or seek for strength where alone it can be found, in the Unchangeable God. What will be our thoughts in that day, when at length this outward world drops away altogether, and we find ourselves where we ever have been, in His presence, with Christ standing at His right hand!

On the contrary, what a blessed discovery is it to those who make it, that this world is but vanity and without substance; and that really they are ever in their Saviour's presence. This is a thought which it is scarcely right to enlarge upon in a mixed congregation, where there may be some who have not given their hearts to God; for why should the privileges of the true Christian be disclosed to mankind at large, and sacred subjects, which are his peculiar treasure, be made common to the careless liver? He knows his blessedness, and needs not another to tell it him. He knows in whom he has believed; and in the hour of danger or trouble he knows what is meant by that peace, which Christ did not explain when He gave it to His Apostles, but merely said it was not as the world could give.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength[1]."

[1] Isa. xxvi. 3, 4.

SERMON III.

Knowledge of God's Will without Obedience.

"*If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*"—JOHN xiii. 17

THERE never was a people or an age to which these words could be more suitably addressed than to this country at this time; because we know more of the way to serve God, of our duties, our privileges, and our reward, than any other people hitherto, as far as we have the means of judging. To us then especially our Saviour says, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

Now, doubtless, many of us think we know this very well. It seems a very trite thing to say, that it is nothing to *know* what is right, unless we *do* it; an old subject about which nothing new can be said. When we read such passages in Scripture, we pass over them as admitting them without dispute; and thus we contrive practically to forget them. Knowledge is nothing compared with doing; but the *knowing* that knowledge is nothing, we make to be *something*, we make it count, and thus we cheat ourselves.

This we do in parallel cases also. Many a man in-

stead of *learning* humility in practice, confesses himself a poor sinner, and next *prides* himself upon the confession; he ascribes the glory of his redemption to God, and then becomes in a manner *proud* that he is redeemed. He is proud of his so-called humility.

Doubtless Christ spoke no words in vain. The Eternal Wisdom of God did not utter His voice that we might at once catch up His words in an irreverent manner, think we understand them at a glance, and pass them over. But His word endureth for ever; it has a depth of meaning suited to all times and places, and hardly and painfully to be understood in any. They, who think they enter into it easily, may be quite sure they do not enter into it at all.

Now then let us try, by His grace, to make the text a living word to the benefit of our souls. Our Lord says, "If ye know, happy are ye, if ye do." Let us consider *how* we commonly read Scripture.

We read a passage in the Gospels, for instance, a parable perhaps, or the account of a miracle; or we read a chapter in the Prophets, or a Psalm. Who is not struck with the beauty of what he reads? I do not wish to speak of those who read the Bible only now and then, and who will in consequence generally find its sacred pages dull and uninteresting; but of those who study it. Who of such persons does not see the beauty of it? for instance, take the passage which introduces the text. Christ had been washing His disciples' feet. He did so at a season of great mental suffering; it was just before He was seized by His enemies to be put to death. The traitor, His familiar friend, was in the

room. All of His disciples, even the most devoted of them, loved Him much less than they thought they did. In a little while they were all to forsake Him and flee. This He foresaw; yet He calmly washed their feet, and then He told them that He did so by way of an example; that they should be full of lowly services one to the other, as He to them; that he among them was in fact the highest who put himself the lowest. This He had said before; and His disciples must have recollected it. Perhaps they might wonder in their secret hearts *why* He repeated the lesson; they might say to themselves, "We have heard this before." They might be surprised that His significant action, His washing their feet, issued in nothing else than a precept already delivered, the command to be humble. At the same time they would not be able to deny, or rather they would deeply feel, the beauty of His action. Nay, as loving Him (after all) above all things, and reverencing Him as their Lord and Teacher, they would feel an admiration and awe of Him; but their minds would not rest sufficiently on the *practical* direction of the instruction vouchsafed to them. They knew the truth, and they admired it; they did not observe what it was they lacked. Such may be considered their frame of mind; and hence the force of the text, delivered primarily against Judas Iscariot, who knew and sinned deliberately against the truth; secondarily referring to all the Apostles, and St. Peter chiefly, who promised to be faithful, but failed under the trial; lastly, to us all,—all of us here assembled, who hear the word of life continually, know it, admire it, do all but obey it.

Is it not so? is not Scripture altogether pleasant except in its strictness? do not we try to persuade ourselves, that to *feel* religiously, to confess our love of religion, and to be able to talk of religion, will stand in the place of careful obedience, of that *self-denial* which is the very substance of true practical religion? Alas! that religion which is so delightful as a vision, should be so distasteful as a reality. Yet so it is, whether we are aware of the fact or not.

1. The multitude of men even who profess religion are in this state of mind. We will take the case of those who are in better circumstances than the mass of the community. They are well educated and taught; they have few distresses in life, or are able to get over them by the variety of their occupations, by the spirits which attend good health, or at least by the lapse of time. They go on respectably and happily, with the same general tastes and habits which they would have had if the Gospel had not been given them. They have an eye to what the world thinks of them; are charitable when it is expected. They are polished in their manners, kind from natural disposition or a feeling of propriety. Thus their religion is based upon self and the world, a mere *civilization;* the same (I say), as it would have been in the main, (taking the state of society as they find it,) even supposing Christianity were not the religion of the land. But it is; and let us go on to ask, how do they in consequence feel towards it? They accept it, they add it to what they *are*, they ingraft it upon the selfish and worldly habits of an unrenewed heart. They have been taught to revere it, and to

believe it to come from God; so they admire it, and accept it as a rule of life, so far forth as it agrees with the carnal principles which govern them. So far as it does *not* agree, they are blind to its excellence and its claims. They overlook or explain away its precepts. They in no sense obey *because* it commands. They do right when they *would* have done right had it not commanded; however, they speak well of it, and think they understand it. Sometimes, if I may continue the description, they adopt it into a certain refined elegance of sentiments and manners, and then the irreligion is all that is graceful, fastidious, and luxurious. They love religious poetry and eloquent preaching. They desire to have their feelings roused and soothed, and to secure a variety and relief in that eternal subject which is unchangeable. They tire of its simplicity, and perhaps seek to keep up their interest in it by means of religious narratives, fictitious or embellished, or of news from foreign countries, or of the history of the prospects or successes of the Gospel; thus perverting what is in itself good and innocent. This is their state of mind at best; for more commonly they think it enough merely to show some slight regard for the subject of religion; to attend its services on the Lord's day, and then only once, and coldly to express an approbation of it. But of course every description of such persons can be but general; for the shades of character are so varied and blended in individuals, as to make it impossible to give an accurate picture, and often very estimable persons and truly good Christians are partly infected with this bad and earthly spirit.

2. Take again another description of them. They have perhaps turned their attention to the means of promoting the happiness of their fellow-creatures, and have formed a system of morality and religion of their own; then they come to Scripture. They are much struck with the high tone of its precepts, and the beauty of its teaching. It is true, they find many things in it which they do not understand or do not approve; many things they would not have said themselves. But they pass these by; they fancy that these do not apply to the present day, (which is an easy way of removing any thing we do not like,) and *on the whole* they receive the Bible, and they think it highly serviceable for the lower classes. Therefore, they recommend it, and support the institutions which are the channels of teaching it. But as to their own case, it never comes into their minds to apply its precepts seriously to themselves; they *know* them already, they consider. They *know* them and that is enough; but as for *doing* them, by which I mean, going forward to obey them, with an unaffected earnestness and an honest faith *acting upon* them, receiving them as they are, and not as their own previously formed opinions would have them be, they have nothing of this right spirit. They do not contemplate such a mode of acting. To recommend and affect a moral and decent conduct (on *whatever* principles) seems to them to be enough. The spread of knowledge bringing in its train a selfish temperance, a selfish peaceableness, a selfish benevolence, the morality of expedience, this satisfies them. They care for none of the truths of Scripture, *on the ground* of their being in Scripture; these scarcely

become more valuable in their eyes for being there written. They do not obey *because* they are told to obey, on faith; and the need of this divine principle of conduct they do not comprehend. Why will it not answer (they seem to say) to make men good in one way as well as another? "Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, are they not better than all the waters of Israel?" as if all the knowledge and the training that books ever gave had power to unloose one sinner from the bonds of Satan, or to effect more than an outward reformation, an *appearance* of obedience; as if it were not a far different principle, a principle independent of knowledge, above it and before it, which leads to *real* obedience, that principle of divine faith, given from above, which has life in itself, and has power really to use knowledge to the soul's welfare; in the hand of which knowledge is (as it were) the torch lighting us on our way, but not teaching or strengthening us to walk.

3. Or take another view of the subject. Is it not one of the most common excuses made by the poor for being irreligious, that they have had no education? as if to know much was a necessary step for right practice. Again, they are apt to think it *enough* to know and to talk of religion, to make a man religious. Why have you come hither to-day, my brethren?—not as a matter of course, I will hope; not merely because friends or superiors told you to come. I will suppose you have come to church *as a religious act;* but beware of supposing that all is done and over by the act of coming. It is not enough to be *present* here; though many men act as if they forgot they must attend to what is going

on, as well as come. It is not enough to listen to what is preached; though many think they have gone a great way when they do this. You *must pray;* now this is very hard in itself to any one who tries (and this is the reason why so many men prefer the sermon to the prayers, because the former is merely the getting *knowledge,* and the latter is to do a *deed* of obedience): you must *pray;* and this I say is very difficult, because our thoughts are so apt to wander. But even this is not all;—you must, as you pray, really intend to *try to practise* what you pray for. When you say, "Lead us not into temptation," you must in good earnest mean to avoid in your daily conduct those temptations which you have already suffered from. When you say, "Deliver us from evil," you must mean to struggle against that evil in your hearts, which you are conscious of, and which you pray to be forgiven. This is difficult; still more is behind. You must actually carry your good intentions into effect during the week, and in truth and reality war against the world, the flesh, and the devil. And any one here present who falls short of this, that is, who thinks it enough to come to church to *learn* God's will, but does not bear in mind to do it in his daily conduct, be he high or be he low, know he mysteries and all knowledge, or be he unlettered and busily occupied in active life, he is a fool in His sight, who maketh the wisdom of this world foolishness. Surely he is but a trifler, as substituting a formal outward service for the religion of the heart; and he reverses our Lord's words in the text, "because he knows these things, most unhappy is he, because he does them not."

4. But some one may say, 'It is so very *difficult* to serve God, it is so much against my own mind, such an effort, such a strain upon my strength to bear Christ's yoke, I must give it over, or I must delay it at least. Can nothing be taken instead? I acknowledge His law to be most holy and true, and the accounts I read about good men are most delightful. I wish I were like them with all my heart; and for a little while I feel in a mind to set about imitating them. I have begun several times, I have had seasons of repentance, and set rules to myself; but for some reason or other, I fell back after a while, and was even worse than before. I know, but I cannot do. O wretched man that I am!"

Now to such an one I say, You are in a much more promising state than if you were contented with yourself, and thought that knowledge was every thing, which is the grievous blindness which I have hitherto been speaking of; that is, you are in a better state, if you do not feel too much comfort or confidence in your confession. For *this* is the fault of many men; they make such an acknowledgment as I have described a *substitute* for real repentance; or allow themselves, after making it, to *put off* repentance, as if they could be suffered to give a word of promise which did not become due (so to say) for many days. You are, I admit, in a better state than if you were satisfied with yourself, *but you are not in a safe state.* If you were now to die, you would have no hope of salvation: no hope, that is, if your own showing be true, for I am taking your own words. Go before God's judgment-seat, and there plead that you know the Truth and have not done it. This is

what you frankly own;—how will it there be taken? "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee," says our Judge Himself, and who shall reverse His judgment? Therefore such an one must make the confession with great and real terror and shame, if it is to be considered a promising sign in him; else it is mere hardness of heart. For instance: I have heard persons say lightly (every one must have heard them) that they own it would be a wretched thing indeed for them or their companions to be taken off suddenly. The young are especially apt to say this; that is, before they have come to an age to be callous, or have formed excuses to overcome the natural true sense of their conscience. They say they hope some day to repent. This is their own witness against themselves, like that bad prophet at Bethel who was constrained with his own mouth to utter God's judgments while he sat at his sinful meat. But let not such an one think that he will receive any thing of the Lord: he does not speak in faith.

When, then, a man complains of his hardness of heart or weakness of purpose, let him see to it whether this complaint is more than a mere pretence to quiet his conscience, which is frightened at his putting off repentance; or, again, more than a mere idle word, said half in jest and half in compunction. But, should he be earnest in his complaint, then let him consider he has no need to complain. Every thing is plain and easy to the earnest; it is the double-minded who find difficulties. If you hate your own corruption in sincerity and truth, if you are really pierced to the heart that you do not do what you know you should do, if you *would* love God if

you could, then the Gospel speaks to you words of peace and hope. It is a very different thing indolently to say, "I would I were a different man," and to close with God's offer to make you different, when it is put before you. Here is the test between earnestness and insincerity. You say you wish to be a different man; Christ takes you at your word, so to speak; He offers to make you different. He says, "I will take away from you the heart of stone, the love of this world and its pleasures, if you will submit to My discipline." Here a man draws back. No; he cannot bear to *lose* the love of the world, to part with his present desires and tastes; he cannot *consent* to be changed. After all he is well satisfied at the bottom of his heart to remain as he is, only he wants his conscience taken out of the way. Did Christ offer to do this for him, if He would but make bitter sweet and sweet bitter, darkness light and light darkness, *then* he would hail the glad tidings of peace;—till then he needs Him not.

But if a man is in earnest in wishing to get at the depths of his own heart, to expel the evil, to purify the good, and to gain power over himself, so as to do as well as know the Truth, what is the difficulty?—a matter of time indeed, but not of uncertainty is the recovery of such a man. So simple is the rule which he must follow, and so trite, that at first he will be surprised to hear it. God does great things by plain methods; and men start from them through pride, *because* they are plain. This was the conduct of Naaman the Syrian. Christ says, "Watch and pray;" herein lies our cure. To watch and to pray are surely in our

power, and by these means we are certain of getting strength. You feel your weakness; you fear to be overcome by temptation: then keep out of the way of it. This is watching. Avoid society which is likely to mislead you; flee from the very shadow of evil; you cannot be too careful; better be a little too strict than a little too easy,—it is the safer side. Abstain from reading books which are dangerous to you. Turn from bad thoughts when they arise, set about some business, begin conversing with some friend, or say to yourself the Lord's Prayer reverently. When you are urged by temptation, whether it be by the threats of the world, false shame, self-interest, provoking conduct on the part of another, or the world's sinful pleasures, urged to be cowardly, or covetous, or unforgiving, or sensual, shut your eyes and think of Christ's precious blood-shedding. Do not dare to say you cannot help sinning; a little attention to these points will go far (through God's grace) to keep you in the right way. And again, pray as well as watch. You must know that you can do nothing of yourself; your past experience has taught you this; therefore look to God for the will and the power; ask Him earnestly in His Son's name; seek His holy ordinances. Is not *this* in your power? Have you not power at least over the limbs of your body, so as to attend the means of grace constantly? Have you literally not the power to come hither; to observe the Fasts and Festivals of the Church; to come to His Holy Altar and receive the Bread of Life? Get yourself, at least, to do this; to put out the hand, to take His gracious Body

and Blood; this is no arduous work;—and you say you really *wish* to gain the blessings He offers. What would you have more than a free gift, vouchsafed "without money and without price?" So, make no more excuses; murmur not about your own bad heart, your knowing and resolving, and not doing. Here is your remedy.

Well were it if men could be persuaded to be in earnest; but few are thus minded. The many go on with a double aim, trying to serve both God and mammon. Few can get themselves to do what is right, *because* God tells them; they have another aim; they desire to please self or men. When they can obey God without offending the bad Master that rules them, then, and then only, they obey. Thus religion, instead of being the *first* thing in their estimation, is but the second. They differ, indeed, one from another what to put foremost: one man loves to be at ease, another to be busy, another to enjoy domestic comfort: but they agree in converting the truth of God, which they know to be Truth, into a mere instrument of secular aims; not discarding the Truth, but degrading it.

When He, the Lord of hosts, comes to shake terribly the earth, what number will He find of the remnant of the true Israel? We live in an educated age. The false gloss of a mere worldly refinement makes us decent and amiable. We all know and profess. We think ourselves wise; we flatter each other; we make excuses for ourselves when we are conscious we sin, and thus we gradually lose the consciousness that we are sinning. We think our own times superior to all others. "Thou

blind Pharisee!" This was the fatal charge brought by our blessed Lord against the falsely enlightened teachers of His own day. As then we desire to enter into life, let us come to Christ continually for the two foundations of true Christian faith,—humbleness of mind and earnestness!

SERMON IV.

Secret Faults.

Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults."—PSALM xix. 12.

STRANGE as it may seem, multitudes called Christians go through life with no effort to obtain a correct knowledge of themselves. They are contented with general and vague impressions concerning their real state; and, if they have more than this, it is merely such accidental information about themselves as the events of life force upon them. But exact systematic knowledge they have none, and do not aim at it.

When I say this is *strange,* I do not mean to imply that to know ourselves is *easy;* it is very difficult to know ourselves even in part, and so far ignorance of ourselves is not a strange thing. But its strangeness consists in this, viz. that men should profess to receive and act upon the great Christian doctrines, while they are thus ignorant of themselves, considering that self-knowledge is a necessary condition for understanding them. Thus it is not too much to say that all those who neglect the duty of habitual self-examination are using words without meaning. The doctrines of the

forgiveness of sins, and of a *new birth* from sin, cannot be understood without some right knowledge of the *nature* of sin, that is, of our own heart. We may, indeed, assent to a form of words which declares those doctrines; but if such a mere assent, however sincere, is the same as a real *holding of* them, and belief in them, then it is equally possible to believe in a proposition the terms of which belong to some foreign language, which is obviously absurd. Yet nothing is more common than for men to think that because they are familiar with words, they understand the ideas they stand for. Educated persons despise this fault in illiterate men who use hard words as if they comprehended them. Yet they themselves, as well as others, fall into the same error in a more subtle form, when they think they understand terms used in morals and religion, because such are common words, and have been used by them all their lives.

Now (I repeat) unless we have some just idea of our hearts and of sin, we can have no right idea of a Moral Governor, a Saviour or a Sanctifier, that is, in professing to believe in Them, we shall be using words without attaching distinct meaning to them. Thus self-knowledge is at the root of all real religious knowledge; and it is in vain,—worse than vain,—it is a deceit and a mischief, to think to understand the Christian doctrines as a matter of course, merely by being taught by books, or by attending sermons, or by any outward means, however excellent, taken by themselves. For it is in proportion as we search our hearts and understand our own nature, that we understand what is meant by an

Infinite Governor and Judge; in proportion as we comprehend the nature of disobedience and our actual sinfulness, that we feel what is the blessing of the removal of sin, redemption, pardon, sanctification, which otherwise are mere words. God speaks to us primarily in our hearts. Self-knowledge is the key to the precepts and doctrines of Scripture. The very utmost any outward notices of religion can do, is to startle us and make us turn inward and search our hearts; and then, when we have experienced what it is to read ourselves, we shall profit by the doctrines of the Church and the Bible.

Of course self-knowledge admits of degrees. No one perhaps, is *entirely* ignorant of himself; and even the most advanced Christian knows himself only "in part." However, most men are contented with a slight acquaintance with their hearts, and therefore a superficial faith. This is the point which it is my purpose to insist upon. Men are satisfied to have numberless secret faults. They do not think about them, either as sins or as obstacles to strength of faith, and live on as if they had nothing to learn.

Now let us consider attentively the strong presumption that exists, that we all have serious secret faults; a fact which, I believe, all are ready to confess in general terms, though few like calmly and practically to dwell upon it; as I now wish to do.

1. Now the most ready method of convincing ourselves of the existence in us of faults unknown to ourselves, is to consider how plainly we see the secret faults of others. At first sight there is of course no reason for

supposing that we differ materially from those around us; and if we see sins in them which *they* do not see, it is a presumption that they have their own discoveries about ourselves, which it would surprise us to hear. For instance: how apt is an angry man to fancy that he has the command of himself! The very charge of being angry, if brought against him, will anger him more; and, in the height of his discomposure, he will profess himself able to reason and judge with clearness and impartiality. Now, it may be his turn another day, for what we know, to witness the same failing in us; or, if we are not naturally inclined to violent passion, still at least we may be subject to other sins, equally unknown to ourselves, and equally known to him as his anger was to us. For example: there are persons who act mainly from self-interest at times when they conceive they are doing generous or virtuous actions; they give freely, or put themselves to trouble, and are praised by the world, and by themselves, as if acting on high principle; whereas close observers can detect desire of gain, love of applause, shame, or the mere satisfaction of being busy and active, as the principal cause of their good deeds. This may be our condition as well as that of others; or, if it be not, still a parallel infirmity, the bondage of some other sin or sins, which others see, and we do not.

But, say there is no human being sees sin in us, of which we are not aware ourselves, (though this is a bold supposition to make,) yet why should man's accidental knowledge of us limit the extent of our imperfections? Should all the world speak well of us, and good men

hail us as brothers, after all there is a Judge who trieth the hearts and the reins. He knows our real state; have we earnestly besought Him to teach us the knowledge of our own hearts? If we have not, that very omission is a presumption against us. Though our praise were throughout the Church, we may be sure He sees sins without number in us, sins deep and heinous, of which we have no idea. If man sees so much evil in human nature, what must God see? "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Not *acts* alone of sin does He set down against us daily, of which we know nothing, but the thoughts of the heart too. The stirrings of pride, vanity, covetousness, impurity, discontent, resentment, these succeed each other through the day in momentary emotions, and are known to Him. We know them not; but how much does it concern us to know them!

2. This consideration is suggested by the first view of the subject. Now reflect upon the *actual disclosures* of our hidden weakness, which accidents occasion. Peter followed Christ boldly, and suspected not his own heart, till it betrayed him in the hour of temptation, and led him to deny his Lord. David lived years of happy obedience while he was in private life. What calm, clear-sighted faith is manifested in his answer to Saul about Goliath:—"The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine[1]." Nay, not only in retired life, in severe trial, under ill usage from Saul, he continued faithful to his God;

[1] 1 Sam. xvii. 37.

years and years did he go on, fortifying his heart, and learning the fear of the Lord; yet power and wealth weakened his faith, and for a season overcame him. There was a time when a prophet could retort upon him, "Thou art the man[1]" whom thou condemnest. He had kept his principles in words, but lost them in his heart. Hezekiah is another instance of a religious man bearing *trouble* well, but for a season falling back under the temptation of prosperity; and that, after extraordinary mercies had been vouchsafed to him[2]. And if these things be so in the case of the favoured saints of God, what (may we suppose) is our own real spiritual state in His sight? It is a serious thought. The warning to be deduced from it is this:—Never to think we have a due knowledge of ourselves till we have been exposed to various kinds of temptations, and tried on every side. Integrity on one side of our character is no voucher for integrity on another. We cannot tell how we should act if brought under temptations different from those which we have hitherto experienced. This thought should keep us humble. We are sinners, but we do not know how great. He alone knows who died for our sins.

3. Thus much we cannot but allow; that we do not know ourselves in those respects in which we have not been tried. But farther than this; What if we do not know ourselves even where we *have* been tried, and found faithful? It is a remarkable circumstance which has been often observed, that if we look to some of the most eminent saints of Scripture, we shall find their

[1] 2 Sam. xii. 7. [2] 2 Kings xx. 12—19.

recorded errors to have occurred in those parts of their duty in which each had had most trial, and generally showed obedience most perfect. *Faithful* Abraham through want of faith denied his wife. Moses, the *meekest* of men, was excluded from the land of promise for a passionate word. The *wisdom* of Solomon was seduced to bow down to idols. Barnabas again, the *son of consolation*, had a sharp contention with St. Paul. If then men, who knew themselves better than we doubtless know ourselves, had so much of hidden infirmity about them, even in those parts of their character which were most free from blame, what are we to think of ourselves? and if our very virtues be so defiled with imperfection, what must be the unknown multiplied circumstances of evil which aggravate the guilt of our sins? This is a third presumption against us.

4. Think of this too. No one begins to examine himself, and to pray to know himself (with David in the text), but he finds within him an abundance of faults which before were either entirely or almost entirely unknown to him. That this is so, we learn from the written lives of good men, and our own experience of others. And hence it is that the best men are ever the most humble; for, having a higher standard of excellence in their minds than others have, and knowing themselves better, they see somewhat of the breadth and depth of their own sinful nature, and are shocked and frightened at themselves. The generality of men cannot understand this; and if at times the habitual self-condemnation of religious men breaks out into words, they think it arises from affectation, or from a strange distempered

state of mind, or from accidental melancholy and disquiet. Whereas the confession of a good man against himself, is really a witness against all thoughtless persons who hear it, and a call on them to examine their own hearts. Doubtless the more we examine ourselves, the more imperfect and ignorant we shall find ourselves to be.

5. But let a man persevere in prayer and watchfulness to the day of his death, yet he will never get to the bottom of his heart. Though he know more and more of himself as he becomes more conscientious and earnest, still the full manifestation of the secrets there lodged, is reserved for another world. And at the last day who can tell the affright and horror of a man who lived to himself on earth, indulging his own evil will, following his own chance notions of truth and falsehood, shunning the cross and the reproach of Christ, when his eyes are at length opened before the throne of God, and all his innumerable sins, his habitual neglect of God, his abuse of his talents, his misapplication and waste of time, and the original unexplored sinfulness of his nature, are brought clearly and fully to his view? Nay, even to the true servants of Christ, the prospect is awful. "The righteous," we are told, "will scarcely be saved[1]." Then will the good man undergo the full sight of his sins, which on earth he was labouring to obtain, and partly succeeded in obtaining, though life was not long enough to learn and subdue them all. Doubtless we must all endure that fierce and terrifying vision of our real selves, that last fiery trial of the soul[2] before its

[1] 1 Pet. iv. 18. [2] 1 Cor. iii. 13.

acceptance, a spiritual agony and second death to all who are not then supported by the strength of Him who died to bring them safe through it, and in whom on earth they have believed.

My brethren, I appeal to your reason whether these presumptions are not in their substance fair and just. And if so, next I appeal to your consciences, whether they are *new* to you; for if you have not even thought about your real state, nor even know how little you know of yourselves, how can you in good earnest be purifying yourselves for the next world, or be walking in the narrow way?

And yet how many are the chances that a number of those who now hear me have no sufficient knowledge of themselves, or sense of their ignorance, and are in peril of their souls! Christ's ministers cannot tell who are, and who are not, the true elect: but when the difficulties in the way of knowing yourselves aright are considered, it becomes a most serious and immediate question for each of you to entertain, whether or not he is living a life of self-deceit, and thinking far more comfortably of his spiritual state than he has any right to do. For call to mind the impediments that are in the way of your knowing yourselves, or feeling your ignorance, and then judge.

1. First of all, self-knowledge does not come as a matter of course; it implies an effort and a work. As well may we suppose, that the knowledge of the languages comes by nature, as that acquaintance with our own heart is natural. Now the very effort of steadily

reflecting, is itself painful to many men; not to speak of the difficulty of reflecting correctly. To ask ourselves *why* we do this or that, to take account of the principles which govern us, and see whether we act for conscience' sake or from some lower inducement, is painful. We are busy in the world, and what leisure time we have we readily devote to a less severe and wearisome employment.

2. And then comes in our self-love. We *hope* the best; this saves us the trouble of examining. Self-love answers for our safety. We think it sufficient caution to allow for certain possible unknown faults at the utmost, and to take them *into* the reckoning when we balance our account with our conscience: whereas, if the truth were known to us, we should find we had nothing but debts, and those greater than we can conceive, and ever increasing.

3. And this favourable judgment of ourselves will especially prevail, if we have the misfortune to have uninterrupted health and high spirits, and domestic comfort. Health of body and mind is a great blessing, if we can bear it; but unless chastened by watchings and fastings[1], it will commonly seduce a man into the notion that he is much better than he really is. Resistance to our acting rightly, whether it proceed from within or without, tries our principle; but when things go smoothly, and we have but to wish, and we can perform, we cannot tell how far we do or do not act from a sense of duty. When a man's spirits are high, he is pleased with every thing; and with himself especially. He can act with vigour and promptness, and he mistakes

[1] 2 Cor. xi. 27.

this mere constitutional energy for strength of faith. He is cheerful and contented; and he mistakes this for Christian peace. And, if happy in his family, he mistakes mere natural affection for Christian benevolence, and the confirmed temper of Christian love. In short, he is in a dream, from which nothing could have saved him except deep humility, and nothing will ordinarily rescue him except sharp affliction.

Other accidental circumstances are frequently causes of a similar self-deceit. While we remain in retirement from the world, we do not know ourselves; or after any great mercy or trial, which has affected us much, and given a temporary strong impulse to our obedience; or when we are in keen pursuit of some good object, which excites the mind, and for a time deadens it to temptation. Under such circumstances we are ready to think far too well of ourselves. The world is away; or, at least, we are insensible to its seductions; and we mistake our merely temporary tranquillity, or our over-wrought fervour of mind, on the one hand for Christian peace, on the other for Christian zeal.

4. Next we must consider the force of habit. Conscience at first warns us against sin; but if we disregard it, it soon ceases to upbraid us; and thus sins, once known, in time become secret sins. It seems then (and it is a startling reflection), that the more guilty we are, the less we know it; for the oftener we sin, the less we are distressed at it. I think many of us may, on reflection, recollect instances, in our experience of ourselves, of our gradually forgetting things to be wrong which once shocked us. Such is the force of habit. By

it (for instance) men contrive to allow themselves in various kinds of dishonesty. They bring themselves to affirm what is untrue, or what they are not sure is true, in the course of business. They overreach and cheat; and still more are they likely to fall into low and selfish ways without their observing it, and all the while to continue careful in their attendance on the Christian ordinances, and bear about them a form of religion. Or, again, they will live in self-indulgent habits; eat and drink more than is right; display a needless pomp and splendour in their domestic arrangements, without any misgiving; much less do they think of simplicity of manners and abstinence as Christian duties. Now we cannot suppose they *always* thought their present mode of living to be justifiable, for *others* are still struck with its impropriety; and what others now feel, doubtless they once felt themselves. But such is the force of habit. So again, to take as a third instance, the duty of stated private prayer; at first it is omitted with compunction, but soon with indifference. But it is not the less a sin because we do not feel it to be such. Habit has made it a secret sin.

5. To the force of habit must be added that of custom. Every age has its own wrong ways; and these have such influence, that even good men, from living in the world, are unconsciously misled by them. At one time a fierce persecuting hatred of those who erred in Christian doctrine has prevailed; at another, an odious over-estimation of wealth and the means of wealth; at another an irreligious veneration of the mere intellectual powers; at another, a laxity of morals; at another, disregard of the

forms and discipline of the Church. The most religious men, unless they are especially watchful, will feel the sway of the fashion of their age; and suffer from it, as Lot in wicked Sodom, though unconsciously. Yet their ignorance of the mischief does not change the nature of their sin;—sin it still is, only custom makes it *secret* sin.

6. Now what is our chief guide amid the evil and seducing customs of the world?—obviously, the Bible. "The world passeth away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever[1]." How much extended, then, and strengthened, necessarily must be this secret dominion of sin over us, when we consider how little we read Scripture! Our conscience gets corrupted,—true; but the words of truth, though effaced from our minds, remain in Scripture, bright in their eternal youth and purity. Yet, we do not study Scripture to stir up and refresh our minds. Ask yourselves, my brethren, what do you know of the Bible? Is there any one part of it you have read carefully, and as a whole? One of the Gospels, for instance? Do you know very much more of your Saviour's works and words than you have heard read in church? Have you compared His precepts, or St. Paul's, or any other Apostle's, with your own daily conduct, and prayed and endeavoured to act upon them? If you have, so far is well; go on to do so. If you have not, it is plain you do not possess, for you have not sought to possess, an adequate notion of that perfect Christian character which it is your duty to aim at, nor an ade-

[1] Isa. xl. 8. 1 Pet. i. 24, 25. 1 John ii. 17.

quate notion of your actual sinful state; you are in the number of those who "come not to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved."

These remarks may serve to impress upon us the difficulty of knowing ourselves aright, and the consequent danger to which we are exposed, of speaking peace to our souls, when there is no peace.

Many things are against us; this is plain. Yet is not our future prize worth a struggle? Is it not worth present discomfort and pain to accomplish an escape from the fire that never shall be quenched? Can we endure the thought of going down to the grave with a load of sins on our head unknown and unrepented of? Can we content ourselves with such an unreal faith in Christ, as in no sufficient measure includes self-abasement, or thankfulness, or the desire or effort to be holy? for how can we feel our need of His help, or our dependence on Him, or our debt to Him, or the nature of His gift to us, unless we know ourselves? How can we in any sense be said to have that "mind of Christ," to which the Apostle exhorts us, if we cannot follow Him to the height above, or the depth beneath; if we do not in some measure discern the cause and meaning of His sorrows, but regard the world, and man, and the system of Providence, in a light different from that which His words and acts supply? If you receive revealed truth merely through the eyes and ears, you believe words, not things; you deceive yourselves. You may conceive yourselves sound in faith, but you know nothing in any true way. Obedience to God's

commandments, which implies knowledge of sin and of holiness, and the desire and endeavour to please Him, this is the only practical interpreter of Scripture doctrine. Without self-knowledge you have no root in yourselves personally; you may endure for a time, but under affliction or persecution your faith will not last. This is why many in this age (and in every age) become infidels, heretics, schismatics, disloyal despisers of the Church. They cast off the form of truth, because it never has been to them more than a form. They endure not, because they never have tasted that the Lord is gracious; and they never have had experience of His power and love, because they have never known their own weakness and need. This *may* be the future condition of some of us, if we harden our hearts to-day,—*apostasy*. Some day, even in this world, we may be found openly among the enemies of God and of His Church.

But, even should we be spared this present shame, what will it ultimately profit a man to profess without understanding? to *say* he has faith, when he has not works[1]? In that case we shall remain in the heavenly vineyard, stunted plants, without the principle of growth in us, barren; and, in the end, we shall be put to shame before Christ and the holy Angels, "as trees of withering fruits, twice dead, plucked up by the roots," even though we die in outward communion with the Church.

To think of these things, and to be alarmed, is the

[1] James ii. 14.

first step towards acceptable obedience; to be at ease, is to be unsafe. We must know what the evil of sin is hereafter, if we do not learn it here. God give us all grace to choose the pain of present repentance before the wrath to come!

SERMON V.

Self-Denial the Test of Religious Earnestness.

"*Now it is high time to awake out of sleep.*"—ROM. xiii. 11.

BY "sleep," in this passage, St. Paul means a state of insensibility to things as they really are in God's sight. When we are asleep, we are absent from this world's action, as if we were no longer concerned in it. It goes on without us, or, if our rest be broken, and we have some slight notion of people and occurrences about us, if we hear a voice or a sentence, and see a face, yet we are unable to catch these external objects justly and truly; we make them part of our dreams, and pervert them till they have scarcely a resemblance to what they really are; and such is the state of men as regards religious truth. God is ever Almighty and All-knowing. He is on His throne in heaven, trying the reins and the hearts; and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, is on His right hand; and ten thousand Angels and Saints are ministering to Him, rapt in the contemplation of Him, or by their errands of mercy connecting this lower world with His courts above; they go to and fro, as though upon the ladder which Jacob saw And the

disclosure of this glorious invisible world is made to us principally by means of the Bible, partly by the course of nature, partly by the floating opinions of mankind, partly by the suggestions of the heart and conscience:—and all these means of information concerning it are collected and combined by the Holy Church, which heralds the news forth to the whole earth, and applies it with power to individual minds, partly by direct instruction, partly by her very form and fashion, which witnesses to them; so that the truths of religion circulate through the world almost as the light of day, every corner and recess having some portion of its blessed rays. Such is the state of a Christian country. Meanwhile, how is it with those who dwell in it? The words of the text remind us of their condition. They are *asleep*. While the Ministers of Christ are using the armour of light, and all things speak of Him, they 'walk" not "becomingly, as in the day." Many live altogether as though the day shone not on them, but the shadows still endured; and far the greater part of them are but very faintly sensible of the great truths preached around them. They see and hear as people in a dream; they mix up the Holy Word of God with their own idle imaginings; if startled for a moment, still they soon relapse into slumber; they refuse to be awakened, and think their happiness consists in continuing as they are.

Now I do not for an instant suspect, my brethren, that you are in the sound slumber of sin. This is a miserable state, which I should hope was, on the whole, the condition of few men, at least in a place like this.

But, allowing this, yet there is great reason for fearing that very many of you are not wide awake: that though your dreams are disturbed, yet dreams they are; and that the view of religion which you think to be a true one, is not that vision of the Truth which you would see were your eyes open, but such a vague, defective, extravagant picture of it as a man sees when he is asleep. At all events, however this may be, it will be useful (please God) if you ask youselves, one by one, the question, "*How do I know* I am in the right way? *How do I know* that I have real faith, and am not in a dream?"

The circumstances of these times render it very difficult to answer this question. When the world was against Christianity it was comparatively easy. But (in one sense) the world is now *for it.* I do not mean there are not turbulent lawless men, who would bring all things into confusion, if they could; who hate religion, and would overturn every established institution which proceeds from, or is connected with it. Doubtless there are very many such, but from such men religion has nothing to fear. The truth has ever flourished and strengthened under persecution. But what we have to fear is the opposite fact, that all the rank, and the station, and the intelligence, and the opulence of the country is professedly with religion. We have cause to fear from the very circumstance that the institutions of the country are based upon the acknowledgment of religion as true. Worthy of all honour are they who so based them! Miserable is the guilt which lies upon those who have attempted, and

partly succeeded, in shaking that holy foundation! But it often happens that our most bitter are not our most dangerous enemies; on the other hand, greatest blessings are the most serious temptations to the unwary. And our danger, at present, is this, that a man's having a general character for religion, reverencing the Gospel and professing it, and to a certain point obeying it, so fully promotes his temporal interests, that it is difficult for him to make out for himself whether he really acts on faith, or from a desire of this world's advantages. It is difficult to find *tests* which may bring home the truth to his mind, and probe his heart after the manner of Him who, from His throne above, tries it with an Almighty Wisdom. It can scarcely be denied that attention to their religious duties is becoming a fashion among large portions of the community,—so large, that, to many individuals, these portions are in fact *the world*. We are, every now and then, surprised to find persons to be in the observance of family prayer, of reading Scripture, or of Holy Communion, of whom we should not have expected beforehand such a profession of faith; or we hear them avowing the high evangelical truths of the New Testament, and countenancing those who maintain them. All this brings it about, that it is our interest in this world to profess to be Christ's disciples.

And further than this, it is necessary to remark, that, in spite of this general profession of zeal for the Gospel among all respectable persons at this day, nevertheless there is reason for fearing, that it is not altogether the real Gospel that they are zealous for. Doubtless we

have cause to be thankful whenever we see persons earnest in the various ways I have mentioned. Yet, somehow, after all, there is reason for being dissatisfied with the character of the religion of the day; dissatisfied, first, because oftentimes these same persons are very inconsistent;—often, for instance, talk irreverently and profanely, ridicule or slight things sacred, speak against the Holy Church, or against the blessed Saints of early times, or even against the favoured servants of God, set before us in Scripture; or *act* with the world and the worse sort of men, even when they do not speak like them; attend to them more than to the Ministers of God, or are very lukewarm, lax, and unscrupulous in matters of conduct, so much so, that they seem hardly to go by principle, but by what is merely expedient and convenient. And then again, putting aside our judgment of these men as individuals, and thinking of them as well as we can (which of course it is our duty to do), yet, after all, taking merely the multitude of them as a symptom of a state of things, I own I am suspicious of any religion that is a people's religion, or an age's religion. Our Saviour says, "Narrow is the way." This, of course, must not be interpreted without great caution; yet surely the whole tenor of the Inspired Volume leads us to believe that His Truth will not be heartily received by the many, that it is against the current of human feeling and opinion, and the course of the world, and so far forth as it *is* received by a man, will be opposed by himself, *i.e.* by his old nature which remains about him, next by all others, so far forth as they have not received it. "The light shining in darkness" is the token of

true religion; and, though doubtless there are seasons when a sudden enthusiasm arises in favour of the Truth (as in the history of St. John the Baptist, in whose "light" the Jews "were willing for a season to rejoice[1]," so as even "to be baptized of him, confessing their sins[2]"), yet such a popularity of the Truth is *but* sudden, comes at once and goes at once, has no regular growth, no abiding stay. It is error alone which grows and is received heartily on a large scale. St. Paul has set up his warning against our supposing Truth will ever be heartily accepted, whatever show there may be of a general profession of it, in his last Epistle, where he tells Timothy, among other sad prophecies, that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse[3]." Truth, indeed, has that power in it, that it forces men to profess it in words; but when they go on to act, instead of obeying *it*, they substitute some idol in the place of it. On these accounts, when there is much talk of religion in a country, and much congratulation that there is a general concern for it, a cautious mind will feel anxious lest some counterfeit be, in fact, honoured instead of it: lest it be the dream of man rather than the verities of God's word, which has become popular, and lest the received form have no more of truth in it than is just necessary to recommend it to the reason and conscience: —lest, in short, it be Satan transformed into an angel of light, rather than the Light itself, which is attracting followers.

If, then, this be a time (which I suppose it is) when a general profession of religion is thought respectable

[1] John v. 35. [2] Matt. iii. 6. [3] 2 Tim. iii. 13.

and right in the virtuous and orderly classes of the community, this circumstance should not diminish your anxiety about your own state before God, but rather (I may say) increase it; for two reasons, first, because you are in danger of doing right from motives of this world; next, because you may, perchance, be cheated of the Truth, by some ingenuity which the world puts, like counterfeit coin, in the place of the Truth.

Some, indeed, of those who now hear me, are in situations where they are almost shielded from the world's influence, whatever it is. There are persons so happily placed as to have religious superiors, who direct them to what is good only, and who are kind to them, as well as pious towards God. This is their happiness, and they must thank God for the gift; but it is their temptation too. At least they are under one of the two temptations just mentioned; good behaviour is, in their case, not only a matter of duty, but of interest. If they obey God, they gain praise from men as well as from Him; so that it is very difficult for them to know whether they do right for conscience' sake, or for the world's sake. Thus, whether in private families, or in the world, in all the ranks of middle life, men lie under a considerable danger at this day, a more than ordinary danger, of self-deception, of being asleep while they think themselves awake.

How then shall we try ourselves? Can any tests be named which will bring certainty to our minds on the subject? No indisputable tests can be given. We cannot know for certain. We must beware of an impatience about knowing what our real state is. St. Paul

himself did not know till the last days of his life (as far as we know), that he was one of God's elect who shall never perish. He said, "I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified[1];" i. e. though I am not conscious to myself of neglect of duty, yet am I not therefore confident of my acceptance? Judge nothing before the time. Accordingly he says in another place, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway[2]." And yet though this absolute certainty of our election unto glory be unattainable, and the desire to obtain it an impatience which ill befits sinners, nevertheless a comfortable hope, a sober and subdued belief that God has pardoned and justified us for Christ's sake (blessed be His name!), is attainable, according to St. John's words, "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God[3]." And the question is, how are we to attain to this, under the circumstances in which we are placed? In what does it consist?

Were we in a heathen land (as I said just now) it were easy to answer. The very profession of the Gospel would almost bring evidence of true faith, as far as we could have evidence; for such profession among Pagans is almost sure to involve persecution. Hence it is that the Epistles are so full of expressions of joy in the Lord Jesus, and in the exulting hope of salvation. Well might they be confident who had suffered for Christ "Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience

[1] 1 Cor. iv. 4. [2] 1 Cor. ix 27. [3] 1 John iii. 21.

and experience hope[1]." "Henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus[2]." "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus; that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body[3]." "Our hope of you is stedfast knowing that as ye are partakers of the suffering, so shall ye be also of the consolation[4]." These and such like texts belong to those only who have witnessed for the truth like the early Christians. They are beyond *us*.

This is certain; yet since the nature of Christian obedience is the same in every age, it still brings with it, as it did then, an evidence of God's favour. We cannot indeed make ourselves as sure of our being in the number of God's true servants as the early Christians were, yet we may possess our degree of certainty, and by the same kind of evidence, the evidence of *self-denial*. This was the great evidence which the first disciples gave, and which we can give still. Reflect upon our Saviour's plain declarations, "Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me[5]." "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after Me, he cannot be My disciple[6]." "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off . . . if thy foot offend thee, cut it off . . . if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: . . . it is better for

[1] Rom. v. 3, 4.
[2] Gal. vi. 17.
[3] 2 Cor. iv. 10.
[4] 2 Cor. i. 7.
[5] Mark viii. 34.
[6] Luke xiv. 26, 27.

thee to enter into life maimed . . . halt . . . with one eye than to be cast into hell[1]."

Now without attempting to explain perfectly such passages as these, which doubtless cannot be understood without a fulness of grace which is possessed by very few men, yet at least we learn thus much from them, that a rigorous self-denial is a chief duty, nay, that it may be considered the test whether we are Christ's disciples, whether we are living in a mere dream, which we mistake for Christian faith and obedience, or are really and truly awake, alive, living in the day, on our road heavenwards. The early Christians went through self-denials in their very profession of the Gospel; *what are our self-denials,* now that the profession of the Gospel is not a self-denial? In what sense do *we* fulfil the words of Christ? have we any distinct notion what is meant by the words "taking up our cross?" in what way are we acting, in which we should not act, supposing the Bible and the Church were unknown to this country, and religion, as existing among us, was *merely* a fashion of this world? What are we doing, which we have reason to trust is done for Christ's sake who bought us?

You know well enough that works are said to be the fruits and evidence of faith. That faith is said to be dead which has them not. Now what works have we to show of such a kind as to give us "confidence," so that we may "not be ashamed before Him at His coming[2]?"

