



LIBRARY
Theological Seminary,
PRINCETON, N. J.

No. Case. 95
No. Shelf. 3
No. Book. 6
~~BR 45 .B35 1785~~

Bampton lectures

500
#17849



E I G H T
S E R M O N S

O N T H E
P R O P H E C I E S

R E S P E C T I N G T H E
D E S T R U C T I O N O F J E R U S A L E M,

P R E A C H E D B E F O R E T H E
U N I V E R S I T Y O F O X F O R D
I N T H E Y E A R 1785.

A T T H E L E C T U R E F O U N D E D B Y T H E L A T E
R E V. J O H N B A M P T O N, ^{Lecturer} M. A.
C A N O N O F S A L I S B U R Y.

B Y R A L P H C H U R T O N, M. A.
F E L L O W O F B R A S E N N O S E C O L L E G E.

O X F O R D:

P R I N T E D A T T H E C L A R E N D O N P R E S S,
F O R J. A N D J. F L E T C H E R; A N D B. W H I T E A N D
S O N, L O N D O N. M D C C L X X X V.

Imprimatur,

JOS. CHAPMAN,

Vice-Can. O x o n.

April 25. 1785.

TO THE REVEREND
THE HEADS OF COLLEGES,
THE FOLLOWING SERMONS,
PREACHED
BY THEIR APPOINTMENT,
ARE,
WITH MUCH RESPECT
AND GRATITUDE,
INSCRIBED.



*Extract from the last Will, and Testa-
ment of the late Reverend JOHN
BAMPTON, Canon of Salisbury.*

—— “ I give and bequeath my Lands
“ and Estates to the Chancellor, Masters,
“ and Scholars of the University of Oxford
“ for ever, to have and to hold all and sin-
“ gular the said Lands or Estates upon trust,
“ and to the intents and purposes herein after
“ mentioned ; that is to say, I will and ap-
“ point, that the Vice-Chancellor of the
“ University of Oxford for the time being
“ shall take and receive all the rents, issues,
“ and profits thereof, and (after all taxes,
“ reparations, and necessary deductions made)
“ that he pay all the remainder to the en-
“ dowment of eight Divinity Lecture Ser-
“ mons, to be established for ever in the said
“ University, and to be performed in the
“ manner following :

“ I direct and appoint, that, upon the first
“ Tuesday in Easter Term, a Lecturer be
“ yearly chosen by the Heads of Colleges
“ only, and by no others, in the room ad-
“ joining to the Printing-House, between
“ the

“ the hours of ten in the morning and two
“ in the afternoon, to preach eight Divinity
“ Lecture Sermons, the year following, at
“ St. Mary’s in Oxford, between the com-
“ mencement of the last month in Lent
“ Term, and the end of the third week in
“ Act Term.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that the eight
“ Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be preach-
“ ed upon either of the following subjects
“ — to confirm and establish the Christian
“ Faith, and to confute all heretics and schif-
“ matics—upon the divine authority of the
“ Holy Scriptures — upon the authority of
“ the writings of the primitive Fathers, as
“ to the faith and practice of the primitive
“ Church — upon the Divinity of our Lord
“ and Saviour Jesus Christ—upon the Divi-
“ nity of the Holy Ghost—upon the Articles
“ of the Christian Faith, as comprehended
“ in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds.

“ Also I direct, that thirty copies of the
“ eight Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be
“ always printed, within two months after
“ they are preached, and one copy shall be
“ given to the Chancellor of the University,
“ and one copy to the Head of every Col-
“ lege,

“ lege, and one copy to the Mayor of the
“ City of Oxford, and one copy to be put
“ into the Bodleian Library; and the ex-
“ pence of printing them shall be paid out
“ of the revenue of the Lands or Estates
“ given for establishing the Divinity Lecture
“ Sermons; and the Preacher shall not be
“ paid, nor be entitled to the revenue, before
“ they are printed.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that no person
“ shall be qualified to preach the Divinity
“ Lecture Sermons, unless he hath taken the
“ Degree of Master of Arts at least, in one
“ of the two Universities of Oxford or Cam-
“ bridge; and that the same person shall
“ never preach the Divinity Lecture Sermons
“ twice.”

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N I.

Introductory view of the Advent of the
Messiah, and of the Coming of his Kingdom.

M A T T. VI. 10.

Thy kingdom come. — — Pag. 1

S E R M O N II.

On the previous Propagation of the Gospel.

M A T T. XXIV. 14.

*This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached
in all the world, for a witness unto all
nations ; and then shall the end come.* 41

S E R M O N III.

On the appearance of false Christs and false Prophets; with some remarks on the evidence of Prophecy and Miracles.

M A T T. XXIV. 4, 5.

Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. 87

S E R M O N IV.

On the Signs of wrath, and the Commencement of troubles.

M A T T. XXIV. 8.

All these are the beginning of sorrows. 125

S E R M O N V.

On the providential Deliverance of the Christians.

L U K E XXI. 20, 21.

When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains. — 153

S E R M O N VI.

On the miseries of the Siege, and the final Desolation of the City and the Temple.

L U K E XIX. 41, 42, 43, 44.

And when he was come near, he beheld the city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. 183

S E R M O N VII.

On the future Conversion of the Jews.

I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery (lest ye should be wise in your own conceits) that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved. ————— 215

SERMON VIII.

Recapitulation, with reflections and inferences.

JOHN XIV. 29.

I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye might believe.

239

ERRATA.

Page 21. n. l. 2. for 19. read 18.

24. n. l. 1. for ii. r. 11.

32. n. d. r. Matt. xiii. 43. and refer Mark xiv. 25. to l. 17.

48. n. l. 2. for lv. r. lxxv.

71. l. 1. d. one their.

74. n. l. 3. for 15. r. 16.

75. l. 21. for wole r. whole.

142. l. 19. for p. r. q.

S E R M O N I.

M A T T. VI. 10.

Thy kingdom come.

THE kingdom of GOD is an expression which has different acceptations in holy scripture^a. It denotes his eternal and his spiritual dominion; that sovereign power, which the Creator of all things exerciseth over the works of his hands, and that state of grace and salvation, which was established in the world by Jesus Christ. The former, it is evident, is neither subject to

^a Βασιλειᾶς τῶ Θεοῦ δύο οἰδὲν ἡ γραφή, τὴν μὲν κριτ' οἰκειώσιν, τὴν δὲ κατὰ δημοκρασίαν. βασιλεύει μὲν γὰρ ὑπάντων—κατὰ τὸν τῆς δημιουργίας λόγον· βασιλεύει δὲ τῶν πιστῶν—κριτὰ τὸν τῆς οἰκειώσεως. Chrysof. Hom. 39. in 1 Cor. Tom. III. p. 509. l. 12. ed. Savil. διπλῆ—ἡ τῆς Σωτῆρος βασιλεία· ἡ μὲν προαιωνίως ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐκ ἐχασσι, ἡ δὲ μετὰ τῆς αἰωνίας, ἀρχὴν ἀπο τῆς οἰκονομίας λαμβάνουσι. Id. T. v. p. 681. l. 10.

diminution, nor admits of increase; it has no other bounds but those of the universe. The latter, wide as it has spread itself from a small beginning, sometimes oppressed, and sometimes prosperous, may still enlarge its borders, as GOD shall bless what his right hand hath planted, and his providence preserved, till that come to pass, which the prophets have foretold, till "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea^b."

If this distinction be applied to the text, though it is plain that the kingdom, in the notion first mentioned, as unchangeable and absolute, cannot be that which is there intended^c; yet it may justly be regarded, and the doxology implies that it ought to be regarded, as the ground of the petition. Because GOD is "King for ever and ever^d," the supreme governor of heaven and earth, we therefore pray, that he may be acknowledged as such; that the gospel of truth may

^b If. xi. 9. Hab. ii. 14.

^c Nam Deus quando non regnat? in cujus manu cor omnium regum est. Sed quicquid nobis optamus, in illum auguramur, et illi deputamus, quod ab illo expectamus.

Tertull. de Orat. c. v.

^d Ps. x. 16.

be published and received throughout the world, and that those who enjoy its sacred light may walk worthy of it, as faithful subjects and obedient children of an Almighty Lord and heavenly Father, as redeemed from sin by the precious blood of the Son of God.