In answering this question I observe, first of all, that, according to Scripture, the self-denial which is the test

[1] Mark ix. 43—47. [2] 1 John ii. 28.

of our faith must be daily. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross *daily*, and follow Me[1]." It is thus St. Luke records our Saviour's words. Accordingly, it seems that Christian obedience does not consist merely in a few occasional efforts, a few accidental good deeds, or certain seasons of repentance, prayer, and activity; a mistake, which minds of a certain class are very apt to fall into. This is the kind of obedience which constitutes what the world calls a great man, i. e. a man who has some noble points, and every now and then acts heroically, so as to astonish and subdue the minds of beholders, but who in private life has no abiding personal religion, who does not regulate his thoughts, words, and deeds, according to the law of God. Again, the word *daily* implies, that the self-denial which is pleasing to Christ consists in little things. This is plain, for opportunity for great self-denials does not come every day. Thus to take up the cross of Christ is no great action done once for all, it consists in the continual practice of small duties which are distasteful to us.

If, then, a person asks how he is to know whether he is dreaming on in the world's slumber, or is really awake and alive unto God, let him first fix his mind upon some one or other of his besetting infirmities. Every one who is at all in the habit of examining himself, must be conscious of such within him. Many men have more than one, all of us have some one or other; and in resisting and overcoming such, self-denial has its first employment. One man is indolent and fond of amusement,

[1] Luke ix. 23.

another man is passionate or ill-tempered, another is vain, another has little control over his tongue; others are weak, and cannot resist the ridicule of thoughtless companions; others are tormented with bad passions, of which they are ashamed, yet are overcome. Now let every one consider what his weak point is; in that is his trial. His trial is not in those things which are easy to him, but in that one thing, in those several things, whatever they are, in which to do his duty is against his nature. Never think yourself safe because you do your duty in ninety-nine points; it is the hundredth which is to be the ground of your self-denial, which must evidence, or rather instance and realize your faith. It is in reference to this you must watch and pray; pray continually for God's grace to help you, and watch with fear and trembling lest you fall. Other men may not know what these weak points of your character are, they may mistake them. But you may know them; you may know them by *their* guesses and hints, and your own observation, and the light of the Spirit of God. And oh, that you may have strength to wrestle with them and overcome them! Oh, that you may have the wisdom to care little for the world's religion, or the praise you get from the world, and your agreement with what clever men, or powerful men, or many men, make the standard of religion, compared with the secret consciousness that you are obeying God in little things as well as great, in the hundredth duty as well as in the ninety-nine! Oh, that you may (as it were) sweep the house diligently to discover what you lack of the *full* measure of obedience! for be quite sure,

that this apparently small defect will influence your whole spirit and judgment in all things. Be quite sure that your judgment of persons, and of events, and of actions, and of doctrines, and your spirit towards God and man, your faith in the high truths of the Gospel, and your knowledge of your duty, all depend in a strange way on this strict endeavour to observe the whole law, on this self-denial in those little things in which obedience *is* a self-denial. Be not content with a warmth of faith carrying you over many obstacles even in your obedience, forcing you past the fear of men, and the usages of society, and the persuasions of interest; exult not in your experience of God's past mercies, and your assurance of what He has already done for your soul, if you are conscious you have neglected the one thing needful, the "one thing" which "thou lackest,"—daily self-denial.

But, besides this, there are other modes of self-denial to try your faith and sincerity, which it may be right just to mention. It may so happen that the sin you are most liable to, is not called forth every day. For instance: anger and passion are irresistible perhaps when they come upon you, but it is only at times that you are provoked, and then you are off your guard; so that the occasion is over, and you have failed, before you were well aware of its coming. It is right then almost to *find out* for yourself daily self-denials; and this because our Lord bids you take up your cross daily, and because it proves your earnestness, and because by doing so you strengthen your general power of self-mastery, and come to have such an habitual command of yourself, as will be a defence ready prepared when the season of tempta-

tion comes. Rise up then in the morning with the purpose that (please God) the day shall not pass without its self-denial, with a self-denial in innocent pleasures and tastes, if none occurs to mortify sin. Let your very rising from your bed be a self-denial; let your meals be self-denials. Determine to yield to others in things indifferent, to go out of your way in small matters, to inconvenience yourself (so that no direct duty suffers by it), rather than you should not meet with your daily discipline. This was the Psalmist's method, who was, as it were, "punished all day long, and chastened every morning."[1] It was St. Paul's method, who "kept under," or bruised "his body, and brought it into subjection."[2] This is one great end of fasting. A man says to himself, "How am I to know I am in earnest?" I would suggest to him, Make some sacrifice, do some distasteful thing, which you are not actually obliged to do, (so that it be lawful,) to bring home to your mind that in fact you do love your Saviour, that you do hate sin, that you do hate your sinful nature, that you have put aside the present world. Thus you will have an evidence (to a certain point) that you are not using mere words. It is easy to make professions, easy to say fine things in speech or in writing, easy to astonish men with truths which they do not know, and sentiments which rise above human nature. "But thou, O servant of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." Let not your words run on; force every one of them into action as it goes, and thus, cleansing yourself from all pollution of

[1] Psalm lxxiii. 14. [2] 1 Cor. ix. 27.

the flesh and spirit, perfect holiness in the fear of God. In dreams we sometimes move our arms to see if we are awake or not, and so we are awakened. This is the way to keep your heart awake also. Try yourself daily in little deeds, to prove that your faith is more than a deceit.

I am aware all this is a hard doctrine; hard to those even who assent to it, and can describe it most accurately. There are such imperfections, such inconsistencies in the heart and life of even the better sort of men, that continual repentance must ever go hand in hand with our endeavours to obey. Much we need the grace of Christ's blood to wash us from the guilt we daily incur; much need we the aid of His promised Spirit! And surely He will grant all the riches of His mercy to His true servants; but as surely He will vouchsafe to none of us the power to believe in Him, and the blessedness of being one with Him, who are not as earnest in obeying Him as if salvation depended on themselves.

SERMON VI.

The Spiritual Mind.

"*The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.*"—1 Cor. iv. 20.

HOW are we the better for being members of the Christian Church? This is a question which has ever claims on our attention; but it is right from time to time to examine our hearts with more than usual care, to try them by the standard of that divinely enlightened temper in the Church, and in the Saints, the work of the Holy Ghost, called by St. Paul "the spirit." I ask then, how are we the better for being Christ's disciples? what reason have we for thinking that our lives are very different from what they would have been if we had been heathens? Have we, in the words of the text, received the kingdom of God in word or in power? I will make some remarks in explanation of this question, which may (through God's grace) assist you, my Brethren, in answering it.

1. Now first, if we would form a just notion how far we are influenced by the power of the Gospel, we must evidently put aside every thing which we do merely in imitation of others, and not from religious principle.

Not that we can actually separate our good words and works into two classes, and say, what is done from faith, and what is done only by accident, and in a random way; but without being able to draw the line, it is quite evident that so very much of our apparent obedience to God arises from mere obedience to the world and its fashions; or rather, that it is so difficult to say what *is* done in the spirit of faith, as to lead us, on reflection, to be very much dissatisfied with ourselves, and quite out of conceit with our past lives. Let a person merely reflect on the number and variety of bad or foolish thoughts which he suffers, and dwells on in private, which he would be ashamed to put into words, and he will at once see, how very poor a test his outward demeanour in life is of his real holiness in the sight of God. Or again, let him consider the number of times he has attended public worship as a matter of course because others do, and without seriousness of mind; or the number of times he has found himself unequal to temptations when they came, which beforehand he and others made light of in conversation, blaming those perhaps who had been overcome by them, and he must own that his outward conduct shapes itself unconsciously by the manners of those with whom he lives, being acted upon by external impulses, apart from any right influence proceeding from the heart. Now, when I say this, am I condemning all that we do without thinking expressly of the duty of obedience at the *very time* we are doing it? Far from it; a religious man, in proportion as obedience becomes more and more easy to him, *will* doubtless do his duty unconsciously. It will

be *natural* to him to obey, and therefore he will *do* it *naturally*, i. e. without effort or deliberation. It is difficult things which we are obliged to think about before doing them. When we have mastered our hearts in any matter (it is true) we no more think of the duty while we obey, than we think how to walk when we walk, or by what rules to exercise any art which we have thoroughly acquired. *Separate acts* of faith aid us only while we are *unstable*. As we get strength, but one extended act of faith (so to call it) influences us all through the day, and our whole day is but one act of obedience also. Then there is no minute distribution of our faith among our particular deeds. Our will runs parallel to God's will. This is the very privilege of confirmed Christians; and it is comparatively but a sordid way of serving God, to be thinking when we do a deed, "if I do not do this, I shall risk my salvation; or, if I do it, I have a chance of being saved;"—*comparatively* a grovelling way, for it is the best, the only way for sinners such as we are, to *begin* to serve God in. Still as we grow in grace, we throw away childish things; then we are able to stand upright like grown men, without the props and aids which our infancy required. This is the noble manner of serving God, to do good without thinking about it, without any calculation or reasoning, from love of the good, and hatred of the evil;—though cautiously and with prayer and watching, yet so generously, that if we were suddenly asked why we so act, we could only reply "because it is our way," or "because Christ so acted;" so spontaneously as not to know so much that we *are* doing right, as that we

are *not* doing wrong; I mean, with more of instinctive fear of sinning, than of minute and careful appreciation of the *degrees* of our obedience. Hence it is that the best men are ever the most humble; as for other reasons, so especially because they *are accustomed* to be religious. They surprise *others*, but not themselves; they surprise others at their very calmness and freedom from thought about themselves. This is to have a great mind, to have within us that "princely heart of innocence[1]" of which David speaks. Common men see God at a distance; in their attempts to be religious they feebly guide themselves as by a distant light, and are obliged to calculate and search about for the path. But the long practised Christian, who, through God's mercy, has brought God's presence near to him, the elect of God, in whom the Blessed Spirit dwells, he does not look out of doors for the traces of God; he is moved by God dwelling in him, and needs not but act on instinct. I do not say there is any man altogether such, for this is an angelic life; but it is the state of mind to which vigorous prayer and watching tend.

How different is this high obedience from that random unawares way of doing right, which to so many men seems to constitute a religious life! The excellent obedience I have been describing is obedience *on habit.* Now the obedience I condemn as untrue, may be called obedience *on custom.* The one is of the heart, the other of the lips; the one is in power, the other in word; the one cannot be acquired without much and constant vigilance, generally not without much pain and trouble;

[1] *Christian Year*, Sixth Sunday after Trinity.

the other is the result of a mere passive imitation of those whom we fall in with. Why need I describe what every man's experience bears witness to? Why do children learn their mother tongue, and not a foreign language? Do they think about it? Are they better or worse for acquiring one language and not another? Their character, of course, is just what it would have been otherwise. How then are we better or worse, if we have but in the same passive way admitted into our minds certain religious opinions; and have but accustomed ourselves to the words and actions of the world around us? Supposing we had never heard of the Gospel, should we not do just what we do, even in a heathen country, were the manners of the place, from one cause or another, as decent and outwardly religious? This is the question we have to ask ourselves. And if we are conscious to ourselves that we are not greatly concerned about the question itself, and have no fears worth mentioning of being in the wrong, and no anxiety to find what is right, is it not evident that we are living to the world, not to God, and that whatever virtue we may actually have, still the Gospel of Christ has come to us not in power, but in word only?

I have now suggested one subject for consideration concerning our reception of the kingdom of God; viz. to inquire whether we have received it more than *externally;* but,

2. I will go on to affirm that we may have received it in a higher sense than in word merely, and yet in no real sense in *power;* in other words, that our obedience may be in some sort religious, and yet hardly deserve the

title of Christian. This may be at first sight a startling assertion. It may seem to some of us as if there were no difference between being religious and being Christian; and that to insist on a difference is to perplex people. But listen to me. Do you not think it possible for men to do their duty, i. e. be religious, in a heathen country? Doubtless it is. St. Peter says, that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him [1]. Now are such persons, therefore, Christians? Certainly *not*. It would seem, then, it *is* possible to fear God and work righteousness, yet without being Christians; for (if we would know the truth of it) to be a Christian is to do this, and to do *much more* than this. Here, then, is a fresh subject for self-examination. Is it not the way of men to dwell with satisfaction on their good deeds, particularly when, for some reason or other, their conscience smites them? Or when they are led to the consideration of death, then they begin to turn in their minds how they shall acquit themselves before the judgment-seat. And then it is they feel a relief in being able to detect, in their past lives, any deeds which may be regarded in any sense religious. You may hear some persons comforting themselves that they never harmed any one; and that they have not given in to an openly profligate and riotous life. Others are able to say more; they can speak of their honesty, their industry, or their general conscientiousness. We will say they have taken good care of their families; they have never defrauded or deceived any one; and they have a good name in the world; nay, they have in one sense lived in the fear of

[1] Acts x. 3.

God. I will grant them this and more; yet possibly they are not altogether Christians in their obedience. I will grant that these virtuous and religious deeds are really fruits of faith, not external merely, done without thought, but proceeding from the heart. I will grant they are really praiseworthy, and, when a man from want of opportunity knows no more, really acceptable to God; yet they determine nothing about his having received the Gospel of Christ in power. Why? for the simple reason that they are *not enough*. A Christian's faith and obedience is *built* on all this, but is only built on it. It is not the same as it. To be Christians, surely it is not enough to be that which we are enjoined to be, and must be, even without Christ; not enough to be no better than good heathens; not enough to be, in some slight measure, just, honest, temperate, and religious. We must indeed be just, honest, temperate, and religious, before we can rise to Christian graces, and to *be* practised in justice and the like virtues is the way, the ordinary way, in which we receive the fulness of the kingdom of God; and, doubtless, any man who despises those who try to practise them (I mean conscientious men, who notwithstanding have not yet clearly seen and welcomed the Gospel system), and slightingly calls them "mere moral men" in disparagement, such a man knows not what spirit he is of, and had best take heed how he speaks against the workings of the inscrutable Spirit of God. I am not wishing to frighten these imperfect Christians, but to lead them on; to open their minds to the greatness of the work before them, to dissipate the meagre and carnal views in which the Gospel has come

to them, to warn them that they must never be contented with themselves, or stand still and relax their efforts, but must go on *unto perfection;* that till they are much more than they are at present, they have received the kingdom of God in word, not in power; that they are not spiritual men, and can have no comfortable sense of Christ's presence in their souls; for to whom much is given, of him is much required.

What is it, then, that they lack? I will read several passages of Scripture which will make it plain. St. Paul says, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Again: "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." "The love of Christ constraineth us." "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye; and above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body, and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts." Lastly, our Saviour's own memorable words, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me[1]." Now it is

[1] 2 Cor. v. 14. 17. Gal. ii. 20. Col. iii. 12—16. Gal. iv. 6. Luke ix. 23.

plain that this is a very different mode of obedience from any which natural reason and conscience tell us of;—different, *not in its nature,* but *in its excellence and peculiarity.* It is much more than honesty, justice, and temperance; and *this* is to be a Christian. Observe in what respect it is different from that lower degree of religion which we may possess without entering into the mind of the Gospel. First of all in its faith; which is placed, not simply in God, but in God as manifested in Christ, according to His own words, "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me [1]." Next, we must adore Christ as our Lord and Master, and love Him as our most gracious Redeemer. We must have a deep sense of our guilt, and of the difficulty of securing heaven; we must live as in His presence, daily pleading His cross and passion, thinking of His holy commandments, imitating His sinless pattern, and depending on the gracious aids of His Spirit; that we may really and truly be servants of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in whose name we were baptized. Further, we must, for His sake, aim at a noble and unusual strictness of life, perfecting holiness in His fear, destroying our sins, mastering our whole soul, and bringing it into captivity to His law, denying ourselves lawful things, in order to do Him service, exercising a profound humility, and an unbounded, never-failing love, giving away much of our substance in religious and charitable works, and discountenancing and shunning irreligious men. This is to be a Christian; a gift easily described, and in a few words, but attainable only with fear and much trembling;

[1] John xiv. 1.

promised, indeed, and in a measure accorded at once to every one who asks for it, but not secured till after many years, and never in this life fully realized. But be sure of this, that every one of us, who has had the opportunities of instruction and sufficient time, and yet does not in some good measure possess it, every one, who, when death comes, has not gained his portion of that gift which it requires a course of years to gain, and which he might have gained, is in a peril so great and fearful, that I do not like to speak about it. As to the notion of a partial and ordinary fulfilment of the duties of honesty, industry, sobriety, and kindness, "availing[1]" him, it has no Scriptural encouragement. We must stand or fall by another and higher rule. We must have become what St. Paul calls "new creatures[2];" that is, we must have lived and worshipped God as the redeemed of Jesus Christ, in all faith and humbleness of mind, in reverence towards His word and ordinances, in thankfulness, in resignation, in mercifulness, gentleness, purity, patience, and love.

Now, considering the obligation of obedience which lies upon us Christians, in these two respects, first, as contrasted with a mere outward and nominal profession, and next contrasted with that more ordinary obedience which is required of those even who have not the Gospel, how evident is it that we are far from the kingdom of God! Let each in his own conscience apply this to himself. I will grant he has *some* real Christian principle in his heart; but I wish him to observe *how little* that is likely to be. Here is a thought not to keep us

[1] Gal. vi. 15.

[2] Gal. vi. 15.

from rejoicing in the Lord Christ, but to make us "rejoice with trembling[1]," wait diligently on God, pray Him earnestly to teach us more of our duty, and to impress the love of it on our hearts, to enable us to obey both in that free spirit, which can act right without reasoning and calculation, and yet with the caution of those who know their salvation depends on obedience in little things, from love of the truth as manifested in Him who is the Living Truth come upon earth, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life[2]."

With others we have no concern; we do not know what their opportunities are. There may be thousands in this populous land who never had the means of hearing Christ's voice fully, and in whom virtues short of evangelical will hereafter be accepted as the fruit of faith. Nor can we know the *hearts* of *any* men, or tell what is the degree in which they have improved their talents. It is enough to keep to ourselves. We dwell in the full light of the Gospel, and the full grace of the Sacraments. We ought to have the holiness of Apostles. There is no reason except our own wilful corruption, that we are not by this time walking in the steps of St. Paul or St. John, and following them as they followed Christ. What a thought is this! Do not cast it from you, my brethren, but take it to your homes, and may God give you grace to profit by it!

[1] Ps. ii. 11. [2] John xiv. 6.

SERMON VII.

Sins of Ignorance and Weakness.

"*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*"—HEB. x. 22.

AMONG the reasons which may be assigned for the observance of prayer at stated times, there is one which is very obvious, and yet perhaps is not so carefully remembered and acted upon as it should be. I mean the necessity of sinners cleansing themselves from time to time of the ever-accumulating guilt which loads their consciences. We are ever sinning; and though Christ has died once for all to release us from our penalty, yet we are not pardoned once for all, but according as, and whenever each of us supplicates for the gift. By the prayer of faith we appropriate it; but only for the time, not for ever. Guilt is again contracted, and must be again repented of and washed away. We cannot by one act of faith establish ourselves for ever after in the favour of God. It is going beyond His will to be impatient for a final acquittal, when we are bid ask only for our *daily* bread. We

are still so far in the condition of the Israelites; and though we do not offer sacrifice, or observe the literal washings of the Law, yet we still require the periodical renewal of those blessings which were formerly conveyed in their degree by the Mosaic rites; and though we gain far more excellent gifts from God than the Jews did, and by more spiritual ordinances, yet means of approaching Him we still need, and continual means to keep us in the justification in which baptism first placed us. Of this the text reminds us. It is addressed to Christians, to the regenerate; yet so far from their regeneration having cleansed them once for all, they are bid ever to sprinkle the blood of Christ upon their consciences, and renew (as it were) their baptism, and so continually appear before the presence of Almighty God.

Let us now endeavour to realize a truth, which few of us will be disposed to dispute as far as words go.

1. First consider our present condition, as shown us in Scripture. Christ has not changed this, though He has died; it is as it was from the beginning,—I mean our actual state as men. We have Adam's nature in the same sense as if redemption had not come to the world. It *has* come to all the world, but the world is not changed thereby as a whole,—that change is not a work done and over in Christ. We are changed *one by one;* the race of man is what it ever was, guilty;—what it was before Christ came; with the same evil passions, the same slavish will. The history of redemption, if it is to be effectual, must begin from the beginning with every individual of us, and be carried on through

our own life. It is not a work done ages before we were born. We cannot profit by the work of a Saviour, though He be the Blessed Son of God, so as to be saved thereby without our own working; for we are moral agents, we have a will of our own, and Christ must be formed in us, and turn us from darkness to light, if God's gracious purpose, fulfilled upon the cross, is to be in our case more than a name, an abused, wasted privilege. Thus the world, viewed as in God's sight, can never become wiser or more enlightened than it has been. We cannot mount upon the labours of our forefathers. We have the same nature that man ever had, and we must begin from the point man ever began from, and work out our salvation in the same slow, persevering manner.

(1.) When this is borne in mind, how important the Jewish Law becomes to us Christians! important in itself, over and above all references contained in it to that Gospel which it introduced. To this day it fulfils its original purpose of impressing upon man his great guilt and feebleness. Those legal sacrifices and purifications which are now all done away, are still evidence to us of a fact which the Gospel has not annulled,—our corruption. Let no one lightly pass over the Book of Leviticus, and say it only contains the ceremonial of a national law. Let no one study it merely with a critic's eye, satisfied with connecting it in a nicely arranged system with the Gospel, as though it contained prophecy only. No; it speaks to us. Are we better than the Jews? is our nature less unbelieving, sensual, or proud, than theirs? Surely man is at all

times the same being, as even the philosophers tell us. And if so, that minute ceremonial of the Law presents us with a picture of *our* daily life. It impressively testifies to our continual sinning, by suggesting that an expiation is needful in all the most trivial circumstances of our conduct; and that it is at our peril if we go on carelessly and thoughtlessly, trusting to our having been once accepted,—whether in baptism,—or (as we think) at a certain season of repentance, or (as we may fancy) at the very time of the death of Christ (as if then the whole race of man were really and at once pardoned and exalted),—or (worse still) if we profanely doubt that man has ever fallen under a curse, and trust idly in the mercy of God, without a feeling of the true misery and infinite danger of sin.

Consider the ceremony observed on the great day of atonement, and you will see what was the sinfulness of the Israelites, and therefore of all mankind, in God's sight. The High Priest was taken to represent the holiest person of the whole world. The nation itself was holy above the rest of the world; from it a holy tribe was selected; from the holy tribe, a holy family; and from that family, a holy person. This was the High Priest, who was thus set apart as the choice specimen of the whole human race; yet even he was not allowed, under pain of death, to approach even the mercy-seat of God, except once a year: nor then in his splendid robes, nor without sacrifices for the sins of himself and the people, the blood of which he carried with him into the holy place.

Or consider the sacrifices necessary according to the

Law for sins of ignorance[1]; or again, for the mere touching any thing which the Law pronounced unclean, or for bodily disease[2], and hence learn how sinful our ordinary thoughts and deeds must be, represented to us as they are by these outward ceremonial transgressions. Not even their thanksgiving might the Israelites offer without an offering of blood to cleanse it; for our corruption is not merely in this act or that, but in our *nature*.

(2.) Next, to pass from the Jewish law, you will observe that God tells us expressly in the history of the fall of Adam, what the legal ceremonies implied; that it *is* our very nature which is sinful. Herein is the importance of the doctrine of original sin. It is very humbling, and as such the only true introduction to the preaching of the Gospel. Men can without trouble be brought to confess that they sin, i. e. that they commit sins. They know well enough they are not perfect; nay, that they do nothing in the best manner. But they do not like to be told that the race from which they proceed is degenerate. Even the indolent have pride here. They think they *can* do their duty, *only do not choose to do it;* they like to believe (though strangely indeed, for they condemn themselves while they believe it), they like to believe that they do not want assistance. A man must be far gone in degradation, and has lost even that false independence of mind which is often a substitute for real religion in leading to exertion, who, while living in sin, steadily and contentedly holds the opinion that he is born *for* sin. And much more do the

[1] Levit. v. [2] Levit. v. 2. 6; xiv. 1—32.

industrious and active dislike to have it forced upon their minds, that, do what they will, they have the taint of corruption about all their doings and imaginings. We know how ashamed men are of being low born, or discreditably connected. This is the sort of shame forced upon every son of Adam. "Thy first father hath sinned:" this is the legend on our forehead which even the sign of the Cross does no more than blot out, leaving the mark of it. This is our shame; but I notice it here, not so much as a humbling thought, as with a view of pressing upon your consciences the necessity of appearing before God at stated seasons, in order to put aside the continually-renewed guilt of your nature. Who will dare go on day after day in neglect of earnest prayer, and the Holy Communion, while each day brings its own fearful burden, coming as if spontaneously, springing from our very nature, but not got rid of without deliberate and direct acts of faith in the Great Sacrifice which has been set forth for its removal?

(3.) Further, look into your own souls, my brethren, and see if you cannot discern some part of the truth of the Scripture statement, which I have been trying to set before you. Recollect the bad thoughts of various kinds which come into your minds like darts; for these will be some evidence to you of the pollution and odiousness of your nature. True, they proceed from your adversary, the Devil; and the very circumstance of your experiencing them is in itself no proof of your being sinful, for even the Son of God, your Saviour, suffered from the temptation of them. But you will scarcely deny that they are received by you so freely and heartily,

as to show that Satan tempts you through your nature, not against it. Again, let them be ever so external in their first coming, do you not make them your own? Do you not detain them? or do you impatiently and indignantly shake them off? Even if you reject them, still do they not answer Satan's purpose in inflaming your mind at the instant, and so evidence that the matter of which it is composed is corruptible? Do you not, for instance, dwell on the thought of wealth and splendour till you covet these temporal blessings? or do you not suffer yourselves, though for a while, to be envious, or discontented, or angry, or vain, or impure, or proud? Ah! who can estimate the pollution hence, of one single day; the pollution of touching merely that dead body of sin which we put off indeed at our baptism, but which is tied about us while we live here, and is the means of our Enemy's assaults upon us! The taint of death is upon us, and surely we shall be stifled by the encompassing plague, unless God from day to day vouchsafes to make us clean.

2. Again, reflect on the *habits* of sin which we superadded to our evil nature before we turned to God. Here is another source of continual defilement. Instead of checking the bad elements within us, perhaps we indulged them for years; and they truly had their fruit unto death. Then Adam's sin increased, and multiplied itself within us; there was a change, but it was for the worse, not for the better; and the new nature we gained, far from being spiritual, was twofold more the child of hell than that with which we were born. So when, at length, we turned back into a better course, what a com-

plicated work lay before us, to unmake ourselves! And however long we have laboured at it, still how much unconscious, unavoidable sin, the result of past transgression, is thrown out from our hearts day by day in the energy of our thinking and acting! Thus, through the sins of our youth, the power of the flesh is exerted against us, as a second creative principle of evil, aiding the malice of the Devil; Satan from without,—and our hearts from within, not passive merely and kindled by temptation, but *devising* evil, and speaking hard things against God with articulate voice, whether we will or not! Thus do past years rise up against us in present offences; gross inconsistencies show themselves in our character; and much need have we continually to implore God to forgive us our past transgressions, which still live in spite of our repentance, and act of themselves vigorously against our better mind, feebly influenced by that younger principle of faith, by which we fight against them.

3. Further, consider how many sins are involved in our obedience, I may say from the mere necessity of the case; that is, from not having that more vigorous and clear-sighted faith which would enable us accurately to discern and closely to follow the way of life. The case of the Jews will exemplify what I mean. There were points of God's perfect Law which were not urged upon their acceptance, because it was foreseen that they would not be able to receive them as they really should be received, or to bring them home practically to their minds, and obey them simply and truly. We, Christians, with the same evil hearts as the Jews had, and most of

us as unformed in holy practice, have, nevertheless, a perfect Law. We are bound to take and use all the precepts of the New Testament, though it stands to reason that many of them are, in matter of fact, quite above the comprehension of most of us. I am speaking of the actual state of the case, and will not go aside to ask why, or under what circumstances God was pleased to change His mode of dealing with man. But so it is; the Minister of Christ has to teach His sinful people a perfect obedience, and does not know how to set about it, or how to insist on any precept, so as to secure it from being misunderstood and misapplied. He sees men are acting upon low motives and views, and finds it impossible to raise their minds all at once, however clear his statements of the Truth. He feels that their good deeds might be done in a much better manner. There are numberless small circumstances about their mode of doing things, which offend him, as implying poverty of faith, superstition, and contracted carnal notions. He is obliged to leave them to themselves with the hope that they may improve generally, and outgrow their present feebleness; and is often perplexed whether to praise or blame them. So is it with all of us, Ministers as well as people; it is so with the most advanced of Christians while in the body, and God sees it. What a source of continual defilement is here; not an omission merely of what might be added to our obedience, but a cause of positive offence in the Eyes of Eternal Purity! Who is not displeased when a man attempts some great work which is above his powers? and is it an excuse for his miserable performance that

the work is above him? Now this is our case; we are bound to serve God with a perfect heart; an exalted work, a work for which our sins disable us. And when we attempt it, necessary as is our endeavour, how miserable must it appear in the eyes of the Angels! how pitiful our exhibition of ourselves; and, withal, how sinful! since did we love God more from the heart, and had we served Him from our youth up, it would not have been with us as it is. Thus our very calling, as creatures, and again as elect children of God, and freemen in the Gospel, is by our sinfulness made our shame; for it puts us upon duties, and again upon the use of privileges, which are above us. We attempt great things with the certainty of failing, and yet the necessity of attempting; and so *while* we attempt, need continual forgiveness for the *failure* of the attempt. We stand before God as the Israelites at the passover of Hezekiah, who *desired* to serve God according to the Law, but could not do so accurately from lack of knowledge; and we can but offer, through our Great High Priest, our sincerity and earnestness instead of exact obedience, as Hezekiah did for them. "The good Lord pardon every one, that *prepareth his heart* to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary[1];" not performing, that is, the full duties of his calling.

And if such be the deficiencies, even of the established Christian, in his ordinary state, how great must be those of the penitent, who has but lately begun the

[1] 2 Chron. xxx. 18, 19.

service of God? or of the young, who are still within the influence of some unbridled imagination, or some domineering passion? or of the heavily depressed spirit, whom Satan binds with the bonds of bodily ailment, or tosses to and fro in the tumult of doubt and indecision? Alas! how is their conscience defiled with the thoughts, nay the words of every hour! and how inexpressibly needful for them to relieve themselves of the evil that weighs upon their heart, by drawing near to God in full assurance of faith, and washing away their guilt in the Expiation which He has appointed!

What I have said is a call upon you, my brethren, in the first place, to daily private prayer. Next, it is a call upon you to join the public services of the Church, not only once a week, but whenever you have the opportunity; knowing well that your Redeemer is especially present where two or three are gathered together. And, further, it is an especial call upon you to attend upon the celebration of the Lord's Supper, in which blessed ordinance we really and truly gain that spiritual life which is the object of our daily prayers. The Body and Blood of Christ give power and efficacy to our daily faith and repentance. Take this view of the Lord's Supper; as the appointed means of obtaining the great blessings you need. The daily prayers of the Christian do but spring from, and are referred back to, his attendance on it. Christ died once, long since: by communicating in His Sacrament, you renew the Lord's death; you bring into the midst of you that Sacrifice which took away the sins of the world; you appropriate the benefit of it, while you eat it under the

elements of bread and wine. These outward signs are simply the means of an hidden grace. You do not expect to sustain your animal life without food; be but as rational in spiritual concerns as you are in temporal. Look upon the consecrated elements as *necessary*, under God's blessing, to your continual sanctification; approach them as the salvation of your souls. Why is it more strange that God should work through means for the health of the soul, than that He should ordain them for the preservation of bodily life, as He certainly has done? It is unbelief to think it matters not to your spiritual welfare whether you communicate or not. And it is worse than unbelief, it is utter insensibility and obduracy, not to discern the state of death and corruption into which, when left to yourselves, you are continually falling back. Rather thank God, that whereas you are sinners, instead of His leaving you the mere general promise of life through His Son, which is addressd to all men, He has allowed you to take that promise to yourselves one by one, and thus gives you a humble hope that He has chosen you out of the world unto salvation.

Lastly, I have all along spoken as addressing true Christians, who are walking in the narrow way, and have hope of heaven. But these are the "few." Are there none here present of the "many" who walk in the broad way, and have upon their heads all their sins, from their baptism upwards? Rather, is it not probable that there are persons in this congregation, who, though mixed with the people of God, are really unforgiven, and if they now died, would die in their sins?

First, let those who neglect the Holy Communion ask themselves whether this is not their condition; let them reflect whether among the signs by which it is given us to ascertain our state, there can be, to a man's own conscience, a more fearful one than this, that he is omitting what is appointed, as the ordinary means of his salvation. This is a plain test, about which no one can deceive himself. But next, let him have recourse to a more accurate search into his conscience; and ask himself whether (in the words of the text) he "draws near to God with a true heart," i. e. whether in spite of his prayers and religious services, there be not some secret, unresisted lusts within him, which make his devotion a mockery in the sight of God, and leave him in his sins; whether he be not in truth thoughtless, and religious only as far as his friends make him seem so,—or light-minded and shallow in his religion, being ignorant of the depths of his guilt, and resting presumptuously on his own innocence (as he thinks it) and God's mercy;—whether he be not set upon gain, obeying God only so far as *His* service does not interfere with the service of mammon;—whether he be not harsh, evil-tempered,—unforgiving, unpitiful, or high-minded,—self-confident, and secure;—or whether he be not fond of the fashions of this world, which pass away, desirous of the friendship of the great, and of sharing in the refinements of society;—or whether he be not given up to some engrossing pursuit, which indisposes him to the thought of his God and Saviour.

Any *one* deliberate habit of sin incapacitates a man for receiving the gifts of the Gospel. All such states of

mind as these are fearful symptoms of the *existence* of some such wilful sin in our hearts; and in proportion as we trace these symptoms in our conduct, so much we dread, lest we be reprobate.

Let us then approach God, all of us, confessing that we do not know ourselves; that we are more guilty than we can possibly understand, and can but timidly hope, not confidently determine, that we have true faith. Let us take comfort in our being still in a state of grace, though we have no certain pledge of salvation. Let us beg Him to enlighten us, and comfort us; to forgive us all our sins, teaching us those we do not see, and enabling us to overcome them.

SERMON VIII.

God's Commandments not Grievous.

"*This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous.*"—1 JOHN v. 3.

IT must ever be borne in mind, that it is a very great and arduous thing to attain to heaven. "Many are called, few are chosen." "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way." "Many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple[1]." On the other hand, it is evident to any one who reads the New Testament with attention, that Christ and His Apostles speak of a religious life as something easy, pleasant, and comfortable. Thus, in the words I have taken for my text:—"This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous." In like manner our Saviour says, "Come unto Me . . . . and I will give you rest . . . . My yoke is easy, and My burden is light[2]." Solomon, also, in the Old Testament, speaks

[1] Matt. xxii. 14; vii. 14. Luke xiii. 24; xiv. 26. [2] Matt. xi. 28—30.

in the same way of true wisdom :—" Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her. . . . . When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet[1]." Again, we read in the prophet Micah: " What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God[2]?" as if it were a little and an easy thing so to do.

Now I will attempt to show *how* it is that these apparently opposite declarations of Christ and His Prophets and Apostles are fulfilled to us. For it may be objected by inconsiderate persons that we are (if I may so express it) *hardly treated;* invited to come to Christ and receive His light yoke, promised an easy and happy life, the joy of a good conscience, the assurance of pardon, and the hope of Heaven; and then, on the other hand, when we actually come, as it were, rudely repulsed, frightened, reduced to despair by severe requisitions and evil forebodings. Such is the objection,—not which any *Christian* would bring forward; for we, my brethren, know too much of the love of our Master and only Saviour in dying for us, seriously to entertain for an instant any such complaint. We have at least faith enough for this (and it does not require a great deal), viz. to believe that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is not " yea and nay, but in Him is yea. For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us[3]." It is for the very reason that none of

[1] Prov. iii. 17—24. [2] Micah vi. 8. [3] 2 Cor. i. 19, 20.

us can seriously put the objection, that I allow myself to state it strongly; to urge it being in a Christian's judgment absurd, even more than it would be wicked. But though none of *us* really feel as an objection to the Gospel, this difference of view under which the Gospel is presented to us, or even as a difficulty, still it may be right (in order to our edification) that we should see how these two views of it are reconciled. We must understand *how* it is *both* severe *and* indulgent in its commands, and both arduous and easy in its obedience, in order that we may understand it at all. "His commandments are not grievous," says the text. How is this?—I will give one answer out of several which might be given.

Now it must be admitted, first of all, as matter of fact, that they *are* grievous to the great mass of Christians. I have no wish to disguise a fact which we do not need the Bible to inform us of, but which common experience attests. Doubtless even those common elementary duties, of which the prophet speaks, "doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God," are to most men *grievous*.

Accordingly, men of worldly minds, finding the true way of life unpleasant to walk in, have attempted to find out other and easier roads; and have been accustomed to argue, that there must be another way which suits them better than that which religious men walk in, for the very reason that Scripture declares that Christ's commandments are *not* grievous. I mean, you will meet with persons who say, "After all it is not to be supposed that a strict religious life is so necessary as is

told us in church; else how should any one be saved? nay, and Christ assures us His yoke is easy. Doubtless we shall fare well enough, though we are not so earnest in the observance of our duties as we might be; though we are not regular in our attendance at public worship; though we do not honour Christ's ministers and reverence His Church as much as some men do; though we do not labour to know God's will, to deny ourselves, and to live to His glory, as entirely as the strict letter of Scripture enjoins." Some men have gone so far as boldly to say, "God will not condemn a man merely for taking a little pleasure;" by which they mean, leading an irreligious and profligate life. And many there are who virtually maintain that we may live to the world, so that we do so decently, and yet live to God; arguing that this world's blessings are given us by God, and therefore may lawfully be used;—that to use lawfully is to use moderately and thankfully;—that it is wrong to take gloomy views, and right to be innocently cheerful, and so on; which is all very true thus stated, did they not apply it unfairly, and call that use of the world *moderate* and *innocent*, which the Apostles would call being *conformed* to the world, and serving mammon instead of God.

And thus, before showing you what is meant by Christ's commandments not being grievous, I have said what is *not* meant by it. It is *not* meant that Christ dispenses with strict religious obedience; the whole language of Scripture is against such a notion. "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in

the kingdom of heaven[1]." "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all[2]." Whatever is meant by Christ's yoke being easy, Christ does not encourage sin. And again, whatever is meant, still I repeat, as a matter of fact, most men find it *not* easy. So far must not be disputed. Now then let us proceed, in spite of this admission, to consider how He fulfils His engagements to us, that His ways are ways of pleasantness.

1. Now, supposing some superior promised you any gift in a particular way, and you did not follow his directions, would *he* have broken his promise, or you have voluntarily excluded yourselves from the advantage? Evidently you would have brought about your own loss; you might, indeed, think his offer not worth accepting, burdened (as it was) with a condition annexed to it, still you could not in any propriety say that *he* failed in his engagement. Now when Scripture promises us that its commandments shall be easy, it couples the promise with the injunction that we should seek God *early*. "I love them that love Me, and those that seek Me *early* shall find Me[3]." Again: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth[4]." These are Solomon's words; and if you require our Lord's own authority, attend to His direction about the children: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of *such* is the kingdom of God[5]." Youth is the time of His covenant with us, when He first gives us His Spirit;

[1] Matt. v. 19. [2] James ii. 10. [3] Prov. viii. 17.
[4] Eccles. xii. 1. [5] Mark x. 14.

first giving *then*, that we may *then* forthwith begin our return of obedience to Him; not then giving it that we may delay our thank-offering for twenty, thirty, or fifty years! Now it is obvious that obedience to God's commandments is ever easy, and almost without effort to those who begin to serve Him from the beginning of their days; whereas those who wait a while, find it grievous in proportion to their delay.

For consider how gently God leads us on in our early years, and how very gradually He opens upon us the complicated duties of life. A child at first has hardly any thing to do but to obey his parents; of God he knows just as much as they are able to tell him, and he is not equal to many thoughts either about Him or about the world. He is almost passive in their hands who gave him life; and, though he has those latent instincts about good and evil, truth and falsehood, which all men have, he does not know enough, he has not had experience enough from the contact of external objects, to elicit into form and action those innate principles of conscience, or to make himself conscious of the existence of them.

And while on the one hand his range of duty is very confined, observe how he is assisted in performing it. First, he has no bad habits to hinder the suggestions of his conscience: indolence, pride, ill-temper, do not then act as they afterwards act, when the mind has accustomed itself to disobedience, as stubborn, deep-seated impediments in the way of duty. To obey requires an effort, of course; but an effort like the bodily effort of the child's rising from the ground, when he has fallen

on it; not the effort of shaking off drowsy sleep; not the effort (far less) of violent bodily exertion in a time of sickness and long weakness: and the first effort made, obedience on a second trial will be easier than before, till at length it will be easier to obey than not to obey. A good habit will be formed, where otherwise a bad habit would have been formed. Thus the child, we are supposing, would begin to have a character; no longer influenced by every temptation to anger, discontent, fear, and obstinacy, in the same way as before; but with something of firm principle in his heart to repel them in a defensive way, as a shield repels darts. In the mean time the circle of his duties would enlarge; and, though for a time the issue of his trial would be doubtful to those who (as the Angels) could see it, yet, should he, as a child, consistently pursue this easy course for a few years, it may be, his ultimate salvation would be actually secured, and might be predicted by those who could see his heart, though he would not know it himself. Doubtless new trials would come on him; bad passions, which he had not formed a conception of, would assail him; but a soul thus born of God, in St. John's words, "sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not[1]." "His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God[2]." And so he would grow up to man's estate, his duties at length attaining their full range, and his soul being completed in all its parts for the due performance of them. This *might* be the blessed

[1] 1 John v. 18. [2] 1 John iii. 9.

condition of every one of us, did we but follow from infancy what we know to be right; and in Christ's early life (if we may dare to speak of Him in connexion with ourselves), it *was* fulfilled while He increased day by day sinlessly in wisdom as in stature, and in favour with God and man. But my present object of speaking of this gradual growth of holiness in the soul, is (not to show what we might be, had we the heart to obey God), but to show *how easy* obedience would in that case be to us; consisting, as it would, in no irksome ceremonies, no painful bodily discipline, but in the free-will offerings of the *heart*, of the heart which had been gradually, and by very slight occasional efforts, trained to love what God and our conscience approve.

Thus Christ's commandments, viewed *as He enjoins them on us*, are not grievous. They *would* be grievous if put upon us all at once; but they are *not* heaped on us, according to *His* order of dispensing them, which goes upon an harmonious and considerate plan; by little and little, first one duty, then another, then both, and so on. Moreover, they come upon us, while the safeguard of virtuous principle is forming naturally and gradually in our minds by our very deeds of obedience, and is following them as their reward. Now, if men will not take their duties in Christ's order, but are determined to delay obedience, with the intention of setting about their duty some day or other, and then making up for past time, is it wonderful that they find it grievous and difficult to perform? that they are overwhelmed with the arrears of their great work, that they are entangled and stumble amid the intricacies of the Divine system which has

progressively enlarged upon them? And is Christ under obligation to stop that system, to recast His providence, to take these men out of their due place in the Church, to save them from the wheels that are crushing them, and to put them back again into some simple and more childish state of trial, where (though they cannot have less to unlearn) they, at least, may for a time have less to do?

2. All this being granted, it still may be objected, since (as I have allowed) the commandments of God *are* grievous to the generality of men, where is the use of saying what men *ought* to be, when we know what they *are?* and how is it fulfilling a promise that His commandments *shall not* be grievous, by informing us that they *ought not* to be? It is one thing to say that the Law is in itself holy, just, and good, and quite a different thing to declare it is not *grievous* to sinful man.

In answering this question, I fully admit that our Saviour spoke of man *as he is*, as a sinner, when He said His yoke should be easy to him. Certainly, He came not to call righteous men, but sinners. Doubtless we are in a very different state from that of Adam before his fall; and doubtless, in spite of this, St. John says that even to fallen man His commandments are not grievous. On the other hand, I grant, that if man *cannot* obey God, obedience *must* be grievous; and I grant too (of course) that man by nature *cannot* obey God. But observe, nothing has here been said, nor by St. John in the text, of man as by nature born in sin; but of man as a *child of grace*, as Christ's purchased possession, who goes *before* us with His mercy, puts the

blessing first, and then adds the command; regenerates us, and *then* bids us obey. Christ bids us do nothing that we cannot do. He repairs the fault of our nature, even before it manifests itself in act. He cleanses us from original sin, and rescues us from the wrath of God by the sacrament of baptism. He gives us the gift of His Spirit, and then He says, "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" and is *this* grievous?

When, then, men allege their bad nature as an excuse for their *dislike of* God's commandments, if, indeed, they are heathens, let them be heard, and an answer may be given to them even as such. But with heathens we are not now concerned. These men make their complaint as *Christians*, and as Christians they are most unreasonable in making it; God having provided a remedy for their natural incapacity in the gift of His Spirit. Hear St. Paul's words; "If through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. . . . . Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord[1]."

And there *are* persons, let it never be forgotten, who have so followed God's leading providence from their youth up, that to them His commandments not only are not grievous, but never have been: and that there *are* such, is the condemnation of all who are not such.

[1] Rom. v. 15—21.

They have been brought up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord[1];" and they now live in the love and "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding[2]." Such are they whom our Saviour speaks of, as "just persons, which need no repentance[3]." Not that they will give that account of themselves, for they are full well conscious in their own hearts of sins innumerable, and habitual infirmity. Still, in spite of stumblings and falls in their spiritual course, they have on the whole persevered. As children they served God on the whole; they disobeyed, but they recovered their lost ground; they sought God and were accepted. Perhaps their young faith gave way for a time altogether; but even then they contrived with keen repentance, and strong disgust at sin, and earnest prayers, to make up for lost time, and keep pace with the course of God's providence. Thus they have *walked* with God, not indeed step by step with Him; never before Him, often loitering, stumbling, falling to sleep; yet in turn starting and "*making haste* to keep His commandments," "running, and prolonging not the time." Thus they proceed, not, however, of themselves, but as upheld by His right hand, and guiding their steps by His Word; and though they have nothing to boast of, and know their own unworthiness, still they are witnesses of Christ to all men, as showing what man *can* become, and what all Christians ought to be; and at the last day, being found meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, they 'condemn the world," as Noah did, and become "heirs

[1] Eph. vi. 4. [2] Phil. iv. 7. [3] Luke xv. 7.

of the righteousness which is by faith," according to the saying, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith[1]."

And now to what do the remarks I have been making tend, but to this?—to humble every one of us. For, however faithfully we have obeyed God, and however early we began to do so, surely we might have begun sooner than we did, and might have served Him more heartily. We cannot but be conscious of this. Individuals among us may be more or less guilty, as the case may be; but the best and worst among us here assembled, may well unite themselves together so far as this, to confess they have "erred and strayed from God's ways like lost sheep," "have followed *too much* the devices and desires of their own hearts," have "no health" in themselves as being "miserable offenders." Some of us may be nearer Heaven, some further from it; some may have a good hope of salvation, and others, (God forbid! but it may be), others *no* present hope. Still let us unite now as one body in confessing (to the better part of us such confession will be the more welcome, and to the worst it is the more needful), in confessing ourselves sinners, deserving God's anger, and having no hope except "according to His promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord." He who first regenerated us and then gave His commandments, and then was so ungratefully deserted by us, He again it is that must pardon and quicken us after our accumulated guilt, if we are to be pardoned. Let us then trace back

[1] 1 John v. 4.

in memory (as far as we can) our early years; what we were when five years old, when ten, when fifteen, when twenty! what our state would have been as far as we can guess it, had God taken us to our account at any age before the present. I will not ask how it would go with us, were we *now* taken; we will suppose the best.

Let each of us (I say) reflect upon his own most gross and persevering neglect of God at various seasons of his past life. How considerate He has been to us! How did He shield us from temptation! how did He open His will gradually upon us, as we might be able to bear it[1]! how has He done all things well, so that the spiritual work might go on calmly, safely, surely! How did He lead us on, duty by duty, as if step by step upwards, by the easy rounds of that ladder whose top reaches to Heaven? Yet how did we thrust ourselves into temptation! how did we refuse to come to Him that we might have life! how did we daringly sin against light! And what was the consequence? that our work grew beyond our strength; or rather that our strength grew less as our duties increased; till at length we gave up obedience in despair. And yet then He still tarried and was merciful unto us; He turned and looked upon us to bring us into repentance; and we for a while were moved. Yet, even then our wayward hearts could not keep up to their own resolves: letting go again the heat which Christ gave them, as if made of stone, and not of living flesh. What could have been done more to His vineyard, that He hath not done in it[2]? "O My people

[1] 1 Cor. x. 13. [2] Isa. v. 4.

(He seems to say to us), what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against Me. I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; . . . . what doth the Lord require of thee, but justice, mercy, and humbleness of mind[1]?" He hath showed us what is good. He has borne and carried us in His bosom, "lest at any time we should dash our foot against a stone[2]." He shed His Holy Spirit upon us that we might love Him. And "*this* is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous." Why, then, have they been grievous to us? Why have we erred from His ways, and hardened our hearts from His fear? Why do we this day stand ashamed, yea, even confounded, because we bear the reproach of our youth?

Let us then turn to the Lord, while yet we may. Difficult it will be in proportion to the distance we have departed from Him. Since every one might have done more than he has done, every one has suffered losses he never can make up. We have made His commands grievous to us: we must bear it; let us not attempt to explain them away because they *are* grievous. We never can wash out the stains of sin. God may forgive, but the sin has had its work, and its memento is set up in the soul. God sees it there. Earnest obedience and prayer will gradually remove it. Still, what miserable loss of time is it, in our brief life, to be merely undoing (as has become necessary) the evil which we have done, instead of going on to perfection! If by God's grace we

[1] Micah vi. 3—8. [2] Ps. xci. 12.

shall be able in a measure to sanctify ourselves in spite of our former sins, yet how much more *should* we have attained, had we always been engaged in His service!

These are bitter and humbling thoughts, but they are good thoughts if they lead us to repentance. And this leads me to one more observation, with which I conclude.

If any one who hears me is at present moved by what I have said, and feels the remorse and shame of a bad conscience, and forms any sudden good resolution, let him take heed to follow it up at once by *acting upon* it. I earnestly beseech him so to do. For this reason;—because if he does not, he is beginning a habit of inattention and insensibility. God *moves* us in order to make the beginning of duty *easy*. If we do not attend, He *ceases* to move us. Any of you, my brethren, who will not take advantage of this considerate providence, if you will not turn to God now with a *warm* heart, you will hereafter be obliged to do so (if you do so at all) *with a cold heart*;—which is much harder. God keep you from this!

SERMON IX.

The Religious use of Excited Feelings.

"*The man out of whom the devils were departed besought Him that he might be with Him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done unto thee.*"—LUKE viii. 38, 39.

IT was very natural in the man whom our Lord had set free from this dreadful visitation, to wish to continue with Him. Doubtless his mind was transported with joy and gratitude; whatever consciousness he might possess of his real wretchedness while the devils tormented him, now at least, on recovering his reason, he would understand that he had been in a very miserable state, and he would feel all the lightness of spirits and activity of mind, which attend any release from suffering or constraint. Under these circumstances he would imagine himself to be in a new world; he had found deliverance; and what was more, a Deliverer too, who stood before him. And whether from a wish to be ever in His Divine presence, ministering to Him, or from a fear lest Satan would return, nay, with sevenfold power, did he lose sight of Christ, or from an undefined notion that all his duties and hopes were now changed, that his former

pursuits were unworthy of him, and that he must follow up some great undertakings with the new ardour he felt glowing within him;—from one or other, or all of these feelings combined, he besought our Lord that he might be with Him. Christ imposed this attendance as a command on others; He bade, for instance, the young ruler follow Him; but He gives opposite commands, according to our tempers and likings; He thwarts us, that He may try our faith. In the case before us He suffered not, what at other times He had bidden. "Return to thine own house," He said, or as it is in St. Mark's Gospel, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee[1]." He directed the current of his newly-awakened feelings into another channel; as if He said, "Lovest thou Me? this do; return home to your old occupations and pursuits. You did them ill before, you lived to the world; do them well now, live to Me. Do your duties, little as well as great, heartily for My sake; go among your friends; show them what God hath done for thee; be an example to them, and teach them[2]." And further, as He said on another occasion, "Show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them[3]"—show forth that greater light and truer love which you now possess in a conscientious, consistent obedience to all the ordinances and rites of your religion.

Now from this account of the restored demoniac, his request, and our Lord's denial of it, a lesson may be

[1] Mark v. 19. [2] Col. iii. 17. [3] Matt. viii. 4.

drawn for the use of those who, having neglected religion in early youth, at length begin to have serious thoughts, try to repent, and wish to serve God better than hitherto, though they do not know how to set about it. We know that God's commandments are pleasant, and "rejoice the heart," if we accept them in the order and manner in which He puts them upon us; that Christ's yoke, as He has promised, is (on the whole) very easy, if we submit to it betimes; that the practice of religion is full of comfort to those who, being first baptized with the Spirit of grace, receive thankfully His influences as their minds open, inasmuch as they are gradually and almost without sensible effort on their part, imbued in all their heart, soul, and strength, with that true heavenly life which will last for ever.

But here the question meets us, "But what are those to do who *have* neglected to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and so have lost all claim on Christ's promise, that His yoke shall be easy, and His commandments not grievous?" I answer, that of course they must not be surprised if obedience is with them a laborious up-hill work all their days; nay, as having been "once enlightened, and partaken of the Holy Ghost" in baptism, they would have no right to complain even though "it were impossible for them to renew themselves again unto repentance." But God is more merciful than this just severity; merciful not only above our deservings, but even above His own promises. Even for those who have neglected Him when young, He has found (if they will avail themselves of it) some sort of remedy of the

difficulties in the way of obedience which they have brought upon themselves by sinning; and what this remedy is, and how it is to be used, I proceed to describe in connexion with the account in the text.

The help I speak of is the excited feeling with which repentance is at first attended. True it is, that all the passionate emotion, or fine sensibility, which ever man displayed, will never by itself make us change our ways, and do our duty. Impassioned thoughts, high aspirations, sublime imaginings, have no strength in them. They can no more make a man obey consistently, than they can move mountains. If any man truly repent, it must be in consequence, not of these, but of a settled conviction of his guilt, and a deliberate resolution to leave his sins and serve God. Conscience, and Reason in subjection to Conscience, *these* are those powerful instruments (under grace) which change a man. But you will observe, that though Conscience and Reason lead us to resolve on and to attempt a new life, they cannot at once make us *love* it. It is long practice and habit which make us love religion; and in the beginning, obedience, doubtless, is very grievous to habitual sinners. Here then is the use of those earnest, ardent feelings of which I just now spoke, and which attend on the first exercise of Conscience and Reason,—to take away from the *beginnings* of obedience its *grievousness*, to give us an impulse which may carry us over the first obstacles, and send us on our way rejoicing. Not as if all this excitement of mind were to last (which cannot be), but it will do its office in thus setting us off; and then will leave us to the more sober and higher comfort re-

sulting from that real *love* for religion, which obedience itself will have by that time begun to form in us, and will gradually go on to perfect.

Now it is well to understand this fully, for it is often mistaken. When sinners at length are led to think seriously, strong feelings generally precede or attend their reflections about themselves. Some book they have read, some conversation of a friend, some remarks they have heard made in church, or some occurrence or misfortune, rouses them. Or, on the other hand, if in any more calm and deliberate manner they have commenced their self-examination, yet in a little time the very view of their manifold sins, of their guilt, and of their heinous ingratitude to their God and Saviour, breaking upon them, and being new to them, strikes, and astonishes, and then agitates them. Here, then, let them know the *intention* of all this excitement of mind in the order of Divine providence. It will not continue; it arises from the novelty of the view presented to them. As they become accustomed to religious contemplations, it will wear away. It is not religion itself, though it is accidentally connected with it, and may be made a means of leading them into a sound religious course of life. It is graciously intended to be a set-off in their case against the first distastefulness and pain of doing their duty; it must be used as such, or it will be of no use at all, or worse than useless. My brethren, bear this in mind (and I may say this generally,—not confining myself to the excitement which attends repentance,—of all that natural emotion prompting us to do good, which we involuntarily feel on various occasions), it is given you in

order that you may find it easy to obey at starting. Therefore obey *promptly;* make use of it whilst it lasts; it waits for no man. Do you feel natural pity towards some case which reasonably demands your charity? or the impulse of generosity in a case where you are called to act a manly self-denying part? Whatever the emotion may be, whether these or any other, do not imagine you will always feel it. Whether you avail yourselves of it or not, still any how you will feel it less and less, and, as life goes on, at last you will not feel such sudden vehement excitement at all. But this is the difference between seizing or letting slip these opportunities;—if you avail yourselves of them for acting, and yield to the impulse so far as conscience tells you to do, you have made a leap (so to say) across a gulf, to which your ordinary strength is not equal; you will have secured the beginning of obedience, and the further steps in the course are (generally speaking) far easier than those which first determine its direction. And so, to return to the case of those who feel any accidental remorse for their sins violently exerting itself in their hearts, I say to them, Do not loiter; go home to your friends, and repent in *deeds* of righteousness and love; hasten to commit yourselves to certain definite *acts* of obedience. Doing is at a far greater distance from intending to do than you at first sight imagine. Join them together while you can; you will be depositing your good feelings into your heart itself by thus making them influence your conduct; and they will "spring up into fruit." This was the conduct of the conscience-stricken Corinthians, as described by St. Paul; who rejoiced

"not that they were made *sorry* (not that their feelings merely were moved), but that they sorrowed *to change of mind*. . . . For godly sorrow (he continues) worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death [1]."

But now let us ask, how do men usually conduct themselves in matter of fact, when under visitings of conscience for their past sinful lives? They are far from thus acting. They look upon the turbid zeal and feverish devotion which attend their repentance, not as in part the corrupt offspring of their own previously corrupt state of mind, and partly a gracious natural provision, only temporary, to encourage them to set about their reformation, but as the substance and real excellence of religion. They think that to be thus agitated is to be religious; they indulge themselves in these warm feelings for their own sake, resting in them as if they were then engaged in a religious exercise, and boasting of them as if they were an evidence of their own exalted spiritual state; not *using them* (the one only thing they ought to do), using them as an incitement to *deeds* of love, mercy, truth, meekness, holiness. After they have indulged this luxury of feeling for some time, the excitement of course ceases; they do not feel as they did before. This (I have said) might have been anticipated, but they do not understand it so. See then their unsatisfactory state. They have lost an opportunity of overcoming the first difficulties of active obedience, and so of fixing their conduct and character, which may

[1] 2 Cor. vii. 9, 10.

never occur again. This is one great misfortune; but more than this, what a perplexity they have involved themselves in! Their warmth of feeling is gradually dying away. Now they think that *in it* true religion consists; therefore they believe that they are losing their faith, and falling into sin again.

And this, alas! *is* too often the case; they *do* fall away, for they have no root in themselves. Having neglected to turn their feelings into principles by acting upon them, they have no inward strength to overcome the temptation to live as the world, which continually assails them. Their minds have been acted upon as water by the wind, which raises waves for a time, then ceasing, leaves the water to subside into its former stagnant state. The precious opportunity of improvement has been lost; "and the latter end is worse with them than the beginning [1]."

But let us suppose, that when they first detect this declension (as they consider it), they are alarmed, and look around for a means of recovering themselves. What do they do? Do they at once begin those practices of lowly obedience which alone can prove them to be Christ's at the last day? such as the government of their tempers, the regulation of their time, self-denying charity, truth-telling sobriety. Far from it; they despise this plain obedience to God as a mere unenlightened morality, as they call it, and they seek for potent stimulants to sustain their minds in that state of excitement which they have been taught to consider

[1] 2 Pet. ii. 20.

the essence of a religious life, and which they cannot produce by the means which before excited them. They have recourse to new doctrines, or follow strange teachers, in order that they may dream on in this their artificial devotion, and may avoid that conviction which is likely sooner or later to burst upon them, that emotion and passion are in our power indeed to repress, but not to *excite;* that there is a limit to the tumults and swellings of the heart, foster them as we will; and, when that time comes, the poor, mis-used soul is left exhausted and resourceless. Instances are not rare in the world of that fearful, ultimate state of hard-heartedness which then succeeds; when the miserable sinner believes indeed as the devils may, yet not even with the devils' trembling, but sins on without fear.

Others, again, there are, who, when their feelings fall off in strength and fervency, are led to despond; and so are brought down to fear and bondage, when they might have been rejoicing in cheerful obedience. These are the better sort, who, having something of true religious principle in their hearts, still are misled in part,—so far, that is, as to rest in their feelings as tests of holiness; therefore they are distressed and alarmed at their own tranquillity, which they think a bad sign, and, being dispirited, lose time, others outstripping them in the race.

And others might be mentioned who are led by this same first eagerness and zeal into a different error. The restored sufferer in the text wished to be with Christ. Now it is plain, all those who indulge themselves in the false devotion I have been describing, may be said to be

desirous of thus keeping themselves in Christ's immediate sight, instead of returning to their own home, as He would have them, that is, to the common duties of life: and they do this, some from weakness of faith, as if He could not bless them, and keep them in the way of grace, though they pursued their worldly callings; others from an ill-directed love of Him. But there are others, I say, who, when they are awakened to a sense of religion, forthwith despise their former condition altogether, as beneath them; and think that they are now called to some high and singular office in the Church. These mistake their duty as those already described neglect it; they do not waste their time in mere good thoughts and good words, as the others, but they are impetuously led on to *wrong acts*, and that from the influence of those same strong emotions which they have not learned to use aright or direct to their proper end. But to speak of these now at any length would be beside my subject.

To conclude;—let me repeat and urge upon you, my brethren, the lesson which I have deduced from the narrative of which the text forms part. Your Saviour calls you from infancy to serve Him, and has arranged all things well, so that His service shall be perfect freedom. Blessed above all men are they who heard His call then, and served Him day by day, as their strength to obey increased. But further, are you conscious that you have more or less neglected this gracious opportunity, and suffered yourselves to be tormented by Satan? See, He calls you a second time; He calls you by your roused affections once and again, ere He leave you

finally. He brings you back for the time (as it were) to a second youth by the urgent persuasions of excited fear, gratitude, love, and hope. He again places you for an instant in that early, unformed state of nature when habit and character were not. He takes you out of yourselves, robbing sin for a season of its in-dwelling hold upon you. Let not those visitings pass away "as the morning cloud and the early dew[1]." Surely, you must still have occasional compunctions of conscience for your neglect of Him. Your sin stares you in the face; your ingratitude to God affects you. Follow on to know the Lord, and to secure His favour by *acting* upon these impulses; by them He pleads with you, as well as by your conscience; they are the instruments of His spirit, stirring you up to seek your true peace. Nor be surprised, though you obey them, that they die away; they have done their office, and if they die, it is but as blossom changes into the fruit, which is far better. They *must* die. Perhaps you will have to labour in darkness afterwards, out of your Saviour's sight, in the home of your own thoughts, surrounded by sights of this world, and showing forth His praise among those who are cold-hearted. Still be quite sure that resolute, consistent obedience, though unattended with high transport and warm emotion, is far more acceptable to Him than all those passionate longings to live in His sight, which look more like religion to the uninstructed. At the very best these latter are but the graceful beginnings of obedience, graceful and becoming in children,

[1] Hosea vi. 4.

but in grown spiritual men indecorous, as the sports of boyhood would seem in advanced years. Learn to live by faith, which is a calm, deliberate, rational principle, full of peace and comfort, and sees Christ, and rejoices in Him, though sent away from His presence to labour in the world. You will have your reward. He will "see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

SERMON X.

Profession without Practice.

"*When there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, He began to say unto His disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.*"—LUKE xii. 1.

HYPOCRISY is a serious word. We are accustomed to consider the hypocrite as a hateful, despicable character, and an uncommon one. How is it, then, that our Blessed Lord, when surrounded by an innumerable multitude, began *first of all,* to warn His disciples against hypocrisy, as though they were in especial danger of becoming like those base deceivers, the Pharisees? Thus an instructive subject is opened to our consideration, which I will now pursue.

I say, we are accustomed to consider the hypocrite as a character of excessive wickedness, and of very rare occurrence. That hypocrisy is a great wickedness need not be questioned; but that it is an uncommon sin, is not true, as a little examination will show us. For what is a hypocrite? We are apt to understand by a hypocrite, one who makes a profession of religion for secret

ends, without practising what he professes; who is malevolent, covetous, or profligate, while he assumes an outward sanctity in his words and conduct, and who does so deliberately and without remorse, deceiving others, and not at all self-deceived. Such a man, truly, would be a portent, for he seems to disbelieve the existence of a God who sees the heart. I will not deny that in some ages, nay, in all ages, a few such men have existed. But this is not what our Saviour seems to have meant by a hypocrite, nor were the Pharisees such.

The Pharisees, it is true, said one thing and did another; but they were not aware that they were thus inconsistent; they deceived *themselves* as well as others. Indeed, it is not in human nature to deceive others for any long time, without in a measure deceiving ourselves also. And in most cases we contrive to deceive ourselves as much as we deceive others. The Pharisees boasted they were Abraham's children, not at all understanding, not knowing what was implied in the term. They were not really included under the blessing given to Abraham, and they wished the world to believe they were; but then they also themselves *thought* that they were, or, at least, with whatever misgivings, they were, on the whole, persuaded of it. They had deceived themselves as well as the world; and therefore our Lord sets before them the great and plain truth, which, simple as it was, they had forgotten. "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham[1]."

This truth, I say, they had *forgotten*;—for doubtless,

[1] John viii. 39.

they once knew it. There was a time doubtless, when in some measure they knew themselves, and what they were doing. When they began (each of them in his turn) to deceive the people, they were *not*, at the moment, *self*-deceived. But by degrees they forgot,—because they did not care to retain it in their knowledge,—they forgot that to be blessed like Abraham, they must be holy like Abraham; that outward ceremonies avail nothing without inward purity, that their thoughts and motives must be heavenly. Part of their duty they altogether ceased to know; another part they might still know indeed, but did not value as they ought. They became ignorant of their own spiritual condition; it did not come home to them, that they were supremely influenced by worldly objects; that zeal for God's service was but a secondary principle in their conduct, and that they loved the praise of men better than God's praise. They went on merely talking of religion, of heaven and hell, the blessed and the reprobate, till their discourses became but words of course in their mouths, with no true meaning attached to them; and they either did not read Holy Scripture at all, or read it without earnestness and watchfulness to get at its real sense. Accordingly, they were scrupulously careful of paying tithe even in the least matters, of mint, anise, and cummin, while they omitted the weightier matters of the Law, judgment, mercy, and faith; and on this account our Lord calls them "*blind* guides,"—not bold impious deceivers, who *knew* that they were false guides, but *blind*[1]. Again, they were *blind*, in thinking that,

[1] Matt. xxiii. 24. Luke xi. 39—52.

had they lived in their fathers' days, they would not have killed the prophets as their fathers did. They did not know themselves; they had unawares deceived themselves as well as the people. Ignorance of their own ignorance was their punishment and the evidence of their sin. "If ye were blind," our Saviour says to them, if you were simply blind, and conscious you were so, and distressed at it, "ye should have no sin; but now ye say, We see,"—they did not even know their blindness—"therefore your sin remaineth[1]."

This then is hypocrisy;—not simply for a man to deceive others, knowing all the while that he *is* deceiving them, but to deceive himself *and* others at the same time, to aim at their praise by a religious profession, without perceiving that he loves their praise more than the praise of God, and that he is professing far more than he practises. And if this be the true Scripture meaning of the word, we have some insight (as it appears) into the reasons which induced our Divine Teacher to warn His Disciples in so marked a way against hypocrisy. An innumerable multitude was thronging Him, and His disciples were around Him. Twelve of them had been appointed to minister to Him as His especial friends. Other seventy had been sent out from Him with miraculous gifts; and, on their return, had with triumph told of their own wonderful doings. All of them had been addressed by Him as the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the children of His kingdom. *They* were mediators between Him and

[1] John ix. 41. Vide James i. 22.

the people at large, introducing to His notice the sick and heavy-laden. And now they stood by Him, partaking in His popularity, perhaps glorying in their connexion with the Christ, and pleased to be gazed upon by the impatient crowd. Then it was that, instead of addressing the multitude, He spoke first of all to His disciples, saying, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy;" as if He had said, "What is the chief sin of My enemies and persecutors? not that they openly deny God, but that they love a profession of religion for the sake of the praise of men that follows it. They like to contrast themselves with other men; they pride themselves on being a little flock, to whom life is secured in the midst of reprobates; they like to stand and be admired amid their religious performances, and think to be saved, not by their own personal holiness, but by the faith of their father Abraham. All this delusion may come upon you also, if you forget that you are hereafter to be tried one by one at God's judgment-seat, according to your works. At present, indeed, you are invested in My greatness, and have the credit of My teaching and holiness: but 'there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid, that shall not be known,' at the last day."

This warning against hypocrisy becomes still more needful and impressive, from the greatness of the Christian privileges as contrasted with the Jewish. The Pharisees boasted they were Abraham's children; we have the infinitely higher blessing which fellowship with Christ imparts. In our infancy we have all been gifted with the most awful and glorious titles, as children of

God, members of Christ, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. We have been honoured with the grant of spiritual influences, which have overshadowed and rested upon us, making our very bodies temples of God; and when we came to years of discretion, we were admitted to the mystery of a heavenly communication of the Body and Blood of Christ. What is more likely, considering our perverse nature, than that we should neglect the duties, while we wish to retain the privileges of our Christian profession? Our Lord has sorrowfully foretold in His parables what was to happen in His Church; for instance, when He compared it to a net which gathered of every kind, but was not inspected till the end, and then emptied of its various contents, good and bad. Till the day of visitation the visible Church will ever be full of such hypocrites as I have described, who live on under her shadow, enjoying the name of Christian, and vainly fancying they will partake its ultimate blessedness.

Perhaps, however, it will be granted that there are vast numbers in the Christian world thus professing without adequately practising; and yet denied, that such a case is enough to constitute a hypocrite in the Scripture sense of the word; as if a hypocrite were one who professes himself to be what he is not, *with some bad motive.* It may be urged that the Pharisees had an *end* in what they did, which careless and formal Christians have not. But consider for a moment; what was the motive which urged the Pharisees to their hypocrisy? surely that they might be seen of men, have glory of men[1]. This is our Lord's own account of them. Now

[1] Matt. vi. 2. 5.

who will say that the esteem and fear of the world's judgment, and the expectation of worldly advantages, do not at present most powerfully influence the generality of men in their profession of Christianity? so much so, that it is a hard matter, and is thought a great and noble act for men who live in the public world to do what they believe to be their duty to God, in a straightforward way, should the opinion of society about it happen to run counter to them. Indeed, there hardly has been a time since the Apostles' day, in which men were more likely than in this age to do their good deeds to be seen of men, to lay out for human praise, and therefore to shape their actions by the world's rule rather than God's will. We ought to be very suspicious, every one of us, of the soundness of our faith and virtue. Let us consider whether we should act as strictly as we now do, were the eyes of our acquaintance and neighbours withdrawn from us. Not that a regard to the opinion of others is a bad motive; in subordination to the fear of God's judgment, it is innocent and allowable, and in many cases a duty to admit it; and the opportunity of doing so is a gracious gift given from God to lead us forward in the right way. But when we *prefer* man's fallible judgment to God's unerring command, then it is we are wrong,—and in two ways; both *because* we prefer it, and because, being fallible, it will mislead us; and what I am asking you, my brethren, is, not whether you merely regard man's opinion of you (which you ought to do), but whether you set it before God's judgment, which you assuredly should not do,—and which if you do, you are like the Pharisees, so far

as to be hypocrites, though you may not go so far as they did in their hollow self-deceiving ways.

1. That even decently conducted Christians are most extensively and fearfully ruled by the opinion of society about them, instead of living by faith in the unseen God, is proved to my mind by the following circumstance;—that according as their rank in life makes men independent of the judgment of others, so the profession of regularity and strictness is given up. There are two classes of men who are withdrawn from the judgment of the community; those who are above it, and those who are below it;—the poorest class of all, which has no thought of maintaining itself by its own exertions, and has lost shame; and what is called (to use a word of this world) high fashionable society, by which I mean not the rich necessarily, but those among the rich and noble who throw themselves out of the pale of the community, break the ties which attach them to others, whether above or below themselves, and then live to themselves and each other, their ordinary doings being unseen by the world at large. Now since it happens that these two ranks, the outlaws, as they may be called, of public opinion, are (to speak generally) the most openly and daringly profligate in their conduct, how much may be thence inferred about the influence of a mere love of reputation in keeping us *all* in the right way! It is plain, as a matter of fact, that the great mass of men are protected from gross sin by the forms of society. The received laws of propriety and decency, the prospect of a loss of character, stand as sentinels, giving the alarm, long before their *Christian* principles have time to act.

But among the poorest and rudest class, on the contrary, such artificial safeguards against crime are unknown; and (observe, I say) it is among them and that other class I have mentioned, that vice and crime are most frequent. Are we, *therefore*, better than they? Scarcely. Doubtless their temptations are greater, which alone prevents our boasting over them; but, besides, do we not rather gain from the sight of their more scandalous sins a grave lesson and an urgent warning for ourselves, a call on us for honest self-examination? for we are of the same nature, with like passions with them; we may be better than they, but our mere seeming so is no proof that we are. The question is, whether, in spite of our greater apparent virtue, we should not fall like them, if the restraint of society were withdrawn; i. e. whether we are not in the main hypocrites like the Pharisees, professing to honour God, while we honour Him only so far as men require it of us?

2. Another test of being like or unlike the Pharisees may be mentioned. Our Lord warns us against hypocrisy in three respects,—in doing our alms, in praying, and in fasting. "When thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. . . . When thou prayest thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. . . . When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast[1]."

[1] Matt. vi. 2—16.

Here let us ask ourselves, first about our *alms*, whether we be not like the hypocrites. Doubtless some of our charity must be public, for the very mentioning our name encourages others to follow our example. Still I ask, is much of our charity also *private?* is as much private as is public? I will not ask whether *much more* is done in secret than is done before men, though this, if possible, ought to be the case. But at least, if we think in the first place of our public charities, and only in the second of the duty of private alms-giving, are we not plainly like the hypocritical Pharisees?

The manner of our *prayers* will supply us with a still stronger test. We are here assembled in worship. It is well. Have we really been praying as well as seeming to pray? have our minds been actively employed in trying to form in us the difficult habit of prayer? Further, are we as regular in praying in our closet to our Father which is in secret, as in public[1]? Do we feel any great remorse in omitting our morning and evening prayers, in saying them hastily and irreverently? And yet should not we feel excessive pain and shame, and rightly, at the thought of having committed any *open* impropriety in church? Should we, for instance, be betrayed into laughter or other light conduct during the service, should we not feel most acutely ashamed of ourselves, and consider we had disgraced ourselves, notwithstanding our habit of altogether forgetting the next moment any sinful carelessness at prayer in our closet? Is not this to be as the Pharisees?

[1] Matt. vi. 6.

Take, again, the case of fasting. Alas! most of us, I fear, do not think at all of fasting. We do not even let it enter our thoughts, nor debate with ourselves, whether or not it be needful or suitable for us to fast, or in any way mortify our flesh. Well, this is *one* neglect of Christ's words. But again, neither do we disfigure our outward appearance to *seem* to fast, which the Pharisees did. Here we seem to differ from the Pharisees. Yet, in truth, this very apparent difference is a singular confirmation of our real likeness to them. Austerity gained them credit; it would gain us none. It would gain us little more than mockery from the world. The age is changed. In Christ's time the show of fasting made men appear saints in the eyes of the many. See then what we do. We keep up the outward show of almsgiving and public worship, --observances which (it so happens) the world approves. We have dropped the show of fasting, which (it so happens) the world at the present day derides. Are we quite sure that if fasting were in honour, we should not begin to hold fasts, as the Pharisees? Thus we seek the praise of men. But in all this, how are we, in any good measure, following *God's* guidance and promises?

We see, then, how seasonable is our Lord's warning to us, His disciples, first of all, to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy: professing without practising. He warns us against it as *leaven*, as a subtle insinuating evil which will silently spread itself throughout the whole character, if we suffer it. He

warns us, His disciples, lovingly considerate for us, lest we make ourselves a scorn and derision to the profane multitude, who throng around to gaze curiously, or malevolently, or selfishly, at His doings. *They* seek Him, not as adoring Him for His miracles' sake, but, if so be that they can obtain any thing from Him, or can please their natural tastes while they profess to honour Him; and in time of trial they desert Him. They make a gain of godliness, or a fashion. So He speaks not to *them*, but to us, His little flock, His Church, to whom it has been His Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom[1]; and He bids us take heed of falling, as the Pharisees did before us, and like them coming short of our reward. He warns us that the pretence of religion never deceives beyond a little time; that sooner or later, "whatsoever we have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light, and that which we have spoken in the ear in closets, shall be proclaimed upon the housetops." Even in this world the discovery is often made. A man is brought into temptation of some sort or other, and having no root in himself falls away, and gives occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. Nay, this will happen to him without himself being aware of it; for though a man begins to deceive others before he deceives himself, yet he does not deceive them so long as he deceives himself. Their eyes are at length opened to him, while his own continue closed to himself. The world sees through him, detects, and triumphs in detecting, his low motives and secular

[1] Luke xii. 32.

plans and artifices, while he is but very faintly sensible of them himself, much less has a notion that others clearly see them. And thus he will go on professing the highest principles and feelings, while bad men scorn him, and insult true religion in his person.

Do not think I am speaking of one or two men, when I speak of the scandal which a Christian's inconsistency brings upon his cause. The Christian world, so called, what is it practically, but a witness for Satan rather than a witness for Christ? Rightly understood, doubtless the very disobedience of Christians witnesses for Him who will overcome whenever He is judged. But is there any *antecedent* prejudice against religion so great as that which is occasioned by the lives of its professors? Let us ever remember, that all who follow God with but a half heart, strengthen the hands of His enemies, give cause of exultation to wicked men, perplex inquirers after truth, and bring reproach upon their Saviour's name. It is a known fact, that unbelievers triumphantly maintain that the greater part of the English people is on *their side;* that the disobedience of professing Christians is a proof, that (whatever they say) yet in their hearts they are unbelievers too. This we ourselves perhaps have heard said; and said, not in the heat of argument, or as a satire, but in sober earnestness, from real and full persuasion that it is true; that is, the men who have cast off their Saviour, console themselves with the idea, that their neighbours, though too timid or too indolent openly to do so, yet in secret, or at least in their real character, do the same. And witnessing this general inconsistency, they despise them

as unmanly, cowardly, and slavish, and hate religion as the origin of this debasement of mind. "The people who in this country call themselves Christians (says one of these men), with few exceptions, are *not* believers; and every man of sense, whose bigotry has not blinded him, must see that persons who are evidently devoted to *worldly gain*, or *worldly vanities*, or *luxurious enjoyments*, though still preserving a little *decency*, while they *pretend* to believe the infinitely momentous doctrines of Christianity, are performers in a *miserable farce*, which is beneath contempt." Such are the words of an open enemy of Christ; as though he felt *he* dared confess his unbelief, and despised the mean hypocrisy of those around him. His argument, indeed, will not endure the trial of God's judgment at the last day, for no one is an unbeliever but by his own fault. But though no excuse for him, it is their condemnation. What, indeed, will they plead before the Throne of God, when, on the revelation of all hidden deeds, this reviler of religion attributes his unbelief in a measure to the sight of *their* inconsistent conduct? When he mentions this action or that conversation, this violent or worldly conduct, that covetous or unjust transaction, or that self-indulgent life, as partly the occasion of his falling away? "Woe unto the world (it is written), because of scandals; for it must needs be that scandals come, but woe to the man *by whom* the scandal cometh[1]!" Woe unto the deceiver and self-deceived! "His hope shall perish; his hope shall be cut off, and his trust shall

[1] Matt. xviii. 7.

be a spider's web: he shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand; he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure[1]." God give us grace to flee from this woe while we have time! Let us examine ourselves, to see if there be any wicked way in us; let us aim at obtaining some comfortable assurance that we are in the narrow way that leads to life. And let us pray God to enlighten us, and to guide us, and to give us the will to please Him, and the power.

[1] Job viii. 13—15.

SERMON XI.

Profession without Hypocrisy.

"*As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ*"
—GAL. iii. 27.

IT is surely most necessary to beware, as our Lord solemnly bids us, of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. We may be infected with it, even though we are not conscious of our insincerity; for they did not *know* they were hypocrites. Nor need we have any definite bad object plainly before us, for they had none,—only the vague desire to be seen and honoured by the world, such as may influence us. So it would seem, that there are vast multitudes of Pharisaical hypocrites among baptized Christians; i. e. men professing without practising. Nay, so far we may be called hypocritical, one and all; for no Christian on earth altogether lives up to his profession.

But here some one may ask, whether in saying that hypocrisy is professing without practising, I am not, in fact, overthrowing all external religion from the foundation, since all creeds, and prayers, and ordinances, go beyond the real belief and frame of mind of even the best Christians. This is even the ground which some men

actually take. They say that it is wrong to baptize, and call Christians, those who have not yet shown themselves to be really such. "As many as are baptized into Christ, put on Christ;" so says the text, and these men argue from it, that till we have actually put on Christ, that is, till we have given our heart to Christ's service, and in our degree become holy as He is holy, it can do no good to be baptized into His name. Rather it is a great evil, for it is to become hypocrites. Nay, really humble, well-intentioned men, feel this about themselves. They shrink from retaining the blessed titles and privileges which Christ gave them in infancy, as being unworthy of them; and they fear lest they are really hypocrites like the Pharisees, after all their better thoughts and exertions.

Now the obvious answer to this mistaken view of religion is to say, that, on the showing of such reasoners, *no* one at all ought to be baptized in any case, and called a Christian; for no one *acts up* to his baptismal profession; no one believes, worships, and obeys duly, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, whose servant he is made in baptism. And yet the Lord *did* say, "Go, baptize all nations;" clearly showing us, that a man may be a fit subject for baptism, though he does not in fact practise every thing that he professes, and therefore, that any fears we may have, lest men should be in some sense like the Pharisees, must not keep us from making them Christians.

But I shall treat the subject more at length, in order that we may understand what kind of disobedience is really hypocrisy, and what is not, lest timid consciences

should be frightened. Now men profess without feeling and doing, or are hypocrites, in nothing so much as in their prayers. This is plain. Prayer is the most directly religious of all our duties; and our falling short of our duty, is, then, most clearly displayed. Therefore I will enlarge upon the case of prayer, to explain what I do *not* mean by hypocrisy. We then use the most solemn words, either without attending to what we are saying, or (even if we do attend) without worthily entering into its meaning. Thus we seem to resemble the Pharisees; a question in consequence arises, whether, this being the case, we should go on repeating prayers which evidently do not suit us. The men I just now spoke of, affirm that we ought to leave them off. Accordingly, such persons in their own case first give up the Church prayers, and take to others which they think will suit them better. Next, when these disappoint them, they have recourse to what is called extempore prayer; and afterwards perhaps, discontented in turn with this mode of addressing Almighty God, and as unable to fix their thoughts as they were before, they come to the conclusion that they ought not to pray, except when specially moved to prayer by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Now, in answer to such a manner of reasoning and acting, I would maintain that no one is to be reckoned a Pharisee or hypocrite in his prayers who *tries* not to be one,—who aims at knowing and correcting himself,—and who is accustomed to pray, though not perfectly, yet not indolently or in a self-satisfied way; however lamentable his actual wanderings of mind may be, or,

again, however poorly he enters into the meaning of his prayers, even when he attends to them.

1. First take the case of not being *attentive* to the prayers. Men, it seems, are tempted to leave off prayers because they cannot follow them, because they find their thoughts wander when they repeat them. I answer, that to pray attentively is a *habit*. This must ever be kept in mind. No one *begins* with having his heart thoroughly in them; but by trying, he is enabled to attend more and more, and at length, after many trials and a long schooling of himself, to fix his mind steadily on them. No one (I repeat) *begins* with being attentive. Novelty in prayers is the cause of persons being attentive in the outset, and novelty is out of the question in the Church prayers, for we have heard them from childhood, and knew them by heart long before we could understand them. No one, then, when he first turns his thoughts to religion, finds it easy to pray; he is irregular in his religious feelings; he prays more earnestly at some times than at others; his devotional seasons come by fits and starts; he cannot account for his state of mind, or reckon upon himself; he frequently finds that he is more disposed for prayer at any time and place than those set apart for the purpose. All this is to be expected; for no habit is formed at once; and before the flame of religion in the heart is purified and strengthened by long practice and experience, of course it will be capricious in its motions, it will flare about (so to say) and flicker, and at times seem almost to go out.

However, impatient men do not well consider this; they overlook or are offended at the necessity of humble,

tedious practice to enable them to pray attentively, and they account for their coldness and wanderings of thought in any way but the true one. Sometimes they attribute this inequality in their religious feelings to the arbitrary coming and going of God's Holy Spirit; a most irreverent and presumptuous judgment, which I should not mention, except that men *do* form it, and therefore it is necessary to state in order to condemn it. Again, sometimes they think that they shall make themselves attentive all at once by bringing before their minds the more sacred doctrines of the Gospel, and thus rousing and constraining their souls. This does for a time; but when the novelty is over, they find themseves relapsing into their former inattention, without apparently having made any advance. And others, again, when discontented with their wanderings during prayer, lay the fault on the prayers themselves as being too long. This is a common excuse, and I wish to call your attention to it.

If any one alleges the *length* of the Church prayers as a reason for his not keeping his mind fixed upon them, I would beg him to ask his conscience whether he sincerely believes this to be at bottom the real cause of his inattention? Does he think he should attend *better* if the prayers were shorter? This is the question he has to consider. If he answers that he believes he *should* attend more closely in that case, then I go on to ask, whether he attends more closely (as it *is*) to the first part of the service than to the last; whether his mind is his own, regularly fixed on what he is engaged in, for any time in any part of the service? Now, if he is obliged to

own that this is not the case, that his thoughts are wandering in all parts of the service, and that even during the Confession, or the Lord's Prayer, which come first, they are not his own, it is quite clear that it is not the *length* of the service which is the real cause of his inattention, but his being deficient *in the habit* of being attentive. If, on the other hand, he answers that he *can* fix his thoughts for a time, and during the early part of the service, I would have him reflect that even this degree of attention was not always his own, that *it* has been the work of time and practice; and, if by trying he has got so far, by trying he may go on and learn to attend for a still longer time, till at length he is able to keep up his attention through the whole service.

However, I wish chiefly to speak to such as are dissatisfied with themselves, and despair of attending properly. Let a man once set his heart upon learning to pray, and strive to learn, and no failures he may continue to make in his manner of praying are sufficient to cast him from God's favour. Let him but persevere, not discouraged at his wanderings, not frightened into a notion he is a hypocrite, not shrinking from the honourable titles which God puts on him. Doubtless he should be humbled at his own weakness, indolence, and carelessness; and he should feel (he cannot feel too much) the guilt, alas! which he is ever contracting in his prayers by the irreverence of his inattention. Still he must not leave off his prayers, but go on looking towards Christ his Saviour. Let him but be in earnest, striving to master his thoughts, and to be serious, and all the guilt of his incidental failings will be washed

away in his Lord's blood. Only let him not be contented with himself; only let him not neglect to *attempt* to obey. What a simple rule it is, to *try* to be attentive in order to be so! and yet it is continually overlooked; that is, we do not *systematically* try, we do not make a point of attempting and attempting over and over again in spite of bad success; we attempt only now and then, and our best devotion is merely when our hearts are excited by some accident which may or may not happen again.

So much on inattention to our prayers, which, I say, should not surprise or frighten us, which does not prove us to be hypocrites unless we acquiesce in it; or oblige us to leave them off, but rather to learn to attend to them.

2. I proceed, secondly, to remark on the difficulty of *entering into* the meaning of them, when we *do* attend to them.

Here a tender conscience will ask, "How is it possible I *can* rightly use the solemn words which occur in the prayers?" A tender conscience *alone* speaks thus. Those confident objectors whom I spoke of just now, who maintain that set prayer is necessarily a mere formal service in the generality of instances, a service in which the heart has no part, they are silent here. They do not feel *this* difficulty, which is the real one; they use the most serious and awful words lightly and without remorse, as if they really entered into the meaning of what is, in truth, beyond the intelligence of Angels. But the humble and contrite believer, coming to Christ for pardon and help, perceives the great strait he is in,

in having to address the God of heaven. This perplexity of mind it was which led convinced sinners in former times to seek refuge in beings short of God; not as denying God's supremacy, or shunning Him, but discerning the vast distance between themselves and Him, and seeking some resting places by the way, some Zoar, some little city near to flee unto[1], because of the height of God's mountain, up which the way of escape lay. And then gradually becoming devoted to those whom they trusted, Saints, Angels, or good men living, and copying them, their faith had a fall, and their virtue trailed upon the ground, for want of props to rear it heavenward. We Christians, sinners though we be like other men, are not allowed thus to debase our nature, or to defraud ourselves of God's mercy; and though it be very terrible to speak to the living God, yet speak we must, or die; tell our sorrows we must, or there is no hope; for created mediators and patrons are forbidden us, and to trust in an arm of flesh is made a sin.

Therefore let a man reflect, whoever from tenderness of conscience shuns the Church as above him (whether he shuns her services, or her sacraments), that, awful as it is to approach Christ, to speak to Him, to "eat His flesh and drink His blood," and to live in Him, *to whom shall he go?* See what it comes to. Christ is the only way of salvation open to sinners. Truly we *are* children, and cannot suitably feel the words which the Church teaches us, though we say them after her, nor feel duly

[1] Gen. xix. 20.

reverent at God's presence! Yet let us but know our own ignorance and weakness, and we are safe. God accepts those who thus come in faith, bringing nothing as their offering, but a confession of sin. And this is the highest excellence to which we ordinarily attain; to understand our own hypocrisy, insincerity, and shallowness of mind,—to own, while we pray, that we cannot pray aright,—to repent of our repentings,—and to submit ourselves wholly to His judgment, who could indeed be extreme with us, but has already shown His loving-kindness in bidding us to pray. And, while we thus conduct ourselves, we must learn to feel that God knows all this before we say it, and far better than we do. He does not need to be informed of our extreme worthlessness. We must pray in the spirit and the temper of the extremest abasement, but we need not search for adequate words to express this, for in truth no words are bad enough for our case. Some men are dissatisfied with the confessions of sin we make in Church, as not being strong enough; but none *can* be strong enough; let us be satisfied with sober words, which have been ever in use; it will be a great thing if we enter into *them*. No need of searching for impassioned words to express our repentance, when we do not rightly enter even into the most ordinary expressions.

Therefore, when we pray let us not be as the hypocrites, making a show; nor use vain repetitions with the heathen; let us compose ourselves, and kneel down quietly as to a work far above us, preparing our minds for our own imperfection in prayer, meekly repeating the wonderful words of the Church our

Teacher, and desiring with the Angels to look into them. When we call God our Father Almighty, or own ourselves miserable offenders, and beg Him to spare us, let us recollect that, though we are using a strange language, yet Christ is pleading for us in the same words with full understanding of them, and availing power; and that, though we know not what we should pray for as we ought, yet the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with plaints unutterable. Thus feeling God to be around us and in us, and therefore keeping ourselves still and collected, we shall serve Him acceptably, with reverence and godly fear; and we shall take back with us to our common employments the assurance that He is still gracious to us, in spite of our sins, not willing we should perish, desirous of our perfection, and ready to form us day by day after the fashion of that divine image which in baptism was outwardly stamped upon us.