Such is, obviously, the general import of this petition. If on the latter part of it any thing more is necessary to be said, we may recollect, how the inspired writers, with equal energy and simplicity, use this and similar expressions, in speaking on subjects of the sublimest nature. When “Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel before his death, he said, The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of his saints^e :” in these respective places he declared his presence, and imparted his blessings to his chosen people. In like manner therefore, by the coming of the kingdom of God, or of Christ, or his coming in his kingdom, may properly be understood any extraordinary manifestation of his power or glory^f, during the continuance of his church upon earth, as well as his ap-

^e Deut. xxxiii. 1, 2.

^f See Wall on Matt. x. 23.

pearance to judge the world at the last day. The words of the text at least, if we consider them as spoken by our Lord, and designed by him for general use in all ages, may well be supposed to have this large and comprehensive meaning; to have carried in them, at first, a prayer for many events long since accomplished; and certainly to have included, in the intention and foreknowledge of the divine Author of them, the entire scheme of his church, from the time when it was but a little flock, to that glorious æra, when it shall comprehend in its fold all the nations upon earth, and that day still more glorious, when he shall come again, with his holy angels, to bestow on all those, who have believed and obeyed him, a crown of righteousness, that fadeth not away.

Viewing the words therefore in this extent, let us consider some of those passages in the Gospels, where the coming of the Son of man, or of his kingdom, is mentioned. The intended course of these lectures will perhaps be a further illustration of the subject; but the scriptures, to which your present attention is requested, it is the more necessary here to examine, because some of them are often applied, whether on good grounds or not we
are

are to inquire, to an event which will be brought forward, if God shall enable us, for future discussion.

But before we proceed to contemplate the appearances of the Messiah's kingdom, it may be proper to state, with as much brevity as the point will admit, some few of the prophecies respecting the advent of the Messiah himself, when he "vouchsafed to pitch his tent among men, and dwelt in a tabernacle of human flesh^g."

"The LORD thy GOD," saith Moses, will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken^h." This prophecy is several times in the New Testament applied to our Lord; and it has often been proved, that it cannot possibly belong to any one else; for all the other prophets were in many respects inferior to Moses. But the passage deserves particular notice from another circumstance. There are instances of kings, both Pagan and Jewish, who were named and described, long before their birth,

^g Stanhope on 1 Sund. in Adv. εσκηνωσεν εν ημεις. Joh. i. 14.

^h Deut. xviii. 15.

by those holy men whom the Lord inspiredⁱ. But, among the prophets themselves, we find not that any one was ever foretold by an antecedent prophet; for it became the promised Deliverer of Israel, in this as in all things, to have the pre-eminence. Him therefore Moses, the first and chief of the prophets, foreshewed, in the passage here adduced, as a prophet in dignity like to himself^k.

Still however by David, in a succeeding age, he was spoken of in terms far more ex-

ⁱ Cyrus was foretold by Isaiah (see c. xlv. 28;) above 100 years before he was born; and Josiah by a man of God in the time of Jereboam, above 300 years before his birth. 1 Kings xiii. 2.

^k Even the harbinger of the Messiah, more honourable in this respect than those by whom the word of God came of old, was foretold by Malachi under the character of Elijah the prophet. Mal. iv. 5. And perhaps this may be, in part at least, our blessed Saviour's meaning, when he mentions the superiority of the baptist: "Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written," &c. Matt. xi. 9, 10. With respect to his being foretold as "Elijah the prophet," possibly that was not merely because he should come "in the spirit and power of Elias" (Luke i. 17.) but for another reason likewise. Had he been described simply as a prophet, or the prophet, there might have been room for a doubt, whether the prediction did not relate to the Messiah himself. See John i. 21. vi. 14. But he who was prefigured as Elijah, the Restorer of the law, could not be the prophet resembling Moses, the Founder of the law.

alted. "The Lord," says he, "said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool¹." On this passage it is justly remarked by St. Chrysostom^m, that as the words come not from the mouth of an ordinary prophet, but from one who was also a king, they can, by fair interpretation, be understood of God alone, who is King of kings. And accordingly, when this text was urged against the Pharisees, by him of whom we believe it to have been meant, they could make no reply to it; for they did not see, or would not admit, the only true exposition, which can ever be given of it, that he who, by human descent, was the son of David, was at the same time, as to his divine nature, his Lord and his Godⁿ.

With regard to the period, in which this illustrious person was to appear, it is evident from the general expectation of the Jews, just before and at the time, when the blessed Jesus conversed among them; that they then understood those to be the very days, which

¹ Pf. cx. 1.

^m Serm. 4. contr. Judæos, T. vi. p. 351. l. 13. See also Pearson on the Creed, Art. vi.

ⁿ See Matt. xxii. 41, &c.

the ancient prophecies, those of Daniel in particular, had marked out for the birth of the Messiah. But be this as it may, for it is not to my present purpose to dwell longer upon the point; it is clear as the light from the prophecy of Haggai, that the Messiah was to come before the destruction of the second temple. “The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.”

This remarkable prophecy is never alledged by any of the writers of the New Testament^p; and the reason seems obvious. While the temple was standing, no certain proof could be drawn from hence, that the Desire of all nations was really come. But had any of the inspired penmen lived to behold the destruction of Jerusalem, and addressed an epistle to the miserable remains of their unbelieving brethren; or had St. John, for instance, who did survive that fatal overthrow, had occasion to discourse with some one, who had escaped the general devastation, and still

^o Hag. ii. 9.

^p Part of it (v. 6.) is cited Heb. xii. 26. but with a different view, not to shew the time of the Messiah's appearance, but the change of the covenant, which was then to take place.

continued obstinate in unbelief, he would, we may presume, have particularly insisted on the passage before us.

“ You have seen the wrath of God poured out upon your country, while you have been delivered by the mercy of heaven : let this awaken you to serious reflection. Your city is laid waste, and your temple in ashes. This prophecy therefore, which the Lord spake by the mouth of Haggai, when the temple was in building, must needs have been fulfilled : “ Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the dry land : And I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.—The glory of this latter house shall be greater, than of the former.” In what respect did the second temple, the place whereof now knoweth it no more, ever equal, much less surpass, the glory of the house built by Solomon ; unless it was by the appearance therein of the promised Messiah, even this Jesus, whom we preach unto you, and whose glory we beheld, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father⁹ ?”

⁹ John i. 14.

Had the Jew made answer, like some of his brethren in later ages, that these predictions were accomplished, in the longer duration of Zerubbabel's temple, in the splendor of the walls as rebuilt by Herod, or the magnificence of the gifts, with which it was adorned by foreign princes; the beloved Apostle, grieved as he must have been with such poor evasions, would yet have expostulated in the spirit of meekness.

“ Can you then suppose an holy prophet to have been solemnly commissioned, by the Lord of hosts, to encourage, with such slender promises, those who wept at the inferiority of the house, which they were building? Could any of these honours, if such you esteem them; or could all of them together, raise the latter temple to an equal dignity with the former; in comparison of which, in the eyes of them who had seen both, it was as nothing? If it stood ten years longer^r, if it was embellished by Herod, an Idumean king, and enriched with offerings from heathen nations; it was profaned by Antiochus and Pompey; no fire

^r This is the Jews' account. According to Usher the first temple stood 417 years, the second 584.

from heaven consumed the sacrifices; the Urim and Thummim were wanting; the visible Majesty of God was not there; and the spirit of prophecy ceased under it. The promise relates not to a remote period, but to a time near at hand; "it is a little while," says the prophet. It does not respect the materials of the structure, or the beauty of its decorations; but the divine presence: "I will fill this house with glory;" as the glory of the Lord, in the time of Moses, filled the tabernacle, and afterwards the temple erected by Solomon^s. But the latter house, before its dissolution, was made still more honourable; for therein the Redeemer of Israel was manifested, even the Son of God, who was there presented, and there taught. Be not therefore faithless but believing^t."

We may conclude then, on the authority of this prophecy, that the Messiah must infallibly have appeared in the second temple; and consequently that he was no other person than the blessed Jesus; who was born, as Jacob had foretold of Shiloh^u, before the

^s See Exod. xl. 34. 1 Kings viii. 10.

^t John xx. 27.