I have spoken only of our prayers, and but referred to our general profession of Christianity. It is plain, however, what has been said about praying, may be applied to all we do and say as Christians. It is true that we profess to be saints, to be guided by the highest principles, and to be ruled by the Spirit of God. We have long ago promised to believe and obey. It is also true that we cannot do these things aright; nay, even with God's help (such is our sinful weakness), still we fall short of our duty. Nevertheless we must not cease to profess. We must not put off from us the wedding garment which Christ gave us in baptism. We may still rejoice in Him without being hypocrites,

that is, if we labour day by day to make that wedding garment our own; to fix it on us and so incorporate it with our very selves, that death, which strips us of all things, may be unable to tear it from us, though as yet it be in great measure but an outward garb, covering our own nakedness.

I conclude by reminding you, how great God's mercy is in thus allowing us to clothe ourselves in the glory of Christ from the first, even before we are worthy[1] of it. I suppose there is nothing so distressing to a true Christian as to have to *prove himself* such to others; both as being conscious of his own numberless failings, and from his dislike of display. Now Christ has anticipated the difficulties of his modesty. He does not allow such an one to speak for himself; He speaks for him. He introduces each of us to his brethren, not as we are in ourselves, fit to be despised and rejected on account of "the temptations which are in our flesh," but "as messengers of God, even as Christ Jesus." It is our happiness that we need bring nothing in proof of our fellowship with Christians, besides our baptism. This is what a great many persons do not understand; they think that none are to be accounted fellow-Christians but those who evidence themselves to be such to their fallible understandings; and hence they encourage others, who wish for their praise, to practise all kinds of display, as a seal of their regeneration. Who can tell the harm this does to the true modesty of the Christian spirit? Instead of using the words

[1] Matt. xxii. 8. Col. i. 10.

of the Church, and speaking to God, men are led to use their own words, and make man their judge and justifier[1]. They think it necessary to tell out their secret feelings, and to enlarge on what God has done to their own souls in particular. And thus making themselves really answerable for all the words they use, which are altogether their own, they do in this case become hypocrites; they do say more than they can in reality feel. Of course a religious man will naturally, and unawares, out of the very fulness of his heart, show his deep feeling and his conscientiousness to his near friends; but when to do so is made a matter of *necessity*, an *object* to be aimed at, and is an *intentional* act, then it is that hypocrisy must, more or less, sully our faith. "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ;" this is the Apostle's decision. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." The Church follows this rule, and bidding us keep quiet, speaks for us; robes us from head to foot in the garments of righteousness, and exhorts us to live henceforth to God. But the disputer of this world reverses this procedure; he strips off all our privileges, bids us renounce our dependence on the Mother of saints, tells us we must each be a Church to himself, and must show himself to the world to be by himself and in himself the elect of God, in order to prove his right to the privileges of a Christian.

[1] 1 Cor. iv. 3—5.

Far be it from us thus to fight against God's gracious purposes to man, and to make the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died[1]! Let us acknowledge all to be Christians, who have not by open word or deed renounced their fellowship with us, and let us try to lead them on into all truth. And for ourselves, let us endeavour to enter more and more fully into the meaning of our own prayers and professions; let us humble ourselves for the very little we do, and the poor advance we make; let us avoid unnecessary display of religion; let us do our duty in that state of life to which God has called us. Thus proceeding, we shall, through God's grace, form within us the glorious mind of Christ. Whether rich or poor, learned or unlearned, walking by this rule, we shall become, at length, true saints, sons of God. We shall be upright and perfect, lights in the world, the image of Him who died that we might be conformed to His likeness.

[1] 1 Cor. viii. 11.

SERMON XII.

Profession without Ostentation.

"*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.*"—MATT. v. 14.

OUR Saviour gives us a command, in this passage of His Sermon on the Mount, to manifest our religious profession before all men. "Ye are the light of the world," He says to His disciples; "A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Yet presently He says, "When thou doest alms . . . when thou prayest . . . when ye fast . . . appear not unto men . . . but unto thy Father which is in secret[1]." How are these commands to be reconciled? how are we at once to *profess* ourselves Christians, and yet hide our Christian words, deeds, and self-denials?

I will now attempt to answer this question; that is,

[1] Matt. vi. 2—18.

to explain how we may be witnesses to the world for God, and yet without pretension, or affectation, or rude and indecent ostentation.

1. Now, first, much might be said on that mode of witnessing Christ which consists in conforming to His Church. He who simply did what the Church bids him do (if he did no more), would witness a good confession to the world, and one which cannot be hid; and at the same time, with very little, if any, personal display. He does only what he is told to do; he takes no responsibility on himself. The Apostles and Martyrs who founded the Church, the Saints in all ages who have adorned it, the Heads of it now alive, all these take from him the weight of his profession, and bear the blame (so to call it) of seeming ostentations. I do not say that irreligious men will not *call* such an one boastful, or austere, or a hypocrite; that is not the question. The question is, whether in *God's* judgment he *deserves* the censure; whether he is not as Christ would have him, *really and truly* (whatever the world may say) joining humility to a bold outward profession; whether he is not, in thus acting, preaching Christ without hurting his own pureness, gentleness, and modesty of character. If indeed a man stands forth *on his own ground,* declaring himself as an individual a witness for Christ, then indeed he *is* grieving and disturbing the calm spirit given us by God. But God's merciful providence has saved us this temptation, and forbidden us to admit it. He bids us unite together in one, and to shelter our personal profession under the authority of the general body. Thus, while we show ourselves as lights to the world far

more effectively than if we glimmered separately in the lone wilderness without communication with others, at the same time we do so with far greater secresy and humility. Therefore it is, that the Church does so many things for us, appoints Fasts and Feasts, times of public prayer, the order of the sacraments, the services of devotion at marriages and deaths, and all accompanied by a fixed form of sound words; in order (I say) to remove from us individually the burden of a high profession, of implying great things of ourselves by inventing for ourselves solemn prayers and praises,—a task far above the generality of Christians, to say the least, a task which humble men will shrink from, lest they prove hypocrites, and which will hurt those who *do* undertake it, by making them rude-spirited and profane. I am desirous of speaking on this subject as a matter of *practice;* for I am sure, that if we wish really and in fact to spread the knowledge of the Truth, we shall do so far more powerfully as *well* as purely, by keeping together, than by witnessing one by one. Men are to be seen adopting all kinds of strange ways of giving glory (as they think) to God. If they would but follow the Church; come together in prayer on Sundays and Saints' days, nay, every day; honour the rubric by keeping to it obediently, and conforming their families to the *spirit* of the Prayer Book, I say that on the whole they would practically do vastly more good than by trying new religious plans, founding new religious societies, or striking out new religious views. I put out of account the greater blessing they might expect to find in the way of duty, which is the first consideration.

2. One way of professing without display has been mentioned;—obeying the Church. Now in the next place, consider how great a profession, and yet a profession how unconscious and modest, arises from the mere ordinary manner in which any strict Christian lives. Let this thought be a satisfaction to uneasy minds which fear lest they are not confessing Christ, yet dread to display. Your *life* displays Christ without your intending it. You cannot help it. Your *words and deeds* will show on the long run (as it is said), where your treasure is, and your heart. Out of the abundance of your heart your mouth speaketh words "seasoned with salt." We sometimes find men who aim at doing their duty in the common course of life, *surprised* to hear that they are ridiculed, and called hard names by careless or worldly persons. This is as it should be; it is as it should be, that they are *surprised* at it. If a private Christian sets out with *expecting* to make a disturbance in the world, the fear is, lest he be not so humble-minded as he should be. But those who go on quietly in the way of obedience, and yet are detected by the keen eye of the jealous, self-condemning, yet proud world, and who, on discovering their situation, first shrink from it and are distrest, then look to see if they have done aught wrongly, and after all are sorry for it, and but slowly and very timidly (if at all) learn to rejoice in it, these are Christ's flock. These are they who follow Him who was meek and lowly of heart, His elect, in whom He sees His own image reflected. Consider how such men show forth their light in a wicked world, yet unconsciously. Moses came down from the

mount, and "wist not that the skin of his face shone" as one who had held intercourse with God. But "when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him[1]." Who can estimate the power of our separate words spoken in season! How many of them are recollected and cherished by this person or that, which *we* have forgotten, and bear fruit! How do our good deeds excite *others* to rivalry in a good cause, as the Angels perceive though we do not! How are men thinking of us we never heard of, or saw but once, and in far countries unknown! Let us for a moment view this pleasing side of our doings, as well as the sad prospect of our evil communications. Doubtless, our prayers and alms are rising as a sweet sacrifice, pleasing to God[2]; and pleasing to Him, not only as an office of devotion, but of charity towards all men. Our businesses and our amusements, our joys and our sorrows, our opinions, tastes, studies, views and principles, are drawn *one* way, heavenward. Be we high or low, in our place we can serve, and in consequence glorify, Him who died for us. "A little maid," who was "brought away captive out of the land of Israel, and waited on Naaman's wife[3]," pointed out to the great captain of the host of the king of Syria the means of recovery from his leprosy, and "his *servants*" spoke good words to him afterwards, and brought him back to his reason when he would have rejected the mode of cure which the prophet prescribed. This may quiet impatient minds,

[1] Exod. xxxiv. 29, 30. [2] Acts x. 4. [3] 2 Kings v. 2.

and console the over-scrupulous conscience. "Wait on God and be doing good," and you must, you cannot but be showing your light before men as a city on a hill.

3. Still it is quite true that there are circumstances under which a Christian is bound openly to express his opinion on religious subjects and matters; and this is the real difficulty, viz. how to do so without display. As a man's place in society is here or there, so it is more or less his duty to speak his mind freely. We must never countenance sin and error. Now the more obvious and modest way of discountenancing evil is by silence, and by separating from it; for example, we are bound to keep aloof from deliberate and open sinners. St. Paul expressly tells us, "not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother (i. e. a Christian) be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one, no not to eat[1]." And St. John gives us the like advice with respect to heretics. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine (i. e. the true doctrine of Christ), receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds[2]." It is plain that such conduct on our part requires no great display, for it is but conforming to the rules of the Church; though it *is* often difficult to know on what occasions we ought to adopt it, which is another question.

A more difficult duty is that of passing judgment (as

[1] 1 Cor. v. 11. [2] 2 John 10, 11.

a Christian is often bound to do) on events of the day and public men. It becomes his duty, in proportion as he has station and influence in the community, in order that he may persuade others to think as he does. Above all, clergymen are bound to form and pronounce an opinion. It is sometimes said, in familiar language, that a clergyman should have nothing to do with politics. This is true, if it be meant that he should not aim at secular objects, should not side with a political party as such, should not be ambitious of popular applause, or the favour of great men, should not take pleasure and lose time in business of this world, should not be covetous. But if it means that he should not express an opinion and exert an influence one way rather than another, it is plainly unscriptural. Did not the Apostles, with all their reverence for the temporal power, whether Jewish or Roman, and all their separation from worldly ambition, did they not still denounce their rulers as wicked men, who had crucified and slain the Lord's Christ[1]? and would they have been as a city on a hill if they had not done so? *If*, indeed, this world's concerns could be altogether disjoined from those of Christ's Kingdom, then indeed all Christians (laymen as well as clergy) should abstain from the thought of temporal affairs, and let the worthless world pass down the stream of events till it perishes; but if (as is the case) what happens in *nations* must affect the cause of *religion* in those nations, since the Church may be seduced and corrupted by the world, and in the world there are myriads of souls

[1] Acts ii. 23; iii. 13—17; iv. 27; xiii. 27.

to be converted and saved, and since a Christian nation is bound to become part of the Church, therefore it is our duty to stand as a beacon on a hill, to cry aloud and spare not, to lift up our voice like a trumpet, and show the people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins [1]. And all this may be done without injury to our Christian gentleness and humbleness, though it is difficult to do it. We need not be angry nor use contentious words, and yet may firmly give our opinion, in proportion as we have the means of forming one. and be zealous towards God in all active good service, and scrupulously and pointedly keep aloof from the bad men whose evil arts we fear.

Another and still more difficult duty is that of personally rebuking those we meet with in the intercourse of life who sin in word or deed, and testifying before them in Christ's name; that is, it is difficult at once to be unassuming and zealous in such cases. We know it is a plain and repeated precept of Christ to tell others of their faults for charity's sake; but how is this to be done without seeming, nay, without being arrogant and severe? There are persons who are anxious to do their duty to the full, who fear that they are deficient in this particular branch of it, and deficient from a blameable backwardness, and the dread of giving offence; yet, on the other hand, they feel the painfulness of rebuking another, and (to use a common word) the awkwardness of it. Such persons must consider that, though to rebuke is a duty, it is not a duty

[1] Isa. lviii. 1.

belonging at once to all men; and the perplexity which is felt about it often arises from the very impropriety of attempting it in the particular case. It is improper, as a general rule, in the young to witness before the old, otherwise than by their silence. Still more improper is it in inferiors to rebuke their superiors; for instance, a child his parent, of course; or a private person his natural and divinely-appointed governour. When we assume a character not suited to us, of course we feel awkward; and although we may have done so in honesty and zeal (however ill-tutored), and so God may in mercy accept our service, still He, at the same time, rebukes us by our very feeling of perplexity and shame. As for such as rudely blame another, and that a superior, and feel no pain at doing so, I have nothing to say to such men, except to express my earnest desire that they may be led into a more Christian frame of mind. They do not even feel the difficulty of witnessing for God without display.

It is to be considered, too, that to do the part of a witness for the truth, to warn and rebuke, is not an elementary duty of a Christian. I mean, that our duties come in a certain order, some before others, and that this is not one of the first of them. Our first duties are to repent and believe. It would be strange, indeed, for a man, who had just begun to think of religion, to set up for "some great one," to assume he was a saint and a witness, and to exhort others to turn to God. This is evident. But as time goes on, and his religious character becomes formed, then, while he goes on to perfection in all his duties, he takes upon himself, in the

number of these, to witness for God by word of mouth. It is difficult to say *when* a man has leave openly to rebuke others; certainly not before he has considerable humility; the test of which may be the absence of a feeling of triumph in doing it, a consciousness that he is no better by nature than the person he witnesses before, and that his actual sins are such as to deserve a severe rebuke were they known to the world; a love towards the person reproved, and a willingness to submit to deserved censure in his turn. In all this I am speaking of laymen. It is a clergyman's duty to rebuke by virtue of his office. And then, after all, supposing it be clearly our duty to manifest our religious profession in this pointed way before another, in order to do so modestly we must do so kindly and cheerfully, as gently as we can; doing it as little as we can help; not making matters worse than they are, or showing our whole Christian stature (or what we think to be such), when we need but put out a hand (so to say) or give a glance. And above all (as I have already said), acting as if we thought, nay, really thinking, that it may be the offender's turn some day to rebuke us; not putting ourselves above him, feeling our great imperfections, and desirous he should rebuke us, should occasion require it, and in prospect thanking him; acting, that is, in the spirit in which you warn a man in walking against rugged ground, which may cause him a fall, thinking him bound by your friendly conduct to do the like favour to you. As to grave occasions of witnessing Christ, they will seldom occur, except a man thrust himself into society where he never ought to have been,

by neglecting the rule, "Come ye out, and be separate;" and then he has scarcely the right to rebuke, having committed the first fault himself. This is another cause of our perplexity in witnessing Christ before the world. We make friends of the sinful, and then they have the advantage over us.

To conclude.—The question is often raised, whether a man can do his duty simply and quietly, without being thought ostentatious by the world. It is no great matter to himself whether he is thought so or not, if he has not provoked the opinion. As a general rule, I would say the Church itself is always hated and calumniated by the world, as being in duty bound to make a bold profession. But whether individual members of the Church are so treated, depends on various circumstances in the case of each. There *are* persons, who, though very strict and conscientious Christians, are yet praised by the world. These are such, as having great meekness and humility, are not so prominent in station or so practically connected with the world as to offend it. Men admire religion, while they can gaze on it as a picture. They think it lovely in books: and as long as they can look upon Christians at a distance, they speak well of them. The Jews in Christ's time built the sepulchres of the prophets whom their fathers killed; then they themselves killed the Just One. They "reverenced" the Son of God before He came, but when their passions and interests were stirred by His coming, then they said, "This is the Heir; come, let us kill Him, and the inheritance shall be ours[1]." Thus Chris-

[1] Mark xii. 7.

tians in active life thwarting (as they do) the pride and selfishness of the world, are disliked by the world, and have "all manner of evil said against them falsely for Christ's sake[1]." Still, even under these circumstances, though they must not shrink from the attack on a personal account, it is still their duty to shelter themselves, as far as they can, under the name and authority of the Holy Church; to keep to its ordinances and rules; and, if they are called to suffer for the Church, rather to be drawn forward to the suffering in the common course of duty, than boldly to take upon them the task of defending it. There is no cowardice in this. Some men are placed in posts of danger, and to these danger comes in the way of duty; but others must not intrude into their honourable office. Thus in the first age of the Gospel, our Lord told His followers to flee from city to city, when persecuted; and even the heads of the Church, in the early persecutions, instead of exposing themselves to the fury of the heathen, did their utmost to avoid it. We are a suffering people from the first; but while, on the one hand, we do not defend ourselves illegally, we do not court suffering on the other. We must witness and glorify God, as lights on a hill, through evil report and good report; but the evil and the good report is not so much of our own making as the natural consequence of our Christian profession.

Who can tell God's will concerning this tumultuous world, or how He will dispose of it? He is tossing it hither and thither in His fury, and in its agitation He

[1] Matt. v. 11.

troubles His own people also. Only, this we know for our comfort. Our light shall never go down; Christ set it upon a hill, and hell shall not prevail against it. The Church will witness on to the last for the Truth, chained indeed to this world, its evil partner, but ever foretelling its ruin, though not believed, and in the end promised a far different recompense. For in the end the Lord Omnipotent shall reign, when the marriage of the Lamb shall come at length, and His wife shall make herself ready; and to her shall be granted "fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints[1]." True and righteous are His judgments; He shall cast death and hell into the lake of fire, and avenge His own elect which cry day and night unto Him!

"Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." May all we be in the number, confessing Christ in this world, that He may confess us before His Father in the last day!

[1] Rev. xix. 6—8.

SERMON XIII.

Promising without Doing.

"*A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, Sir; and went not.*"—MATT. 21. 28-30.

OUR religious professions are at a far greater distance from our acting upon them, than we ourselves are aware. We know generally that it is our duty to serve God, and we resolve we will do so faithfully. We are sincere in thus generally desiring and purposing to be obedient, and we think we are in earnest; yet we go away, and presently, without any struggle of mind or apparent change of purpose, almost without knowing ourselves what we do,—we go away and do the very contrary to the resolution we have expressed. This inconsistency is exposed by our Blessed Lord in the second part of the parable which I have taken for my text. You will observe, that in the case of the first son, who said he would not go work, and yet did go, it is said, "afterward he repented;" he underwent

a positive change of purpose. But in the case of the second, it is merely said, "he answered, I go, Sir; and went not;"—for here there was *no* revolution of sentiment, nothing deliberate; he merely acted according to his habitual frame of mind; he did *not* go work, because it was contrary to his general character to work; only he did not know this. He said, "I go, Sir," sincerely, from the feeling of the moment; but when the words were out of his mouth, then they were forgotten. It was like the wind blowing against a stream, which seems for a moment to change its course in consequence, but in fact flows down as before.

To this subject I shall now call your attention, as drawn from the latter part of this parable, passing over the case of the repentant son, which would form a distinct subject in itself. "He answered and said, I go, Sir; and went not." We promise to serve God: we do not perform; and that not from deliberate faithlessness in the particular case, but because it is our nature, our *way* not to obey, and *we* do not know this; we do not know ourselves, or what we are promising. I will give several instances of this kind of weakness.

1. For instance; that of mistaking good feelings for real religious principle. Consider how often this takes place. It is the case with the young necessarily, who have not been exposed to temptation. They have (we will say) been brought up religiously, they wish to be religious, and so are objects of our love and interest; but they think themselves far more religious than they really are. They suppose they hate sin, and understand

the Truth, and can resist the world, when they hardly know the meaning of the words they use. Again, how often is a man incited by circumstances to utter a virtuous wish, or propose a generous or valiant deed, and perhaps applauds himself for his own good feeling, and has no suspicion that he is not able to act upon it! In truth, he does not understand where the real difficulty of his duty lies. He thinks that the characteristic of a religious man is his having correct notions. It escapes him that there is a great interval between feeling and acting. He takes it for granted he can do what he wishes. He knows he is a free agent, and can on the whole do what he will; but he is not conscious of the load of corrupt nature and sinful habits which hang upon his will, and clog it in each particular exercise of it. He has borne these so long, that he is insensible to their existence. He knows that in little things, where passion and inclination are excluded, he can perform as soon as he resolves. Should he meet in his walk two paths, to the right and left, he is sure he can take which he will at once, without any difficulty; and he fancies that obedience to God is not much more difficult than to turn to the right instead of the left.

2. One especial case of this self-deception is seen in delaying repentance. A man says to himself, "Of course, if the worst comes to the worst, if illness comes, or at least old age, I can repent." I do not speak of the dreadful presumption of such a mode of quieting conscience (though many persons really use it who do not speak the words out, or are aware that they act

upon it), but, merely, of the ignorance it evidences concerning our moral condition, and our power of willing and doing. If men can repent, why do they not do so at once? they answer, that "they intend to do so hereafter;" i. e. they do *not* repent because they *can* Such is their argument; whereas, the very fact that they do not now, should make them suspect that there is a greater difference between intending and doing than they know of.

So very difficult is obedience, so hardly won is every step in our Christian course, so sluggish and inert our corrupt nature, that I would have a man disbelieve he can do one jot or tittle beyond what he has already done; refrain from borrowing aught on the hope of the future, however good a security for it he seems to be able to show; and never take his good feelings and wishes in pledge for one single untried deed. Nothing but *past* acts are the vouchers for *future*. Past sacrifices, past labours, past victories over yourselves,—these, my brethren, are the tokens of the like in store, and doubtless of greater in store; for the path of the just is as the shining, growing light[1]. But trust nothing short of these. "Deeds, not words and wishes," this must be the watchword of your warfare and the ground of your assurance. But if you have done nothing firm and manly hitherto, if you are as yet the coward slave of Satan, and the poor creature of your lusts and passions, never suppose you will one day rouse yourselves from your indolence. Alas! there are men who

[1] Prov. iv. 18.

walk the road to hell, always the while looking back at heaven, and trembling as they pace forward towards their place of doom. They hasten on as under a spell, shrinking from the consequences of their own deliberate doings. Such was Balaam. What would he have given if words and feelings might have passed for deeds! See how religious he was so far as profession goes! How did he revere God in speech! How piously express a desire to die the death of the righteous! Yet he died in battle among God's *enemies;* not suddenly overcome by temptation, only on the other hand, not suddenly turned to God by his good thoughts and fair purposes. But in this respect the power of sin differs from any literal spell or fascination, that we are, after all, willing slaves of it, and shall answer for following it. If "our iniquities, like the wind, take us away[1]," yet we can help this.

Nor is it only among beginners in religious obedience that there is this great interval between promising and performing. We can never answer how we shall act under new circumstances. A very little knowledge of life and of our own hearts will teach us this. Men whom we meet in the world turn out, in the course of their trial, so differently from what their former conduct promised, they view things so differently *before* they were tempted and *after,* that we, who see and wonder at it, have abundant cause to look to ourselves, not to be "high-minded," but to "fear." Even the most matured saints, those who imbibed in largest measure

[1] Isa. lxiv. 6.

the power and fulness of Christ's Spirit, and worked righteousness most diligently in their day, could they have been thoroughly scanned even by man, would (I am persuaded) have exhibited inconsistencies such as to surprise and shock their most ardent disciples. After all, one good deed is scarcely the pledge of another, though I just now said it was. The best men are uncertain; they are great, and they are little again; they stand firm, and then fall. Such is human virtue;—reminding us to call no one master on earth, but to look up to our sinless and perfect Lord; reminding us to humble ourselves, each within himself, and to reflect what we must appear to God, if even to ourselves and each other we seem so base and worthless; and showing clearly that all who are saved, even the least inconsistent of us, can be saved only by faith, not by works.

3. Here I am reminded of another plausible form of the same error. It is a mistake concerning what is meant by faith. We know Scripture tells us that God accepts those who have faith in Him. Now the question is, What *is* faith, and how can a man tell that he *has* faith? Some persons answer at once and without hesitation, that "to have faith is to feel oneself to be nothing, and God every thing; it is to be convinced of sin, to be conscious one cannot save oneself, and to wish to be saved by Christ our Lord; and that it is, moreover, to have the love of Him warm in one's heart, and to rejoice in Him, to desire His glory, and to resolve to live to Him and not to the world." But I will answer, with all due seriousness, as speaking on a serious sub-

ject, that this is *not* faith. Not that it is not necessary (it is very necessary) to be convinced that we are laden with infirmity and sin, and without health in us, and to look for salvation solely to Christ's blessed sacrifice on the cross; and we may well be thankful if we are thus minded; but that a man may feel all this that I have described, vividly, and still not yet possess one particle of true religious faith. Why? Because there is an immeasurable distance between feeling right and doing right. A man may have all these good thoughts and emotions, yet (if he has not yet hazarded them to the experiment of practice) he cannot promise himself that he has any sound and permanent principle at all. If he has not yet acted upon them, we have no voucher, barely on *account* of them, to believe that they are any thing but words. Though a man spoke like an angel, I would not believe him, on the mere ground of his speaking. Nay, till he acts upon them, he has not even evidence to himself that he has true living faith. Dead faith (as St. James says) profits no man. Of course; the Devils have it. What, on the other hand is *living* faith? Do fervent thoughts make faith *living?* St. James tells us otherwise. He tells us *works,* deeds of obedience, are the life of faith. "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also[1]." So that those who think they really believe, because they have in word and thought surrendered themselves to God, are much too hasty in their judgment. They have done something, indeed, but not at all the most difficult

[1] James ii. 26.

part of their duty, which is to surrender themselves to God in deed and act. They have as yet done nothing to show they will not, after saying "I go," the next moment "go not;" nothing to show they will not act the part of the self-deceiving disciple, who said, "Though I die with Thee, I will not deny Thee," yet straightway went and denied Christ thrice. As far as we know any thing of the matter, justifying faith has no existence independent of its particular definite acts. It may be described to be the temper under which men obey; the humble and earnest desire to please Christ which causes and attends on actual services. He who does one little deed of obedience, whether he denies himself some comfort to relieve the sick and needy, or curbs his temper, or forgives an enemy, or asks forgiveness for an offence committed by him, or resists the clamour or ridicule of the world – such an one (as far as we are given to judge) evinces more true faith than could be shown by the most fluent religious conversation, the most intimate knowledge of Scripture doctrine, or the most remarkable agitation and change of religious sentiments. Yet how many are there who sit still with folded hands, dreaming, doing nothing at all, thinking they have done every thing, or need do nothing, when they merely have had these good *thoughts*, which will save no one!

My object has been, as far as a few words can do it, to lead you to some true notion of the depths and deceitfulness of the heart, which we do not really know. It is easy to speak of human nature as corrupt in the general, to admit it in the general, and then get quit of the subject; as if the doctrine being once admitted, there

was nothing more to be done with it. But in truth we can have no real apprehension of the doctrine of our corruption, till we view the structure of our minds, part by part; and dwell upon and draw out the signs of our weakness, inconsistency, and ungodliness, which are such as can arise from nothing else than some strange original defect in our moral nature.

1. Now it will be well if such self-examination as I have suggested leads us to the habit of constant dependence upon the Unseen God, in whom "we live and move and have our being." We are in the dark about ourselves. When we act, we are groping in the dark, and may meet with a fall any moment. Here and there, perhaps, we see a little; or, in our attempts to influence and move our minds, we are making experiments (as it were) with some delicate and dangerous instrument, which works we do not know how, and may produce unexpected and disastrous effects. The management of our hearts is quite above us. Under these circumstances it becomes our comfort to look up to God. "Thou, God, seest me!" Such was the consolation of the forlorn Hagar in the wilderness. He knoweth whereof we are made, and He alone can uphold us. He sees with most appalling distinctness all our sins, all the windings and recesses of evil within us; yet it is our only comfort to know this, and to trust Him for help against ourselves. To those who have a right notion of their weakness, the thought of their Almighty Sanctifier and Guide is continually present. They believe in the necessity of a spiritual influence to change and strengthen them, not as a mere abstract doctrine, but as a practical and most

consolatory truth, daily to be fulfilled in their warfare with sin and Satan.

2. And this conviction of our excessive weakness must further lead us to try ourselves continually in little things, in order to prove our own earnestness; ever to be suspicious of ourselves, and not only to refrain from promising much, but actually to put ourselves to the test in order to keep ourselves wakeful. A sober mind never enjoys God's blessings to the full; it draws back and refuses a portion to show its command over itself. It denies itself in trivial circumstances, even if nothing is gained by denying, but an evidence of its own sincerity. It makes trial of its own professions; and if it has been tempted to say any thing noble and great, or to blame another for sloth or cowardice, it takes itself at its word, and resolves to make some sacrifice (if possible) in little things, as a price for the indulgence of fine speaking, or as a penalty on its censoriousness. Much would be gained if we adopted this rule even in our professions of friendship and service one towards another; and never said a thing which we were not willing to do.

There is only one place where the Christian allows himself to profess openly, and that is in Church. Here, under the guidance of Apostles and Prophets, he says many things boldly, as speaking after them, and as before Him who searcheth the reins. There can be no harm in professing much directly to God, because, *while* we speak, we know He sees through our professions, and takes them for what they really are, *prayers*. How much, for instance, do we profess when we say the Creed! and in the Collects we put on the full character

of a Christian. We desire and seek the best gifts, and declare our strong purpose to serve God with our whole hearts. By doing this, we remind ourselves of our duty; and withal, we humble ourselves by the taunt (so to call it) of putting upon our dwindled and unhealthy forms those ample and glorious garments which befit the upright and full-grown believer.

Lastly, we see from the parable, what is the course and character of human obedience on the whole. There are two sides of it. I have taken the darker side; the case of profession without practice, of saying "I go, Sir," and of not going. But what is the brighter side? Nothing better than to say, "I go not," and to repent and go. The more *common* condition of men is, not to know their inability to serve God, and readily to answer for themselves; and so they quietly pass through life, as if they had nothing to fear. Their best estate, what is it, but to rise more or less in rebellion against God, to resist His commandments and ordinances, and then poorly to make up for the mischief they have done, by repenting and obeying? Alas! to be alive as a Christian, is nothing better than to struggle against sin, to disobey and repent. There has been but One amongst the sons of men who has said and done *consistently;* who said, "I come to do Thy will, O God," and without delay or hindrance did it. He came to show us what human nature might become, if carried on to its perfection. Thus He teaches us to think highly of our nature as viewed in Him; not (as some do) to speak evil of our nature and exalt ourselves personally, but while we acknowledge *our own* distance from heaven, to view our

nature as renewed in Him, as glorious and wonderful beyond our thoughts. Thus He teaches us to be hopeful; and encourages us while conscience abases us. Angels seem little in honour and dignity, compared with that nature which the Eternal Word has purified by His own union with it. Henceforth, we dare aspire to enter into the heaven of heavens, and to live for ever in God's presence, because the first-fruits of our race is already there in the Person of His Only-begotten Son.

SERMON XIV.

Religious Emotion.

"*But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee in any wise.*"—MARK. xiv. 31.

IT is not my intention to make St. Peter's fall the direct subject of our consideration to-day, though I have taken this text; but to suggest to you an important truth, which that fall, together with other events at the same season, especially enforces; viz. that violent impulse is not the same as a firm *determination*,—that men may have their religious feelings roused, without being on that account at all the more likely to obey God in practice, rather the less likely. This important truth is in various ways brought before our minds at the season sacred to the memory of Christ's betrayal and death. The contrast displayed in the Gospels between His behaviour on the one hand, as the time of His crucifixion drew near, and that both of His disciples and of the Jewish populace on the other, is full of instruction, if we will receive it; *He* steadily fixing His face to endure those sufferings which were the atonement for our sins, yet without aught of mental excitement or

agitation; His disciples and the Jewish multitude first protesting their devotion to Him in vehement language, then, the one deserting Him, the other even clamouring for His crucifixion. He entered Jerusalem in triumph; the multitude cutting down branches of palm-trees, and strewing them in the way, as in honour of a king and conqueror[1]. He had lately raised Lazarus from the dead; and so great a miracle had given Him great temporary favour with the populace. Multitudes flocked to Bethany to see Him and Lazarus[2]; and when He set out for Jerusalem where He was to suffer, they, little thinking that they would soon cry "Crucify Him," went out to meet Him with the palm-branches, and hailing Him as their Messiah, led Him on into the holy city. Here was an instance of a *popular* excitement. The next instance of excited feeling is found in that melancholy self-confidence of St. Peter, contained in the text. When our Saviour foretold Peter's trial and fall, Peter at length "spake the more vehemently, If I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee in any wise." Yet in a little while both the people and the Apostle abandoned their Messiah; the ardour of their devotion had run its course.

Now it may, perhaps, appear, as if the circumstance I am pointing out, remarkable as it is, still is one on which it is of little use to dwell, in addressing a mixed congregation, on the ground that most men feel too *little* about religion. And it may be thence argued, that the aim of Christian teaching rather should be to

[1] Matt. xxi. 8. John xii. 13. [2] John xii. 1—18.

rouse them from insensibility, than to warn them against excess of religious feeling. I answer, that to mistake mere transient emotion, or mere good thoughts, for obedience, is a far commoner deceit than at first sight appears. How many a man is there, who, when his conscience upbraids him for neglect of duty, comforts himself with the reflection that he has never treated the subject of religion with open scorn,—that he has from time to time had serious thoughts,—that on certain solemn occasions he has been affected and awed,—that he has at times been moved to earnest prayer to God,—that he has had accidentally some serious conversation with a friend! This, I say, is a case of frequent occurrence among men called Christian. Again, there is a further reason for insisting upon this subject. No one (it is plain) can be religious without having his heart in his religion; his affections must be actively engaged in it; and it is the aim of all Christian instruction to promote this. But if so, doubtless there is great danger lest a perverse use should be made of the affections. In proportion as a religious duty is difficult, so is it open to abuse. For the very reason, then, that I desire to make you earnest in religion, must I also warn you against a counterfeit earnestness, which often misleads men from the plain path of obedience, and which most men are apt to fall into just on their first awakening to a serious consideration of their duty. It is not enough to bid you to serve Christ in faith, fear, love, and gratitude; care must be taken that it is the faith, fear, love, and gratitude of a sound mind. That vehement tumult of zeal which St. Peter felt before his trial failed

him under it. That open-mouthed admiration of the populace at our Saviour's miracle was suddenly changed to blasphemy. This may happen now as then; and it often happens in a way distressing to the Christian teacher. He finds it is far easier to interest men in the subject of religion (hard though this be), than to rule the spirit which he has excited. His hearers, when their attention is gained, soon begin to think he does not go far enough; then they seek means which he will not supply, of encouraging and indulging their mere feelings to the neglect of humble practical efforts to serve God. After a time, like the multitude, they suddenly turn round to the world, abjuring Christ altogether, or denying Him with Peter, or gradually sinking into a mere form of obedience, while they still think themselves true Christians, and secure of the favour of Almighty God.

For these reasons I think it is as important to warn men against impetuous feelings in religion, as to urge them to give their heart to it. I proceed therefore to explain more fully what is the connexion between strong emotions and sound Christian principle, and how far they are consistent with it.

Now that perfect state of mind at which we must aim, and which the Holy Spirit imparts, is a deliberate preference of God's service to every thing else, a determined resolution to give up all for Him; and a love for Him, not tumultuous and passionate, but such love as a child bears towards his parents, calm, full, reverent, contemplative, obedient. Here, however, it may be objected, that this is not always possible: that we

cannot help feeling emotion at times; that even to take the case of parents and children, a man is at certain times thrown out of that quiet affection which he bears towards his father and mother, and is agitated by various feelings; again, that zeal, for instance, though a Christian virtue, is almost inseparable from ardour and passion. To this I reply, that I am not describing the state of mind to which any one of us has *attained*, when I say it is altogether calm and meditative, but that which is the *perfect* state, that which we should aim at. I know it *is* often impossible, for various reasons, to avoid being agitated and excited; but the question before us is, whether we should *think highly* of violent emotion, whether we should encourage it. Doubtless it is no sin to feel at times passionately on the subject of religion; it is natural in some men, and under certain circumstances it is praiseworthy in others. But these are accidents. As a general rule, the more religious men become, the calmer they become; and at all times the religious principle, viewed by itself, is calm, sober, and deliberate.

Let us review some of the accidental circumstances I speak of.

1. The natural tempers of men vary very much. Some men have ardent imaginations and strong feelings; and adopt, as a matter of course, a vehement mode of expressing themselves. No doubt it is impossible to make all men think and feel alike. Such men of course may possess deep-rooted principle. All I would maintain is, that their ardour does not of itself make their faith deeper and more genuine; that they

must not think themselves better than others on account of it; that they must be aware of considering it a proof of their real earnestness, instead of narrowly searching into their conduct for the satisfactory *fruits* of faith.

2. Next, there are, besides, particular occasions on which excited feeling is natural, and even commendable; but not for its own sake, but *on account* of the peculiar circumstances under which it occurs. For instance, it is natural for a man to feel especial remorse at his sins when he first begins to think of religion; he *ought* to feel bitter sorrow and keen repentance. But all such emotion evidently is not the highest state of a Christian's mind; it is but the first stirring of grace in him. A sinner, indeed, can do no better; but in proportion as he learns more of the power of true religion, such agitation will wear away. What is this but saying, that change of mind is only the inchoate state of a Christian? Who doubts that sinners are bound to repent and turn to God? yet the Angels have no repentance; and who denies their peacefulness of soul to be a higher excellence than ours? The woman who had been a sinner, when she came behind our Lord wept much, and washed His feet with tears[1]. It was well done in her; she did what she could; and was honoured with our Saviour's praise. Yet it is clear this was not a permanent state of mind. It was but the first step in religion, and would doubtless wear away. It was but the accident of a season. Had her faith no deeper root

[1] Luke vii. 38.

than this emotion, it would soon have come to an end, as Peter's zeal.

In like manner, whenever we fall into sin, (and how often is this the case!) the truer our faith is, the more we shall for the time be distressed, perhaps agitated. No doubt; yet it would be a strange procedure to make much of this disquietude. Though it is a bad sign if we do not feel it (according to our mental temperament), yet if we do, what then? It argues no high Christian excellence; I repeat it, it is but the virtue of a very imperfect state. Bad is the best offering we can offer to God after sinning. On the other hand, the more consistent our habitual obedience, the less we shall be subject to such feelings.

3. And further, the accidents of life will occasionally agitate us: — affliction and pain; bad news; though here, too, the Psalmist describes the higher excellence of the mind, viz. the calm confidence of the believer, who "will not be afraid of any evil tidings, *for* his heart standeth fast, and believeth in the Lord[1]." Times of persecution will agitate the mind; circumstances of especial interest in the fortunes of the Church will cause anxiety and fear. We see the influence of some of these causes in various parts of St. Paul's Epistles. Such emotion, however, is not the essence of true faith, though it accidentally accompanies it. In times of distress religious men will speak more openly on the subject of religion, and lay bare their feelings; at other times they will conceal them. They are neither better nor worse for so doing.

[1] Ps. cxii. 7.

Now all this may be illustrated from Scripture. We find the same prayers offered, and the same resolutions expressed by good men, sometimes in a calm way, sometimes with more ardour. How quietly and simply does Agur offer his prayer to God! "Two things have I required of Thee; deny me them not before I die. Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me." St. Paul, on the other hand, with greater fervency, because he was in more distressing circumstances, but with not more acceptableness on that account in God's sight, says, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound;" and so he proceeds. Again, Joshua says, simply but firmly, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." St. Paul says as firmly, but with more emotion, when his friends besought him to keep away from Jerusalem:—"What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Observe how calm Job is in his resignation: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." And on the other hand, how calmly that same Apostle expresses his assurance of salvation at the close of his life, who, during the struggle, was accidentally agitated:—"I am now ready to be offered. . . . . I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness [1]."

[1] Prov. xxx. 7, 8. Phil. iv. 11, 12. Josh. xxiv. 15. Acts xxi. 13. Job i. 21. 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

These remarks may suffice to show the relation which excited feelings bear to true religious principle. They are sometimes natural, sometimes suitable; but they are not religion itself. They come and go. They are not to be counted on, or encouraged; for, as in St. Peter's case, they may supplant true faith, and lead to self-deception. They will gradually lose their place within us as our obedience becomes confirmed;—partly because those men are kept in perfect peace, and sheltered from all agitating feelings, whose minds are stayed on God[1]; —partly because these feelings themselves are fixed into habits by the power of faith, and instead of coming and going, and agitating the mind from their suddenness, they are permanently retained so far as there is any thing good in them, and give a deeper colour and a more energetic expression to the Christian character.

Now, it will be observed, that in these remarks I have taken for granted, as not needing proof, that the highest Christian temper is free from all vehement and tumultuous feeling. But, if we wish some evidence of this, let us turn to our Great Pattern, Jesus Christ, and examine what was the character of that perfect holiness which He alone of all men ever displayed.

And can we find any where such calmness and simplicity as marked His devotion and His obedience? When does He ever speak with fervour or vehemence? Or, if there be one or two words of His in His mysterious agony and death, characterized by an energy which we do not comprehend, and which sinners must silently

[1] Isa. xxvi. 8.

adore, still how conspicuous and undeniable is His composure in the general tenour of His words and conduct! Consider the prayer He gave us; and this is the more to the purpose, for the very reason that He has given it as a model for our worship. How plain and unadorned is it! How few are the words of it! How grave and solemn the petitions! What an entire absence of tumult and feverish emotion! Surely our own feelings tell us, it could not be otherwise. To suppose it otherwise were an irreverence towards Him.—At another time when He is said to have "rejoiced in spirit," His thanksgiving is marked with the same undisturbed tranquility. "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight."—Again, think of His prayer in the garden. He then was in distress of mind beyond our understanding. Something there was, we know not what, which weighed heavy upon Him. He prayed He might be spared the extreme bitterness of His trial. Yet how subdued and how concise is His petition! "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee: take away this cup from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt[1]." And this is but one instance, though a chief one, of that deep tranquility of mind, which is conspicuous throughout the solemn history of the Atonement. Read the thirteenth chapter of St. John, in which He is described as washing His disciples' feet, Peter's in particular. Reflect upon His

[1] Luke x. 21. Mark xiv. 36.

serious words addressed at several times to Judas who betrayed Him; and His conduct when seized by His enemies, when brought before Pilate, and lastly, when suffering on the cross. When does He set us an example of passionate devotion, of enthusiastic wishes, or of intemperate words?

Such is the lesson our Saviour's conduct teaches us. Now let me remind you how diligently we are taught the same by our own Church. Christ gave us a prayer to guide us in praying to the Father; and upon this model our own Liturgy is strictly formed. You will look in vain in the Prayer Book for long or vehement Prayers; for it is only upon occasions that agitation of mind is right, but there is ever a call upon us for seriousness, gravity, simplicity, deliberate trust, deep-seated humility. Many persons, doubtless, think the Church prayers, for this very reason, cold and formal. They do not discern their high perfection, and they think they could easily write better prayers. When such opinions are advanced, it is quite sufficient to turn our thoughts to our Saviour's precept and example. It cannot be denied that those who thus speak, ought to consider our Lord's prayer defective; and sometimes they are profane enough to think so, and to confess they think so. But I pass this by. Granting for argument's sake His *precepts* were intentionally defective, as delivered before the Holy Ghost descended, yet what will they say to His *example?* Can even the fullest light of the Gospel revealed after His resurrection, bring us His followers into the remotest resemblance to our Blessed Lord's

holiness? yet how calm was He, who was perfect man, in His own obedience!

To conclude:—Let us take warning from St. Peter's fall. Let us not promise much; let us not talk much of ourselves; let us not be high-minded, nor encourage ourselves in impetuous bold language in religion. Let us take warning, too, from that fickle multitude who cried, first Hosanna, then Crucify. A miracle startled them into a sudden adoration of their Saviour;—its effect upon them soon died away. And thus the especial mercies of God sometimes excite us for a season. We feel Christ speaking to us through our consciences and hearts; and we fancy He is assuring us we are His true servants, when He is but calling on us to receive Him. Let us not be content with saying "Lord, Lord," without "doing the thing which He says." The husbandman's son who said, "I go, sir," yet went not to the vineyard, gained nothing by his fair words. One secret act of self-denial, one sacrifice of inclination to duty, is worth all the mere good thoughts, warm feelings, passionate prayers, in which idle people indulge themselves. It will give us more comfort on our death-bed to reflect on one deed of self-denying mercy, purity, or humility, than to recollect the shedding of many tears, and the recurrence of frequent transports, and much spiritual exultation. These latter feelings come and go; they may or may not accompany hearty obedience; they are never tests of it; but good actions are the fruits of faith, and assure us that we are Christ's; they comfort us as an evidence of the Spirit working in us. By them we shall be judged at the last day; and though

they have no worth in themselves, by reason of that infection of sin which gives its character to every thing we do, yet they will be accepted for His sake, who bore the agony in the garden, and suffered as a sinner on the cross.

SERMON XV.

Religious Faith Rational.

"*He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God: and being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform.*"—ROM. iv. 20, 21.