^u Gen. xlix. 10.

subversion of the civil polity of Judah ; of the family of David, and at the city of Bethlehem, according to the purport of other predictions ^x ; the son of a pure Virgin, as Isaiah had foreshewn of him ^y, and as the same holy prophet in conformity with the doctrine of the royal Psalmist ^z, had taught he should be, Immanuel, GOD with us, or in our nature. To this his divine origin the Father himself gave attestation at his baptism by a voice from heaven : “ This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased ^a.” When after this initiation into his office he began publicly to teach, he dated his gospel from that point of time, which the ancient prophecies had fixed for its commencement ^b, the preaching of his forerunner : “ the law and the prophets,” the former covenant of GOD with his people, “ were until John : since that time the kingdom of GOD,” the new dispensation from heaven to mankind, “ is preached, and every man presseth into it ^c.”

Such then was the first advent of the blessed Jesus : agreeable, in every respect, to what

^x Mic. v. 2. Pf. cxxxii. 6. 1 Sam. xvii. 12. Gen. xxxv. 19.

^y If. vii. 14.

^z Pf. cx. 1.

^a Matt. iii. 17.

^b Comp. Mal. iv. 5, 6. 2, 3. with If. xl. 3-5.

^c Luke xvi. 16. comp. Matt. xi. 11, 12.

the Holy Ghost had, in old time, declared concerning the Messiah's appearance. Let us now consider some of those events, which are described by our Lord, in the course of his ministry, as the coming of his kingdom.

Of these the first which we meet with is mentioned by St. Matthew, in the following words: "Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom ^c."

In explaining this passage, the best of our commentators have not referred it to that event, to which alone it seems to belong. When I venture to say this, let me not be thought presumptuous; for if among the moderns many are against me, the ancients are unanimously on my side. The learned Origen ^d, and the venerable Chrysostom ^e, and the rest of the fathers ^f, apply the passage,

^c Matt. xvi. 28.

^d In loc. He considers this as the literal sense, to which he subjoins an allegorical interpretation.

^e In loc. T. II. p. 357.

^f Hilary, Jerome, Theophylact, and Euthymius, on St. Matthew. St. Augustin in a discourse on the subject, Tom. V. col. 425. ed. Paris 1689, and also on Galat. ii. T. iii. 948. Ephraim Syrus, *λογος εις την Μετμεροφωσιν τῆς Σωτηριος*. St. Ambrose

with one voice, to our Lord's transfiguration; and to this, I conceive, the context itself, in each of the three Gospels, where this speech and that event are recorded, naturally leads. For the evangelists, without staying to relate any one intermediate fact or discourse, pass on at once, from these memorable words, to the transfiguration; and the time that intervened, from the previous declaration of our blessed Saviour, to this appearance of his glory, is distinctly marked by all the three^s; a circumstance to which in no other instance have they so uniformly attended, except in the transactions of the holy week.

brose seems to understand it in this sense, but is not very explicit; and Bede gives this and another exposition, leaving it to the reader to judge for himself. To these authorities may be added, among the more eminent commentators abroad, Chemnitius, Maldonate, Estius, Episcopius, L. Brugenfis, Menochius, Vatablus, &c. The same sense is given by Wall in loc. and Dr. Jackson, Vol. I. p. 103. Other English divines and expositors generally understand the passage of the destruction of Jerusalem.

^s Matt. xvii. 1. Mar. ix. 2. The connection in St. Luke ix. 28. is still more observable: *Εγενετο δε μετα τας λογους τατας ωστε ημερην οκτω.* And by the seeming variation in the number of the days he has fixed the time with greater precision, and shews us that it was on the eighth day after the preceding speech. *ο μιν γαρ ης αυτην την ημεραν καθ' ην εφθραξατο, κακεινη καθ' ην ανηραzen, ειπεν' ο δε [Ματθαιος] τας μεταξυ τετων μγων* Chrysoft. in Matt. xvii. 1.

If the destruction of Jerusalem, as many have imagined, was here intended, and the words were addressed to the apostles alone; surely their Lord would not have included more than one in a promise, which one only was to see accomplished ^b.

If again, with others, you apply the passage to the establishment of the gospel, by the resurrection and ascension of its heavenly author, and suppose the words spoken to the whole multitude present ⁱ; would it have been intimated, that few only, who heard the prediction, should behold its completion, when eleven of the apostles, and probably the far greater part of the people who stood there, saw that wonderful event come to pass ?

With the overthrow of the Jewish state the phraseology adopted seems not to suit; for though “power,” which St. Mark mentions ^k, is undoubtedly applicable to those days of vengeance, other expressions appear

^b When Mary anointed our blessed Saviour, we are told Mark xiv. 4. “there were some (τινες) that had indignation” at the pious act; which perhaps is to be understood of the traitor alone; but it is by no means credible that such laxity of expression would be used by the holy speaker in delivering, or the historian in recording, a solemn Promise.

ⁱ See Mark viii. 34.

^k Mark. ix. 1.

less proper. Where the punishment of enemies is the end in view, it seems not agreeable to the general turn of scriptural language on such occasions, to style it, with St. Mark and St. Luke, “the kingdom of God¹,” or with St. Matthew, “the Son of man coming in his kingdom;” the immediate object of that being, in every instance, to save and not to destroy^m. Even in the description of our Lord’s final advent, although the kingdom, then to be bestowed on his faithful servants, is said to have been prepared for them from the foundation of the world; yet, as one has well remarked, the everlasting fire, which the same account assures us the wicked shall inherit, is not said to have been prepared for them, but for the devil and his angelsⁿ.

To the transfiguration then we refer the passage. For it is not implied, that of the persons present many should die before the fulfilling of the promise; as if it related to

¹ Luke ix. 27.

^m Our Lord says indeed, Matt. x. 34. “I came not to send peace, but a sword.” But this expresses the consequence only, not the design, of his coming: “Ita hæc ejus adventu consecutura, tanquam ea de causa venisset.” Maldonat.

ⁿ Vide Matt. xxv. 31, &c. et Chrysoft. in loc. T. II. p. 494. l. 29, &c.

some distant period°. The direct import seems to be this: “some of those standing here shall, before their death, be favoured with a sight of the kingdom of God; but the rest shall not, in this life, be spectators of such an appearance.” Clearer terms were not used, nor the names mentioned of the chosen Three, who were to be thus honoured, lest the others should be moved with envy; and for the same reason probably, they were charged to tell the vision to no man, till the Son of man was

° *Hæc autem locutio non gustabunt mortem donec videant mihi videtur proverbialis, et denotare rem certò et proximo tempore futuram. Lamy in loc.—“That inevitable stroke, which may fall any day and which never is far off, shall not happen, before, &c.”* This seems to be confirmed by what we read Luke ii. 26. of Simeon; to whom it was revealed “that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.” Neither the age of this devout person nor the time of this revelation to him is mentioned; but the whole tenor of the story evidently suggests this interpretation: “That old as he was, and though, in the ordinary course of providence, there was but a step between him and death; still, nevertheless, he should live to behold the promised Messiah.” Had he not already reached, if not passed, the usual term of human life, instead of “Nunc dimittis,” the more natural wish would have been, that he might live to be a hearer of the heavenly discourses, and spectator of the miracles of the glorious child, of whose birth it had pleased God to forewarn him.

O mihi tam longæ maneat pars ultima vitæ,
Spiritus et quantum sat erit tua dicere facta.

Virg.

B

risen

rifen from the dead ; when the defcent of the Holy Spirit, which was quickly to enfue, would enlighten their minds, and fubdue their prejudices.

In the mean time, this promise, graciously fubjoined to the preceding predictions of calamities and perils, was a fource of confolation, as its accomplifhment evinced, and an affurance that their Lord was able to reward, as well as to punifh, to the uttermoft. It was evidently a difplay both of power and of glory^p. The great Lawgiver of Ifrael, and the Reftorer of the law, the man Mofes, with whom the Lord fpake face to face, and the prophet Elijah, who was caught up to heaven in a fiery chariot ; thefe perfonages, whom the Lord of old fo highly honoured, now appeared as the fervants of the Son of man, and talked with him. Of a future ftate God had never left men without fufficient evidence. The refpective tranflations of Enoch and Elijah were proofs of this, in times when proof was moft wanted, among the fons of riot before the flood, and when idolatry pre-

^p St. Peter, mentioning this appearance, fpeaks of it as a manifeftation of "power," of "majefly, of "honour," and of "glory." See 2 Pet. i. 16-18. He feems alfo to allude to it in his firft Ep. c. v. 1.

vailed most in Israel. But when the Son of GOD assumed our nature, heaven, as it were, came down upon mount Tabor, and glorified humanity was made visible to eyes of flesh. In Moses were represented the generations of the dead, and in Elias, who died not, those who shall be alive at the last day. When Moses on mount Sinai talked with GOD, his countenance was so bright that the Israelites could not steadfastly behold it^a. When St. Stephen was arraigned before the Sanhedrim, they “saw his face as it had been the face of an angel^r.” If such is the effect of God’s blessed countenance, whenever he vouchsafes a glimpse of it in this life; what shall be the radiance, how ineffable the bliss, when we shall behold him face to face, and enjoy him for evermore^s!

^a 2 Cor. iii. 7. with Exod. xxxiv. 29, 30. It is in like manner supposed by some, and with great probability, that the countenance of our Lord shone, when he descended from the mount. See Dr. Townson on the Gospels, p. 8. n. *. and Whitby and Doddridge on Mark ix. 15. to whom he refers.

^r Acts vi. 15.

^s See 1 Cor. xiii. 12. 2 Cor. iii. 18. In support of the above interpretation of Matt. xvi. 28. another argument might have been offered; which, as it was necessary not to lengthen the sermon, I shall beg leave to state here. Our blessed Saviour, on one or other occasion, foretold to his disciples almost all the greater events of his life and his death. Is it likely then, that the Transfiguration, which whether we con-

Another advent of the Son of man is mentioned by St. Matthew, previously to that which we have been considering; but it relates, I apprehend, to a subsequent period. When our Lord sent forth the twelve to preach the kingdom of God, he not only gave them ample instructions for that purpose, but likewise forewarned them of the dangers that awaited them, on this as well as on future occasions, in his service. For the present he permitted, or rather enjoined them, when persecuted in one city, to flee to another; and he was pleased to add this as a reason: "For verily I say unto you, ye shall

consider it simply in itself, or as the attestation of God to his beloved Son, is undoubtedly the most august appearance recorded of the ministry of our Lord; is it likely, that this manifestation of his glory should have been left without its proper prediction, to happen as if it had been unforeseen? This, I imagine, will hardly be supposed; and yet if the transfiguration is not alluded to in the passage before us, I think it is not at all foretold in the Gospels. Whether the words were, or, which is more probable, were not understood by the apostles at the time, is not material; for they did not understand the much plainer prophecies of their Lord concerning his death, but fancied them, as it seems, to have some figurative signification. It was sufficient therefore if the prediction was expressed in such a manner, that either the event itself, or the subsequent illumination of the Holy Spirit, should lead them to the true intention of the Speaker; and that, it is hoped, has been shewn, with some probability, to have been his then approaching Transfiguration.

not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come^t.”

It may help us perhaps to ascertain the true meaning of this passage, if we see, first of all, to what it does not belong; and it cannot be referred to the destruction of Jerusalem. Several, indeed, of the preceding verses have respect to events, which happened some time after our Lord's ascension; when, as it is there foretold, the apostles and others were “brought before governors and kings,—for a testimony against them and the gentiles^u.” But the words under consideration will not admit of so remote a reference.

The truth is, some of the admonitions, contained in this discourse of our blessed Lord, appear to have been delivered by him again, on another occasion. These particulars therefore St. Matthew has recorded here, when first they fell from the heavenly speaker; but St. Mark has inserted them in a series of predictions, with which, in point of time, they were more nearly connected, when they were repeated in the account of the approaching dissolution of the Jewish state^x.

^t Matt. x. 23.

^u Matt. x. 19.

^x Compare, in the original, Matt. x. 17-22. with Mark xiii. 9. 11-13. The 21st and 22d verses of St. Matthew are, both

And it is observable that the latter evangelist, plainly copying from this part of the former Gospel, drops it however when he comes to the twenty third verse, the passage in question; as if to tell us, that this related not to the subject then in hand: and it certainly does not. For the gospel was to be preached, before the temple was destroyed, not only throughout all Judea, but among the Gentiles also, even to the uttermost parts of the then known and inhabited world ^γ.

Shall we then, with Theophylact ^z and others, understand the text before us to mean nothing more, than if it had been said, in plainer words, “I will come to you?” This, it should seem, is also inadmissible. As the apostles were sent into different districts, two

in the words and the order, exactly the same with the 12th and 13th verses of St. Mark; and the latter being copied from the former, that is the reason why the words *των εθνων* are not in St. Mark, though St. Matthew has them in the corresponding part of his Gospel, c. xxiv. 9. The addition of the 10th verse in St. Mark (c. xiii.) is a further proof, that these verses in St. Matthew (c. x. 17-22.) belong to the time after our Lord's ascension. St. Matthew expresses the same thing, but in different words, xxiv. 14.

^γ See Matt. xxiv. 14. Mark xiii. 10.

^z In loc. S. Chrysofom, Beza, &c.

and two together ^a, their Lord could not well go to Them, and they did, in fact, return to Him ^b. Then, had this been his intention, he would have said, I conceive, as he elsewhere does, “I will see you again,” or “I will come to you ^c ;” and not have used a mode of speaking, which they would probably misapply.

The Messiah, it has been observed, was promised by the prophets, and expected by the Jews, as the *ὁ ἐρχόμενος*, he that was coming, or should come ^d. On this ground it was probably, that the Coming of the Son of man is so frequently and emphatically applied, in the New Testament, to our blessed Lord; and though it sometimes may denote his bodily presence ^e, yet not as unaccompanied

^a Mark vi. 7. And so the seventy, Luke x. 1.

^b Luke ix. 10. Mark vi. 30. So likewise the seventy, Luke x. 17.

^c John xvi. 22. xiv. 18.

^d See Kidder on the Messiah, P. I. p. 37. See also Dr. Bandinel's excellent Sermons, p. 169.

^e It seems in such instances not to be used simply, but to have some other words joined with it, as Matt. xi. 19. Luke vii. 34. So too with regard to his future appearance to judge the world, it was said by the holy angels to the apostles, “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come *in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*”

with some signal circumstance of dignity or power ; not a private interview between him and the apostles.

How They would understand the words it seems not difficult to explain. They believed their Master to be the Redeemer of Israel ; and they knew that his kingdom had been announced, by the preaching of the Baptist. But all that had been done, from his days to the present time, they considered, and rightly considered, as introductory to something more illustrious. What they were instructed to proclaim, and what their Lord himself taught, was *γγικεν ἡ βασιλεια*, the kingdom of heaven is near, or at hand^f ; a phrase never used when the thing spoken of was actually present.

The whole space of the public ministry of our Lord was, if I may so call it, but the inchoation, or commencement, of his kingdom. He had indeed, by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon him at his baptism, been anointed king ; but the adversary, the prince of this world, the Saul, as it were, of this

ven." Acts i. ii. In other passages where coming is mentioned absolutely, as 1 Cor. xv. 23. 1 Thess. ii. 19. &c. the word in the original is different.

^f See Matt. x. 7. iv. 17. &c.

Son of David, was not yet destroyed. On the cross the great consummation was pronounced; the shadows of the law were done away; death was subdued, and he that had the power of death^g. By the resurrection the victory was made manifest; and when he ascended into heaven, he was enthroned king at God's right hand, and gave, at this his solemn inauguration^h, gifts unto men, in the miraculous effusion of the Holy Spirit.

To this magnificent train of events it is probable our blessed Redeemer alluded, when he spoke of the coming of the Son of man, as about to take place, before the apostles should have gone over the cities of Israel. And although of these things they had then no conception, for they, with their countrymen, expected a Messiah invested with temporal authority and splendor; yet being right in the main, in referring the words to the instating of their Lord in the throne of David, how that great event was to be brought about, and what should be the nature of his kingdom, were points which were left to be explained, partly by future conference with

^g See Heb. ii. 14.

^h See Hammond's Pract. Catech. p. 21.

their divine Master, partly by the marvelous works themselves, but chiefly by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, which was to guide them into all the truth.

If to this interpretation it should be thought an objection, that the words are not referred to one single appearance ; it may be answered, that the resurrection and ascension of our Lord and the mission of the Holy Ghost followed each other so soon, and were, in the divine economy, so closely connected, that they may properly be regarded, not as separate independent facts, but rather as parts of one and the same transaction. Thus it is that the scripture seems to speak of themⁱ ; and expositors accordingly often apply a particular text to all the three^k. If however any one chooses, with Grotius, to confine the passage to the last of these three glorious events, the descent of Holy Spirit, before which it is certain the kingdom of the Messiah was not fully come ;

ⁱ See Eph. i. 20. where the resurrection and ascension of Christ are represented as one continued operation, if I may so speak, of divine power. And in the same Epistle, c. iv. 8. the ascension of our Lord and the mission of the Holy Spirit are mentioned as of equally close connection. Compare John xiv. 28. xvi. 7.