THERE are serious men who are in the habit of describing Christian Faith as a feeling or a principle such as ordinary persons cannot enter into; a something strange and peculiar in its very nature, different in kind from every thing that affects and influences us in matters of this world, and not admitting any illustration from our conduct in them. They consider that, because it is a spiritual gift, and heavenly in its origin, it is therefore altogether superhuman; and that to compare it with any of our natural principles or feelings, is to think unworthily of it. And thus they lead others, who wish an excuse for their own irreligious lives, to speak of Christian Faith as extravagant and irrational, as if it were a mere fancy or feeling, which some persons had and others had not; and which, accordingly, could only, and would necessarily, be felt by those who were disposed that certain way. Now, that the *object* on which Faith

fixes our thoughts, that the doctrines of Scripture are *most* marvellous and exceeding in glory, unheard and unthought of elsewhere, is quite true; and it is also true that no mind of man will form itself to a habit of Faith without the preventing and assisting influences of Divine Grace. But it is not at all true that Faith itself, i. e. Trust, is a strange principle of action; and to say that it is irrational is even an absurdity. I mean such a Faith as that of Abraham, mentioned in the text, which led him to believe God's word when opposed to his own experience. And it shall now be my endeavour to show this.

To hear some men speak (I mean men who scoff at religion), it might be thought we never acted on Faith or Trust, except in religious matters; whereas we are acting on trust every hour of our lives. When faith is said to be a religious principle, it is (I repeat) the things believed, not the act of believing them, which is peculiar to religion. Let us take some examples.

It is obvious that we trust to our *memory*. We do not now witness what we saw yesterday; yet we have no doubt it took place in the way we *remember*. We recollect clearly the circumstances of morning and afternoon. Our confidence in our memory is so strong that a man might reason with us all day long, without persuading us that we slept through the day, or that we returned from a long journey, when our memory deposes otherwise. Thus we have faith in our memory; yet what is irrational here?

Again, even when we use reasoning, and are convinced of any thing by reasoning, what is it but that we trust

the general soundness of our reasoning powers? From knowing one thing we think we can be sure about another, even though we do not see it. Who of us would doubt, on seeing strong shadows on the ground, that the sun was shining out, though our face happened to be turned the other way? Here is faith without sight; but there is nothing against reason here, unless reason can be against itself.

And what I wish you particularly to observe, is, that we continually trust our memory and our reasoning powers in this way, though *they often deceive us.* This is worth observing, because it is sometimes said that we cannot be *certain* that our faith in religion is not a mistake. I say our memory and reason often deceive us; yet no one says it is therefore absurd and irrational to continue to trust them; and for this plain reason, because *on the whole* they are true and faithful witnesses, because it is only *at times* that they mislead us; so that the chance is, that they are right in this case or that, which happens to be before us; and (again) because in all practical matters we are obliged to dwell upon not what *may be possibly,* but what is *likely* to be. In matters of daily life, we have no time for fastidious and perverse fancies about the minute chances of our being deceived. We are obliged to act at once, or we should cease to live. There is a chance (it cannot be denied) that our food to-day may be poisonous,—we cannot be quite certain,—but it looks the same and tastes the same, and we have good friends round us; so we do not abstain from it, for all this chance, though it is real. This necessity of acting promptly is our hap-

piness in this world's matters; in the concerns of a future life, alas! we have time for carnal and restless thoughts about possibilities. And this is our *trial;* and it will be our condemnation, if with the experience of the folly of such idle fancyings about what may be, in matters of this life, we yet indulge them as regards the future. If it be said, that we sometimes do distrust our reasoning powers, for instance, when they lead us to some unexpected conclusion, or again our memory, when another's memory contradicts it, this only shows that there *are* things which we should be weak or hasty in believing; which is quite true. Doubtless there is such a fault as credulity, or believing too readily and too much (and this, in religion, we call superstition); but this neither shows that *all* trust is irrational, nor again that trust is necessarily irrational, which is founded on what is but likely to be, and may be denied without an actual absurdity. Indeed, when we come to examine the subject, it will be found that, strictly speaking, we know little more than that we exist, and that there is an Unseen Power whom we are bound to obey. Beyond this we must *trust;* and first our senses, memory, and reasoning powers; then other authorities:—so that, in fact, almost all we do, every day of our lives, is on trust, i. e. *faith.*

But it may be said, that belief in these informants, our senses, and the like, is not what is commonly meant by faith;—that to trust our senses and reason is in fact nothing more than to trust ourselves;—and though these do sometimes mislead us, yet they are so continually about us, and so at command, that we can use

them to correct each other; so that on the whole we gain from these the truth of things quite well enough to act upon;—that on the other hand it is a very different thing from this to trust another person; and that faith, in the Scripture sense of the word, is trusting another, and therefore is not proved to be rational by the foregoing illustrations.

Let us, then, understand faith in this sense of *reliance on the words of another,* as opposed to trust in oneself. This is the common meaning of the word, I grant;—as when we contrast it to sight and to reason; and yet what I have already said has its use in reminding men who are eager for demonstration in matters of religion, that there are difficulties in matters of sense and reasoning also. But to proceed as I have proposed.—It is easy to show, that, even considering faith as trust in another, it is no irrational or strange principle of conduct in the concerns of this life.

For when we consider the subject attentively, how few things there are which we can ascertain for ourselves by our own senses and reason! After all, what *do* we know without trusting others? We know that we are in a certain state of health, in a certain place, have been alive for a certain number of years, have certain principles and likings, have certain persons around us, and perhaps have in our lives travelled to certain places at a distance. But what do we know more? Are there not towns (we will say) within fifty or sixty miles of us which we have never seen, and which, nevertheless, we fully believe to be as we have heard them described? To extend our view;—we know that land stretches in every direction

of us, a certain number of miles, and then there is sea on all sides; that we are in an island. But who has *seen* the land all around, and has proved for himself that the fact is so? What, then, convinces us of it? the *report of others*,—this trust, this faith in testimony which, when religion is concerned, then, and only then, the proud and sinful would fain call irrational.

And what I have instanced in one set of facts, which we believe, is equally true of numberless others, of almost all of those which we think we know.

Consider how men in the business of life, nay, all of us, confide, are obliged to confide, in persons we never saw, or know but slightly; nay, in their hand-writings, which, for what we know, may be *forged*, if we are to speculate and fancy what *may be*. We act upon our trust in them implicitly, because common sense tells us, that with proper caution and discretion, faith in others is perfectly safe and rational. Scripture, then, only bids us act in respect to a future life, as we are every day acting at present. Or, again, how certain we all are (when we think on the subject) that we must sooner or later die. No one seriously thinks he can escape death; and men dispose of their property and arrange their affairs, confidently contemplating, not indeed the exact time of their death, still death as sooner or later to befall them. Of course they do; it would be most irrational in them not to expect it. Yet observe, *what proof* has any one of us that he shall die? because other men die? how does he know that? has he seen them die? he can know nothing of what took place before he was born, nor of what happens in other countries. How little,

indeed, he knows about it at all, except that it is *a received fact*, and except that it would, in truth, be idle to doubt what mankind as *a whole* witness, though each individual has only his proportionate share in the universal testimony! And, further, we constantly believe things even against our own judgment; i. e. when we think our informant likely to know more about the matter under consideration than ourselves, which is the precise case in the question of religious faith. And thus from reliance on others we acquire knowledge of all kinds, and proceed to reason, judge, decide, act, form plans for the future. And in all this (I say) *trust* is at the bottom; and this the world calls *prudence* (and rightly); and not to trust and act upon trust, *imprudence*, or (it may be) headstrong folly, or *madness*.

But it is needless to proceed; the world could not go on without trust. The most distressing event that can happen to a state is (we know) the spreading of a want of confidence between man and man. Distrust, *want of faith*, breaks the very bonds of human society. Now, then, shall we account it only rational for a man, when he is ignorant, to believe his fellow-man, nay, to yield to another's judgment as better than his own, and yet think it *against reason* when one, like Abraham, gives ear to the Word of God, and sets the promise of God above his own short-sighted expectation? Abraham, it is true, rested in hope beyond hope, in the hope afforded by a Divine promise beyond that hope suggested by nature. He had fancied he never should have a son, and God promised him a son. But might he not well address those self-wise persons who neglect to walk in the steps of his faith, in the

language of just reproof? "If we receive the witness of *men*" (he might well urge with the Apostle), "the witness of *God* is greater [1]." Therefore, he "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform."

But it may be objected; "True, if we *knew for certain* God had spoken to us as He did to Abraham, it were then madness indeed in us to disbelieve Him; but it is not *His voice* we hear, but *man's* speaking in His name. The Church tells us, that God has revealed to man His will; and the Ministers of the Church point to a book which they say is holy, and contains the words of God. How are we to know whether they speak truth or not? To believe this, is it according to reason or against it?"

This objection brings us to a very large and weighty question, though I do not think it is, generally speaking, a very practical one; viz. what are our reasons for believing the Bible came from God? If any one asks this in a scoffing way, he is not to be answered; for he is profane, and exposes himself to the curse pronounced by St. Paul upon the haters of the Lord Jesus. But if a man inquires sincerely, wishing to find the truth, waiting on God humbly, yet perplexed at knowing or witnessing the deeds of scorners and daring blasphemers, and at hearing their vain reasonings, and not knowing what to think or say about them, let him consider the following remarks, with which I conclude.

Now, first, whatever such profane persons may say

[1] 1 John v. 9.

about their willingness to believe, if they could find reason,—however willing they may profess themselves to admit that we daily take things on trust, and that to act on faith is in itself quite a rational procedure, —though they may pretend that they do not quarrel with being required to believe, but say that they do think it hard that better evidence is not given them for believing what they are bid believe undoubtingly, viz. the divine authority of the Bible,—in spite of all this, depend upon it, (in a very great many cases), they *do* murmur at being required to believe, they *do* dislike being bound to act without seeing, they *do* prefer to trust themselves to trusting God, even though it *could* be plainly proved to them that God was in truth speaking to them. Did they see God, did He show Himself as He will appear at the last day, still they would be faithful to their own miserable and wretched selves, and would be practically disloyal to the authority of God. Their conduct shows this. Why otherwise do they so frequently scoff at religious men, as if timid and narrow-minded, merely because they fear to sin? Why do they ridicule such conscientious persons as will not swear, or jest indecorously, or live dissolutely? Clearly, it is their very faith itself they ridicule; not their believing on false grounds, but their believing at all. Here they show what it is which rules them within. They do not like the tie of religion, they do not like dependence. To trust another, much more to trust him implicitly, is to acknowledge oneself to be his inferior; and this man's proud nature cannot bear to do. He is apt to think it unmanly, and to be

ashamed of it; he promises himself liberty by breaking the chain (as he considers it) which binds him to his Maker and Redeemer. You will say, why then do such men trust each other if they are so proud? I answer, that they cannot help it; and, again, that while they trust, they are trusted in turn; which puts them on a sort of equality with others. Unless this mutual dependence takes place, it is true, they cannot bear to be bound to trust another, to depend on him. And this is the reason that such men are so given to cause tumults and rebellion in national affairs. They set up some image of freedom in their minds, a freedom from the shackles of dependence, which they think their natural right, and which they aim to gain for themselves; a liberty, much like that which Satan aspired after, when he rebelled against God. So, let these men profess what they will, about their not finding fault with Faith on its own account, they do dislike it. And it is therefore very much to our purpose to accustom our minds to the fact, on which I have been insisting, that almost every thing we do is grounded on mere trust in others. We are from our birth dependent creatures, utterly dependent;—dependent immediately on man; and that visible dependence reminds us forcibly of our truer and fuller dependence upon God.

Next, I observe, that these unbelieving men, who use hard words against Scripture, condemn themselves out of their own mouth;—in this way. It is a mistake to suppose that our obedience to God's will is merely founded on our belief in the word of such persons as

tell us Scripture came from God. We obey God primarily because we actually feel His presence in our consciences bidding us obey Him. And this, I say, confutes these objectors on their own ground; because the very reason they give for their unbelief is, that they trust their own sight and reason, because their own, more than the words of God's Ministers. Now, let me ask, if they trust their senses and their reason, why do they not trust their conscience too? Is not conscience their own? Their conscience is as much a part of themselves as their reason is; and it is placed within them by Almighty God in order to balance the influence of sight and reason; and yet they will not attend to it; for a plain reason,—they love sin,—they love to be their own masters, and therefore they will not attend to that secret whisper of their hearts, which tells them they are *not* their own masters, and that sin is hateful and ruinous.

Nothing shows this more plainly than their conduct, if ever you appeal to their conscience in favour of your view of the case. Supposing they are using profane language, murmurings, or scoffings at religion; and supposing a man says to them, "You *know* in your heart you should not do so;" how will they reply? They immediately get angry; or they attempt to turn what is said into ridicule; any thing will they do, except answer by *reasoning*. No; their boasted argumentation then fails them. It flies like a coward before the slight stirring of conscience; and their passions, these are the only champions left for their defence. They in effect say, "We do so, because we like it;" perhaps they even

avow this in so many words. "He feedeth on ashes; a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand[1]?"

And are such the persons whom any Christian can in any degree trust? Surely faith in them would be of all conceivable confidences the most irrational, the most misplaced. Can we allow ourselves to be perplexed and frightened at the words of those who carry upon them the tokens of their own inconsistency, the mark of Cain? Surely not; and as that first rebel's mark was set on him, "lest any finding him should kill him," in like manner their presence but reminds us thereby to view them with love, though most sorrowfully, and to pray earnestly, and do our utmost (if there is ought we can do), that they may be spared the second death;—to look on them with awe, as a land cursed by God, the plain of Siddim or the ruins of Babel, but which He, for our Redeemer's sake, is able to renew and fertilize.

For ourselves, let us but obey God's voice in our hearts, and I will venture to say we shall have no doubts practically formidable about the truth of Scripture. Find out the man who strictly obeys the law within him, and yet is an unbeliever as regards the Bible, and then it will be time enough to consider all that variety of proof by which the truth of the Bible is confirmed to us. This is no practical inquiry for *us*. Our doubts, if we have any, will be found to

[1] Isa. xliv. 20.

arise after *disobedience;* it is bad company or corrupt books which lead to unbelief. It is sin which quenches the Holy Spirit.

And if we but obey God strictly, in time (through His blessing) faith will become like sight; we shall have no more difficulty in finding what will please God than in moving our limbs, or in understanding the conversation of our familiar friends. This is the blessedness of confirmed obedience. Let us aim at attaining it; and in whatever proportion we now enjoy it, praise and bless God for His unspeakable gift.

SERMON XVI.

The Christian Mysteries.

"*How can these things be?*"—JOHN iii. 9.

THERE is much instruction conveyed in the circumstance, that the Feast of the Holy Trinity immediately succeeds that of Whit Sunday. On the latter Festival we commemorate the coming of the Spirit of God, who is promised to us as the source of all spiritual knowledge and discernment. But lest we should forget the nature of that illumination which He imparts, Trinity Sunday follows, to tell us what it is not; not a light accorded to the reason, the gifts of the intellect; inasmuch as the Gospel has its mysteries, its difficulties, and secret things, which the Holy Spirit does not remove.

The grace promised us is given, not that we may know more, but that we may do better. It is given to influence, guide, and strengthen us in performing our duty towards God and man; it is given to us as creatures, as sinners, as men, as immortal beings, not as mere reasoners, disputers, or philosophical inquirers.

It teaches what we are, whither we are going, what we must do, how we must do it; it enables us to change our fallen nature from evil to good, "to make ourselves a new heart and a new spirit." But it tells us nothing for the *sake* of telling it; neither in His Holy Word, nor through our consciences, has the Blessed Spirit thought fit so to act. Not that the desire of knowing sacred things for the sake of knowing them is wrong. As knowledge about earth, sky, and sea, and the wonders they contain, is in itself valuable, and in its place desirable, so doubtless there is nothing sinful in gazing wistfully at the marvellous providences of God's moral governance, and wishing to understand them. But still God has not given us such knowledge in the Bible, and therefore to look into the Bible for such knowledge, or to expect it in any way from the inward teaching of the Holy Ghost, is a dangerous mistake, and (it may be) a sin. And since men are apt to prize knowledge above holiness, therefore it is most suitably provided, that Trinity Sunday should succeed Whit Sunday; to warn us that the enlightening vouchsafed to us is not an understanding of "all mysteries and all knowledge," but that love or charity which is "the fulfilling of the Law."

And in matter of fact there have been very grievous mistakes respecting the nature of Christian knowledge. There have been at all times men so ignorant of the object of Christ's coming, as to consider mysteries inconsistent with the light of the Gospel. They have thought the darkness of Judaism, of which Scripture speaks, to be a state of intellectual ignorance; and

Christianity to be, what they term, a "rational religion." And hence they have argued, that no doctrine which was *mysterious*, i. e. too deep for human reason, or inconsistent with their self-devised notions, could be contained in Scripture; as if it were honouring Christ to maintain that when He said a thing, He could not have meant what He said, because *they* would not have said it. Nicodemus, though a sincere inquirer, and (as the event shows) a true follower of Christ, yet at first was startled at the mysteries of the Gospel. He said to Christ, "How can these things be?" He felt the temptation, and overcame it. But there are others who are altogether offended and fall away on being exposed to it; as those mentioned in the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel, who went back and walked no more with Him.

The Feast of Trinity succeeds Pentecost; the light of the Gospel does not remove mysteries in religion. This is our subject. Let us enlarge upon it.

1. Let us consider such difficulties of religion, as press upon us independently of the Scriptures. Now we shall find the Gospel has not removed these; they remain as great as before Christ came.—How excellent is this world! how very good and fair is the face of nature! how pleasant it is to walk into the green country, and "to meditate in the field at the eventide[1]!" As we look around, we cannot but be persuaded that God is most good, and loves His creatures; yet amid all the splendour we see around us, and the happy beings,

[1] Gen. xxiv. 63.

thousands and ten thousands, which live in the air and water, the question comes upon us, "But *why is there pain in the world?*" We see that the brutes prey on each other, inflicting violent, unnatural deaths. Some of them, too, are enemies of man, and harm us when they have an opportunity. And man tortures others unrelentingly, nay, condemns some of them to a life of suffering. Much more do pain and misery show themselves in the history of man;—the numberless diseases and casualties of human life, and our sorrows of mind;—then, further, the evils we inflict on each other, our sins and their awful consequences. Now why does God permit so much evil in His own world? This is a difficulty, I say, which we feel at once, before we open the Bible; and which we are quite unable to solve. We open the Bible; the fact is acknowledged there, but it is not explained at all. We are told that sin entered the world *through the Devil,* who tempted Adam to disobedience; so that God created the world good, *though* evil is in it. But why He thought fit to *suffer* this, we are not told. We know no more on the subject than we did before opening the Bible. It was a mystery before God gave His revelation, it is as great a mystery now; and doubtless for this reason, because knowledge about it would do us no good, it would merely satisfy curiosity. It is not practical knowledge.

2. Nor, again, are the difficulties of Judaism removed by Christianity. The Jews were told, that if they put to death certain animals, they should be admitted by way of consequence into God's favour, which their continual transgressions were ever forfeiting. Now there

was something mysterious here. How should the death of unoffending creatures make God gracious to the Jews? They could not tell, of course. All that could be said to the point was, that in the daily course of human affairs the unoffending constantly suffer instead of the offenders. One man is ever suffering for the fault of another. But this experience did not lighten the difficulty of so mysterious a provision. It was still a mystery that God's favour should depend on the death of brute animals. Does Christianity solve this difficulty? No; it continues it. The Jewish sacrifices indeed are done away, but still there remains One Great Sacrifice for sin, infinitely higher and more sacred than all other conceivable sacrifices. According to the Gospel message, Christ has voluntarily suffered, "the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." Here is the mystery continued. Why was this suffering necessary to procure for us the blessings which we were in ourselves unworthy of? We do not know. We should not be better men for knowing why God did not pardon us without Christ's death; so He has not told us. One suffers for another in the ordinary course of things; and under the Jewish Law, too; and in the Christian scheme; and why all this, is still a mystery.

Another difficulty to a thoughtful Israelite would arise from considering the state of the heathen world. Why did not Almighty God bring all nations into His Church, and teach them, by direct revelation, the sin of idol-worship? He would not be able to answer. God had chosen one nation. It is true the same principle of preferring one to another is seen in the system of the

whole world. God gives men unequal advantages, comforts, education, talents, health. Yet this does not satisfy us, *why* He has thought fit to do so at all. Here, again, the Gospel recognizes and confirms the mysterious fact. *We* are born in a Christian country, others are not; *we* are baptized; *we* are educated; others are not. We are favoured *above* others. But why? We cannot tell; no more than the Jews could tell why they were favoured;—and for this reason, because to know it is nothing to us; it would not make us better men to know it. It is intended that we should look to ourselves, and rather consider why we have privileges given us, than why others have not the same. Our Saviour repels such curious questions more than once. "Lord, and what shall this man do[1]?" St. Peter asked about St. John. Christ replied, "If I will that he tarry till I come, *what is that to thee? Follow thou Me.*"

Thus the Gospel gives us no advantages in respect to mere *barren knowledge,* above the Jew, or above the unenlightened heathen.

3. Nay, we may proceed to say, further than this, *that it increases our difficulties.* It is indeed a remarkable circumstance, that the very revelation that brings us *practical and useful knowledge* about our souls, in the very *act of doing* so, nay (as it would seem), in *consequence of* doing so, brings us mysteries. We gain spiritual light at the price of intellectual perplexity; a blessed exchange doubtless, (for which is better, to be well and

[1] John xxi. 21, 22.

happy within ourselves, or to know what is going on at the world's end?) still at the price of perplexity. For instance, how infinitely important and blessed is the news of eternal happiness? but we learn in connexion with this joyful truth, that there is a *state of endless misery* too. Now, how great a mystery is this! yet the difficulty goes hand in hand with the spiritual blessing. It is still more strikingly to the point to refer to the message of mercy itself. We are saved by the death of Christ; but who is Christ? Christ is the Very Son of God, Begotten of God and One with God from everlasting, God incarnate. This is our inexpressible comfort, and a most sanctifying truth if we receive it rightly; but how stupendous a mystery *is* the incarnation and sufferings of the Son of God! Here, not merely do the good tidings and the mystery go together, as in the revelation of eternal life and eternal death, but the very doctrine which *is* the mystery, brings the comfort also. Weak, ignorant, sinful, desponding, sorrowful man, gains the knowledge of an infinitely merciful Protector, a Giver of all good, most powerful, the Worker of all righteousness within him; at what price? at the price of a mystery. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory;" and He laid down His life for the world. What rightly disposed mind but will gladly make the exchange, and exclaim, in the language of one whose words are almost sacred among us, "Let it be counted folly, or frenzy, or fury whatsoever; it is our comfort and our wisdom. We care for no *knowledge* in the world but this, that man hath sinned, and God hath suffered; that God hath made

Himself the Son of Man, and that men are made the righteousness of God[1]."

The same singular connexion between religious light and comfort, and intellectual darkness, is also seen in the doctrine of the Trinity. Frail man requires pardon and sanctification; can he do otherwise than gratefully devote himself to, and trust implicitly in, his Redeemer and his Sanctifier? But if our Redeemer were not God, and our Sanctifier were not God, how great would have been our danger of preferring creatures to the Creator! What a source of light, freedom, and comfort is it, to know we cannot love Them too much, or humble ourselves before Them too reverently, for both Son and Spirit are separately God! Such is the *practical* effect of the doctrine; but what a mystery also is therein involved! What a source of perplexity and darkness (I say) to the reason, is the doctrine which immediately results from it! for if Christ be by Himself God, and the Spirit be by Himself God, and yet there be but One God, here is plainly something altogether beyond our comprehension; and, though we might have antecedently supposed there were numberless truths relating to Almighty God which we could neither know nor understand, yet certain as this is, it does not make this mystery at all less overpowering when it *is* revealed.

And it is important to observe, that this doctrine of the Trinity *is not proposed in Scripture as a mystery*. It seems then that, as we draw forth many remarkable facts concerning the natural world which do not lie on its

[1] Hooker on Justification.

surface, so by meditation we detect in Revelation this remarkable principle, which is not openly propounded, *that religious light is intellectual darkness.* As if our gracious Lord had said to us; "Scripture does not *aim* at making mysteries, but they are as shadows brought out by the Sun of Truth. When you knew nothing of revealed light, you knew not revealed darkness. Religious truth requires you should be told *something*, your own imperfect nature prevents your knowing *all;* and to know *something*, and *not all,—partial knowledge,*— must of course perplex; doctrines imperfectly revealed must be mysterious."

4. Such being the necessary mysteriousness of Scripture doctrine, how can we best turn it to account in the contest which we are engaged in with our evil hearts? Now we are given to see how to do this in part, and, as far as we see, let us be thankful for the gift. It seems, then, that difficulties in revelation are especially given to prove *the reality of our faith.* What shall separate the insincere from the sincere follower of Christ? When the many own Christ with their lips, what shall try and discipline His true servant, and detect the self-deceiver? Difficulties in revelation mainly contribute to this end. They are stumbling-blocks to proud and unhumbled minds, and were intended to be such. Faith is unassuming, modest, thankful, obedient. It receives with reverence and love whatever God gives, when convinced it is His gift. But when men do not feel rightly their need of His redeeming mercy, their lost condition and their inward sinfulness, when, in fact, they do not seek Christ in good earnest, in order to gain something, and do some-

thing, but as a matter of curiosity, or speculation, or form, *of course* these difficulties will become great objections in the way of their receiving His word simply. And I say these difficulties were intended to be such by Him who "scattereth the proud in the imagination of their hearts." St. Peter assures us, that that same corner-stone which is unto them that believe "*precious*," is "unto them which be disobedient, a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence," "whereunto also (he adds) *they were appointed*[1]." And our Lord's conduct through His ministry is a continued example of this. He spoke in parables[2], that they might see and hear, yet not understand,—a righteous detection of insincerity; whereas the same difficulties and obscurities, which offended irreligious men, would but lead the humble and meek to seek for more light, for information as far as it was to be obtained, and for resignation and contentedness, where it was not given. When Jesus said, . . . "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. . . . . Many of His disciples . . . . said, This is a hard saying: who can hear it? . . . . and from that time many . . . . went back, and walked no more with Him. . . . . Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Here is the trial of faith, *a difficulty*. Those "that believe not" fall away; the true disciples remain firm, for they feel their *eternal interests* at stake, and ask

[1] 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8. [2] Vide Mark iv. 11—25, &c.

the very plain and practical, as well as affectionate question, "*To whom* shall we go[1]," if we leave Christ?

At another time our Lord says, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent (those who trust reason rather than Scripture and conscience), and hast revealed them unto babes (those who humbly walk by faith). Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight[2]."

5. Now what do we gain from thoughts such as these? Our Saviour gives us the conclusion, in the words which follow a passage I have just read. "Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given him of My Father." Or, again, "No man can come to Me, except the Father, which hath sent Me, draw him." Therefore, if we feel the necessity of coming to Christ, yet the difficulty, let us recollect that the gift of coming is in God's hands, and that we must pray Him to give it to us. Christ does not merely tell us, that we cannot come of ourselves (though this He does tell us), but He tells us also with whom the power of coming is lodged, with His Father,—that we may seek it of Him. It is true, religion has an austere appearance to those who never have tried it; its doctrines full of mystery, its precepts of harshness; so that it is uninviting, offending different men in different ways, but in some way offending all. When then we feel within us the risings of this opposition to Christ, proud aversion to His Gospel, or

[1] John vi. 53—68. [2] Matt. xi. 25, 26.

a low-minded longing after this world, let us pray God to draw us; and though we cannot move a step without Him, at least let us try to move. He looks into our hearts and sees our strivings even before we strive, and He blesses and strengthens even our feebleness. Let us get rid of curious and presumptuous thoughts by going about our business, whatever it is; and let us mock and baffle the doubts which Satan whispers to us by *acting* against them. No matter whether we believe doubtingly or not, or know clearly or not, so that *we act* upon our belief. The rest will follow in time; part in this world, part in the next. Doubts may pain, but they cannot harm, unless we give way to them; and that we *ought not* to give way, our conscience tells us, so that our course is plain. And the more we are in earnest to "work out our salvation," the less shall we care to know how those things really are, which perplex us. At length, when our hearts are in our work, we shall be indisposed to take the trouble of listening to curious truths (if they are but curious), though we might have them explained to us. For what says the Holy Scripture? that of speculations "there is no end," and they are "a weariness of the flesh;" but that we must "fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man[1]."

[1] Eccles. xii. 12 13.

SERMON XVII.

The Self-Wise Inquirer.

"*Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.*"—1 Cor. iii. 18, 19.

AMONG the various deceptions against which St. Paul warns us, a principal one is that of a *false wisdom;* as in the text. The Corinthians prided themselves on their intellectual acuteness and knowledge; as if any thing could equal the excellence of Christian love. Accordingly, St. Paul writing to them says, "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world" (i. e. has the reputation of wisdom in the world), "let him become a fool (what the world calls a fool), that he may (really) be wise." "For," he proceeds (just as real wisdom is foolishness in the eyes of the world, so in turn), "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

This warning of the Apostle against *our trusting our own wisdom,* may lead us, through God's blessing, to some profitable reflections to-day.

The world's wisdom is said to be *foolishness* in God's sight; and the end of it error, perplexity, and then ruin. "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." Here is one especial reason why professed inquirers after Truth do not find it. They seek it in a wrong way, by a vain wisdom, which leads them away from the Truth, however it may seem to promise success.

Let us then inquire what is this *vain wisdom*, and then we shall the better see how it leads men astray.

Now, when it is said that to trust our own notions is a wrong thing and a vain wisdom, of course this is not meant of all our own notions whatever; for we must trust our own notions in one shape or other, and some notions which we form are right and true. The question, therefore, is, what is that *evil* trusting to ourselves, that sinful self-confidence, or self-conceit, which is called in the text the "wisdom of the world," and is a chief cause of our going wrong in our religious inquiries?

These are the notions which we may trust *without* blame; viz. such as come to us by way of our Conscience, for such come from God. I mean our certainty that there is a right and a wrong, that some things ought to be done, and other things not done; that we have duties, the neglect of which brings remorse; and further, that God is good, wise, powerful, and righteous, and that we should try to obey Him. All these notions, and a multitude of others like these, come by natural conscience, i. e. they are impressed on all our minds from our earliest years without our trouble. They do not proceed from the mere exercise of our minds, though it

is true they are strengthened and formed thereby. They proceed from God, whether within us or without us; and though we cannot trust them so implicitly as we can trust the Bible, because the truths of the Bible are actually preserved in writing, and so cannot be lost or altered, still, as far as we have reason to think them true, we may rely in them, and make much of them, without incurring the sin of self-confidence. These notions which we obtain without our exertion will never make us proud or conceited, because they are ever attended with a sense of sin and guilt, from the remembrance that we have at times transgressed and injured them. To trust them is not the false wisdom of the world, or foolishness, because they come from the All-wise God. And far from leading a man into error, they will, if obeyed, of a certainty lead him to a firm belief in Scripture; in which he will find all those vague conjectures and imperfect notions about Truth, which his own heart taught him, abundantly sanctioned, completed, and illustrated.

Such then are the opinions and feelings of which a man is *not* proud. What are those of which he is likely to be proud? those which he obtains, *not* by nature, but by his own industry, ability, and research; those which he possesses and others not. Every one is in danger of valuing himself for what he does; and hence truths (or fancied truths) which a man has obtained for himself after much thought and labour, such he is apt to make much of, and to rely upon; and this is the source of that vain wisdom of which the Apostle speaks in the text.

Now (I say) this confidence in our own reasoning powers not only leads to pride, but to "*foolishness*" also, and destructive error, because it will oppose itself to Scripture. A man who fancies he can find out truth by himself, disdains revelation. He who thinks he *has* found it out, is *impatient* of revelation. He fears it will interfere with his own imaginary discoveries, he is unwilling to consult it; and when it does interfere, then he is angry. We hear much of this proud rejection of the truth in the Epistle from which the text is taken. The Jews felt anger, and the Greeks disdain, at the Christian doctrine. "The Jews required a sign (according to their preconceived notions concerning the Messiah's coming), and the Greeks seek after wisdom (some subtle train of reasoning), but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness[1]." In another place the Apostle says of the misled Christians of Corinth, "Now ye are full" of your own notions, "now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings *without us*[2];" i. e. you have prided yourself on a wisdom, "without," separate from, the truth of Apostolic doctrine. Confidence, then, in our own reasoning powers leads to (what St. Paul calls) foolishness, by causing in our hearts an indifference towards, or a distaste for Scripture information.

But, besides thus keeping us from the best of guides, it also makes us fools, because it is a confidence in a *bad* guide. Our reasoning powers are very weak in all inquiries into moral and religious truth. Clear-sighted as

[1] 1 Cor. i. 22, 23. [2] 1 Cor. iv. 8.

reason is on other subjects, and trustworthy as a guide, still in questions connected with our duty to God and man it is very unskilful and equivocating. After all, it barely reaches the same great truths which are authoritatively set forth by Conscience and by Scripture; and if it be used in religious inquiries, without reference to these divinely-sanctioned informants, the probability is, it will miss the Truth altogether. Thus the (so-called) wise will be taken in their own craftiness. All of us, doubtless, recollect our Lord's words, which are quite to the purpose; "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the *wise and prudent* (those who trust in their own intellectual powers), and hast revealed them unto *babes*[1]," those, i. e. that act by faith and for conscience sake.

The false wisdom, then, of which St. Paul speaks in the text, is a trusting our own powers for arriving at religious truth, instead of taking what is divinely provided for us, whether in nature or revelation. This is the way of the world. In the world, Reason is set against Conscience, and usurps its power; and hence men become "wise in their own conceits," and "leaning to their own understandings," "err from the truth." Let us now review some particulars of this contest between our instinctive sense of right and wrong, and our weak and conceited reason.

It begins within us, when childhood and boyhood are past; and the time comes for our entrance into life. Before that time we trusted our divinely-enlightened

[1] Matt. xi. 25.

sense of duty and our right feeling implicitly; and though (alas!) we continually transgressed, and thereby impaired this inward guide, at least we did not question its authority. *Then* we had that original temper of faith, wrought in us by baptism, the spirit of little children, without which our Lord assures us, none of us, young or old, can enter the kingdom of heaven [1].

But when our minds became more manly, and the world opened upon us, then in proportion to the intellectual gifts with which God had honoured us, came the temptation of unbelief and disobedience. Then came reason, led on by passion, to war against our better knowledge. We were driven into the wilderness, after our Lord's manner, by the very Spirit given us, which exposed us to the Devil's devices, before the time or power came of using the gift in God's service. And how many of the most highly endowed then fall away under trials which the sinless Son of God withstood! He feels for all who are tempted, having Himself suffered temptation; yet what a sight must He see, and by what great exercise of mercy must the Holy Jesus endure, the bold and wicked thoughts which often reign the most triumphantly in the breasts of those (at least for a time) whom He has commissioned by the abundance of their talents to be the especial ministers of His will!

A murmuring against that religious service which is perfect freedom, complaints that Christ's yoke is heavy, a rebellious rising against the authority of Conscience, and a proud arguing against the Truth, or at least an

[1] Matt. xviii. 3.

endurance of doubt and scoffing, and a light, unmeaning use of sceptical arguments and assertions, these are the beginnings of apostasy. Then come the affectation of originality, the desire to appear manly and independent, and the fear of the ridicule of our acquaintance, all combining to make us first speak, and then really think evil of the supreme authority of religion. This gradual transgression of the first commandment of the Law is generally attended by a transgression of the fifth. In our childhood we loved both religion and our home; but as we learn to despise the voice of God, so do we first affect, and then feel, an indifference towards the opinions of our superiors and elders. Thus our minds become gradually hardened against the purest pleasures, both divine and human.

As this progress in sin continues, our disobedience becomes its own punishment. In proportion as we lean to our own understanding, we are driven to do so for want of a better guide. Our first true guide, the light of innocence, is gradually withdrawn from us; and nothing is left for us but to "grope and stumble in the desolate places," by the dim, uncertain light of reason. Thus we are taken in our own craftiness. This is what is sometimes called *judicial blindness;* such as Pharaoh's, who, from resisting God's will, at length did not know the difference between light and darkness.

How far each individual proceeds in this bad course, depends on a variety of causes, into the consideration of which I need not enter. Some are frightened at themselves, and turn back into the right way before it is too

late. Others are checked; and though they do not seek God with all their heart, yet are preserved from any strong and full manifestation of the evil principles which lurk within them; and others are kept in a correct outward form of religion by the circumstances in which they are placed. But there are others, and these many in number, perhaps in all ranks of life, who proceed onwards in evil; and I will go on to describe in part their condition,—the condition, that is, of those in whom intellectual power is fearfully unfolded amid the neglect of moral truth.

The most common case, of course, is that of those who, with their principles thus unformed, or rather unsettled, become engaged, in the ordinary way, in the business of life. Their first simplicity of character went early. The violence of passion followed, and was indulged; and it is gone, too, leaving (without their suspecting it) most baneful effects on their mind; just as some diseases silently change the constitution of the body. Lastly, a vain reason has put into disorder their notions about moral propriety and duty, both as to religion and the conduct of life. It is quite plain, that, having nothing of that faith which "overcomes the world," they must be overcome by it. Let it not be supposed I am speaking of some strange case which does not concern us; for what we know, it concerns some of us most nearly. The issue of our youthful trial in good and evil, probably has had somewhat of a decided character one way or the other; and we may be quite sure that, if it has issued in evil, we shall not know it. Deadness to the voice of God, hardness of

heart, is one of the very symptoms of unbelief. God's judgments, whether to the world or the individual, are not loudly spoken. The decree goes forth to build or destroy; Angels hear it; but we go on in the way of the world as usual, though our souls may have been, at least for a season, abandoned by God. I mean, that it is not at all unlikely that, in the case of some of those who now hear me, a great part of their professed faith is a mere matter of *words*, not *ideas and principles;* that what opinions they really hold by any exertion of their own minds, have been reached by the mere exercise of their intellect, the random and accidental use of their mere reasoning powers, whether they be strong or not, and are not the result of habitual, firm, and progressive obedience to God, not the knowledge which an honest and good heart imparts. Our religious notions may lie on the mere surface of our minds, and have no root within them; and (I say) from this circumstance,—that the indulgence of early passions, though forgotten now, and the misapplication of reason in our youth, have left an indelibly evil character upon our heart, a judicial hardness and blindness. Let us think of this; it may be the state of those who have had to endure only ordinary temptations, from the growth of that reasoning faculty with which we are all gifted.

But when that gift of reason is something especial,—clear, brilliant, or powerful,—then our danger is increased. The first sin of men of superior understanding is to *value* themselves upon it, and look down upon others. They make intellect the measure of praise and blame; and instead of considering a common *faith*

to be the bond of union between Christian and Christian, they dream of some other fellowship of civilization, refinement, literature, science, or general mental illumination, to unite gifted minds one with another. Having thus cast down moral excellence from its true station, and set up the usurping empire of mere reason, next, they place a value upon all truths exactly in proportion to the possibility of proving them by means of that mere reason. Hence, moral and religious truths are thought little of by them, because they fall under the province of *Conscience* far more than of the intellect. Religion sinks in their estimation, or becomes of no account; they begin to think all religions alike; and no wonder, for they are like men who have lost the faculty of discerning colours, and who never, by any exercise of reason, can make out the difference between white and black. As to the code of morals, they acknowledge it in a measure, that is, so far as its dicta can be *proved* by reasoning, by an appeal to sight, and to expedience, and without reference to a natural sense of right and wrong as the sanction of these informants. Thinking much of intellectual advancement, they are much bent on improving the world by making *all men* intellectual; and they labour to convince themselves, that as men grow in knowledge they will grow in virtue.

As they proceed in their course of judicial blindness, from *undervaluing* they learn *to despise* or to *hate* the authority of Conscience. They treat it as a weakness, to which all men indeed are subject,—they themselves in the number,—especially in seasons of sickness, but of which they have cause to be ashamed. The notions of

better men about an over-ruling Providence, and the Divine will, designs, appointments, works, judgments, they treat with scorn, as irrational; especially if (as will often be the case) these notions are conveyed in incorrect language, with some accidental confusion or intellectual weakness of expression.

And all these inducements to live by sight and not by faith are greatly increased, when men are engaged in any pursuit which properly *belongs* to the intellect. Hence sciences conversant with experiments on the material creation, tend to make men forget the existence of spirit and the Lord of spirits.

I will not pursue the course of infidelity into its worst and grossest forms; but it may be instructive, before I conclude, to take the case of such a man as I have been describing, when under the influence of some relentings of conscience towards the close of his life.

This is a case of no unfrequent occurrence; that is, it must frequently happen that the most hardened conscience is at times visited by sudden compunctions, though generally they are but momentary. But it sometimes happens, further than this, that a man, from one cause or other, feels he is not in a safe state, and struggles with himself, and the struggle terminates in a manner which affords a fresh illustration of the working of that wisdom of the world which in God's sight is foolishness.

How shall a sinner, who has formed his character upon unbelief, trusting sight and reason rather than Conscience and Scripture, how shall he begin to repent? What must he do? Is it possible he can overcome him-

self, and new make his heart in the end of his days? It *is* possible,—not with man, but with God, who gives grace to all who ask for it; but in only one way, *in the way of His commandments*, by a slow, tedious, toilsome self-discipline; slow, tedious, and toilsome, that is, to one who has been long hardening himself in a dislike of it, and indulging himself in the rapid flights and easy victories of his reason. There is but one way to heaven; the narrow way; and he who sets about to seek God, though in old age, must enter it at the same door as others. He must retrace his way, and begin again with the very beginning as if he were a boy. And so proceeding,—labouring, watching, and praying,—he seems likely, after all, to make but little progress during the brief remnant of his life; both because the time left to him is short, and because he has to undo while he does a work;—he has to overcome that resistance from his old stout will and hardened heart, which in youth he would not have experienced.

Now it is plain how humbling this is to his pride: he wishes to be saved; but he cannot stoop to be a penitent all his days: to beg he is ashamed. Therefore he looks about for other means of finding a safe hope. And one way among others by which he deceives himself, is this same idea that he may gain religious knowledge merely by his reason.

Thus it happens, that men who have led profligate lives in their youth, or who have passed their days in the pursuit of wealth, or in some other excitement of the world, not unfrequently settle down into *heresies* in their latter years. Before, perhaps, they professed nothing,

and suffered themselves to be called Christians and members of the Church; but at length, roused to inquire after truth, and forgetting that the pure in heart alone can see God, and therefore that they must begin by a *moral* reformation, by self-denial, they inquire merely by the way of reasoning. No wonder they err; they cannot understand any part of the Church's system whether of doctrine or discipline; yet they *think* themselves judges; and they treat the most sacred ordinances and the most solemn doctrines, with scorn and irreverence. Thus "the last state of such men is worse than the first." In the words of the text, they ought to have become fools, that they might have been in the end really wise; but they prefer another way, and are taken in their own craftiness.

May we ever bear in mind, that the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom[1];" that obedience to our conscience, in all things, great and small, is the way to know the Truth; that pride hardens the heart, and sensuality debases it; and that all those who live in pride and sensual indulgence, can no more comprehend the way of the Holy Spirit, or know the voice of Christ, than the devils who believe with a dead faith and tremble!

"Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" . . . where there is "no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof[2]."

[1] Prov. i. 7. [2] Rev. xxi. 23; xxii. 14

SERMON XVIII.

Obedience the Remedy for Religious Perplexity.

"*Wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt thee to inherit the land.*"—PSALM xxxvii. 34.

THE Psalm from which I have taken my text, is written with a view of encouraging good men who are in perplexity,—and especially perplexity concerning God's designs, providence, and will. "Fret not thyself;" this is the lesson it inculcates from first to last. This world is in a state of confusion. Unworthy men prosper, and are looked on as the greatest men of the time. Truth and goodness are thrown into the shade; but wait patiently,—peace, be still; in the end, the better side shall triumph,—the meek shall inherit the earth.

Doubtless the Church is in great darkness and perplexity under the Christian dispensation, as well as under the Jewish. Not that Christianity does not explain to us the most important religious questions,—which it does to our great comfort; but that, from the nature of the case, imperfect beings, as we are, must always be, on the whole, in a state of darkness. Nay,

the very doctrines of the New Testament themselves bring with them their own peculiar difficulties; and, till we learn to quiet our minds, and to school them into submission to God, we shall probably find more perplexity than information even in what St. Paul calls "the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ[1]." Revelation was not given us to satisfy doubts, but to make us better men; and it is as we become better men, that it becomes light and peace to our souls; though even to the end of our lives we shall find difficulties both in it and in the world around us.

I will make some remarks to-day on the case of those who, though they are in the whole honest inquirers in religion, yet are more or less in perplexity and anxiety, and so are discouraged.

The use of difficulties to all of us in our trial in this world is obvious. Our faith is variously assailed by doubts and difficulties, in order to prove its sincerity. If we really love God and His Son, we shall go on in spite of opposition, even though, as in the case of the Canaanitish woman, He seem to repel us. If we are not in earnest, difficulty makes us turn back. This is one of the ways in which God separates the corn from the chaff, gradually gathering each, as time goes on, into its own heap, till the end comes, when "He will gather the wheat into His garner, but the chaff He will burn with fire unquenchable[2]."

Now, I am aware that to some persons it may sound strange to speak of *difficulties* in religion, for they find

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 4.

[2] Luke iii. 17.

none at all. But though it is true, that the earlier we begin to seek God in earnest, the less of difficulty and perplexity we are likely to endure, yet this ignorance of religious difficulties in a great many cases, I fear, arises from ignorance of religion itself. When our hearts are not in our work, and we are but carried on with the stream of the world, continuing in the Church because we find ourselves there, observing religious ordinances merely because we are used to them, and professing to be Christians because others do, it is not to be expected that we should know what it is to feel ourselves wrong, and unable to get right,—to feel doubt, anxiety, disappointment, discontent; whereas, when our minds are awakened, and we see that there is a right way and a wrong way, and that we have much to learn, when we try to gain religious knowledge from Scripture, and to apply it to our selves, then from time to time we are troubled with doubts and misgivings, and are oppressed with gloom.