^k So Grotius, Beza, &c. on Matt. xvi. 28.

that will make no material alteration in the sense contended for. Either way the meaning will be nearly the same, and to this effect: "In discharging the duty, upon which I now send you, ye will meet with many, who will not receive the tidings which ye bring, but will cast you out. When they shall do so, when they persecute in one city, flee to another. And fear not lest your enemies should follow you thither, or the men of that city should likewise persecute you, so that places of refuge should at last fail you. For I tell you of a truth, ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, before the throne of David shall be given unto me, when ye shall be endued with power to encounter dangers far greater than any of those, which in this your first mission ye shall experience."

Still there is one text, and that of some difficulty, which demands our attention on the present occasion. Our blessed Saviour, the night before he suffered, eating his last supper with the twelve, having delivered to them the cup, said unto them, as we read in St. Matthew, "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink

drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom¹."

Many have supposed that this passage represents to us, in figurative language, the joys of heaven: but to this, I conceive, there are weighty objections. It is readily granted, that the happiness of another life is, both in the New and Old Testament, metaphorically expressed by eating and drinking; but if we do not force the passage before us to that sense, I think it is no where said, in regard to that state, that the Son of God shall eat or drink with Us, or even that we shall eat or drink with Him^m.

In the Apocalypse mention is made of the "marriage supper of the Lambⁿ." Our bles-

¹ Matt. xxvi. 29.

^m Dr. Trapp indeed on Matt. xxvi. 29. quotes, as from Luke xxii. 30. "Ye shall eat and drink *with me* at my table in my kingdom." But the quotation and the remark upon it are borrowed, without examination, from Whitby on Mark xiv. 25. There are no such words as *with me* in St. Luke. In the Rev. c. iii. 20. we read "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and *will sup with him*, and he with me." But this seems to be rightly explained by the commentators of spiritual blessings and comfort in this life; the reward of another life is spoken of in the following verse.

ⁿ Rev. xix. 9.

fed Saviour, in one of his parables, compared the kingdom of heaven to a marriage, which a certain king made for his son^o; and in the parable of the ten virgins, the wise, who were prepared, go in with the bridegroom to the marriage^p; but on none of these occasions is it intimated, that the bridegroom sat down with the guests. It is said, in one instance, that the king came in; but it was to see the guests, not to feast with them^q. We are elsewhere told, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down as to meat, *ανακληθησονται*, in the kingdom of heaven; but it is not said, with their Redeemer, but with his saints, with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob^r. “If we be dead with Christ,” we are assured by an apostle, “that we shall also live with him^s ;” “if we suffer, we shall also reign with him^t ;” but of Him who is exalted to the right hand of God, and crowned with the glory, which he had with the Father before the world began^u, holy scripture seems not to authorise a metaphor borrowed from the necessary supplies of our

^o Matt. xxii. 2, &c.

^p Ibid. xxv. 10.

^q Ibid. xxii. 11.

^r Ibid. viii. 11.

^s Rom. vi. 8. 2 Tim. ii. 11. Comp. 2 Cor. iv. 10, 11.

^t 2 Tim. ii. 12. Comp. Rom. viii. 17.

^u See John xvii. 5.

mortal bodies. Should we not be cautious then, of explaining in this sense the passage in question, if it will bear a different meaning? And why may we not, with authors of the first eminence^x, understand it, without a figure, of the time between our Lord's resurrection and ascension; during which, we know, to prove beyond dispute the verity of his body, he condescended both to eat and to drink with his disciples^y?

To this application the words "that day" can be no just exception. They sometimes denote the day of judgement; but they were used by our Lord, as we learn from St. John^z, on the very same night of which we are treating, three different times, with relation certainly, in every instance, to some future portion of the natural life of his apostles; and once at least with a view to the period, to which we suppose him to allude in St. Matthew, the days immediately following his resurrection.

With regard to the term "new," if it is not easy to assign its precise meaning, the

^x St. Chrysofom, Theophylact, in loc. Lightfoot, Vol. I. p. 569.

^y Acts x. 41.

^z See c. xiv. 20. The other places are xvi. 23. 26.

difficulty however, which is neither created nor augmented by this interpretation, should not be considered as a peculiar objection. The primary and literal sense, of this as of other words, often gives place to a secondary notion. It is frequently attributed to subjects or to actions that in some one respect are new or extraordinary; to songs of praise for recent victories, or special blessings^a. The whole world, which by the transgression of the first Adam was made subject to vanity, partook in the deliverance wrought by the second; and there was, as it were, a new creation. “Old things,” says St. Paul, “are passed away; behold all things are become new^b,” and this renovation he speaks of as effected by the reconciliation, that is, by the death, of Jesus Christ. In this new state therefore, in this state of liberty, whatever related to the kingdom now given to the Son of man, or to its blessed and sovereign Lord, might, agreeably to the scriptural use of the word, be denominated new. So, at least, wine might be called, if our gracious Redeemer vouchsafed to partake of it, not now as the

^a See Mr. Mede’s exposition of *Canticum novum*, p. 513: 593. See also how the word is used, Mark xvi. 17. compared with Acts ii. 4.

^b 2 Cor. v. 17, 18.

refreshment of mortal nature, but for another and higher purpose; to shew the reality of his precious body, and the certainty of his triumph over death and the grave.

Lastly, if the expression, “The kingdom of my Father,” is not elsewhere used, as I believe it is not, by our blessed Saviour; we cannot, from this circumstance alone, conclude whether it meant a state of grace or of glory. When celestial bliss is the subject spoken of there are other phrases: “In *my Father’s house* are many mansions^c :” “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in *the kingdom of Their Father*^d.” St Mark in the parallel passage, instead of “The kingdom of my Father,” has “The kingdom of GOD;” and, being the later evangelist, he should be considered as explaining the diction of St. Matthew, especially as St. Luke agrees with him in this instance: and “The kingdom of GOD,” as used in the Gospels, whatever may be its ultimate meaning, generally has, for its direct and primary object, the spiritual kingdom of Christ upon earth. Now with this kingdom, with authority to govern to protect and to save his church, our Lord

^c John xiv. 2.

^d Mark xiv. 25.

was rewarded, upon his resurrection from the dead; according to that his own declaration, "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth^e." He was sent from above and appeared among men, to preach what is termed indifferently the kingdom of heaven or of God; but of that state of his church, which was to commence when his personal ministry should be finished, when he should be in the actual possession of the promised dominion, he might speak, it may seem, with peculiar significance, as of the kingdom of his Father.

The exposition, which we are endeavouring to establish, will receive additional confirmation, if it may be allowed that St. Luke, who is more full in the history of the paschal supper, has recorded the same speech of our Lord in the following verses: "With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer. For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup and gave thanks, and said, Take this and divide it among yourselves. For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come^f."

^e Matt. xxviii. 18.

^f Luke xxii. 15-18. On comparing this part of St. Luke's Gospel with St. Matthew and St. Mark, it seems evident, that

In the former part of this passage, where the passover is the subject spoken of, it is evident, that the word "until" must be taken in a sense not uncommon in holy scripture, so as not to imply, that, after the time mentioned, the contrary to what is before expressed should happen^s; or in other words,

these words were spoken by our Lord before the institution of the holy Eucharist. St. Matthew and St. Mark are very concise in their account of this interesting evening; St. Luke is more full and distinct. Hence the former evangelists, relating part of our blessed Saviour's speech, and introducing it after the sacramental cup, do not however connect it with that sacred ordinance (Matt. xxvi. 29. Mar. xiv. 25.) but St. Luke, mentioning particularly, what they only hinted at, the paschal supper, and inserting the entire speech in its proper place, gives it its proper connection: "With desire have I desired, &c. *For* I say unto you, &c. Take this, &c. *For* I say unto you, I will not drink, &c." From these last words it is probable, that our Lord denied himself the refreshment of the cup, which he gave to his disciples (see Townson on the Gospels, p. 231, 232) and if we are right as to the time of this speech, he certainly did not drink of the sacramental cup afterwards. Indeed it seems not so natural to suppose he did himself partake of what represented his own blessed body and blood; and if he did not eat of the bread, nor drink of the cup, at the time of institution, neither, we may conclude, did he partake of them after he was risen from the dead. This therefore, as far as it goes, is an additional argument in favour of the interpretation proposed, That he ate and drank with the disciples to demonstrate the truth of his resurrection.