To all those who are perplexed in any way soever, who wish for light but cannot find it, one precept must be given,—*obey*. It is obedience which brings a man into the right path; it is obedience keeps him there and strengthens him in it. Under all circumstances, whatever be the cause of his distress,—obey. In the words of the text, "Wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt thee."

Let us apply this exhortation to the case of those who have but lately taken up the subject of religion at all. Every science has its difficulties at first; why then should the science of living well be without them?

When the subject of religion is new to us, it is strange. We have heard truths all our lives without feeling them duly; at length, when they affect us, we cannot believe them to be the same we have long known. We are thrown out of our fixed notions of things; an embarrassment ensues; a general painful uncertainty. We say, "Is the Bible true? Is it possible?" and are distressed by evil doubts, which we can hardly explain to ourselves, much less to others. No one can help us. And the relative importance of present objects is so altered from what it was, that we can scarcely form any judgment upon them, or when we attempt it, we form a wrong judgment. Our eyes do not accommodate themselves to the various distances of the objects before us, and are dazzled; or like the blind man restored to sight, we "see men as trees, walking[1]." Moreover, our judgment of persons, as well as of things, is changed; and, if not every where changed, yet at first every where suspected by ourselves. And this general distrust of ourselves is the greater the longer we have been already living in inattention to sacred subjects, and the more we now are humbled and ashamed of ourselves. And it leads us to take up with the first religious guide who offers himself to us, whatever be his real fitness for the office.

To these agitations of mind about what is truth and what is error, is added an anxiety about ourselves, which, however sincere, is apt to lead us wrong. We do not feel, think, and act as religiously as we could

[1] Mark viii. 24.

wish; and while we are sorry for it, we are also (perhaps) somewhat *surprised* at it, and impatient at it,—which is natural but unreasonable. Instead of reflecting that we are just setting about our recovery from a most serious disease of long standing, we conceive we ought to be able to trace the course of our recovery by a sensible improvement. This same impatience is seen in persons who are recovering from bodily indisposition. They gain strength slowly, and are better perhaps for some days, and then worse again; and a slight relapse dispirits them. In the same way, when we begin to seek God in earnest, we are apt, not only to be humbled (which we ought to be), but to be discouraged at the slowness with which we are able to amend, in spite of all the assistances of God's grace. Forgetting that our proper title at very best is that of penitent sinners, we seek to rise all at once into the blessedness of the sons of God. This impatience leads us to misuse the purpose of self-examination; which is principally intended to inform us of our sins, whereas we are disappointed if it does not at once tell us of our improvement. Doubtless, in a length of time we shall be conscious of improvement too, but the object of ordinary self-examination is to find out whether we are in earnest, and again, what we have done wrong, in order that we may pray for pardon, and do better. Further, reading in Scripture how exalted the thoughts and spirit of Christians should be, we are apt to forget that a Christian spirit is the growth of time; and that we cannot force it upon our minds, however desirable and necessary it may be to possess it; that by giving

utterance to religious sentiments we do not become religious, rather the reverse; whereas, if we strove to obey God's will in all things, we actually should be gradually training our hearts into the fulness of a Christian spirit. But not understanding this, men are led to speak much and expressly upon sacred subjects, as if it were a duty to do so, and in the hope of its making them better; and they measure their advance in faith and holiness, not by their power of obeying God in practice, mastering their wills, and becoming more exact in their daily duties, but by the warmth and energy of their religious feelings. And, when they cannot sustain these to that height which they consider almost the characteristic of a true Christian, then they are discouraged, and tempted to despair. Added to this, sometimes their old sins, reviving from the slumber into which they have been cast for a time, rush over their minds, and seem prepared to take them captive. They cry to God for aid, but He seems not to hear them, and they know not which way to look for safety.

Now such persons must be reminded first of all, of the greatness of the work which they have undertaken, viz. the sanctification of their souls. Those, indeed, who think this an easy task, or (which comes to the same thing) who think that, though hard in itself, it will be easy to them, for God's grace will take all the toil of it from them, such men of course must be disappointed on finding by experience the force of their original evil nature, and the extreme slowness with which even a Christian is able to improve it. And

it is to be feared that this disappointment in some cases issues in a belief that it is *impossible* to overcome our evil selves; that bad we are, bad we must be; that our innate corruption lies like a load in our hearts, and no more admits of improvement than a stone does of light and thought; and, in consequence, that all we have to do, is to believe in Christ who is to save us, and to dwell on the thoughts of His perfect work for us,—that this is all we can do,—and that it is presumption as well as folly to attempt more.

But what says the text? "Wait on the Lord and keep His way." And Isaiah? "They that wait upon the Lord shall *renew* their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint[1]." And St. Paul? "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me[2]." The very fruit of Christ's passion was the gift of the Holy Spirit, which was to enable us to do what otherwise we could not do—"*to work out our own salvation*[3]."—Yet, while we must aim at this, and feel convinced of our ability to do it at length through the gifts bestowed on us, we cannot do it rightly without a deep settled conviction of the exceeding difficulty of the work. That is, not only shall we be tempted to negligence, but to impatience also, and thence into all kinds of unlawful treatments of the soul, if we be possessed by a notion that religious discipline soon becomes easy to the believer, and that the heart is speedily changed. Christ's "yoke is easy[4]:" true, to those who

[1] Isa. xl. 31. [2] Phil. iv. 13. [3] Phil. ii. 12. [4] Matt. xi. 30.

are accustomed to it, not to the unbroken neck. "Wisdom is very unpleasant to the unlearned (says the son of Sirach), he that is without understanding will not remain with her." "At the first she will walk with him by crooked ways, and bring fear and dread upon him, and torment him with her discipline, until she may trust his soul and try him by her laws. Then will she return the straight way unto him, and comfort him, and show him her secrets[1]."

Let, then, every beginner make up his mind to suffer disquiet and perplexity. He cannot complain that it should be so; and though he should be deeply ashamed of himself that it is so (for had he followed God from a child, his condition would have been far different, though, even then perhaps, not without some perplexities), still he has no cause to be surprised or discouraged. The more he makes up his mind manfully to bear doubt, struggle against it, and meekly to do God's will all through it, the sooner this unsettled state of mind will cease, and order will rise out of confusion. "Wait on the Lord," this is the rule; "keep His way," this is the manner of waiting. Go about your duty; mind little things as well as great. Do not pause, and say, "I am as I was; day after day passes, and still no light;" go on. It is very painful to be haunted by wandering doubts, to have thoughts shoot across the mind about the reality of religion altogether, or of this or that particular doctrine of it, or about the correctness of one's own faith, and the safety of

[1] Ecclus. vi. 20; iv. 17, 18.

one's own state. But it must be right to serve God; we have a voice within us answering to the injunction in the text, of waiting on Him and keeping His way. David confesses it. "When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek[1]."—And surely such obedient waiting upon Him will obtain His blessing. "*Blessed* are they that keep His commandments." And besides this express promise, even if we had to seek for a way to understand His perfect will, could we conceive one of greater promise than that of beginning with little things, and so gradually making progress? In all other things is not this the way to perfection? Does not a child learn to walk short distances at first? Who would attempt to bear great weights before he had succeeded with the lesser? It is from God's great goodness that our daily constant duty is placed in the performance of small and comparatively easy services. To be dutiful and obedient in ordinary matters, to speak the truth, to be honest, to be sober, to keep from sinful words and thoughts, to be kind and forgiving,—and all this for our Saviour's sake,—let us attempt *these* duties first. *They* even will be difficult,—the least of them; still they are much easier than the solution of the doubts which harass us, and they will by degrees give us a practical knowledge of the Truth.

To take one instance, out of many which might be given: suppose we have any perplexing, indescribable doubts about the Divine power of our Blessed Lord, or

[1] Ps. xxvii. 8.

concerning the doctrine of the Trinity; well, let us leave the subject and turn to do God's will. If we do this in faith and humility, we shall in time find that, while we have been obeying our Saviour's precepts, and imitating His conduct in the Gospels, our difficulties have been removed, though it may take time to remove them; and though we are not, during the time, sensible of what is going on. There may, indeed, be cases in which they are never removed entirely,—and in which doubtless some great and good object is secured by the trial; but we may fairly and safely look out for a more comfortable issue. And so as regards all our difficulties. "Wait on the Lord, and keep His way." His word is sure; we may safely trust it. We shall gain light as to general doctrines by embodying them in those particular instances in which they become ordinary duties. But it too often happens, that from one cause or other men do not pursue this simple method of gradually extricating themselves from error.—They seek some new path which promises to be shorter and easier than the lowly and the circuitous way of obedience. They wish to arrive at the heights of Mount Zion without winding round its base; and at first (it must be confessed) they seem to make greater progress than those who are content to wait, and work righteousness. Impatient of "sitting in darkness, and having no light," and of completing the Prophet's picture of a saint in trouble, "by fearing the Lord, and obeying the voice of His servant[1]," they expect to gain speedy peace and

[1] Isa. i. 10.

holiness by means of new teachers, and by a new doctrine.

Many are misled by confidence in themselves. They look back at the first seasons of their repentance and conversion, as if the time of their greatest knowledge; and instead of considering that their earliest religious notions were probably the most confused and mixed with error, and therefore endeavouring to separate the good from the bad, they consecrate all they then felt as a standard of doctrine to which they are bound to appeal; and as to the opinion of others, they think little of it, for religion being a new subject to themselves, they are easily led to think it must be a new and untried subject to others also, especially, since the best men are often the least willing to converse, except in private, on religious subjects, and still more averse to speak of them to those who they think will not value them rightly.

But, leaving the mention of those who err from self-confidence, I would rather lament over such as are led away from the path of plain simple obedience by a compliance with the views and wishes of those around them. Such persons there are all through the Church, and ever have been. Such perhaps have been many Christians in the communion of the Church of Rome; who, feeling deeply the necessity of a religious life, yet strive by means different from those which God has blessed, to gain His favour. They begin religion at the very end of it, and make those observances and rules the chief means of pleasing Him, which in fact should be but the spontaneous acts of the formed Christian temper. And

others among ourselves are bound by a similar yoke of bondage, though it be more speciously disguised, when they subject their minds to certain unscriptural rules, and fancy they must separate in some self-devised way from the world, and that they must speak and act according to some arbitrary and novel form of doctrine, which they try to set before themselves, instead of endeavouring to imbue their hearts with that free, unconstrained spirit of devotion, which lowly obedience in ordinary matters would imperceptibly form within them. How many are there, more or less such, who love the Truth, and would fain do God's will, who yet are led aside and walk in bondage, while they are promised superior light and freedom! They desire to be living members of the Church, and they anxiously seek out whatever they can admire in the true sons of the Church; but they feel forced to measure every thing by a certain superstitious standard which they revere,—they are frightened at shadows,—and thus they are, from time to time, embarrassed and perplexed, whenever, that is, they cannot reconcile the conduct and lives of those who are really, and whom they wish to believe eminent Christians, with that false religious system which they have adopted.

Before concluding, I must notice one other state of mind in which the precept of "waiting on God and keeping His way," will avail, above all others, to lead right a doubting and perplexed mind.

It sometimes happens, from ill health or other cause, that persons fall into religious despondency. They fancy that they have so abused God's mercy that there

is no hope for them; that once they knew the Truth, but that now it is withdrawn from them; that they have had warnings which they have neglected, and now they are left by the Holy Spirit, and given over to Satan. Then, they recollect divers passages of Scripture, which speak of the peril of falling away, and they apply these to their own case. Now I speak of such instances, only so far as they can be called ailments of the mind,—for often they must be treated as ailments of the body. As far as they are mental, let us observe how it will conduce to restore the quiet of the mind, to attend to the humble ordinary duties of our station, that walking in God's way, of which the text speaks. Sometimes, indeed, persons thus afflicted increase their disorder by attempting to console themselves by those elevated Christian doctrines which St. Paul enlarges on; and others encourage them in it. But St. Paul's doctrine is not intended for weak and unstable minds[1]. He says himself: "We speak wisdom among them that *are perfect;*" not to those who are (what he calls) "babes in Christ[2]." In proportion as we gain strength, we shall be able to understand and profit by the full promises of the Christian covenant; but those who are confused, agitated, restless in their minds, who busy themselves with many thoughts, and are overwhelmed with conflicting feelings, such persons are, in general, made more restless and more unhappy (as the experience of sick beds may show us), by holding out to them doctrines and assurances which they cannot rightly

[1] 2 Pet. iii. 16. [2] 1 Cor. ii. 6; iii. 1.

apprehend. Now, not to speak of that peculiar blessing which is promised to obedience to God's will, let us observe how well it is calculated, by its natural effect, to soothe and calm the mind. When we set about to obey God, in the ordinary businesses of daily life, we are at once interested by realities which withdraw our minds from vague fears and uncertain indefinite surmises about the future. Without laying aside the thoughts of Christ (the contrary), still we learn to view Him in His tranquil providence, before we set about contemplating His greater works, and we are saved from taking an unchristian thought for the morrow, while we are busied in present services. Thus our Saviour gradually discloses Himself to the troubled mind; not as He is in heaven, as when He struck down Saul to the ground, but as He was in the days of His flesh, eating and conversing among His brethren, and bidding us, in imitation of Him, think no duty beneath the notice of those who sincerely wish to please God.

Such afflicted inquirers, then, after truth, must be exhorted to keep a guard upon their feelings, and to control their hearts. They say they are terrified lest they should be past hope; and they will not be persuaded that God is all-merciful, in spite of all the Scriptures say to that effect. Well, then, I would take them on their own ground. Supposing their state to be as wretched as is conceivable, can they deny it is their duty *now* to serve God? Can they do better than try to serve Him? Job said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him[1]." They say they do not *wish* to serve

[1] Job xiii. 15

God,—that they want a heart to serve Him. Let us grant (if they will have it so), that they are most obdurate; still they are alive,—they must be doing something, and can they do aught better than try to quiet themselves, and be resigned, and to do right rather than wrong, even though they are persuaded that it does not come from their heart, and is not acceptable to God? They say they dare not ask for God's grace to assist them. This is doubtless a miserable state: still, since they must act in some way, though they cannot do what is really good without His grace, yet, at least, let them do what seems like truth and goodness. Nay, though it is shocking to set before their minds such a prospect, yet even were they already in the place of punishment, will they not confess, it would be the best thing they could do, to commit then as little sin as possible? Much more, then, *now*, when, even if they have no hope, their heart at least is not so entirely hardened as it will be then.

It must not be for an instant supposed I am admitting the possibility of a person being rejected by God, who has any such right feelings in his mind. The anxiety of the sufferers I have been describing, shows they are still under the influence of Divine grace, though they will not allow it; but I say this, to give another instance in which a determination to obey God's will strictly in ordinary matters tends, through His blessing, to calm and comfort the mind, and to bring it out of perplexity into the clear day.

And so in various other cases which might be recounted. Whatever our difficulty be, this is plain.

"Wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt thee." Or in our Saviour's words: "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me, shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." "Whosoever shall do and teach these least commandments, shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance[1]."

[1] John xiv. 21. Matt. v. 19; xiii. 12.

SERMON XIX.

Times of Private Prayer.

"*Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*"—MATT. vi. 6.

HERE is our Saviour's own sanction and blessing vouchsafed to private prayer, in simple, clear, and most gracious words. The Pharisees were in the practice, when they prayed by themselves, of praying in *public*, in the corners of the streets; a strange inconsistency according to our notions, since in our language prayer by oneself is even called *private* prayer. Public private prayer, this was their self-contradictory practice. Warning, then, His disciples against the particular form of hypocrisy in which the self-conceit of human nature at that day showed itself, our Lord promises in the text His Father's blessing on such humble supplications as were really addressed to Him, and not made to gain the praise of men. Those who seek the unseen God (He seems to say), seek Him in their hearts and hidden thoughts, not in loud words, as if He were far off from them. Such men would

retire from the world into places where no human eye saw them, there to meet Him humbly and in faith, who is "about their path, and about their bed, and spieth out all their ways." And He, the Searcher of hearts, would reward them openly. Prayers uttered in secret, according to God's will, are treasured up in God's Book of Life. They seem, perhaps, to have sought an answer here, and to have failed. Their memory perishes even in the mind of the petitioner, and the world never knew of them. But God is ever mindful, and in the last day, when the books are opened, they shall be disclosed and rewarded before the whole world.

Such is Christ's gracious promise in the text, acknowledging and blessing, in His condescension, those devotional exercises which were a duty even before Scripture enjoined them; and changing into a privilege that work of faith, which, though bidden by conscience, and authorized by reason, yet before He revealed His mercy, is laden, in every man's case who attempts it, with guilt, remorse, and fear. It is the Christian's unspeakable privilege, and his alone, that he has at all times free access to the throne of grace through the mediation of his Lord and Saviour.

But, in what I shall now say concerning prayer, I shall not consider it as a privilege, but as a duty; for till we have some experience of the duties of religion, we are incapable of entering duly into the privileges; and it is too much the fashion of the day to view prayer chiefly as a mere privilege, such a privilege as it is inconsiderate indeed to neglect, but only inconsiderate, not sinful; and optional to use.

Now, we know well enough that we are bound to be in one sense in prayer and meditation all the day long. The question then arises, are we to pray in any other way? Is it enough to keep our minds fixed upon God through the day, and to commune with Him in our hearts, or is it necessary, over and above this habitual faith, to set apart particular times for the more systematic and earnest exercise of it? Need we pray at certain times of the day in a set manner? *Public* worship, indeed, from its very nature, requires *places, times,* and even set *forms.* But *private* prayer does not necessarily require set *times,* because we have no one to consult but ourselves, and we are always with ourselves; nor *forms,* for there is no one else whose thoughts are to keep pace with ours. Still, though set times and forms of prayer are not absolutely *necessary* in private prayer, yet they are highly expedient; or rather, times are actually commanded us by our Lord in the text, "Thou, *when* thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

In these words certain *times* for private prayer, over and above the secret thought of God which must ever be alive in us, are clearly enjoined; and the practice of good men in Scripture gives us an example in confirmation of the command. Even our Saviour had His peculiar seasons of communing with God. *His* thoughts indeed were one continued sacred service offered up to His Father; nevertheless, we read of His going up "into a mountain apart to pray," and again, of His "continu-

ing all night in prayer to God[1]." Doubtless, you well recollect that solitary prayer of His, before His passion, thrice repeated, "that the cup might pass from Him." St. Peter too, as in the narrative of the conversion of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, in the tenth chapter of the Acts, went up upon the house-top to pray about the sixth hour; then God visited him. And Nathanael seems to have been in prayer under the fig-tree, at the time our Saviour saw him, and Philip called him[2]. I might multiply instances from Scripture of such "Israelites without guile;" which are of course applicable to us, because, though they were under a Divine government in many respects different from the Christian, yet *personal* religion is the same at all times; "the just" in every dispensation "shall live by faith," and whatever reasons there were then for faith to display and maintain itself by stated prayer, remain substantially the same now. Let two passages suffice. The Psalmist says, "*Seven* times a day do I praise Thee, because of Thy righteous judgments[3]." And Daniel's practice is told us on a memorable occasion: "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed (the impious decree, forbidding prayer to any but king Darius for thirty days), he went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees *three times* a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, *as he did aforetime*[4]."

It is plain, then, besides the devotional temper in which we should pass the day, more solemn and direct

[1] Matt. xiv. 23. Luke vi. 12.
[2] John i. 48.
[3] Ps. cxix. 164.
[4] Dan. vi. 10

acts of worship, nay, *regular and periodical*, are required of us by the precept of Christ, and His own example, and that of His Apostles and Prophets under both covenants.

Now it is necessary to insist upon this duty of observing private prayer at stated times, because amid the cares and hurry of life men are very apt to neglect it: and it is a much more important duty than it is generally considered, even by those who perform it.

It is important for the two reasons which follow.

1. It brings religious subjects before the mind in regular course. Prayer *through* the day, is indeed the characteristic of a Christian spirit, but we may be sure that, in most cases, those who do not pray at stated times in a more solemn and direct manner, will never pray well at other times. We know in the common engagements of life, the importance of collecting and arranging our thoughts calmly and accurately before proceeding to any important business, in order to the right performance of it; and so in that one really needful occupation, the care of our eternal interests, if we would have our minds composed, our desires subdued, and our tempers heavenly through the day, we must, before commencing the day's employment, stand still awhile to look into ourselves, and commune with our hearts, by way of preparing ourselves for the trials and duties on which we are entering. A like reason may be assigned for evening prayer, viz. as affording us a time of looking back on the day past, and summing up (as it were) that account, which, if *we* do not reckon, at least God has reckoned, and written down in that book which will be

produced at the Judgment; a time of confessing sin, and of praying for forgiveness, of giving thanks for what we have done well, and for mercies received, of making good resolutions in reliance on the help of God, and of sealing up and setting sure the day past, at least as a stepping-stone of good for the morrow. The precise times indeed of private prayer are no where commanded us in Scripture; the most obvious are those I have mentioned, morning and evening. In the texts just now read to you, you heard of praying three times a day, or seven times. All this depends of course on the opportunities of each individual. Some men have not leisure for this; but for morning and evening prayer all men can and should *make* leisure.

Stated times of private prayer, then, are useful as impulses (so to say) to the continuous devotion of the day. They instruct us and engage us in what is ever our duty. It is commonly said, that what is every one's business is practically no one's; this applies here. I repeat it, if we leave religion as a subject of thought for all hours of the day equally, it will be thought of in none. In all things it is by small beginnings and appointed channels that an advance is made to extensive works. Stated times of prayer put us in that posture (as I may call it) in which we ought ever to be; they urge us forward in a heavenly direction, and then the stream carries us on. For the same reason it is expedient, if possible, to be solemn in the forms of our private worship, in order to impress our minds. Our Saviour *kneeled* down, fell on His face, and prayed[1],—

[1] Matt. xxvi. 39. Luke xxii. 41.

so did His Apostles[1]; and so did the Saints of the Old Testament. Hence many persons are accustomed (such as have the opportunity) to set apart a particular place for their private devotions; still for the same reason, to compose their mind,—as Christ tells us in the text, to enter into our closet.

2. I now come to the second reason for stated private prayer. Besides its tending to produce in us lasting religious impressions, which I have already enlarged upon, it is also a more direct means of gaining from God an answer to our requests. He has so sanctioned it in the text:—"Shut thy door, and pray to thy Father which seeth in secret, and He shall reward thee openly." We do not know *how* it is that prayer receives an answer from God at all. It is strange, indeed, that weak man should have strength to move God; but it is our privilege to know that we *can* do so. The whole system of this world is a history of man's interfering with Divine decrees; and if we have the melancholy power of baffling His good-will, to our own ruin (an awful, an incomprehensible truth!), if, when He designs our eternal salvation, we can yet annul our heavenly election, and accomplish our eternal destruction, much more have we the power to move Him (blessed be His name!) when He, the Searcher of hearts, discerns in us the mind of that Holy Spirit, which "maketh intercession for the saints according to His will." And, as He has thus promised an answer to our poor prayers, so it is not more strange that prayers offered up at particular times, and in a particular way,

[1] Acts xx. 36; xxi. 5. Eph. iii. 14.

should have especially prevailing power with Him. And the reason of it may be as follows. It is faith that is the appointed means of gaining all blessings from God. "All things are possible to him that believeth[1]." Now, at stated times, when we gather up our thoughts to pray, and draw out our petitions in an orderly and clear manner, the act of faith is likely to be stronger and more earnest; then we realize more perfectly the presence of that God whom we do not see, and Him on whom once all our sins were laid, who bore the weight of our infirmities and sickness once for all, that in all our troubles we might seek Him, and find grace in time of need. Then this world is more out of sight, and we more simply appropriate those blessings, which we have but to claim humbly and they are really ours.

Stated times of prayer, then, are necessary; first, as a means of making the mind sober, and the general temper more religious; secondly, as a means of exercising earnest faith, and thereby of receiving a more certain blessing in answer, than we should otherwise obtain.

Other reasons, doubtless, may be given; but these are enough, not only as containing subject for thought which may be useful to us, but besides, as serving to show how wise and merciful those Divine provisions really are, which our vain minds are so apt to question. All God's commands, indeed, ought to be received at once upon faith, though we saw no reason for them. It is no excuse for a man's disobeying them, even if he thinks he sees reasons against them; for God knows

[1] Mark ix. 23.

better than we do. But in great condescension He has allowed us to see here and there His reasons for what He does and enjoins; and we should treasure up these occasional notices as memorials against the time of temptation, that when doubt and unbelief assail us, and we are perplexed at His revealed word, we may call to mind those former instances in our own experience, where what at first seemed strange and hard, on closer consideration was found to have a wise end.

Now the duty of having stated times of private prayer is one of those observances, concerning which we are apt to entertain the unbelieving thoughts I have been describing. It seems to us to be a form, or at least a light matter, to observe or omit; whereas in truth, such creatures are we, there is the most close and remarkable connexion between small observances and the permanence of our chief habits and practices. It is easy to see why it is irksome; because it presses upon us and is inconvenient. It is a duty which claims our attention continually, and its irksomeness leads our hearts to rebel; and then we proceed to search for reasons to justify our own dislike of it. Nothing is more difficult than to be disciplined and regular in our religion. It is very easy to be religious by fits and starts, and to keep up our feelings by artificial stimulants; but regularity seems to trammel us, and we become impatient. This is especially the case with those to whom the world is as yet new, and who can do as they please. Religion is the chief subject which meets them, which enjoins regularity; and they bear it only so far as they can make it like things of this world, something curious, or changeable, or exciting.

Satan knows his advantage here. He perceives well enough that stated private prayer is the very emblem and safeguard of true devotion to God, as impressing on us and keeping up in us a rule of conduct. He who gives up regularity in prayer has lost a principal means of reminding himself that spiritual life is obedience to a Lawgiver, not a mere feeling or a taste. Hence it is that so many persons, especially in the polished ranks of society, who are out of the way of temptation to gross vice, fall away into a mere luxurious self-indulgent devotion, which they take for religion; they reject every thing which implies self-denial, and regular prayer especially. Hence it is that others run into all kinds of enthusiastic fancies; because, by giving up set private prayer in written forms, they have lost the chief rule of their hearts. Accordingly, you will hear them exclaim against regular prayer (which is the very medicine suited to their disease) as a formal service, and maintain that times and places and fixed words are beneath the attention of a spiritual Christian. And others, who are exposed to the seductions of sin, altogether fall away from the same omission. Be sure, my brethren, whoever of you is persuaded to disuse his morning and evening prayers, is giving up the armour which is to secure him against the wiles of the Devil. If you have left off the observance of them, you may fall any day;—and you will fall without notice. For a time you will go on, seeming to yourselves to be the same as before; but the Israelites might as well hope to lay in a stock of manna as you of grace. You pray God for your daily bread, your bread day by day; and if you have not

prayed for it this morning, it will profit you little that you prayed for it yesterday. You did then pray and you obtained,—but not a supply for two days. When you have given over the practice of stated prayer, you gradually become weaker without knowing it. Samson did not know he had lost his strength till the Philistines came upon him; you will think yourselves the men you used to be, till suddenly your adversary will come furiously upon you, and you will as suddenly fall. You will be able to make little or no resistance. This is the path which leads to death. Men first leave off private prayer; then they neglect the due observance of the Lord's day (which is a stated service of the same kind); then they gradually let slip from their minds the very idea of obedience to a fixed eternal law; then they actually allow themselves in things which their conscience condemns; then they lose the direction of their conscience, which being ill used, at length refuses to direct them. And thus, being left by their true inward guide, they are obliged to take another guide, their reason, which by itself knows little or nothing about religion; then, this their blind reason forms a system of right or wrong for them, as well as it can, flattering to their own desires, and presumptuous where it is not actually corrupt. No wonder such a scheme contradicts Scripture, which it is soon found to do; not that they are certain to perceive this themselves; they often do not know it, and think themselves still believers in the Gospel, while they maintain doctrines which the Gospel condemns. But sometimes they perceive that their system is contrary to Scripture; and then, instead

of giving it up, they give up Scripture, and profess themselves unbelievers. Such is the course of disobedience, beginning in (apparently) slight omissions, and ending in open unbelief; and all men who walk in the broad way which leads to destruction are but at different stages of it, one more advanced than another, but all in one way. And I have spoken of it here, in order to remind you how intimately it is connected with the neglect of set private prayer; whereas, he who is strict in the observance of prayer morning and evening, praying with his heart as well as his lips, can hardly go astray, for every morning and evening brings him a monitor to draw him back and restore him.

Beware then of the subtilty of your Enemy, who would fain rob you of your defence. Do not yield to his bad reasonings. Be on your guard especially, when you get into novel situations or circumstances which interest and delight you, lest they throw you out of your regularity in prayer. Any thing new or unexpected is dangerous to you. Going much into mixed society, and seeing many strange persons, taking share in any pleasant amusements, reading interesting books, entering into a new line of life, forming some new acquaintance, the sudden prospect of any worldly advantage, travelling; all these things and such like, innocent as they are in themselves, and capable of a religious use, become means of temptation if we are not on our guard. See that you are not *unsettled* by them; this is the danger; fear becoming *unsettled.* Consider that stability of mind is the chief of virtues, for it is Faith. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace,

whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee[1];" this is the promise. But "the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked[2]." Nor to the wicked only, in our common sense of the word "wicked," but to none is there rest, who in any way leave their God, and rove after the goods of this world. Do not indulge visions of earthly good, fix your hearts on higher things, let your morning and evening thoughts be points of rest for your mind's eye, and let those thoughts be upon the narrow way, and the blessedness of heaven, and the glory and power of Christ your Saviour. Thus will you be kept from unseemly risings and fallings, and steadied in an equable way. Men in general will know nothing of this; they witness not your private prayers, and they will confuse you with the multitude they fall in with. But your friends and acquaintance will gain a light and a comfort from your example; they will see your good works, and be led to trace them to their true secret source, the influences of the Holy Ghost sought and obtained by prayer. Thus they will glorify your heavenly Father, and in imitation of you will seek Him; and He who seeth in secret, shall at length reward you openly.

[1] Isa. xxvi. 3. [2] Isa. lvii. 20, 21.

SERMON XX.

Forms of Private Prayer.

"*Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.*"—LUKE xi. 1.

THESE words express the natural feelings of the awakened mind, perceiving its great need of God's help, yet not understanding well what its particular wants are, or how they are to be relieved. The disciples of John the Baptist, and the disciples of Christ, waited on their respective Masters for instruction *how to pray*. It was in vain that the duty of repentance was preached to the one, and of faith to the other; in vain that God's mercies and His judgments were set before them, and their own duties; they seemed to have all that was necessary for making prayers for themselves, yet they could not; their hearts were full, but they remained dumb; they could offer no petition except to *be taught* to pray; they knew the Truth, but they could not use it. So different a thing is it to be instructed in religion, and to have so mastered it in practice that it is altogether our own.

Their need has been the need of Christians ever since.

All of us in childhood, and most men ever after, require direction how to pray; and hence the use of *Forms of prayer*, which have always obtained in the Church. John taught his disciples; Christ gave the Apostles the prayer which is distinguished by the name of the *Lord's Prayer;* and after He had ascended on high, the Holy Spirit has given us excellent services of devotion by the mouth of those blessed Saints, whom from time to time He has raised up to be overseers in the Church. In the words of St. Paul, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought[1];" but "the Spirit helpeth our infirmities;" and that, not only by guiding our thoughts, but by directing our words.

This, I say, is the origin of *Forms of prayer*, of which I mean to speak to-day; viz. these two undeniable truths, first, that all men have the same spiritual wants, and, secondly, that they cannot of themselves express them.

Now it has so happened, that in these latter times self-wise reasoners have arisen who have questioned the use of Forms of prayer, and have thought it better to pray out of their own thoughts at random, using words which come into their minds at the time they pray. It may be right, then, that we should have some reason at hand for our use of those Forms, which we have adopted because they were handed down to us. Not, as if it were not quite a *sufficient* reason for using them, that we have received them, and (in St. Paul's words) that "neither we nor the Churches of God have known any

[1] Rom. viii. 26.

other custom[1]," and that the best of Christians have ever used them; for this *is* an abundantly satisfactory reason;—nor again, as if we could hope by reasons ever so good, to persuade those who inquire of us, which most likely we shall not be able to do; for a man is far gone in extravagance who deliberately denies the use of Forms, and is likely to find our reasons as difficult to receive as the practice we are defending;—so that we can only say of such men, after St. Paul's manner, "if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant," there is no help for it. But it may be useful to show you *how* reasonable the practice is, in order that you yourselves may turn it to better account; for when we know why we do a thing, we are likely (the same circumstances being supposed) to do it more comfortably than when we obey ignorantly.

Now, I suppose no one is in any difficulty about the use of Forms of prayer in *public* worship; for common sense almost will tell us, that when many are to pray together *as one* man, if their thoughts are to go together, they *must* agree beforehand what is to be the subject of their prayers, nay, what the *words* of their prayers, if there is to be any certainty, composure, ease, and regularity, in their united devotions. To be present at extempore prayer, is to *hear prayers*. Nay, it might happen, or rather often would happen, that we did not understand what was said; and then the person praying is scarcely praying "in a tongue understanded of the people" (as our Article expresses it); he is rather inter-

[1] 1 Cor. xi. 16.

ceding *for* the people, than praying *with* them, and leading their worship. In the case, then, of *public* prayer the need of Forms is evident; but it is not at first sight *so* obvious that in *private* prayer also we need use written Forms, instead of praying *extempore* (as it is called); so I proceed to show the use of them.

1. Let us bear in mind the precept of the wise man. "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few[1]." Prayers framed at the moment are likely to become *irreverent*. Let us consider for a few moments before we pray, into whose presence we are entering,—the presence of God. What need have we of humble, sober, and subdued thoughts! as becomes *creatures*, sustained hourly by His bounty;—as becomes *lost sinners* who have no right to speak at all, but must submit in silence to Him who is holy;—and still more, as grateful *servants of Him* who bought us from ruin at the price of His own blood; meekly sitting at His feet like Mary to learn and to do His will, and like the penitent at the great man's feast, quietly adoring Him, and doing Him service without disturbance, washing His feet (as it were) with our tears, and anointing them with precious ointment, as having sinned much and needing a large forgiveness. Therefore, to avoid the irreverence of many or unfit words and rude half-religious thoughts, it is necessary to pray from book or memory, and not at random.

[1] Eccles. v. 2.

It may be objected, that this reason for using Forms proves too much; viz. that it would be wrong ever to do without them; which is an over-rigorous bond upon Christian liberty. But I reply, that reverence in our prayers will be sufficiently secured, if at our stated seasons for prayer we make use of Forms. For thus a tone and character will be imparted to our devotion throughout the day; nay, even the very petitions and ejaculations will be supplied, which we need. And much more will our souls be influenced by the power of them, at the very time we are using them; so that, should the occasion require, we shall find ourselves able to go forward naturally and soberly into such additional supplications, as are of too particular or private a nature, to admit of being written down in set words.

2. In the next place, Forms of prayer are necessary to guard us against the irreverence of *wandering* thoughts. If we pray without set words (read or remembered), our minds will stray from the subject; other thoughts will cross us, and we shall pursue them; we shall lose sight of His presence whom we are addressing. This wandering of mind is in good measure prevented, under God's blessing, by Forms of prayer. Thus a chief use of them is that of *fixing the attention.*

3. Next, they are useful in securing us from the irreverence of *excited thoughts.* And here there is room for saying much; for, it so happens, Forms of prayer are censured for the very circumstance about them which is their excellence. They are accused of impeding the current of devotion, when, in fact, that (so called) current is in itself faulty, and ought to be checked. And those

persons (as might be expected) are most eager in their opposition to them, who require more than others the restraint of them. They sometimes throw their objection into the following form, which it may be worth while to consider. They say, "If a man is in earnest, he will soon find words; there is no need of a set Form of prayer. And if he is not in earnest, a Form can do him no good." Now that a man who is in earnest will soon find words, is true or not true, according to what is meant by being in earnest. It is true that at certain times of strong emotion, grief or joy, remorse or fear, our religious feelings outrun and leave behind them any Form of words. In such cases, not only is there no *need* of Forms of prayer, but it is perhaps impossible to write *Forms* of prayer for Christians agitated by such feelings. For each man feels in his own way,—perhaps no two men exactly alike;—and we can no more write down *how* men ought to pray at such times, than we can give rules how they should weep or be merry. The better men they are, of course the better they will pray in such a trying time; but you cannot make them better; they must be left to themselves. And, though good men have before now set down in writing Forms of prayer for persons so circumstanced, these were doubtless meant rather as patterns and helps, or as admonitions and (if so be) quietings of the agitated mind, than as prayers which it was expected would be used literally and entirely in their detail. As a general rule, Forms of prayer should not be written in strong and impassioned language; but should be calm, composed, and short. Our Saviour's own prayer is our model in this respect. How few are

its petitions! how soberly expressed! how reverently! and at the same time how deep are they, and how comprehensive!—I readily grant, then, that there *are* times when the heart outruns any written words; as the jailor cried out, "What shall I do to be saved?" Nay, rather I would maintain that set words should not attempt to imitate the impetuous workings to which all minds are subject at times in this world of change (and therefore religious minds in the number), lest one should seem to encourage them.

Still the question is not at all settled; granting there *are* times when a thankful or a wounded heart bursts through all Forms of prayer, yet these are not *frequent*. To be excited is not the *ordinary* state of the mind, but the extraordinary, the now and then state. Nay, more than this, it *ought not* to be the common state of the mind; and if we are encouraging within us this excitement, this unceasing rush and alternation of feelings, and think that this, and this only, is being in earnest in religion, we are harming our minds, and (in one sense) I may even say grieving the peaceful Spirit of God, who would silently and tranquilly work His Divine work in our hearts. This, then, is an especial *use* of Forms of prayer, *when* we are in earnest, as we ought always to be; viz. to keep us from self-willed earnestness, to still emotion, to calm us, to remind us what and where we are, to lead us to a purer and serener temper, and to that deep unruffled love of God and man, which is really the fulfilling of the law, and the perfection of human nature.

Then, again, as to the usefulness of Forms, if we are

not in earnest,—this also is true or not, as we may take it. For there are degrees of earnestness. Let us recollect, the power of praying, being a habit, must be acquired, like all other habits, by practice. In order at length to pray well, we must begin by praying ill, since ill is all we can do. Is not this plain? Who, in the case of any other work, would wait till he could do it perfectly, before he tried it? The idea is absurd. Yet those who object to Forms of prayer on the ground just mentioned, fall into this strange error. If, indeed, we could pray and praise God like the Angels, we might have no need of Forms of prayer; but Forms are to teach those who pray poorly to pray better. They are helps to our devotion, as teaching us what to pray for and how, as St. John and our Lord taught their disciples; and, doubtless, even the *best* of us prays *but* poorly, and *needs* the help of them. However, the persons I speak of, think that prayer is nothing else but the bursting forth of strong feeling, not the action of a habit, but an emotion, and, therefore, *of course* to such men the very notion of *learning* to pray seems absurd. But this indulgence of emotion is in truth founded on a mistake, as I have already said.

4. Further, Forms are useful to *help our memory,* and to set before us at once, completely, and in order, what we have to pray for. It does not follow, that when the heart is really full of the thought of God, and alive to the reality of things unseen, then it is easiest to pray. Rather, the deeper insight we have into His Majesty and our innumerable wants, the less we shall be able to draw out our thoughts into words. The publican could

only say, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" this was enough for his *acceptance;* but to offer such a scanty service was not to exercise the *gift* of prayer, the privilege of a ransomed and exalted son of God. He whom Christ has illuminated with His grace, is heir of all things. He has an interest in the world's multitude of matters. He has a boundless sphere of duties within and without him. He has a glorious prospect before him. The saints shall hereafter judge the world; and shall they not *here* take cognizance of its doings? are they not in one sense counsellors and confidential servants of their Lord, intercessors at the throne of grace, the secret agents by and for whom He guides His high Providence, and carries on the nations to their doom? And in their own persons is forgiveness merely and acceptance (extreme blessings as these are) the scope of their desires? else might they be content with the publican's prayer. Are they not rather bidden to go on to perfection, to use the spirit given them, to enlarge and purify their own hearts, and to draw out the nature of man into the fulness of its capabilities after the image of the Son of God? And for the thought of all these objects at once, who is sufficient? Whose mind is not overpowered by the view of its own immense privilege, so as eagerly to seek for words of prayer and intercession, carefully composed according to the number and the nature of the various petitions it has to offer? so that he who prays without plan, is in fact losing a great part of the privilege with which his Baptism has gifted him.

5. And further, the use of a Form as a help to the memory is still more obvious, when we take into account

the engagements of this world with which most men are surrounded. The cares and businesses of life press upon us with a reality which we cannot overlook. Shall we trust the matters of the next world to the chance thoughts of our own minds, which come this moment, and go the next, and may not be at hand when the time of employing them arrives, like unreal visions, having no substance and no permanence? This world is Satan's efficacious Form, it is the instrument through which he spreads out in order and attractiveness his many snares; and these doubtless will engross us, unless we also give Form to the spiritual objects towards which we pray and labour. How short are the seasons which most men have to give to prayer? Before they can collect their memories and minds, their leisure is almost over, even if they have the power to dismiss the thoughts of this world, which just before engaged them. Now Forms of prayer do this *for* them. They keep the ground occupied, that Satan may not encroach upon the seasons of devotion. They are a standing memorial, to which we can recur as to a temple of God, finding every thing in order for our worship as soon as we go into it, though the time allotted us at morning and evening be ever so circumscribed.

6. And this use of Forms in prayer becomes great beyond power of estimating, in the case of those multitudes of men, who, after going on well for a while, fal. into sin. If even conscientious men require continual aids to be reminded of the next world, how extreme is the need of those who try to forget it! It cannot be denied, fearful as it is to reflect upon it, that far the

greater number of those who come to manhood, for a while (at least) desert the God who has redeemed them; and, then, if in their earlier years they have learned and used no prayers or psalms by which to worship Him, what is to keep them from blotting altogether from their minds the thought of religion? But here it is that the Forms of the Church have ever served her children, both to restrain them in their career of sin, and to supply them with ready utterance on their repentance. Chance words and phrases of her services adhere to their memories, rising up in moments of temptation or of trouble, to check or to recover them. And hence it happens, that in the most irreligious companies a distinction is said to be observable between those who have had the opportunity of using our public Forms in their youth, and those whose religious impressions have not been thus happily fortified; so that, amid their most reckless mirth, and most daring pretence of profligacy, a sort of secret reverence has attended the wanderers, restraining them from that impiety and profaneness in which the others have tried to conceal from themselves the guilt and peril of their doings.

And again on their repentance (should they be favoured with so high a grace), what friends do they seem to find amid their gloom in the words they learned in their boyhood,—a kindly voice, aiding them to say what they otherwise would not know how to say, guiding and composing their minds upon those objects of faith which they ought to look to, but cannot find of themselves, and so (as it were) interceding for them with the power of the blessed Spirit, while nature can but groan

and travail in pain! Sinners as they are by their own voluntary misdeeds, and with a prospect of punishment before them, enlightened by but few and faint gleams of hope, what shall keep them from feverish restlessness, and all the extravagance of fear, what shall soothe them into a fixed, resigned waiting for their Judge, and such lowly efforts to obey Him, however poorly, as become a penitent, but those words, long buried in their minds, and now rising again as if with the life of their uncorrupted boyhood? It requires no great experience of sick beds to verify the truth of this statement. Blessed, indeed, is the power of those formularies, which thus succeed in throwing a sinner for a while out of himself, and in bringing before him the scenes of his youth, his guardian friends now long departed, their ways and their teaching, their pious services, and their peaceful end; and though all this is an excitement, and lasts but for a season, yet, if improved by him, it may be converted into an habitual contemplation of persons and deeds which now live to God, though removed hence,—if improved by his acting upon it, it will become an abiding motive to seek the world to come, an abiding persuasion, winning him from the works of darkness, and raising him to the humble hope of future acceptance with his Saviour and Judge.

7. Such is the force of association in undoing the evil of past years, and recalling us to the innocence of children. Nor is this all we may gain from the prayers we use, nor are penitent sinners the only persons who can profit by it. Let us recollect for how long a period our prayers have been the standard Forms of devotion

in the Church of Christ, and we shall gain a fresh reason for loving them, and a fresh source of comfort in using them. I know different persons will feel differently here, according to their different turn of mind; yet surely there are few of us, if we dwelt on the thought, but would feel it a privilege to use, as we do (for instance, in the Lord's Prayer), the very petitions which Christ spoke. He gave the prayer and used it. His Apostles used it; all the Saints ever since have used it. When we use it we seem to join company with them. Who does not think himself brought nearer to any celebrated man in history, by seeing his house, or his furniture, or his handwriting, or the very books that were his? Thus does the Lord's Prayer bring us near to Christ, and to His disciples in every age. No wonder, then, that in past times good men thought this Form of prayer so sacred, that it seemed to them impossible to say it too often, as if some especial grace went with the use of it. Nor *can* we use it too often; it contains in itself a sort of plea for Christ's listening to us; we cannot, so that we keep our thoughts fixed on its petitions, and use our minds as well as our lips when we repeat it. And what is true of the Lord's Prayer, is in its measure true of most of those prayers which our Church teaches us to use. It is true of the Psalms also, and of the Creeds; all of which have become sacred, from the memory of saints departed who have used them, and whom we hope one day to meet in heaven.