^s Origen on Matt. xvi. 28. St. Chrysoft. and Oecumenius on 1 Cor. xv. 25. and the commentators on Matt. i. 25.

the

the meaning is, that he would never more eat of the passover. And this is further manifest from what follows: "until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God;" that is, till the great sacrifice, of which the paschal lamb was a type, shall be offered up on the cross, when, the substance being come, the shadow shall vanish. Afterwards it is observable, the phrase is varied; for wine was not, among the Jewish ceremonies, particularly emblematical of any future blessing. It is not therefore said "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until it be fulfilled," but "until the kingdom of God shall come." The former words pointed to the death of Christ; in the latter it was implied, that he should rise again. "By my suffering on the cross, the passover and the other rites of the law, their end being accomplished, shall be superseded and cease. But I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice^b. To give you fuller assurance of the truth of my resurrection, I will eat and drink with you in my kingdom, which the Father, after I am risen, will give unto me."

It is hoped, the interpretations, which have been offered, of the several passages above

^b John xvi. 22.

examined, will be found not unsatisfactory. But be this as it may, be the expositions ever so erroneous, the ground, which they are built upon, is good, the principles fixt and unalterable. Certain it is, that the gospel kingdom was ushered in, by the preaching of the Baptist; that, though increasing, it was still in a state of privacy, not of power, during the lifetime of its blessed Founder; that, upon his resurrection, the authority of a king was given unto him; and that, when he ascended, in the sight of his disciples, the gates of heaven lifted up their heads, the everlasting doors were opened, and He, the King of glory, entered in, and sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; whence he sent forth, according to his promise, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, to teach his apostles, and to enable them to work miracles, in confirmation of their doctrine, and to overcome dangers and death. Thus was the foundation laid of that spiritual dominion, of which it was said, that it should have no end; and these, no doubt, as its first outgoings, were included in that comprehensive petition, by which our Lord, in the beginning of his ministry, taught his disciples to pray for the increase and prosperity of his kingdom.

But

But the kingdom is one, under one supreme Head, in all ages and countries, however distant from the time and place where first it began ; and every signal enlargement of its borders, whether immediately, by the conversion of multitudes, or by consequence, from the overthrow of enemies, may be considered as having been either directly intended, or more remotely implied, in the prayer for this kingdom's propagation and furtherance. Several events of this sort, besides those above noticed, are foretold in the Gospels, and other books of the New Testament. But none is more frequently alluded to, none more minutely described, than the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem. The prophecies, therefore, respecting that period, and other points closely connected with it, I shall endeavour, with GOD's blessing, to state and illustrate in the ensuing lectures.

True it is, these prophecies, from the days of their accomplishment to the present time, have frequently been examined with care, and enforced with ability. But a subject, which affords such a direct and convincing proof of the truth and divinity of our holy religion, can scarcely be too often reviewed, or unseasonably urged.

Treading in a beaten track, exploring a region so often described and so well known, it was the preacher's wish, that the reports and observations should, nevertheless, be his own. He surveyed therefore, as it were, the face of the country, he collected and considered the historical facts, before he inquired, how others had applied them. Hence, if the account to be offered shall in some points differ from, and in others agree with, former writers; as such diversity will not proceed from a spirit of innovation, so neither will the coincidence be the result of blind deference to respectable authority. The testimony of conviction alone can be valuable. The remark therefore, which shall appear just, will not be given up, though it may be proposed with more diffidence, when others have thought differently; nor will observations always be retrenched, because they have occurred to others before, but rather be urged with greater boldness, as being supported by those, who have with skill and attention considered the subject.¹

¹ Ἡμεῖς γε μὲντοι ὅσοις συνετυχημεν ταῦτα γινώσκοντες ἐκεῖνα, οὐκ ἐξαλειφόμεν ἐκ τῶν ἡμετέρων, ἀλλὰ πολὺ ἡδίων παραδώσομεν αὐτὰ τοῖς φίλοις, νομίζοντες ἀξιοπιστοτέροι εἶναι, ὅτι κἀκείνος κρῖται ταῦτα ἡμῖν ἐγὼ, ἵππικος ἄν. Xen. de Re Equest.

In conducting this argument, a point which has often been proved, and which the Jews themselves, with whom at present we are chiefly concerned, do not deny, will be taken for granted; namely, that the books of the New Testament were written at the time generally supposed, and by the persons whose names they bear. This being allowed, if the prophecies contained in them have been punctually fulfilled, the consequence is undeniable, That they are of heavenly original.

It was the observation of a young man in Tully, with regard to the great question of the soul's immortality, that whilst he read the treatise of Plato on the subject, he was convinced by his reasoning; but when he laid down the book, and revolved the matter with himself, his assent vanished*. So numerous, it may be presumed, or so perplexing were the difficulties, which the state of things then presented to his mind, that they effaced the impressions made by philosophy.

The case, in the present instance, is far otherwise. Read the arguments of those, who

* Tuscul. Quæst. L. I. c. xi.

have defended Christianity; the demonstration is clear, your conviction full. Step forth from your closet, and cast your eyes abroad, your belief is confirmed. View the works of creation, they cry out, There is a G O D; survey the moral world, and the revolutions of kingdoms, they resound, There is a providence. Look upon the people, that once were the Lord's; see them continue, as it was foretold of them, though dispersed, yet not lost, though persecuted, yet not destroyed; what do they but proclaim, by their infidelity now, as they shall one day, we trust, in their conversion acknowledge, "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord G O D Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."

To Him therefore, to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, three persons in one adorable and undivided Godhead, be ascribed, by us and by all creatures, "blessing and honour and glory and power!" now henceforth and for evermore! Amen.

¹ Rev. v. 12.

S E R M O N I I.

M A T T. XXIV. 14.

This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come.

IT is needless to prove, that by the end here mentioned we are to understand, not the final dissolution of the world, but the destruction of the temple, and the Jewish state. To this, the question of the apostles, in the beginning of the chapter, relates; and to this confessedly belongs the whole of the context before, and several verses after, the words now read. The parallel passage, in St. Mark, is, “The gospel must *first* be published among all nations^a ;” where “first” can allude to nothing, but the subject in

^a Mark xiii. 10.

hand ; and that is, as here, the overthrow of the temple.

With regard to the extent of the propagation of the gospel, foretold as previous to this great revolution ; the words, which are translated “all the world,” have, like many others, a latitude of signification, which may generally be determined, with a sufficient degree of certainty and precision, from the scope of the passage where they occur. That they are not here to be restrained to Judea, is evident, not only from the text of St. Mark, just quoted, but also from St. Matthew himself. If the gospel was to be “preached for a Witness to all nations,” it must surely be preached Among all nations ; for a testimony, which is unknown, can be no testimony.

On the other hand however, it is by no means necessary, from the universality of the terms, to extend the prophecy to every individual, or even every district, of the peopled earth. It was justly remarked, by one of the ancients, in a treatise on the present subject, the calling of the Gentiles ; that expressions, similar to those now before us, are often used in scripture, when a part of the globe, or a
portion

portion of mankind, is all that is intended ^b. Accordingly, the text may well be construed, to have for its object, what certainly included the far greater part of the then known world, the Roman empire ^c. And this interpretation is justified by St. Luke, in a passage, of which the meaning cannot be mistaken. The decree of Augustus, that “All the World should be taxed ^d” or enrolled, must doubtless have respected those alone, who were subjects of the empire.

Throughout this empire then, the most extensive, that ever was united, under one head; from the mouth of the Rhine, to the borders of Ethiopia; from the western Gades, to the banks of Euphrates ^e; kingdoms, which the

^b Vide Auctor. de Vocat. Omn. Gent. apud S. Ambros. Tom. IV. L. 1. c. 3.