One caution I give in conclusion as to using these thoughts. Beware lest your religion be one of sentiment

merely, not of practice. Men may speak in a high imaginative way of the ancient Saints and the Holy Apostolic Church, without making the fervour or refinement of their devotion bear upon their conduct. Many a man likes to be religious in graceful language; he loves religious tales and hymns, yet is never the better Christian for all this. The works of every day, these are the tests of our glorious contemplations, whether or not they shall be available to our salvation; and he who does one deed of obedience for Christ's sake, let him have no imagination and no fine feeling, is a better man, and returns to his home justified rather than the most eloquent speaker, and the most sensitive hearer, of the glory of the Gospel, if such men do not practise up to their knowledge.

SERMON XXI.

The Resurrection of the Body.

"*Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For He is not a God of the dead, but of the living; for all live unto Him.*"—LUKE XX. 37, 38.

THESE words of our Saviour show us how much more there is in Scripture than at first sight appears. God spoke to Moses in the burning bush, and called Himself the "God of Abraham;" and Christ tells us, that in this simple announcement was contained the promise that Abraham should rise again from the dead. In truth, if we may say it with reverence, the All-wise, All-knowing God cannot speak without meaning many things at once. He sees the end from the beginning; He understands the numberless connexions and relations of all things one with another. Every word of His is full of instruction, looking many ways; and though it is not often given to us to know these various senses, and we are not at liberty to attempt lightly to imagine them, yet, as far as they are told us, and as far as we may reasonably

infer them, we must thankfully accept them. Look at Christ's words, and this same character of them will strike you; whatever He says is fruitful in meaning, and refers to many things. It is well to keep this in mind when we read Scripture; for it may hinder us from self-conceit, from studying it in an arrogant critical temper, and from *giving over* reading it, as if we had got from it all that can be learned.

Now let us consider in what sense the text contains a promise of a resurrection, and see what instruction may be gained from knowing it.

When God called Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He implied that those holy patriarchs were still alive, though they were no more seen on earth. This may seem evident at first sight; but it may be asked, how the text proves that their *bodies* would live; for, if their *souls* were still living, that would be enough to account for their being still called in the Book of Exodus servants of God. This is the point to be considered. Our Blessed Lord seems to tell us, that in some sense or other Abraham's *body* might be considered still alive as a pledge of his resurrection, though it was dead in the common sense in which we apply the word. His announcement is, Abraham *shall* rise from the dead, because in truth, he *is* still alive. He cannot in the end be held under the power of the grave, more than a sleeping man can be kept from waking. Abraham is still alive in the dust, though not risen thence. He is alive because all God's saints live to Him, though they seem to perish.

It may seem a paradox to say, that our bodies, even

when dead, are still alive; but since our Lord seems to countenance us in saying so, I will say it, though a strange saying, because it has an instructive meaning. We are apt to talk about our bodies as if we knew how or what they really were; whereas we only know what our eyes tell us. They seem to grow, to come to maturity, to decay; but after all we know no more about them than meets our senses, and there is, doubtless, much which God sees in our material frames, which we cannot see. We have no direct cognizance of what may be called the substantive existence of the body, only of its accidents. Again, we are apt to speak of *soul and body*, as if we could distinguish between them, and knew much about them; but for the most part we use words without meaning. It is useful indeed to make the distinction, and Scripture makes it; but after all, the Gospel speaks of our nature, in a religious sense, *as one.* Soul and body make up one man, which is born once, and never dies. Philosophers of old time thought the soul indeed might live for ever, but that the body perished at death; but Christ tells us otherwise, He tells us the body will live for ever. In the text He seems to intimate that it never really dies; that we lose sight indeed of what *we* are accustomed to see, but that God still sees the elements of it which are not exposed to our senses.

God graciously called Himself *the God of Abraham.* He did not say the God of Abraham's soul, but simply of *Abraham.* He blest Abraham, and He gave him eternal life; not to his soul only without his body, but to Abraham as one man. And so He is *our* God, and it

is not given us to distinguish between what He does for our different natures, spiritual and material. These are mere words; each of us may feel himself to be one, and that one being, in all its substantial parts, and attributes, will never die.

You will see this more clearly by considering what our Saviour says about the blessed Sacrament of His Supper. He says He will give us His flesh to eat[1]. How is this done? we do not know. He gives it under the outward symbols of bread and wine. But in what real sense is the consecrated bread His body? It is not told us, we may not inquire. We say indeed *spiritually, sacramentally, in a heavenly way;* but this is in order to impress on our minds religious, and not carnal notions of it. All we are concerned to know is, *the effect* upon us of partaking this blessed food. Now observe what He tells us about that. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life, and I will *raise him up at the last day*[2]." Now there is no distinction made here between soul and body. Christ's blessed Supper is food to us altogether, *whatever* we are, soul, body, and all. It is the seed of eternal life within us, the food of immortality, to "preserve our body and soul unto everlasting life[3]." The forbidden fruit wrought in Adam unto

[1] John vi. 51. [2] John vi. 53, 54.

[3] "In the Supper of the Lord there is no vain ceremony, no bare sign, no untrue figure of a thing absent; but as the Scripture says, . . . the communion of the Body and Blood of the Lord, in a marvellous incorporation, which by the operation of the Holy Ghost . . . is

death; but this is the fruit which makes us live for ever. Bread sustains us in this *temporal* life; the consecrated bread is the means of *eternal* strength for soul and body. Who could live this visible life without earthly food? And in the same general way the Supper of the Lord is the "*means*" of our living for ever. We have no reason for thinking we shall live for ever unless we eat it, no more than we have reason to think our temporal life will be sustained without meat and drink. God *can*, indeed, sustain us, "not by bread alone;" but this is His *ordinary* means, which His will has made such. He can sustain our immortality without the Christian Sacraments, as He sustained Abraham and the other saints of old time; but under the Gospel these are His *means*, which He appointed at His will. We eat the sacred bread, and our bodies become sacred; they are not ours; they are Christ's; they are instinct with that flesh which saw not corruption; they are inhabited by His Spirit; they become immortal; they die but to appearance, and for a time; they spring up when their sleep is ended, and reign with Him for ever.

The inference to be drawn from this doctrine is plain. Among the wise men of the heathen, as I have said, it was usual to speak slightingly and contemptuously of the mortal body; they knew no better. They thought it scarcely a part of their real selves, and fancied they should be in a better condition without it. Nay, they considered it to be the cause of their sinning; as if the

through faith wrought in the souls of the faithful, whereby not only their souls live to eternal life, but they surely trust to *win their bodies a resurrection* to immortality."—*Homily on the Sacrament*, Part I.

soul of man were pure, and the material body were gross, and defiled the soul. *We* have been taught the truth, viz. that sin is a disease of *our minds*, of ourselves; and that the whole of us, not body alone, but soul and body, is naturally corrupt, and that Christ has redeemed and cleansed whatever we are, sinful soul and body. Accordingly *their* chief hope in death was the notion they should be rid of their body. Feeling they were sinful, and not knowing how, they laid the charge on their body; and knowing they were badly circumstanced here, they thought death perchance might be a change for the better. Not that they rested on the hope of returning to a God and Father, but they thought to be unshackled from the earth, and able to do what they would. It was consistent with this slighting of their earthly tabernacle, that they burned the dead bodies of their friends, not burying them as we do, but consuming them as a mere worthless case of what had been precious, and was then an incumbrance to the ground. Far different is the temper which the glorious light of the Gospel teaches us. Our bodies shall rise again and live for ever; they may not be irreverently handled. *How* they will rise we know not; but surely if the word of Scripture be true, the body from which the soul has departed shall come to life. There are some truths addressed solely to our faith, not to our reason; not to our reason, because we know so little about "the power of God" (in our Saviour's words), that we have nothing to reason *upon*. One of these, for instance, is the presence of Christ in the Sacrament. We *know* we eat His Body and Blood; but it is our

wisdom not curiously to ask how or whence, not to give our thoughts range, but to take and eat and profit thereby. This is the secret of gaining the blessing promised. And so, as regards the resurrection of the dead, we have no means or ground of argument. We cannot determine in what exact sense our bodies on the resurrection will be the same as they are at present, but we cannot harm ourselves by taking God's declaration simply, and acting upon it. And it is as believing this comfortable truth, that the Christian Church put aside that old irreverence of the funeral pile, and consecrated the ground for the reception of the saints that sleep. We deposit our departed friends calmly and thoughtfully, in faith; not ceasing to love or remember that which once lived among us, but marking the place where it lies, as believing that God has set His seal upon it, and His Angels guard it. His Angels, surely, guard the bodies of His servants; Michael the Archangel, thinking it no unworthy task to preserve them from the powers of evil[1]. Especially those like Moses, who fall "in the wilderness of the people," whose duty has called them to danger and suffering, and who die a violent death, these too, if they have eaten of that incorruptible bread, are preserved safe till the last day. There are, who have not the comfort of a peaceful burial. They die in battle, or on the sea, or in strange lands, or, as the early believers, under the hands of persecutors. Horrible tortures, or the mouths of wild beasts, have ere now

[1] Jude 9.

dishonoured the sacred bodies of those who had fed upon Christ; and diseases corrupt them still. This is Satan's work, the expiring efforts of his fury, after his overthrow by Christ. Still, as far as we can, *we* repair these insults of our Enemy, and tend honourably and piously those tabernacles in which Christ has dwelt. And in this view, what a venerable and fearful place is a Church, in and around which the dead are deposited! Truly it is chiefly sacred, as being the spot where God has for ages manifested Himself to His servants; but add to this the thought, that it is the actual resting-place of those very servants, through successive times, who still live unto Him. The dust around us will one day become animate. We may ourselves be dead long before, and not see it. We ourselves may elsewhere be buried, and, should it be our exceeding blessedness to rise to life eternal, we may rise in other places, far in the east or west. But, as God's word is sure, what is sown is raised; the earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, shall become glory to glory, and life to the living God, and a true incorruptible image of the spirit made perfect. Here the saints sleep, here they shall rise. A great sight will a Christian country then be, if earth remains what it is; when holy places pour out the worshippers who have for generations kept vigil therein, waiting through the long night for the bright coming of Christ! And if this be so, what pious composed thoughts should be ours when we enter Churches! God indeed is every where, and His Angels go to and fro; yet can they be more worthily employed in their condescending care of man, than where good men sleep?

In the service of the Communion we magnify God together with Angels and Archangels, and all the company of heaven. Surely there is more meaning in this than we know of; what a "dreadful" place would this appear, if our eyes were opened as those of Elisha's servant! "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

On the other hand, if the dead bodies of Christians are honourable, so doubtless are the living; *because* they have had their blessedness when living, *therefore* have they in their sleep. He who does not honour his own body as something holy unto the Lord, may indeed revere the dead, but it is then a mere superstition, not an act of piety. To reverence holy places (right as it is) will not profit a man unless he reverences *himself*. Consider what it is to be partaker of the Body and Blood of Christ. We pray God, in our Church's language, that "our sinful bodies may become clean through His body;" and we are promised in Scripture, that our bodies shall be *temples of the Holy Ghost*. How should we study, then, to cleanse them from all sin, that they may be true members of Christ! We are told that the peril of disease and death attends the unworthy partaking of the Lord's Supper. Is this wonderful, considering the strange sin of receiving it into a body disgraced by wilful disobedience? All that defiles it, intemperance or other vice, all that is unbecoming, all that is disrespectful to Him who has bought our bodies with a price, must be put aside[1]. Hear St. Paul's

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

words, "Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more . . . likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin . . . let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof[1]." "If the Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His indwelling Spirit. . . . . If ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live[2]."

Work together with God, therefore, my brethren, in this work of your redemption. While He feeds you, prepare for the heavenly feast; "discern the Lord's body" when it is placed before you, and suitably treasure it afterwards. Lay up year by year this seed of life within you, believing it will one day bear fruit. "Believe that ye receive it, and ye shall have it[3]." Glorious, indeed, will be the spring time of the Resurrection, when all that seemed dry and withered will bud forth and blossom. The glory of Lebanon will be given it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; the fir tree for the thorn, the myrtle tree for the briar; and the mountains and the hills shall break forth before us in singing. Who would miss being of that company? Wretched men they will then appear, who now for a season enjoy the pleasures of sin. Wretched, who follow their own selfish will, instead of walking by faith, who are now idle, instead of trying to serve God, who are set upon the world's vanities, or who scoff at religion, or who allow themselves in known sin, who live in anger,

[1] Rom. vi. 9—12. [2] Rom. viii. 11. [3] Mark xi. 24.

or malice, or pride, or covetousness, who do not continually strive to become better and holier, who are afraid to profess themselves Christians and take up their cross and follow Christ. May the good Lord make us all willing to follow Him! may He rouse the slumberers, and raise them to a new life here, that they may inherit His eternal kingdom hereafter!

SERMON XXII.

Witnesses of the Resurrection.

"*Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead.*"—Acts x. 40, 41.

IT might have been expected, that, on our Saviour's rising again from the dead, He would have shown Himself to very great numbers of people, and especially to those who crucified Him; whereas we know from the history, that, far from this being the case, He showed Himself only to chosen witnesses, chiefly His immediate followers; and St. Peter avows this in the text. This seems at first sight strange. We are apt to fancy the resurrection of Christ as some striking visible display of His glory, such as God vouchsafed from time to time to the Israelites in Moses' day; and considering it in the light of a public triumph, we are led to imagine the confusion and terror which would have overwhelmed His murderers, had He presented Himself alive before *them*. Now, thus to reason, is to conceive Christ's kingdom of *this* world, which it is not; and to suppose that then Christ came to judge the world,

whereas that judgment will not be till the last day, when in very deed those wicked men *shall* "look on Him whom they have pierced."

But even without insisting upon the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, which seems to be the direct reason why Christ did not show Himself to all the Jews after His resurrection, other distinct reasons may be given, instructive too. And one of these I will now set before you.

This is the question, "Why did not our Saviour show Himself after His resurrection to all the people? why only to witnesses chosen before of God?" and this is my answer: "Because this was the most effectual means of propagating His religion through the world."

After His resurrection, He said to His disciples, "Go, convert all nations[1]:" this was His especial charge. If, then, there are grounds for thinking that, by showing Himself to a few rather than to many, He was more surely advancing this great object, the propagation of the Gospel, this is a sufficient reason for our Lord's having so ordained; and let us thankfully receive His dispensation, as He has given it.

1. Now consider what would have been the probable effect of a public exhibition of His resurrection. Let us suppose that our Saviour had shown Himself as openly as before He suffered; preaching in the Temple and in the streets of the city; traversing the land with His Apostles, and with multitudes following to see the miracles which He did. What would have been the

[1] Matt. xxviii. 19.

effect of this? Of course, what it had already been. His former miracles had not effectually moved the body of the people; and, doubtless, this miracle too would have left them as it found them, or worse than before. They might have been more startled at the time; but why should this amazement last? When the man taken with a palsy was suddenly restored at His word, the multitude were all amazed, and glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen strange things to-day[1]." What *could* they have said and felt more than this, when "one rose from the dead"? In truth, this is the way of the mass of mankind in all ages, to be influenced by sudden fears, sudden contrition, sudden earnestness, sudden resolves, which disappear as suddenly. Nothing is done effectually through untrained human nature; and such is ever the condition of the multitude. Unstable as water, it cannot excel. One day it cried Hosanna; the next, Crucify Him. And, had our Lord appeared to them *after* they had crucified Him, of course they would have shouted Hosanna once more; and when He had ascended out of sight, then again they would have persecuted His followers. Besides, the miracle of the Resurrection was much more exposed to the cavils of unbelief than others which our Lord had displayed; than that, for instance, of feeding the multitudes in the wilderness. Had our Lord appeared in public, yet few could have touched Him, and certified themselves it was He Himself. Few, comparatively, in a great multitude could so have seen Him

[1] Luke v. 26.

both before and after His death, as to be adequate witnesses of the reality of the miracle. It would have been open to the greater number of them still to deny that He *was* risen. This is the very feeling St. Matthew records. When He appeared on a mountain in Galilee to His apostles and others, as it would seem (perhaps the five hundred brethren mentioned by St. Paul), "*some doubted*" whether it were He. How could it be otherwise? these had no means of ascertaining that they really saw *Him* who had been crucified, dead, and buried. Others, admitting it was Jesus, would have denied that He ever died. Not having seen Him dead on the cross, they might have pretended He was taken down thence before life was extinct, and so restored. This supposition would be a sufficient excuse to those who *wished* not to believe. And the more ignorant part would fancy they had seen a *spirit* without flesh and bones as man has. They would have resolved the miracle into a magical illusion, as the Pharisees had done before, when they ascribed His works to Beelzebub; and would have been rendered no better or more religious by the sight of Him, than the common people are now-a-days by tales of apparitions and witches.

Surely so it would have been; the chief priests would not have been moved at all; and the populace, however they had been moved at the time, would not have been lastingly moved, not practically moved, not so moved as to proclaim to the world what they had heard and seen, as to preach the Gospel. This is the point to be kept in view: and consider that the very reason *why* Christ showed Himself at all was in order to raise up *witnesses*

to His resurrection, ministers of His word, founders of His Church; and how in the nature of things could a populace ever become such?

2. Now, on the other hand, let us contemplate the means which His Divine Wisdom actually adopted with a view of making His resurrection subservient to the propagation of His Gospel.—He showed Himself openly, not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God. It is, indeed, a *general* characteristic of the course of His providence to make the few the channels of His blessings to the many; but in the instance we are contemplating, a few were selected, because only a few *could* (humanly speaking) be made instruments. As I have already said, to be witnesses of His resurrection it was requisite to have known our Lord intimately before His death. This was the case with the Apostles; but this was not enough. It was necessary they should be certain it was He Himself, the very same whom they before knew. You recollect how He urged them to handle Him, and be sure that they could testify to His rising again. This is intimated in the text also; "witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead." Nor were they required merely to know Him, but the thought of Him was to be stamped upon their minds as the one master-spring of their whole course of life for the future. But men are not easily wrought upon to be faithful advocates of any cause. Not only is the multitude fickle: but the best men, unless urged, tutored, disciplined to their work, give way; untrained nature has no principles.

It would seem, then, that our Lord gave His attention to a few, because, if the few be gained, the many will follow. To these few He showed Himself again and again. These He restored, comforted, warned, inspired. He formed them unto Himself, that they might show forth His praise. This His gracious procedure is opened to us in the first words of the Book of the Acts. "To the Apostles whom He had chosen He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs; being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Consider, then, if we may state the alternative reverently, *which* of the two seems the more likely way, even according to a human wisdom, of forming preachers of the Gospel to all nations,—the exhibition of the Resurrection to the Jewish people generally, or this intimate private certifying of it to a few? And remember that, as far as we can understand, the two procedures were inconsistent with each other; for that period of preparatory prayer, meditation, and instruction, which the Apostles passed under our Lord's visible presence for forty days, was to them what it could not have been, had they been following Him from place to place in public, supposing there had been an object in this, and mixing in the busy crowds of the world.

3. I have already suggested, what is too obvious almost to insist upon, that in making a select few the ministers of His mercy to mankind at large, our Lord was but acting according to the general course of His providence. It is plain every great change is effected by the few, not by the many; by the resolute, un-

daunted, zealous few. True it is that societies sometimes fall to pieces by their own corruption, which is in one sense a change without special instruments chosen or allowed by God; but this is a dissolution, not a work. Doubtless, much may be *undone* by the many, but nothing is *done* except by those who are specially trained for action. In the midst of the famine Jacob's sons stood looking one upon another, but did nothing. One or two men, of small outward pretensions, but with their hearts in their work, these do great things. These are prepared, not by sudden excitement, or by vague general belief in the truth of their cause, but by deeply impressed, often repeated instruction; and since it stands to reason that it is easier to teach a few than a great number, it is plain such men always will be few. Such as these spread the knowledge of Christ's resurrection over the idolatrous world. Well they answered the teaching of their Lord and Master. Their success sufficiently approves to us His wisdom in showing Himself to them, not to all the people.

4. Remember, too, this further reason why the witnesses of the Resurrection were few in number; viz. because they were on the side of *Truth*. If the witnesses were to be such as really loved and obeyed the Truth, there *could not* be many chosen. Christ's cause was the cause of light and religion, therefore His advocates and ministers were necessarily few. It is an old proverb (which even the heathen admitted), that "the many are bad." Christ did not confide His Gospel to the many; had He done so, we may even say, that it would have been at first sight a presumption against its coming

from God. What was the chief work of His whole ministry, but that of choosing and separating *from* the multitude those who should be fit recipients of His Truth? As He went the round of the country again and again, through Galilee and Judea, He tried the spirits of men the while; and rejecting the baser sort who "honoured Him with their lips while their hearts were far from Him," He specially chose twelve. The many He put aside for a while as an adulterous and sinful generation, intending to make one last experiment on the mass when the Spirit should come. But His twelve He brought near to Himself at once, and taught them. Then He sifted them, and one fell away; the eleven escaped as though by fire. *For* these eleven especially He rose again; He visited *them* and taught *them* for forty days; for in *them* He saw the fruit of the "travail of His soul and was satisfied;" in them "He saw His seed, He prolonged His days, and the pleasure of the Lord prospered in His hand." These were His witnesses, for they had the love of the Truth in their hearts. "I have chosen you," He says to them, "and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain [1]."

So much then in answer to the question, Why did not Christ show Himself to the whole Jewish people after His resurrection. I ask in reply, what would have been the use of it? a mere passing triumph over sinners whose judgment is reserved for the next world. On the other hand, such a procedure would have interfered with,

[1] John xv. 16.

nay, defeated, the real object of His rising again, the propagation of His Gospel through the world by *means of His own intimate friends* and followers. And further, this preference of the few to the many seems to have been necessary from the nature of man, since all great works are effected, not by a multitude, but by the deep-seated resolution of a few;—nay, necessary too from man's depravity, for, alas! popular favour is hardly to be expected for the cause of Truth. And our Lord's instruments were few, if for no other reason, yet at least for this, because more were not to be found, because there were but few faithful Israelites without guile in Israel according to the flesh.

Now, let us observe how much matter, both for warning and comfort, is supplied by this view. We learn from the picture of the *infant* Church what that Church has been ever since, that is, as far as man can understand it. Many are called, few are chosen. We learn to reflect on the great danger there is, lest we be not in the *number* of the chosen, and are warned to "watch and pray that we enter not into temptation," to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling," to seek God's mercy in His Holy Church, and to pray to Him ever that He would "fulfil in us the good pleasure of His will," and complete what He once began.

But, besides this, we are comforted too; we are comforted, as many of us as are living humbly in the fear of God. Who those secret ones are, who in the bosom of the visible Church live as saints fulfilling their calling, God only knows. We are in the dark about it. We may indeed know much about

ourselves, and we may form somewhat of a judgment about those with whom we are well acquainted. But of the general body of Christians we know little or nothing. It is our duty to consider them as Christians, to take them as we find them, and to love them; and it is no concern of ours to debate about their state in God's sight. Without, however, entering into this question concerning God's secret counsels, let us receive this truth before us for a practical purpose; that is, I speak to *all who* are conscious to themselves that they wish and try to serve God, whatever their progress in religion be, and whether or not they dare apply to themselves, or in whatever degree, the title of Christian in its most sacred sense. All who obey the Truth are on the side of the Truth, and the Truth will prevail. Few in number but strong in the Spirit, despised by the world, yet making way while they suffered, the twelve Apostles overturned the power of darkness, and established the Christian Church. And let all "who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" be quite sure, that weak though they seem, and solitary, yet the "foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." The many are "deceitful," and the worldly-wise are "vain;" but he "that feareth the Lord, the same shall be praised." The most excellent gifts of the intellect last but for a season. Eloquence and wit, shrewdness and dexterity, these plead a cause well and propagate it quickly, but it dies with them. It has no root in the hearts of men, and lives not out a generation. It is the consolation of the despised Truth, that its works endure. Its words

are few, but they live. Abel's faith to this day, "yet speaketh[1]." The blood of the Martyrs is the seed of the Church. "Fret not thyself" then "because of evil doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord and do good . . . . delight thyself also in Him, and He shall give thee the desires of thy heart; commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. . . . . He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day. . . . . A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of *many* wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholdeth the righteous. . . . . I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree, yet he passed away, and, lo! he was not; yea, I sought him, and he could not be found[2]." The heathen world made much ado when the Apostles preached the Resurrection. They and their associates were sent out as lambs among wolves; but they prevailed.

We, too, though we are not witnesses of Christ's actual resurrection, are so spiritually. By a heart awake from the dead, and by affections set on heaven, we can as truly and without figure witness that Christ liveth, as they did. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself. Truth bears witness by itself to its Divine Author. He who obeys God conscientiously, and lives holily, forces all about him to

[1] Heb. xi. 4.

[2] Ps. xxxvii. 1—6. 16, 17, 35, 36.

believe and tremble before the unseen power of Christ. To the world indeed at large he witnesses not; for few can see him near enough to be moved by his manner of living. But to his neighbours he manifests the Truth in proportion to their knowledge of him; and some of them, through God's blessing, catch the holy flame, cherish it, and in their turn transmit it. And thus in a dark world Truth still makes way in spite of the darkness, passing from hand to hand. And thus it keeps its station in high places, acknowledged as the creed of nations, the multitude of which are ignorant, the while, on what it rests, how it came there, how it keeps its ground; and despising it, think it easy to dislodge it. But "the Lord reigneth." He is risen from the dead, "His throne is established of old; He is from everlasting. The floods have lifted up their voice, the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea. His testimonies are very sure; holiness becometh His house for ever[1]."

Let these be our thoughts whenever the prevalence of error leads us to despond. When St. Peter's disciple, Ignatius, was brought before the Roman emperor, he called himself Theophorus; and when the emperor asked the feeble old man why he so called himself, Ignatius said it was because he carried Christ in his breast. He witnessed there was but One God, who made heaven, earth, and sea, and all that is in them, and One Lord Jesus Christ, His Only-begotten Son, "whose kingdom

[1] Ps. xciii. 2—5.

(he added) be my portion!" The emperor asked, "His kingdom, say you, who was crucified under Pilate?" "His (answered the Saint) who crucified my sin in me, and who has put all the fraud and malice of Satan under the feet of those who carry Him in their hearts: as it is written, 'I dwell in them and walk in them.'"

Ignatius was one against many, as St. Peter had been before him; and was put to death as the Apostle had been;—but he handed on the Truth, in his day. At length we have received it. Weak though we be, and solitary, God forbid we should not in our turn hand it on; glorifying Him by our lives, and in all our words and works witnessing Christ's passion, death, and resurrection!

SERMON XXIII.

Christian Reverence.

"*Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.*"—PSALM ii. 11.

WHY did Christ show Himself to so few witnesses after He rose from the dead? Because *He was a King*, a King exalted upon God's "Holy hill of Zion;" as the Psalm says which contains the text. Kings do not court the multitude, or show themselves as a spectacle at the will of others. They are the rulers of their people, and have their state as such, and are reverently waited on by their great men: and when they show themselves, they do so out of their condescension. They act by means of their servants, and must be *sought* by those who would gain favours from them.

Christ, in like manner, when exalted as the Only-begotten Son of God, did not mix with the Jewish people, as in the days of His humiliation. He rose from the grave in secret, and taught in secret for forty days, because "the government was upon His shoulder." He was no longer a servant washing His disciples' feet, and dependent on the wayward will of the multitude. He was the acknowledged Heir of all things. His throne

was established by a Divine decree; and those who desired His salvation, were bound to *seek* His face. Yet not even by those who sought was He at once found. He did not permit the world to approach Him rashly, or curiously to gaze on Him. Those only did He call beside Him who had been His friends, who loved Him. Those only He bade "ascend the hill of the Lord," who had "clean hands and a pure heart, who had not worshipped vanity nor sworn deceitfully." These drew near, and "saw the Lord God of Israel," and so were fitted to bear the news of Him to the people at large. *He* remained "in His holy temple;" *they* from Him proclaimed the tidings of His resurrection, and of His mercy, His free pardon offered to all men, and the promises of grace and glory which His death had procured for all who believe.

Thus are we taught to serve our risen Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Let us pursue the subject thus opened upon us.—Christ's second sojourn on earth (after His resurrection) was *in secret*. The time had been when He "preached openly in the synagogues," and in the public ways; and openly wrought miracles such as man never did. Was there to be no end of His labours in our behalf? His *death* "finished" them; afterwards He taught His *followers* only. Who shall complain of His withdrawing Himself at last from the world, when it was of His own spontaneous loving-kindness that He ever showed Himself at all?

Yet it must be borne in mind, that even before He entered into His glory, Christ spoke and acted as a King. It must not be supposed that, even in the days

of His flesh, He could forget who He was, or "behave Himself unseemly" by any weak submission to the will of the Jewish people. Even in the lowest acts of His self-abasement, still He showed His greatness. Consider His conduct when He washed St. Peter's feet, and see if it were not calculated (assuredly it was) to humble, to awe, and subdue the very person to whom He ministered. When He taught, warned, pitied, prayed for, His ignorant hearers, He never allowed them to relax their reverence or to overlook His condescension. Nay, He did not allow them to praise Him aloud, and publish His acts of grace; as if what is called popularity would be a dishonour to His holy name, and the applause of men would imply their right to censure. The world's praise is akin to contempt. Our Lord delights in the tribute of the secret heart. Such was His conduct in the days of His flesh. Does it not interpret His dealings with us after His resurrection? He who was so reserved in His communications of Himself, even when He came to minister, much more would withdraw Himself from the eyes of men when He was exalted over all things.

I have said, that even when a servant, Christ spoke with the authority of a king; and have given you some proof of it. But it may be well to dwell upon this. Observe then, the difference between His promises, stated doctrinally and generally, and His mode of addressing those who came actually before Him. While He announced God's willingness to forgive *all* repentant sinners, in all the fulness of loving-kindness and tender mercy, yet He did not use supplication to these persons or those, whatever their number or their rank might be.

He spoke as one who knew He had great favours to confer, and had nothing to gain from those who received them. Far from urging them to accept His bounty, He showed Himself even backward to confer it, inquired into their knowledge and motives, and cautioned them against entering His service without counting the cost of it. Thus sometimes He even repelled men from Him.

For instance: When there went "great multitudes with Him . . . . He turned and said unto them, If any man come to Me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." These were not the words of one who courted popularity. He proceeds;—"Which of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? . . . . So likewise, whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple[1]." On the other hand, observe His conduct to the powerful men, and the learned Scribes and Pharisees. There are persons who look up to human power, and who are pleased to associate their names with the accomplished and cultivated of this world. Our blessed Lord was as inflexible towards these, as towards the crowds which followed Him. They asked for a sign; He named them "an evil and adulterous generation," who refused to profit by what they had already received[2]. They asked Him, whether He did not confess Himself to be One with God; but

[1] Luke xiv. 25—33. [2] Matt. xii. 39; xxi. 23—27.

He, rather than tell such proud disputers, seemed even to abandon His own real claim, and made His former clear words ambiguous[1]. Such was the King of Israel in the eyes both of the multitude and of their rulers; a "hard saying," a "rock of offence even to the disobedient," who came to Him "with their lips, while their hearts were far from Him." Continue this survey to the case of individuals, and it will still appear, that, loving and merciful as He was most abundantly, yet still He showed both His power and His grace with reserve, even to them, as well as to the fickle many, or the unbelieving Pharisees.

One instance is preserved to us of a person addressing Him, with some notions, indeed, of His greatness, but in a light and careless tone. The narrative is instructive from the mixture of good and bad which the inquirer's character displays[2]. He was young, and wealthy, and is called "a ruler;" yet was anxious for Christ's favour. So far was well. Nay, he "came running and kneeling to Him." And he *seemed* to address Him in what would generally be considered as respectful terms: "Good Master," he said. Yet our Saviour saw in his conduct a deficiency;—"One thing thou lackest:" viz. *devotion* in the true sense of the word,—a giving himself up to Christ. This young man seems to have considered religion as an easy work, and thought he could live as the world, and yet serve God acceptably. In consequence, we may suppose, he had little right notion

[1] John x. 30—37.

[2] Matt. xix. 16—22. Mark x. 17—22. Luke xviii. 18—23.

of the dignity of a Messenger from God. He did not associate the Ministers of religion with awful prospects beyond the grave, in which he was interested; nor *reverence* them accordingly, though he was not without some kind of *respect* for them. Doubtless he thought he was *honouring* our Lord when he had called Him "*Good Master;*" and would have been surprised to hear his attachment to sacred subjects and appointments called in question. Yet our Saviour rejected such half homage, and rebuked what even seemed piously offered.—"*Why* callest thou Me good?" He asked; "There is none good but One, that is, God:" as if He said, "Observest thou *what* words thou art using as if words of course? '*Good Master*'—am I accounted by thee as a teacher of man's creation, and over whom man has power, and to be accosted by a form of honour, which, through length of time, has lost its meaning; or am I acknowledged to come and have authority from Him who is the only source of goodness?" Nor did our Lord relax His severity even after this reproof. Expressly as it is told us, "*He loved him,*" and spoke to him therefore in great compassion and mercy, yet He strictly charged him to sell all he had and give it away, if he would show he was in earnest, and He sent him away "sorrowful."

You may recollect, too, our Lord's frequent inquiry into *the faith* of those who came to Him. This arose, doubtless, from the same rule,—a regard to His own Majesty as a King. "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth[1]." He did not work

[1] Mark ix. 23.

miracles as a mere display of power; or allow the world profanely to look on as at some exhibition of art. In this respect, as in others, even Moses and Elias stand in contrast with Him. Moses wrought miracles before Pharaoh to rival the magicians of Egypt. Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to bring down fire from heaven. The Son of God deigned not to exert His power before Herod, after Moses' pattern; nor to be judged by the multitude, as Elijah. He subdued the power of Satan at His own appointed seasons; but when the Devil tempted Him and demanded a miracle in proof of His Divinity, He would do none.

Further, even when an inquirer showed earnestness, still He did not try to gain him over by smooth representations of His doctrine. He declared, indeed, the general characteristic of His doctrine, "My yoke is easy;" but "He made Himself strange and spake roughly" to those who came to Him. Nicodemus was another ruler of the Jews, who sought Him, and he professed his belief in His miracles and Divine mission. Our Saviour answered in these severe words;—"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Such was our Saviour's conduct even during the period of His ministry; much more might we expect it to be such, when He had risen from His state of servitude, and such we find it.

No man saw Him rise from the grave. His Angels indeed beheld it; but His earthly followers were away, and the heathen soldiers were not worthy. They saw, indeed, the great Angel, who rolled away the stone

from the opening of the tomb. This was Christ's servant; but Him they saw not. *He* was on His way to see His own faithful and mourning followers. To these He had revealed His doctrine during His humiliation, and called them "His friends[1]." First of all, He appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden itself where He had been buried; then to the other women who ministered unto Him; then to the two disciples travelling to Emmaus; then to all the Apostles separately; besides, to Peter and to James; and to Thomas in the presence of them all. Yet not even these, His friends, had free access to Him. He said to Mary, "Touch Me not." He came and left them according to His own pleasure. When they saw Him, they felt an awe which they had not felt during His ministry. While they doubted if it were He, "None of them," S. John says, "durst ask Him, Who art Thou? believing that it was the Lord[2]." However, as kings have their days of state, on which they show themselves publicly to their subjects, so our Lord appointed a meeting of His disciples, when they might see Him. He had determined this even before His crucifixion; and the Angels reminded them of it. "He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you[3]." The place of meeting was a mountain; the same (it is supposed) as that on which He had been transfigured; and the number who saw Him there was five hundred at once, if we join St. Paul's account to that in the

[1] Matt. xiii. 11. John xv. 15.

[2] John xxi. 12.

[3] Mark xvi. 7.

Gospels. At length, after forty days, He was taken from them; He ascended up, "and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

Are *we* to feel less humble veneration for Him now, than His Apostles then? Though He is our Saviour, and has removed all slavish fear of death and judgment, are we, therefore, to make light of the prospect before us, as if we were sure of that reward which He bids us struggle for? Assuredly, we are still to "serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with reverence,"—to "kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and so we perish from the right way, if His wrath be kindled, yea but a little." In a Christian's course, *fear and love must go together*. And this is the lesson to be deduced from our Saviour's withdrawing from the world after His resurrection. He showed His love for men by dying for them, and rising again. He maintained His honour and great glory by retiring from them when His merciful purpose was attained, that they might seek Him if they would find Him. He ascended to His Father out of our sight. Sinners would be ill company for the exalted King of Saints. When we have been duly prepared to see Him, we shall be given to approach Him.

In heaven, love will absorb fear; but in this world, *fear and love must go together*. No one can love God aright without fearing Him; though many fear Him, and yet do not love Him. Self-confident men, who do not know their own hearts, or the reasons they have for being dissatisfied with themselves, do not fear God, and they think this bold freedom is to love Him. Deliberate sinners fear but cannot love Him. But devotion to

Him consists in love and fear, as we may understand from our ordinary attachment to each other. No one really loves another, who does not feel a certain reverence towards him. When friends transgress this sobriety of affection, they may indeed continue associates for a time, but they have broken the bond of union. It is mutual respect which makes friendship lasting. So again, in the feelings of inferiors towards superiors. Fear must go before love. Till he who has authority shows he has it and can use it, his forbearance will not be valued duly; his kindness will look like weakness. We learn to contemn what we do not fear; and we cannot love what we contemn. So in religion also. We cannot understand Christ's mercies till we understand His power, His glory, His unspeakable holiness, and our demerits; that is, until we first fear Him. Not that fear comes first, and then love; for the most part they will proceed together. Fear is allayed by the love of Him, and our love sobered by our fear of Him. Thus He draws us on with encouraging voice amid the terrors of His threatenings. As in the young ruler's case, He loves us, yet speaks harshly to us that we may learn to cherish mixed feelings towards Him. He hides Himself from us, and yet calls us on, that we may hear His voice as Samuel did, and, believing, approach Him with trembling. This may seem strange to those who do not study the Scriptures, and to those who do not know what it is earnestly to seek after God. But in proportion as the state of mind is strange, so is there in it, therefore, untold and surpassing pleasure to those who

partake it. The bitter and the sweet, strangely tempered, thus leave upon the mind the lasting taste of Divine truth, and satisfy it; not so harsh as to be loathed; nor of that insipid sweetness which attends enthusiastic feelings, and is wearisome when it becomes familiar. Such is the feeling of conscience too, God's original gift; how painful! yet who would lose it? "I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for Thy commandments[1]." This is David's account of it. Ezekiel describes something of the same feeling when the Spirit lifted him up and took him away, "and he went in bitterness, in the heat of his spirit," "the hand of the Lord" being "strong upon him[2]."

Now how does this apply to us here assembled? Are we in danger of speaking or thinking of Christ irreverently? I do not think we are in any immediate danger of deliberate profaneness; but we are in great danger of this, viz. first, of allowing ourselves to appear profane, and secondly, of gradually becoming irreverent, while we are pretending to be so. Men do not begin by *intending* to dishonour God; but they are afraid of the ridicule of others: they are ashamed of appearing religious; and thus are led to pretend that they are worse than they really are. They say things which they do not mean; and, by a miserable weakness, allow actions and habits to be imputed to them which they dare not really indulge in. Hence, they affect a liberty of speech which only befits the companions of evil spirits. They take God's name in vain, to show

[1] Ps. cxix. 131. [2] Ezek. iii. 14.

that they can do what devils do, and they invoke the evil spirit, or speak familiarly of all that pertains to him, and deal about curses wantonly, as though they were not fire-brands, — as if acknowledging the Author of Evil to be their great master and lord. Yes! he *is* a master who allows himself to be served without trembling. It is his very art to lead men to be at ease with him, to think lightly of him, and to trifle with him. He will submit to their ridicule, take (as it were) their blows, and pretend to be their slave, that he may ensnare them. *He* has no dignity to maintain, and he waits his time when his malice shall be gratified. So it has ever been all over the earth. Among all nations it has been his aim to make men laugh at him; going to and fro upon the earth, and walking up and down in it, hearing and rejoicing in that light perpetual talk about him which is his *worship*.

Now, it is not to be supposed that all this careless language can be continued without its affecting a man's heart at last; and this is the second danger I spoke of. Through a false shame, we disown religion with our lips, and next our words affect our thoughts. Men at last become the cold, indifferent, profane characters they professed themselves to be. They think contemptuously of God's Ministers, Sacraments, and Worship; they slight His Word, rarely looking into it, and never studying it. They undervalue all religious profession, and judging of others by themselves, impute the conscientious conduct they witness to bad motives. Thus they are in heart infidels; though they may not formally be such, and may attempt to disguise their own unbelief under

pretence of objecting to one or other of the doctrines or ordinances of religion. And should a time of temptation come, when it would be *safe* to show themselves as they really are, they will (almost unawares) throw off their profession of Christianity, and join themselves to the scoffing world.

And how must Christians, on the other hand, treat such heartless men? They have our Lord's example to imitate. Not that they dare precisely follow the conduct of Him who had no sin. They dare not assume to themselves any honour on their own account; and they are bound, especially if they are His Ministers, to humble themselves as the Apostles did, and "going out to the highways and hedges (as it were) compel[1]" men to be saved. Yet, while they use greater earnestness of entreaty than their Lord, they must not forget His dignity the while, who sends them. He manifested His love towards us, "in deed and in truth," and we, His Ministers, declare it in word; yet for the very reason that it is so abundant, we must in very gratitude learn reverence towards Him. We must not take advantage (so to say) of His goodness; or misuse the powers committed to us. Never must we solicitously press the truth upon those who do not profit by what they already possess. It dishonours Christ, while it does the scorner harm, not good. It is casting pearls before swine. We must wait for all opportunities of being useful to men, but beware of attempting too much at once. We must impart the Scripture doctrines, in

[1] Luke xiv. 23.

measure and season, as they can bear them; not being eager to recount them all, rather, hiding them from the world. Seldom must we engage in controversy or dispute; for it lowers the sacred truths to make them a subject for ordinary debate. Common propriety suggests rules like these at once. Who would speak freely about some revered friend in the presence of those who did not value him? or who would think he could with a few words overcome their indifference towards him? or who would hastily dispute about him when his hearers had no desire to be made love him?

Rather, shunning all intemperate words, let us show our light before men by our *works*. Here we must be safe. In doing justice, showing mercy, speaking the truth, resisting sin, obeying the Church,—in thus glorifying God, there can be no irreverence. And, above all, let us look at home, check all bad thoughts, presumptuous imaginings, vain desires, discontented murmurings, self-complacent reflections, and so in our hearts ever honour Him in secret, whom we reverence by open profession.

May God guide us in a dangerous world; and deliver us from evil. And may He rouse to serious thought, by the power of His Spirit, all who are living in profaneness or unconcern!

SERMON XXIV.

The Religion of the Day.

"*Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.*"—HEB. xii. 28, 29.

IN every age of Christianity, since it was first preached, there has been what may be called a *religion of the world*, which so far imitates the one true religion, as to deceive the unstable and unwary. The world does not oppose religion *as such*. I may say, it never has opposed it. In particular, it has, in all ages, acknowledged in one sense or other the Gospel of Christ, fastened on one or other of its characteristics, and professed to embody this in its practice; while by neglecting the other parts of the holy doctrine, it has, in fact, distorted and corrupted even that portion of it which it has exclusively put forward, and so has contrived to explain away the whole;—for he who cultivates only one precept of the Gospel to the exclusion of the rest, in reality attends to no part at all. Our duties *balance* each other; and though we are too sinful to perform them all perfectly, yet we may in some measure be performing them all, and preserving the balance on the

whole; whereas, to give ourselves only to this or that commandment, is to incline our minds in a wrong direction, and at length to pull them down to the earth, which is the aim of our adversary, the Devil.

It is his *aim* to break our strength; to force us down to the earth,—to bind us there. The world is his instrument for this purpose; but he is too wise to set it in open opposition to the Word of God. No! he affects to be a prophet like the prophets of God. He calls his servants also prophets; and they mix with the scattered remnant of the true Church, with the solitary Micaiahs who are left upon the earth, and speak in the name of the Lord. And in one sense they speak the truth; but it is not the whole truth; and we know, even from the common experience of life, that half the truth is often the most gross and mischievous of falsehoods.

Even in the first age of the Church, while persecution still raged, he set up a counter religion among the philosophers of the day, partly like Christianity, but in truth a bitter foe to it; and it deceived and made shipwreck of the faith of those who had not the love of God in their hearts.

Time went on, and he devised a second idol of the true Christ, and it remained in the temple of God for many a year. The age was rude and fierce. Satan took the darker side of the Gospel: its awful mysteriousness, its fearful glory, its sovereign inflexible justice; and here *his* picture of the truth ended, "God is a consuming fire;" so declares the text, and we know it. But we know more, viz. that God is love also; but Satan did not add this to his religion, which became one of

fear. The religion of the world was then a fearful religion. Superstitions abounded, and cruelties. The noble firmness, the graceful austerity of the true Christian were superseded by forbidding spectres, harsh of eye, and haughty of brow; and these were the patterns or the tyrants of a beguiled people.

What is Satan's device in this day? a far different one; but perhaps a more pernicious. I will attempt to expose it, or rather to suggest some remarks towards its exposure, by those who think it worth while to attempt it; for the subject is too great and too difficult for an occasion such as the present, and, after all, no one can detect falsehood for another;—every man must do it for himself; we can but *help* each other.

What is the world's religion now? It has taken the brighter side of the Gospel,—its tidings of comfort, its precepts of love; all darker, deeper views of man's condition and prospects being comparatively forgotten. This is the religion *natural* to a civilized age, and well has Satan dressed and completed it into an idol of the Truth. As the reason is cultivated, the taste formed, the affections and sentiments refined, a general decency and grace will of course spread over the face of society, quite independently of the influence of Revelation. That beauty and delicacy of thought, which is so attractive in books, then extends to the conduct of life, to all we have, all we do, all we are. Our manners are courteous; we avoid giving pain or offence; our words become correct; our relative duties are carefully performed. Our sense of propriety shows itself even in our domestic arrangements, in the embellishments of our houses, in

our amusements, and so also in our religious profession. Vice now becomes unseemly and hideous to the imagination, or, as it is sometimes familiarly said, "out of taste." Thus elegance is gradually made the test and standard of virtue, which is no longer thought to possess an intrinsic claim on our hearts, or to exist, *further than* it leads to the quiet and comfort of others. Conscience is no longer recognized as an independent arbiter of actions, its authority is explained away; partly it is superseded in the minds of men by the so-called moral sense, which is regarded merely as the love of the beautiful; partly by the rule of expediency, which is forthwith substituted for it in the details of conduct. Now conscience is a stern, gloomy principle; it tells us of guilt and of prospective punishment. Accordingly, when its terrors disappear, then disappear also, in the creed of the day, those fearful images of Divine wrath with which the Scriptures abound. They are explained away. Every thing is bright and cheerful. Religion is pleasant and easy; benevolence is the chief virtue; intolerance, bigotry, excess of zeal, are the first of sins. Austerity is an absurdity;—even firmness is looked on with an unfriendly, suspicious eye. On the other hand, all open profligacy is discountenanced; drunkenness is accounted a disgrace; cursing and swearing are vulgarities. Moreover, to a cultivated mind, which recreates itself in the varieties of literature and knowledge, and is interested in the ever-accumulating discoveries of science, and the ever-fresh accessions of information, political or otherwise, from foreign countries, religion will commonly seem to be dull, from want of novelty.

Hence excitements are eagerly sought out and rewarded. New objects in religion, new systems and plans, new doctrines, new preachers, are necessary to satisfy that craving which the so-called spread of knowledge has created. The mind becomes morbidly sensitive and fastidious; dissatisfied with things as they are, desirous of a change *as such*, as if alteration must of itself be a relief.

Now I would have you put Christianity for an instant out of your thoughts; and consider whether such a state of refinement as I have attempted to describe, is not that to which men might be brought, quite independent of religion, by the mere influence of education and civilization; and then again, whether, nevertheless, this mere refinement of mind is not more or less all that is called religion at this day. In other words, is it not the case, that Satan has so composed and dressed out what is the mere natural produce of the human heart under certain circumstances, as to serve his purposes as the counterfeit of the Truth? I do not at all deny that this spirit of the world uses words, and makes professions, which it would not adopt except for the suggestions of Scripture; nor do I deny that it takes a general colouring from Christianity, so as really to be modified by it, nay, in a measure enlightened and exalted by it. Again, I fully grant that many persons in whom this bad spirit shows itself, are but partially infected by it, and at bottom, good Christians, though imperfect. Still, after all, here is an existing teaching, only partially evangelical, built upon worldly principle, yet pretending to be the Gospel, dropping one whole

side of the Gospel, its austere character, and considering it enough to be benevolent, courteous, candid, correct in conduct, delicate,—though it includes no true fear of God, no fervent zeal for His honour, no deep hatred of sin, no horror at the sight of sinners, no indignation and compassion at the blasphemies of heretics, no jealous adherence to doctrinal truth, no especial sensitiveness about the particular means of gaining ends, provided the ends be good, no loyalty to the Holy Apostolic Church, of which the Creed speaks, no sense of the authority of religion as external to the mind: in a word, no seriousness,—and therefore is neither hot nor cold, but (in Scripture language) *lukewarm*. Thus the present age is the very contrary to what are commonly called the dark ages; and together with the faults of those ages we have lost their virtues. I say their virtues; for even the errors then prevalent, a persecuting spirit, for instance, fear of religious inquiry, bigotry, these were, after all, but perversions and excesses of *real virtues*, such as zeal and reverence; and we, instead of limiting and purifying them, have taken them away root and branch. Why? because we have not acted from a love of the Truth, but from the influence of the Age. The old generation has passed, and its character with it; a new order of things has arisen. Human society has a new framework, and fosters and developes a new character of mind; and this new character is made by the enemy of our souls, to resemble the Christian's obedience as near as it may, its likeness all the time being but accidental. Meanwhile, the Holy Church of God, as from the beginning, continues her

course heavenward; despised by the world, yet influencing it, partly correcting it, partly restraining it, and in some happy cases reclaiming its victims, and fixing them firmly and for ever within the lines of the faithful host militant here on earth, which journeys towards the City of the Great King. God give us grace to search our hearts, lest we be blinded by the deceitfulness of sin! lest we serve Satan transformed into an Angel of light, while we think we are pursuing true knowledge; lest, over-looking and ill-treating the elect of Christ here, we have to ask that awful question at the last day, while the truth is bursting upon us, "Lord, *when* saw we Thee a stranger and a prisoner?" when saw we Thy sacred Word and Servants despised and oppressed, "and did not minister unto Thee[1]?"

Nothing shows more strikingly the power of the world's religion, as now described, than to consider the very different classes of men whom it influences. It will be found to extend its sway and its teaching both over the professedly religious and the irreligious.

1. Many religious men, rightly or not, have long been expecting a millennium of purity and peace for the Church. I will not say, whether or not with reason, for good men may well differ on such a subject. But, any how, in the case of those who have expected it, it has become a temptation to take up and recognize the world's religion as I have already delineated it. They have more or less identified their vision of Christ's kingdom with the elegance and refinement of mere human civilization;

[1] Matt. xxv. 44.

and have hailed every evidence of improved decency, every wholesome civil regulation, every beneficent and enlightened act of state policy, as signs of their coming Lord. Bent upon achieving their object, an extensive and glorious diffusion and profession of the Gospel, they have been little solicitous about the *means* employed. They have countenanced and acted with men who openly professed unchristian principles. They have accepted and defended what they considered to be reformations and ameliorations of the existing state of things, though injustice must be perpetrated in order to effect them, or long cherished rules of conduct, indifferent perhaps in their origin but consecrated by long usage, must be violated. They have sacrificed Truth to expedience. They have strangely imagined that bad men are to be the immediate instruments of the approaching advent of Christ; and (like the deluded Jews not many years since in a foreign country) they have taken, if not for their Messiah (as the Jews did), at least for their Elijah, their reforming Baptist, the Herald of the Christ, children of this world, and sons of Belial, on whom the anathema of the Apostle lies from the beginning, declaring, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha[1]."

2. On the other hand, the form of doctrine, which I have called the religion of the day, is especially adapted to please men of sceptical minds, the opposite extreme to those just mentioned, who have never been careful to obey their conscience, who cultivate the intellect without

[1] 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

disciplining the heart, and who allow themselves to speculate freely about what religion *ought to be,* without going to Scripture to discover what it really is. Some persons of this character almost consider religion itself to be an obstacle in the advance of our social and political well-being. But they know human nature requires it; therefore they select the most *rational* form of religion (so they call it) which they can find. Others are far more seriously disposed, but are corrupted by bad example or other cause. But they *all* discard (what they call) gloomy views of religion; they all trust themselves more than God's word, and thus may be classed together; and are ready to embrace the pleasant consoling religion natural to a polished age. They lay much stress on works on *Natural Theology,* and think that all religion is contained in these; whereas, in truth, there is no greater fallacy than to suppose such works to be in themselves in any true sense religious at all. Religion, it has been well observed, is something *relative to us;* a system of commands and promises from God *towards* us. But how are we concerned with the sun, moon, and stars? or with the laws of the universe? how will they teach us our *duty?* how will they speak to *sinners?* They do not speak to sinners at all. They were created *before* Adam fell. They "declare the *glory* of God," but not His *will.* They are all perfect, all harmonious; but that brightness and excellence which they exhibit in their own creation, and the Divine benevolence therein seen, are of little moment to fallen man. We see nothing there of God's *wrath,* of which the conscience of a sinner

loudly speaks. So that there cannot be a more dangerous (though a common) device of Satan, than to carry us off from our own secret thoughts, to make us forget our own hearts, which tell us of a God of justice and holiness, and to fix our attention merely on the God who made the heavens; who is *our* God indeed, but not God as manifested to us sinners, but as He shines forth to His Angels, and to His elect hereafter.

When a man has so far deceived himself as to trust his destiny to what the heavens tell him of it, instead of consulting and obeying his conscience, what is the consequence? that at once he misinterprets and perverts the whole tenor of Scripture. It cannot be denied that, pleasant as religious observances are declared in Scripture to be to the holy, yet to men in general they are said to be difficult and distasteful; to all men *naturally* impossible, and by few fulfilled even with the assistances of grace, on account of their wilful corruption. Religion is pronounced to be against nature, to be against our original will, to require God's aid to make us love and obey it, and to be commonly refused and opposed in spite of that aid. We are expressly told, that "strait is the gate and narrow the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it;" that we must "*strive*" or struggle "to enter in at the strait gate," for that "many shall *seek* to enter in," but that is not enough, they merely seek and therefore do not find; and further, that they who do not obtain everlasting life, "shall go into everlasting punishment[1]." This is the dark side of religion; and the men I have

[1] Matt. vii. 14. Luke xiii. 24. Matt. xxv. 46.

been describing cannot bear to think of it. They shrink from it as too terrible. They easily get themselves to believe that those strong declarations of Scripture do not belong to the present day, or that they are figurative. They have no language within their heart responding to them. Conscience has been silenced. The only information they have received concerning God has been from Natural Theology, and that speaks only of benevolence and harmony; so they will not credit the plain word of Scripture. They seize on such parts of Scripture as seem to countenance their own opinions; they insist on its being commanded us to "rejoice evermore;" and they argue that it is our duty to solace ourselves here (in moderation, of course) with the goods of this life,—that we have only to be thankful while we use them,—that we need not alarm ourselves,—that God is a merciful God,—that amendment is quite sufficient to atone for our offences,—that though we have been irregular in our youth, yet that is a thing gone by,—that we forget it, and therefore God forgets it,—that the world is, on the whole, very well disposed towards religion,—that we should avoid enthusiasm,—that we should not be over serious,—that we should have large views on the subject of human nature,—and that we should love all men. This indeed is the creed of shallow men, in *every* age, who reason a little, and feel not at all, and who think themselves enlightened and philosophical. Part of what they say is false, part is true, but misapplied; but why I have noticed it here, is to show how exactly it fits in with what I have already described as the peculiar religion of a civilized age; it

fits in with it equally well as does that of the (so called) religious world, which is the opposite extreme.

One further remark I will make about these professedly rational Christians; who, be it observed, often go on to deny the mysteries of the Gospel. Let us take the text:—"Our God is a consuming fire." Now supposing these persons fell upon these words, or heard them urged as an argument against their own doctrine of the unmixed satisfactory character of our prospects in the world to come, and supposing they did not know what part of the Bible they occurred in, what would they say? Doubtless they would confidently say that they applied only to the Jews and not to Christians; that they only described the Divine Author of the Mosaic Law[1]; that God formerly spoke in terrors to the Jews, because they were a gross and brutish people, but that civilization has made us quite other men; that our *reason*, not our *fears*, is appealed to, and that the Gospel is love. And yet, in spite of all this argument, the text occurs in the Epistle to the Hebrews, written by an Apostle of Christ.

I shall conclude with stating more fully what I mean by the dark side of religion; and what judgment ought to be passed on the superstitious and gloomy.

Here I will not shrink from uttering my firm conviction, that it would be a gain to this country, were it vastly more supersticious, more bigoted, more gloomy, more fierce in its religion, than at present it shows itself to be. Not, of course, that I think the tempers of mind

[1] Deut. iv. 24.

herein implied desirable, which would be an evident absurdity; but I think them infinitely more desirable and more promising than a heathen obduracy, and a cold, self-sufficient, self-wise tranquillity. Doubtless, peace of mind, a quiet conscience, and a cheerful countenance are the gift of the Gospel, and the sign of a Christian; but the same effects (or, rather, what appear to be the same) may arise from very different causes. Jonah slept in the storm,—so did our Blessed Lord. The one slept in an evil security: the Other in the "peace of God which passeth all understanding." The two states cannot be confounded together, they are perfectly distinct; and as distinct is the calm of the man of the world from that of the Christian. Now take the case of the sailors on board the vessel; they cried to Jonah, "What meanest thou, O sleeper?"—so the Apostles said to Christ; "Lord, we perish". This is the case of the superstitious; they stand between the false peace of Jonah and the true peace of Christ; they are better than the one, though far below the Other. Applying this to the present religion of the educated world, full as it is of security and cheerfulness, and decorum, and benevolence, I observe that these appearances may arise either from a great deal of religion, or from the absence of it; they may be the fruits of shallowness of mind and a blinded conscience, or of that faith which has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And if this alternative be proposed, I might leave it to the common sense of men to decide (if they could get themselves to think seriously) to which of the two the temper of the age is to be referred. For myself I cannot doubt, seeing what I see of the world,

that it arises from the sleep of Jonah; and it is therefore but a dream of religion, far inferior in worth to the well-grounded alarm of the superstitious, who are awakened and see their danger, though they do not attain so far in faith as to embrace the remedy of it.

Think of this, I beseech you, my brethren, and lay it to heart, as far as you go with me, as you will answer for having heard it at the last day. I would not willingly be harsh; but knowing "that the world lieth in wickedness," I think it highly probable that you, so far as you are in it (as you must be, and we all must be in our degree), are, most of you, partially infected with its existing error, that shallowness of religion, which is the result of a blinded conscience; and, therefore, I speak earnestly to you. Believing in the existence of a general plague in the land, I judge that you probably have your share in the sufferings, the voluntary sufferings, which it is spreading among us. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom; till you see Him to be a consuming fire, and approach Him with reverence and godly fear, as being sinners, you are not even in sight of the strait gate. I do not wish you to be able to point to any particular time when you renounced the world (as it is called), and were converted; this is a deceit. Fear and love must go together; always fear, always love, to your dying day. Doubtless;—still you must know what it is to sow in tears here, if you would reap in joy hereafter. Till you know the weight of your sins, and that not in mere imagination, but in practice, not so as merely to confess it in a formal phrase of lamentation, but daily and in your heart in secret, you cannot embrace

the offer of mercy held out to you in the Gospel, through the death of Christ. Till you know what it is to fear with the terrified sailors or the Apostles, you cannot sleep with Christ at your Heavenly Father's feet. Miserable as were the superstitions of the dark ages, revolting as are the tortures now in use among the heathen of the East, better, far better is it, to torture the body all one's days, and to make this life a hell upon earth, than to remain in a brief tranquillity here, till the pit at length opens under us, and awakens us to an eternal fruitless consciousness and remorse. Think of Christ's own words: "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Again, He says, "Fear Him, who after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear Him." Dare not to think you have got to the bottom of your hearts; you do not know what evil lies there. How long and earnestly must you pray, how many years must you pass in careful obedience, before you have any right to lay aside sorrow, and to rejoice in the Lord? In one sense, indeed, you may take comfort from the first; for, though you dare not yet anticipate you are in the number of Christ's true elect, yet from the first you know He desires your salvation, has died for you, has washed away your sins by baptism, and will ever help you; and this thought must cheer you while you go on to examine and review your lives, and to turn to God in self-denial. But, at the same time, you never can be sure of salvation, while you are here; and therefore you must always fear while you hope. Your knowledge of your sins increases with your view of God's mercy in Christ. And this is the true

Christian state, and the nearest approach to Christ's calm and placid sleep in the tempest;—not perfect joy and certainty in heaven, but a deep resignation to God's will, a surrender of ourselves, soul and body, to Him; hoping indeed, that we shall be saved, but fixing our eyes more earnestly on Him than on ourselves; that is, acting for His glory, seeking to please Him, devoting ourselves to Him in all manly obedience and strenuous good works; and, when we do look within, thinking of ourselves with a certain abhorrence and contempt as being sinners, mortifying our flesh, scourging our appetites, and composedly awaiting that time when, if we be worthy, we shall be stripped of our present selves, and new made in the kingdom of Christ.

SERMON XXV.

Scripture a Record of Human Sorrow.

"*There is at Jerusalem by the sheepmarket a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.*"—JOHN v. 2, 3.

WHAT a scene of misery this pool of Bethesda must have presented! of pain and sickness triumphing unto death! the "blind, halt, withered, and impotent," persuaded by the hope of cure to disclose their sufferings in the eye of day in one large company. This pool was endued, at certain times, with a wonderful virtue by the descent of an Angel into it, so that its waters effected the cure of the first who stepped into it, whatever was his disease. However, I shall not speak of this wonderful pool; nor of our Saviour's miracle, wrought there upon the man who had no one to put him in before the rest, when the water was troubled, and who had been for thirty-eight years afflicted with his infirmity. Without entering into these subjects, let us take the text as it stands in the opening of the chapter which contains it, and deduce a lesson from it.

There lay about the pool "a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, and withered." This is a painful picture, such as we do not like to dwell upon,—a picture of a chief kind of human suffering, bodily disease; one which suggests to us and typifies all other suffering,—the most obvious fulfilment of that curse which Adam's fall brought upon his descendants. Now it must strike every one who thinks at all about it, that the Bible is full of such descriptions of human misery. We know it also abounds in accounts of human sin; but not to speak of these, it abounds in accounts of human distress and sufferings, of our miserable condition, of the vanity, unprofitableness, and trials of life. The Bible begins with the history of the curse pronounced on the earth and man; it ends with the book of Revelation, a portion of Scripture fearful for its threats, and its prediction of judgments; and whether the original curse on Adam be now removed from the world or not, it is certain that God's awful curses, foretold by St. John, are on all sides of us. Surely, in spite of the peculiar promises made to the Church in Christ our Saviour, yet as regards the world, the volume of inspiration is still a dreary record, "written within and without with lamentations, and mourning, and woe." And further, you will observe that it seems to drop what might be said in favour of this life, and enlarges on the unpleasant side of it. The history passes quickly from the Garden of Eden, to dwell on the sufferings which followed, when our first parents were expelled thence; and though, in matter of fact, there are traces of paradise still left among us, yet it is evident, Scripture says little of them

in comparison of its accounts of human misery. Little does it say concerning the innocent pleasures of life; of those temporal blessings which rest upon our worldly occupations, and make them easy; of the blessings which we derive from "the sun and moon, and the everlasting hills," from the succession of the seasons and the produce of the earth;—little about our recreations and our daily domestic comforts;—little about the ordinary occasions of festivity and mirth which occur in life, and nothing at all about those various other enjoyments which it would be going too much into detail to mention. Human tales and poems are full of pleasant sights and prospects; they make things better than they are, and pourtray a sort of imaginary perfection; but Scripture (I repeat) seems to abstain even from what might be said in praise of human life as it is. We read, indeed, of the feast made when Isaac was weaned, of Jacob's marriage, of the domestic and religious festivities of Job's family; but these are exceptions in the tenor of the Scripture history. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity;" "man is born to trouble:" these are its customary lessons. The text is but a specimen of the descriptions repeated again and again throughout Scripture of human infirmity and misery.

So much is this the case, that thoughtless persons are averse to the Scripture narrative for this very reason. I do not mean bad men, who speak hard, presumptuous words against the Bible, and in consequence expose themselves to the wrath of God; but I speak of *thoughtless* persons; and of these there are many, who consider the Bible a gloomy book, and on that account seldom

look into it, saying that it makes them melancholy. Accordingly, there have been attempts made on the other hand to hide this austere character of Scripture, and make it a bright interesting picture of human life. Its stories have before now been profanely embellished in human language, to suit the taste of weak and cowardly minds. All this shows, that in the common opinion of mankind, the Bible does not take a pleasant sunshine view of the world.

Now why have I thus spoken of this general character of the sacred history?—in order to countenance those who complain of it?—let it not be imagined;—far from it. God does nothing without some wise and good reason, which it becomes us devoutly to accept and use. He has not given us this dark view of the world without a cause. In truth, this view is the ultimate *true* view of human life. But this is not all; it is a view which it concerns us much to know. It concerns us (I say) much to be told that this world is, after all, in spite of first appearances and partial exceptions, a dark world; else we shall be obliged to learn it (and, sooner or later, we must learn it) by sad *experience;* whereas, if we are forewarned, we shall unlearn false notions of its excellence, and be saved the disappointment which follows them. And therefore it is that Scripture omits even what might be said in praise of this world's pleasures;—not denying their value, such as it is, or forbidding us to use them religiously, but knowing that we are sure to find them out for ourselves without being told of them, and that our danger is on the side, not of undervaluing, but of overvaluing them; whereas, by being told of the world's

vanity, *at first,* we shall learn (what else we should only attain *at last*), not indeed to be gloomy and discontented, but to bear a sober and calm heart under a smiling cheerful countenance. This is one chief reason of the solemn character of the Scripture history; and if we keep it in view, so far from being offended and frightened away by its notes of sorrow, because they grate on the ear at first, we shall stedfastly listen to them, and get them by heart, as a gracious gift from God sent to us, as a remedy for all dangerous overflowing joy in present blessings, in order to save us far greater pain (if we use the lesson well), the pain of actual disappointment, such as the overthrow of vainly cherished hopes of lasting good upon earth, will certainly occasion.

Do but consider what is the consequence of ignorance or distrust of God's warning voice, and you will see clearly how merciful He is, and how wise it is to listen to Him. I will not suppose a case of gross sin, or of open contempt for religion; but let a man have a general becoming reverence for the law and Church of God, and an unhesitating faith in his Saviour Christ, yet suppose him so to be taken with the goods of this world, as (without his being aware of it) to give his heart to them. Let him have many good feelings and dispositions; but let him love his earthly pursuits, amusements, friends, too well;—by which I mean, so well as to forget that he is bound to live in the spirit of Abraham's faith, who gave up home, kindred, possessions, all his eye ever loved, at God's word,—in the spirit of St. Paul's faith, who "counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord,"

and to win His favour "suffered the loss of all things." How will the world go with a man thus forgetful of his true interests? For a while all will be enjoyment;—if at any time weariness comes, he will be able to change his pleasure, and the variety will relieve him. His health is good and his spirits high, and easily master and bear down all the accidental troubles of life. So far is well; but, as years roll on, by little and little he will discover that, after all, he is not, as he imagined, possessed of any real substantial good. He will begin to find, and be startled at finding, that the things which once pleased, please less and less, or not at all. He will be unable to recall those lively emotions in which he once indulged; and he will wonder why. Thus, by degrees, the delightful visions which surrounded him will fade away, and in their stead, melancholy forms will haunt him, such as crowded round the pool of Bethesda. Then will be fulfilled the words of the wise man. The days will have come, "when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; the sun and the light and the moon and the stars shall be darkened, and the clouds return after the rain; then they who look out of the window shall be darkened, the doors shall be shut in the streets, all the daughters of music shall be brought low, fears shall be in the way, and desire shall fail[1]." Then a man will begin to be restless and discontented, for he does not know how to amuse himself. Before, he was cheerful only from the natural flow of his spirits, and when such cheerfulness is lost with increasing years,

[1] Eccles. xii. 1—5.

he becomes evil-natured. He has made no effort to change his heart,—to raise, strengthen, and purify his faith,—to subdue his bad passions and tempers. Now their day is come; they have sprung up and begin to domineer. When he was in health, he thought about his farm, or his merchandize, and lived to himself; he laid out his strength on the world, and the world is nothing to him, as a worthless bargain (so to say), seeing it is nothing worth to one who cannot take pleasure in it. He had no habitual thought of God in the former time, however he might have a general reverence for His name; and now he dreads Him, or (if the truth must be said) even begins to hate the thought of Him. Where shall he look for succour? Perhaps, moreover, he is a burden to those around him; they care not for him,—he is in their way. And so he will lie year after year, by the pool of Bethesda, by the waters of health, with no one helping him;—unable to advance himself towards a cure, in consequence of his long habits of sin, and others passing him by, perhaps unable to help one who obstinately refuses to be comforted. Thus he has at length full personal, painful experience, that this world is really vanity or worse, and all this because he would not believe it from Scripture.

Now should the above description appear overcharged, should it be said that it supposes a man to be possessed of more of the pleasures of life than most men have, and of keener feelings,—should it be said that most men have little to enjoy, and that most of those who have much go on in an ordinary tranquil way, and take and lose things without much thought, not pleased much in

their vigorous days, and not caring much about the change when the world deserts them,—then I must proceed to a more solemn consideration still, on which I do not like to dwell, but would rather leave it for your own private reflection upon it. There is a story in the Gospels of a man who was taken out of this life before he had turned his thoughts heaven-ward, and in another world he lift up his eyes being in torments. Be quite sure that every one of us, even the poorest and the most dull and insensible, is far more attached to this world than he can possibly imagine. We get used to the things about us, and forget they are necessary for our comfort. Every one, when taken out of this world, would miss a great deal that he was used to depend on, and would in consequence be in great discomfort and sorrow in his new abode, as a stranger in an unknown place; every one, that is, who had not, while on earth, made God his Father and Protector,—that Great God who alone will there be found. We do not, then, mend the the matter at all in supposing a man not to find out the world's vanity here; for, even should the world remain his faithful friend, and please him with its goods, to his dying day, still that world will be burnt up at the day of his resurrection; and even had he little of its comforts here, that little he will then miss. Then all men, small and great, will know it to be vanity, and feel their infinite loss if they have trusted it, when all the dead stand before God.

Let this suffice on the use we must make of the solemn view which the Scripture takes of this life. Those disclosures are intended to save us pain, by preventing us

from enjoying the world unreservedly; that we may use not abusing it.

Nor let it seem as if this view of life must make a man melancholy and gloomy. There are, it is true, men of ill-constituted minds, whom it has driven out of the world; but, rightly understood, it has no such tendency. The great rule of our conduct is to take things as they come. He who goes out of his way as shrinking from the varieties of human life which meet him, has weak faith, or a strangely perverted conscience,—he wants elevation of mind. The true Christian rejoices in those earthly things which give joy, but in such a way as not to care for them when they go. For no blessings does he care much, except those which are immortal, knowing that he shall receive all such again in the world to come. But the least and the most fleeting, he is too religious to contemn, considering them God's gift; and the least and most fleeting, thus received, yield a purer and deeper, though a less tumultuous joy. And if he at times refrains, it is lest he should encroach upon God's bounty, or lest by a constant use of it he should forget how to do without it.

Our Saviour gives us a pattern which we are bound to follow. He was a far greater than John the Baptist, yet He came, not with St. John's outward austerity,—condemning the *display* of strictness or gloominess, that we, His followers, might fast the more in private, and be the more austere in our secret hearts. True it is, that such self-command, composure, and inward faith, are not learned in a day; but if they were, why should this life be given us? It is given us as a very pre-

paration time for obtaining them. Only look upon the world in this light;—its sights of sorrows are to calm you, and its pleasant sights to try you. There is a bravery in thus going straightforward, shrinking from no duty little or great, passing from high to low, from pleasure to pain, and making your principles strong without their becoming formal. Learn to be as the Angel, who could descend among the miseries of Bethesda, without losing his heavenly purity or his perfect happiness. Gain healing from troubled waters. Make up your mind to the prospect of sustaining a certain measure of pain and trouble in your passage through life; by the blessing of God this will prepare you for it,—it will make you thoughtful and resigned without interfering with your cheerfulness. It will connect you in your own thoughts with the Saints of Scripture, whose lot it was to be patterns of patient endurance; and this association brings to the mind a peculiar consolation. View yourselves and all Christians as humbly following the steps of Jacob, whose days were few and evil; of David, who in his best estate was as a shadow that declineth, and was withered like grass; of Elijah, who despised soft raiment and sumptuous fare; of forlorn Daniel, who led an Angel's life; and be lighthearted and contented, *because* you are thus called to be a member of Christ's pilgrim Church. Realize the paradox of making merry and rejoicing in the world because it is *not* your's. And if you are hard to be affected (as many men are), and think too little about the changes of life, going on in a dull way without hope or fear, feeling neither your need nor the excellence of religion;

then, again, meditate on the mournful histories recorded in Scripture, in order that your hearts may be opened thereby and roused. Read the Gospels in particular; you there find accounts of sick and afflicted persons in every page as mementos. Above all, you there read of Christ's sufferings, which I am not now called upon to speak of; but the thought of which is far more than enough to make the world, bright as it may be, look dark and miserable in itself to all true believers, even if the record of *them* were the only sorrowful part of the whole Bible.

And now I conclude, bidding you think much of the Scripture history in the light in which I have put it,—that you may not hereafter find that you have missed one great benefit which it was graciously intended to convey.

SERMON XXVI.

Christian Manhood.

"*When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*"—1 Cor. xiii. 11.

WHEN our Lord was going to leave the world and return to His Father, He called His disciples *orphans;* children, as it were, whom He had been rearing, who were still unable to direct themselves, and who were soon to lose their Protector; but He said, "I will not leave you comfortless orphans, I will come to you[1];" meaning to say, He would come again to them in the power of His Holy Spirit, who should be their present all-sufficient Guide, though He Himself was away. And we know, from the sacred history, that when the Holy Spirit came, they ceased to be the defenceless children they had been before. He breathed into them a divine life, and gifted them with spiritual manhood, or *perfection,* as it is called in Scripture. From that time forth, they put away childish things:

[1] John xiv. 18.

they spake, they understood, they thought, as those who had been taught to govern themselves; and who, having "an unction from the Holy One, knew all things."

That such a change was wrought in the Apostles, according to Christ's promise, is evident from comparing their conduct *before* the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended on them, and *after*. I need not enlarge on their wonderful firmness and zeal in their Master's cause afterwards. On the other hand, it is plain from the Gospels, that before the Holy Ghost came down, that is, while Christ was still with them, they were as helpless and ignorant as children; had no clear notion what they ought to seek after, and how; and were carried astray by their accidental feelings and their long-cherished prejudices.—What was it but to act the child, to ask how many times a fellow-Christian should offend against us, and we forgive him, as St. Peter did? or to ask to see the Father, with St. Philip? or to propose to build tabernacles on the mount, as if they were not to return to the troubles of the world? or to dispute who should be the greatest[1]? or to look for Christ's restoring at that time the temporal kingdom to Israel[2]? Natural as such views were in the case of half-instructed Jews, they were evidently unworthy of those whom Christ had made His, that He might "present them perfect" before the throne of God.

Yet the first disciples of Christ at least put off their vanities once for all, when the Spirit came upon them;

[1] Matt. xvii. 4; xviii. 1; xx. 20. John xiv. 8. [2] Acts i. 6.

but as to ourselves, the Spirit has long since been poured upon us, even from our earliest years; yet it is a serious question, whether multitudes of us, even of those among us who make a profession of religion, are even so far advanced in a knowledge of the Truth as the Apostles were before the day of Pentecost. It may be a profitable employment to-day to consider this question, as suggested by the text,—to inquire how far we have proceeded in putting off such childish things as are inconsistent with a manly, honest profession of the Gospel.

Now, observe, I am not inquiring whether we are plainly living in sin, in wilful disobedience; nor even whether we are yielding through thoughtlessness to sinful practices and habits. The condition of those who act against their conscience, or who act without conscience, that is, lightly and carelessly, is far indeed from bearing any resemblance to that of the Apostles in the years of their early discipleship. I am supposing you, my brethren, to be on the whole followers of Christ, to profess to obey Him; and I address you as those who seem to themselves to have a fair hope of salvation. I am directing your attention, not to your sins, not to those faults and failings which you know to be such, and are trying to conquer, as being confessedly evil in themselves, but to such of your views, wishes, and tastes, as resemble those which the Apostles cherished, true believers though they were, before they attained their manhood in the Gospel: and I ask, how far you have dismissed these from your minds as vain and trifling; that is, how far you have made what St. Paul in the text seems to consider the first step in the true spiritual

course of a Christian, on whom the Holy Ghost has descended.

1. For example, Let us consider our love of the pleasures of life. I am willing to allow there is an innocent love of the world, innocent in itself. God made the world, and has sanctioned the general form of human society, and has given us abundant pleasures in it; I do not say *lasting* pleasures, but still, while they are present, really pleasures. It is natural that the young should look with hope to the prospect before them. They cannot help forming schemes what they will do when they come into active life, or what they would wish to be, had they their choice. They indulge themselves in fancyings about the future, which they know at the time cannot come true. At other times they confine themselves to what is possible; and then their hearts burn, while they dream of quiet happiness, domestic comfort, independence. Or, with bolder views, they push forward their fortunes into public life, and indulge ambitious hopes. They fancy themselves rising in the world, distinguished, courted, admired; securing influence over others, and rewarded with high station. James and John had such a dream when they besought Christ that they might sit at His side in the most honourable places in His kingdom.

Now such dreams can hardly be called sinful in themselves, and without reference to the particular case; for the gifts of wealth, power, and influence, and much more of domestic comfort, come from God, and may be religiously improved. But, though not directly censurable, they are *childish;* childish either in them-

selves, or at least when cherished and indulged; childish in a Christian, who has infinitely higher views to engross his mind; and, as being childish, excusable only in the young. They *are* an offence when retained as life goes on; but in the young we may regard them after the pattern of our Saviour's judgment upon the young man who was rich and noble. He is said to have "loved him;" pitying (that is) and not harshly denouncing the anticipations which he had formed of happiness from wealth and power, yet withal not concealing from him the sacrifice of all these which he must make, "if he would be perfect," that is, a man, and not a mere child in the Gospel.

2. But there are other childish views and habits besides, which must be put off while we take on ourselves the full profession of a Christian; and these, not so free from intrinsic guilt as those which have been already noticed;—such as the love of display, greediness of the world's praise, and the love of the comforts and luxuries of life. These, though wrong tempers of mind, still I do not now call by their hardest names, because I would lead persons, if I could, rather to turn away from them as unworthy a Christian, with a sort of contempt, outgrowing them as they grow in grace, and laying them aside as a matter of course, while they are gradually learning to "set their affections on things above, not on things of the earth."

Children have evil tempers and idle ways which we do not deign to speak seriously of. Not that we, in any degree, approve them or endure them on their own account; nay, we punish some of them; but we bear

them *in* children, and look for their disappearing as the mind becomes more mature. And so in religious matters there are many habits and views, which we bear with in the unformed Christian, but which we account disgraceful and contemptible should they survive that time when a man's character may be supposed to be settled. Love of display is one of these; whether we are vain of our abilities, or our acquirements, or our wealth, or our personal appearance; whether we discover our weakness in talking much, or in love of managing, or again in love of dress. Vanity, indeed, and conceit are always disagreeable, for the reason that they interfere with the comfort of other persons, and vex them; but I am here observing, that they are *in themselves* odious, when discerned in those who enjoy the full privileges of the Church, and are by profession men in Christ Jesus, odious from their inconsistency with Christian faith and earnestness.

And so with respect to the love of worldly comforts and luxuries (which, unhappily, often grows upon us rather than disappears, as we get old), whether or not it be natural in youth, at least, it is (if I may so say) *shocking* in those who profess to be "perfect," if we would estimate things aright; and this from its great incongruity with the spirit of the Gospel. Is it not something beyond measure strange and monstrous (if we could train our hearts to possess a right judgment in all things), to profess that our treasure is not here, but in heaven with Him who is ascended thither, and to own that we have a cross to bear after Him, who first suffered before He triumphed; and yet to set ourselves

deliberately to study our own comfort as some great and sufficient end, to go much out of our way to promote it, to sacrifice any thing considerable to guard it, and to be downcast at the prospect of the loss of it? Is it possible for a true son of the Church militant, while "the ark, and Israel, and Judah abide in tents," and the "servants of his Lord are encamped in the open field," to "eat and drink" securely, to wrap himself in the furniture of wealth, to feed his eyes with the "pride of life," and complete for himself the measure of this world's elegancies?

Again, all timidity, irresolution, fear of ridicule, weakness of purpose, such as the Apostles showed when they deserted Christ, and Peter especially when he denied Him, are to be numbered among the tempers of mind which are childish as well as sinful; which we must learn to despise,—to be ashamed at ourselves if we are influenced by them, and, instead of thinking the conquest of them a great thing, to account it as one of the very first steps towards being but an ordinary true believer; just as the Apostles, in spite of their former discipleship, only commenced (surely) their Christian course at the day of Pentecost, and then took to themselves a good measure of faith, boldness, zeal, and self-mastery, not as some great proficiency and as a boast, but as the very condition of their being Christians at all, as the elements of spiritual life, as a mere outfitting, and a small attainment indeed in that extended course of sanctification through which the Blessed Spirit is willing to lead every Christian.

Now in this last remark I have given a chief reason

for dwelling on the subject before us. It is very common for Christians to make much of what are but petty services; first to place the very substance of religious obedience in a few meagre observances, or particular moral precepts which are easily complied with, and which they think fit to call giving up the world; and then to make a great vaunting about their having done what, in truth, every one who is not a mere child in Christ ought to be able to do, to congratulate themselves upon their success, ostentatiously to return thanks for it, to condemn others who do not happen to move exactly along the very same line of minute practices in detail which they have adopted, and in consequence to forget that, after all, by such poor obedience, right though it be, still they have not approached even to a distant view of that point in their Christian course, at which they may consider themselves, in St. Paul's words, to have "attained" a sure hope of salvation; just as little children, when they first have strength to move their limbs, triumph in every exertion of their newly-acquired power, as in some great victory. To put off idle hopes of earthly good, to be sick of flattery and the world's praise, to see the emptiness of temporal greatness, and to be watchful against self-indulgence,—these are but the beginnings of religion; these are but the preparation of heart, which religious earnestness implies; without a good share of them, how can a Christian move a step? How could Abraham, when called of God, have even set out from his native place, unless he had left off to think much of this world, and cared not for its ridicule? Surely

these attainments are but our first manly robe, showing that childhood is gone; and, if we feel the love and fear of the world still active within our hearts, deeply must we be humbled, yes, and alarmed; and humbled even though but the traces remain of former weaknesses. But even if otherwise, what thank have we? See what the Apostles were, by way of contrast, and then you will see what is the true life of the Spirit, the substance and full fruit of holiness. To love our brethren with a resolution which no obstacles can overcome, so as almost to consent to an anathema on ourselves, if so be we may save those who hate us,—to labour in God's cause against hope, and in the midst of sufferings,—to read the events of life, as they occur, by the interpretation which Scripture gives them, and that, not as if the language were strange to us, but to do it promptly,—to perform all our relative daily duties most watchfully,—to check every evil thought, and bring the whole mind into captivity to the law of Christ,—to be patient, cheerful, forgiving, meek, honest, and true,—to persevere in this good work till death, making fresh and fresh advances towards perfection—and after all, even to the end, to confess ourselves unprofitable servants, nay, to feel ourselves corrupt and sinful creatures, who (with all our proficiency) would still be lost unless God bestowed on us His mercy in Christ;—these are some of the difficult realities of religious obedience, which we must pursue, and which the Apostles in high measure attained, and which we may well bless God's holy name, if He enables us to make our own.

Let us then take it for granted, as a truth which

cannot be gainsaid, that to break with the world, and make religion our first concern, is only to cease to be children; and, again, that in consequence, those Christians who have come to mature years, and yet do not even so much as this, are "in the presence of the Angels of God" an odious and unnatural spectacle, a mockery of Christianity. I do not say what such men are in God's sight, and what are their prospects for the next world, for that is a fearful thought,—and we ought to be influenced by motives far higher than that mere slavish dread of future punishment to which such a consideration would lead us.

But here some one may ask, whether I am not speaking severely in urging so many sacrifices at the beginning of true Christian obedience. In conclusion, then, I observe, in the first place, that I have not said a word against the moderate and thankful enjoyment of this life's goods, *when* they actually come in our way; but against the wishing earnestly for them, seeking them, and preferring them to God's righteousness, which is commonly done. Further, I am not excluding from the company of Christians all who cannot at once make up their minds thus vigorously to reject the world, when its goods are dangerous, inexpedient, or unsuitable; but excluding them from the company of mature, manly Christians. Doubtless our Lord deals gently with us. He has put His two Sacraments apart from each other. Baptism first admits us to His favour; His Holy Supper brings us among His perfect ones. He has put from fourteen to twenty years between them, in the ordinary course of things, that we may have time to

count the cost, and make our decision calmly. Only there must be no standing still,—there cannot be; time goes slowly, yet surely, from birth to the age of manhood, and in like manner, our minds, though slowly formed to love Christ, must still be forming. It is when men are mature in years, and yet are "children in understanding," then they are intolerable, because they have exceeded their season, and are out of place. Then it is that ambitious thoughts, trifling pursuits and amusements, passionate wishes and keen hopes, and the love of display, are directly sinful, because they are by that time deliberate sins. While they were children, "they spake as children, understood, thought as children;" but when they became men, "it was high time to awake out of sleep;" and "put away childish things." And if they have continued children instead of "having their senses exercised to discriminate between the excellent and the base," alas! what deep repentance must be theirs, before they can know what true peace is!—what self-reproach and sharp self-discipline, before their eyes can be opened to see effectually those truths which are "spiritually discerned!"

So much on the case of those who neglect to grow betimes into the hope of their calling. As to the young themselves, it is plain that nothing I have said can give encouragement to them to acquiesce in their present incomplete devotion of themselves to God, because it will be as much as they can do, even with their best efforts, to make their growth of wisdom and of stature keep pace with each other. And if there be any one who, as thinking the enjoyments of youth must soon be relin-

quished, deliberately resolves to make the most of them before the duties of manhood come upon him, such an one, in doing so, is rendering it impossible for him to give them up, when he is called to do so. As for those who allow themselves in what, even in youth, is clearly sinful,—the deliberate neglect of prayer, profaneness, riotous living, or other immorality,—the case of such persons has not even entered into my mind, when I spoke of youthful thoughtlessness. They, of course, have no "inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."

But if there be those among us, and such there well may be, who, like the young ruler, "worshipping Christ," and "loved" by Him, and obeying His commandments from their youth up, yet cannot but be "sorrowful" at the thought of giving up their pleasant visions, their childish idolatries, and their bright hopes of earthly happiness, such I bid be of good cheer, and take courage. What is it your Saviour requires of you, more than will also be exacted from you by that hard and evil master, who desires your ruin? Christ bids you give up the world; but will not, at any rate, the world soon give up you? Can you keep it, by being its slave? Will not he, whose creature of temptation it is, the prince of the world, take it from you, whatever he at present promises? What does your Lord require of you, but to look at all things as they really are, to account them merely as His instruments, and to believe that good is good because He wills it, that He can bless as easily by hard stone as by bread, in the desert as in the fruitful field, if we have faith in Him who gives us the true

bread from heaven? Daniel and his friends were princes of the royal house of David; they were "children well-favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, cunning in knowledge, and understanding science[1];" yet they had faith to refuse even the literal meat and drink given them, because it was an idol's sacrifice, and God sustained them without it. For ten days of trial they lived on pulse and water; yet "at the end," says the sacred record, "their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat." Doubt not, then, His power to bring you through any difficulties, who gives you the command to encounter them. He has showed you the way; He gave up the home of His mother Mary to "be about His Father's business," and now He but bids you take up after Him the cross which He bore for you, and "fill up what is wanting of His afflictions in your flesh." Be not afraid,—it is but a pang now and then, and a struggle; a covenant with your eyes, and a fasting in the wilderness, some calm habitual watchfulness, and the hearty effort to obey, and all will be well. Be not afraid. He is most gracious, and will bring you on by little and little. He does not show you whither He is leading you; you might be frightened did you see the whole prospect at once. Sufficient for the day is its own evil. Follow His plan; look not on anxiously; look down at your present footing "lest it be turned out of the way," but speculate not about the future.

[1] Dan. i. 4.

I can well believe that you have hopes now, which you cannot give up, and even which support you in your present course. Be it so; whether they will be fulfilled, or not, is in His hand. He may be pleased to grant the desires of your heart; if so, thank Him for His mercy; only be sure, that all will be for your highest good, and "as thy days, so shall thy strength be. There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in His excellency on the sky. The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms[1]." He knows no variableness, neither shadow of turning; and when we outgrow our childhood, we but approach, however feebly, to His likeness, who has no youth nor age, who has no passions, no hopes, nor fears, but who loves truth, purity, and mercy, and who is supremely blessed, because He is supremely holy.

Lastly, while we thus think of Him, let us not forget to be up and doing. Let us beware of indulging a mere barren faith and love, which dreams instead of working, and is fastidious when it should be hardy. This is only spiritual childhood in another form; for the Holy Ghost is the Author of active good works, and leads us to the observance of all lowly deeds of ordinary obedience as the most pleasing sacrifice to God.

[1] Deut. xxxiii. 25—27.

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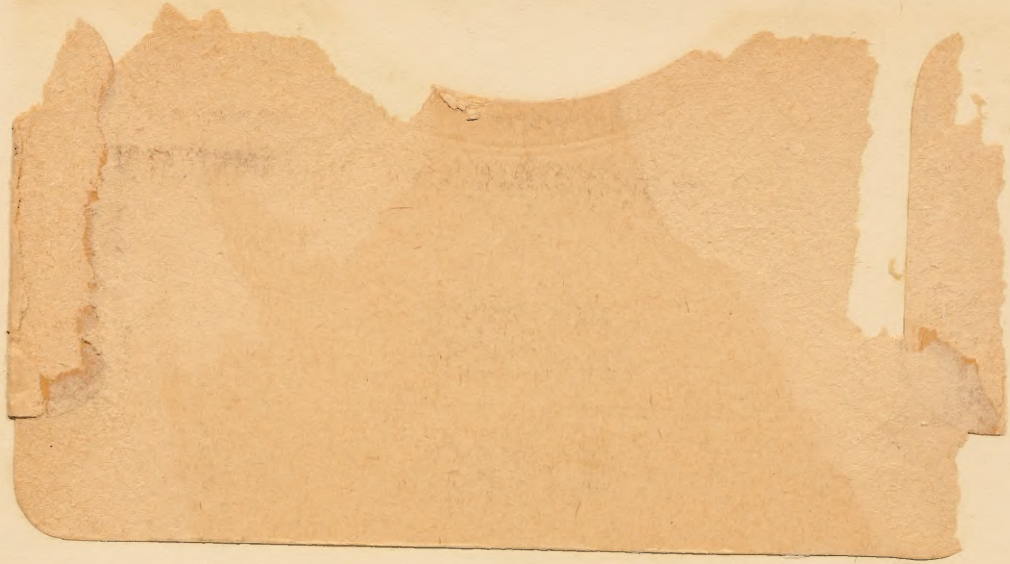
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