^c Τις γὰρ ἰδὼν Γαῖον—παρειληφὸτα τὴν ἡγεμονίαν πάσης γῆς καὶ θαλάττης—ἐκ ἐθαυμάσει—ἀρχὴν ἔχει τῶν πλείστων καὶ ἀναγκαϊοτάτων μέρων τῆς οἰκουμένης, ἃ δὴ καὶ κυρίως ἀν τὴν οἰκουμένην εἶποι, δύο ποταμοὶ ὀρίζομεναι, Εὐφράτη τε καὶ Ῥηνῶν,—ἀλλ', ὡς εἶπον ἤδη, τὴν μὲν ἡλίκ ἀνοίσιτος ἀχρὶ ἑσόμεθα, τὴν τε ἐντὸς ὠκεαῖς καὶ ὑπερωκεανίους. Philo de Leg. ad Caium p. 546. Compare Agrippa's speech, dissuading the Jews from war, B. Jud. L. II. c. xvi. §. 4. p. 1086.

^d Luke ii. 1. Compare also Acts ii. 5. with the subsequent enumeration of countries, verse 9. &c.

^e See Tacit. Ann. L. XV. 17. Senec. Nat. Quæst. L. VI. c. 7.

Roman sword had been ages in subduing ; it was foretold by our Lord, that his gospel should be published, during that generation. And this prediction, which was delivered by him, when his death was now at hand, was committed to writing, soon after his ascension, while the church was yet confined to the circumcision ; “ to testify to mankind,” as an excellent writer observes, “ that the calling of the Gentiles was not an after-thought of the apostles themselves, because the Jews rejected them, but an original part of the gospel economy ^f.”

But “ all the ways of G O D are prepared, and his judgements are in his foreknowledge ^g.” In order therefore that the argument may have its full weight, it will be proper to inquire, whether intimations were not aforetime given by the prophets, that the Gentiles should one day be admitted, into covenant with G O D. Astonishing as the rapid propagation of the gospel is, considered merely as an historical event ; yet if it is found to have taken place, in perfect conformity with the voice of prophecy, in various

^f Dr. Townson on the Gospels, p. 127. See also St. Chrysostom, Sermon. 2. in Ephes. T. III. p. 770.

^g Judith ix. 6.

ages, the proof, thence arising, of the truth of Christianity, will, from such a view of the matter, be more complete and convincing.

Now first of all, when “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin^h ;” the Lord, in his goodness, was pleased to provide a remedy adequate to the fatal disease. As this delivery, therefore, was to comprehend the whole race, and was accordingly promised to all mankind, in their common parents ; so it might be expected, that when the seed of the woman was really come, and the power of the serpent crushed and subdued, the victory, which was originally foretold to all, should, now that it was obtained, be made known unto all men.

St. Paul has remarked, that “the scripture, foreseeing that GOD would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abrahamⁱ.” In the same manner, I conceive, from the declaration of heaven to our first parents, it may be inferred, that the gospel, or, in other words, universal redemption, was taught to them immediately after the fall.

^h Rom. v. 12.

ⁱ Gal. iii. 8.

But leaving consequences, deduced from the sense of holy scripture, however certain they may be in themselves, let us proceed to express predictions; and first to that, upon which the apostle makes the observation already quoted, the promise given to the father of the faithful, that in his seed all nations should be blessed.

To have a just idea of the extent and value of this promise, we should reflect, for a moment, on the state of mankind, at the time, when it was made. When the Lord, with a mighty hand, led the descendants of this patriarch, out of Egypt; he often declared, to the stiff-necked people, by his servant Moses, that they were not rescued for their own righteousness, but to fulfil the covenant, made with their fathers. In like manner, when God said unto Abram, that in Him all families of the earth should be blessed^{*}; this inestimable privilege (with reverence to the memory of this highly honoured friend of God be it spoken) was not properly the reward of the holiness and piety, great as they were, of Him, to whom it was granted,

* Gen. xii. 3.

but flowed rather from the boundless mercy of heaven.

The knowledge and practice of pure religion were not yet lost among the children of men. Melchizedech, priest of the most high GOD, stands forth upon record, who received tithes, even of Abraham, and blessed him; and, as one of the first masters of reasoning has observed, “without all contradiction, the less is blessed of the better¹.” The promise therefore, delivered at such a time, and under such circumstances, could not possibly be interpreted, by the holy patriarch, as an exclusive adoption of the offspring of his body, when as yet he had no son; but must have been regarded, in the fullest sense of the words, as a benefit, of which all mankind should partake.

“The gifts and calling of GOD,” says the apostle, “are without repentance^m;” no blessing is promised, which is not, in its season, punctually fulfilled. The covenant therefore, which was established with Abraham, could not be made void by the law, which was afterwards given by the hand of Moses. In

¹ See Heb. vii. 1. 6, 7. Gen. xiv. 18-20.

^m Rom. xi. 29.

fact there are many things, in the prophetic parts of the writings of Moses, agreeing with and confirming those antecedent promises, which, as an historian, he has recorded. "I will move them to jealousy," says he, "with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger, with a foolish nation^a." The jealousy, here spoken of, can only be a religious jealousy; and those, who were not a people, or not yet a people, must be aliens from Israel, and consequently Gentiles.

Hitherto the time, for the accomplishment of this promise, had not been distinctly pointed out; but as the day approached, the declarations concerning it became more express. In the prophets it is observable, that the coming of the Messiah, the calling of the Gentiles, and the rejection of the Jews, are often mentioned together, as events connected one with the other, as well in time as in other respects^o. Whatever therefore fixes the season of one, of the first, for instance, upon which something was said in the preceding lecture, must likewise, in some measure, determine the others. But one or two passages, which particularly belong to the point in hand, may at present suffice.

^a Deut. xxxii. 21. Rom. x. 19.

^o See, as one instance among many, If. lv. 1, 2.

“ I will

“ I will declare the decree,” says the Psalmist ; “ the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen, for thine inheritance ; and the uttermost parts of the earth, for thy possession^p.” It is evident, that the person, who is here addressed, cannot be David himself, since he reigned over Judea alone^q ; nor did Jehovah ever say, to any man, or to any angel, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee^r. That those words are justly applied, by St. Paul, to Christ’s Resurrection, has been shewn by others^s, and is less to our present purpose. Interpret that part of the passage as you please, either of the incarnation of the Son of God, or of his being begotten again from the dead ; it may well be presumed, that the accession of the heathen, which is immediately subjoined, should, in point of time, soon after be given to him.

And this is confirmed by the prophecy of Isaiah : “ The Gentiles shall come to thy

^p Ps. ii. 7, 8.

^q Vide Tertull. adv. Judæos, c. xii. et ad finem libri.

^r See Heb. i. 5. v. 5. Vide et Chrysoft. T. IV. p. 103. l. 26.

^s Acts xiii. 33. See Kidder on the Messias, P. I. p. 98. P. II. p. [87.] Lightfoot, Vol. II. p. 1104.

light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising †." Whatever partial completion these words might have, in the visit of the wise men to the infant Jesus; neither the verse itself, nor the context, will suffer an application to such an event, for its adequate accomplishment. The whole chapter is employed in describing the sudden increase of the church, by the overflowing abundance of the forces of the Gentiles, from afar, from the isles, and from the sea.

Indeed, the conversion of the heathen affords frequent matter of exultation and praise, to the hallowed lips of the evangelical prophet. With this he closes his book †, and with this he begins early, in the following manner: "It shall come to pass, in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established, in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.—For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem *." It is well

† If. lx. 3.

* See Ch. lxvi. 18, 19. which are quoted, among many others on this subject, by St. Cyprian adv. Jud. L. I. c. 21.

* If. ii. 2, 3.

known,

known, that The last days, or The future age, is a familiar expression, both in the Old Testament and among the Jews, to denote the time of the expected Messiah ^y. Of Him therefore the prophet here speaks; and his law, he informs us, should go forth, not as that given by Moses did, from mount Sinai, but from mount Sion and Jerusalem ^z; and consequently before Jerusalem was destroyed, and laid level with the ground.

Still however, if the Jews should demand clearer proof from the prophets, that the Messiah should be the founder of a new law, into which, and not that of Moses ratified by him, the nations should be admitted; such proof is at hand. For the LORD did expressly foretel by Jeremiah, that the days were coming, when he would “make a new and everlasting covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah ^a.”

And that this covenant, though made with Them, was not to be confined to them, but

^y See Kidder on the Messias, P. III. p. 130. 164. Pocock on Micah iv. 1.

^z Vide St. Augustin. adv. Judæos, §. 9. Tom. VIII. p. 35.

^a Jer. xxxi. 31. xxxii. 40. And see St. Augustin. adv. Jud. §. 8.

imparted to others, is manifest from various passages; but particularly from the words of the prophet Malachi: "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts ^b."

The sacrifices, appointed by the law of Moses, were not to be offered up, within any of their gates, where the devotion of the worshiper might prompt him; but in that place alone, which the LORD should choose, out of all their tribes, to put his name there ^c. This circumstance was even of more strict obligation, than that of time. For those, who were "unclean, by reason of a dead body, or were in a journey afar off," and could not keep the passover, at the appointed season, were commanded to keep it, on the

^b Mal. i. 11.

^c See Deut. xii. 5-14. Vide Chrysoft. Serm. I. adv. Jud. T. VI. p. 315. l. 32. &c. 380. l. 28. Tertull. adv. Jud. c. v. St. Augustin. adv. Jud. §. 12, 13. Euseb. Dem. Evang. L. I. c. 1. Lightfoot on Act. v. 36. informs us, from the Jewish writers, that when one Theudas, a Jew living at Rome, taught men *to eat holy things without*, that is, the passover at Rome, the wise men threatened him with excommunication.

fourteenth day of the second month^d; but no such injunction, or even permission, is any where mentioned, with regard to the place.

When the Jews were in Babylon, it was grief perhaps alone, that silenced their harps, and restrained them from singing the LORD's song, in a strange land^e. But it appears from Daniel and other authorities, that they kept not the passover^f; and sorrow of heart would not have made them neglect the positive ordinance of heaven, had its observance, under such circumstances, been consistent with the precept of its foundation.

If then, according to the prediction of Malachi, incense should one day be offered to the LORD, in every place; certain it is, that the statutes of Moses were to be previously abrogated, and another law given, not local and temporary, confined to one temple and one priesthood, but pure and spiritual, whereby the well pleasing sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving might be presented to the GOD of Jacob, in every land, and in all ages.

^d See Num. ix. 9-11.

^e See Ps. cxxxvii.

^f See Dan x. 2-4. whence it appears, as St. Chrysostom remarks (ut supra, p. 317.) that he fasted at the time of the paschal feast. See also The Song of the three Children, verse 15.

Such are the declarations of ancient prophecy, respecting this matter; and if they were, in their season, exactly accomplished, the religion, thus planted, and thus propagated, must have been the work and counsel of God. This therefore let us now proceed to consider.

It has been before observed^s, that the baptism of John, the ministry of Christ, and the preaching of the apostles, during their divine Master's residence on earth, were so many preparatory steps, towards the gospel kingdom, rather than its actual commencement with power. Accordingly, if we look at the general effect of the wonderful works, and heavenly discourses, of the blessed Jesus; they seem to have roused and astonished multitudes whom they did not fully convince. There were many, among his hearers, to whom might be applied what was said of one; they were "not far from the kingdom of God^h," though, as yet, they were not thoroughly persuaded, or had not courage to profess their belief. The hopes of all these were, we may suppose, entirely blasted, by

^s Serm. I. p. 24.

^h Mark xii. 34. See John xii. 42.

that event, which staggered the apostles themselves, the death of their Lord; and after his resurrection, he did not shew himself to all the people, but to chosen witnesses, who did eat and drink with him, and were permitted to handle his body, which had been crucified. At one interview indeed “he was seen of above five hundred brethrenⁱ ;” but there is some ground for questioning, whether all these were, even now, so unprejudiced as to believe in, or so bold as to acknowledge, him whom they beheld. For after our Lord’s ascension, when most of the Jews were already, it is probable, come up, to keep the approaching feast; the disciples being together, “the number of the names was” only, as St. Luke informs us, “about an hundred and twenty^k.”

But grant that this is a vain surmise, say that there were now more than five hundred followers of Christ; what are These, if they are to bring about the mighty revolution, foreshewn by the prophets; if They are to combat Jewish obstinacy, if They are to famish the gods of the heathen^l, to make their temples forsaken, and their rites ab-

ⁱ 1 Cor. xv. 6.^k Acts i. 15.^l See Zeph. ii, 11.

horred? But these, how many so ever, or how powerful so ever, they may, in fact, have been, are not the men, to undertake this exploit; they have no such commission. Twelve are the number set apart for the work; and if GOD be with them, then indeed “a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation^m ;” if otherwise, the attempt shall surely be fruitless. Let us mark the event therefore, and let it speak for itself.

“When the day of Pentecost,” on which the law was of old delivered upon mount Sinai, and which was observed by the Jews, in remembrance of that blessing; when this day “was fully comeⁿ,” and the disciples “were with one accord in one place,” the new law, in exact conformity with the word of GOD, began to be promulged in Jerusalem. “Suddenly,” says the historian, “there came a sound from heaven,” not like a gentle breeze, or still small voice, but “as of a rushing mighty wind;” for the effects, which it was to produce, were to be great and astonishing. “It filled all the house;” and it

^m If. lx. 22.

ⁿ Acts ii. 1 &c. Vide S. Augustin. adv. Jud. §. 9. Patrick on Exod. xix. 1. Mede p. 265. and Stanhope on Whitsonday.

was ere long to fill the whole earth. A cloven tongue, like as of fire, fat upon each of them; for the word, in their mouth, was to be “quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword^o.” They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

By the division of language, it pleased God once to disunite, and separate, the sons of men; by the marvelous gift, now imparted, it was his gracious design, to join, in one body and one holy faith, all nations under heaven^p. The multitudes, who were then, from all quarters, assembled at Jerusalem to celebrate the feast, flocked together, when this was noised abroad. They were amazed, when they heard the various and dissimilar languages of the world, pronounced by the lips of illiterate Galileans. But Peter stood up, and spake unto them all, with such wisdom, and such power, that “the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”

^o Heb. iv. 12.

^p Vide omnino lectu dignissima apud Chrysof. Serm. II. in Pentecosten, T. V. p. 612. l. 40. &c.

This wonderful conversion must, without doubt, be principally ascribed to the blessed influence of that Holy Spirit, who had, in such a glorious manner, descended on the apostles. But the speech itself, uttered at such a time, and with so much effect, being recorded for the instruction of all ages of the church, must deserve some attention.

How then did the apostle address his brethren? Did he proclaim to them, what they would have heard of with raptures, a temporal prince of the house of David, who should fight their battles, and deliver them from the Romans, and make them lords of the world? No such thing. He reasons with his hearers, as all who reason justly must do, upon principles, which they themselves allowed; and from these he deduces truths, which before they did not allow. He alledges the writings of their own prophets; who testified, while as yet the Spirit was vouchsafed in Judah, that it should, in the last days, be poured out, in greater abundance, upon all flesh. This, says the apostle, is fulfilled upon Us. Ask ye the cause hereof? listen to my words. "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you,
by

by miracles and wonders and signs, which GOD did by him, in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of GOD, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." But David foretold of the Messiah, that he should rise from the grave, and not see corruption. And accordingly "this Jesus hath GOD raised up, whereof we all are witnesses."

Such is the clear demonstration of the apostle, that Jesus was the Messiah; that, being man, he suffered, and died, and rose again from the dead. But did the holy preacher stop here? having taught the humanity of this Son of David, did he prudently avoid dropping the least intimation, before a prejudiced multitude, of a higher character, sustained by the same person; and reserve that and other mysterious points, to be instilled by degrees, among the initiated, in private conference? Far otherwise. The very same gift, which in the beginning of his speech, he ascribes unto GOD, even Jehovah the true GOD, for He it is, who utters the words in Joel⁹; this self same gift, to-

⁹ See Joel ii. 27. &c.

wards the close of his address, he attributes to Christ: "Therefore," says he, "being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." Immediately after this, he quotes from the royal Psalmist, a passage, which is, at once, a proof of our gracious Redeemer's exaltation, as the Messiah, and of his proper Divinity, as the Son of God: "The LORD said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool." And then he draws, from the whole, this general conclusion: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

During the personal abode of our blessed Saviour with his disciples, they were enjoined secrecy, on some important articles; but it was only, till the Son of man was risen from the dead^r. There were likewise many things, which as yet they could not bear^s; but when the Spirit of truth was come, he was to guide

^r Comp. Matt. xvii. 9. Mark. ix. 9. with Matt. xvi. 20. Mark viii. 30. Luke ix. 21.

^s See John xvi. 12, 13.

them into all the truth; and then, as their Lord had expressly charged them, they were to speak in the light, what he had told them in the darkness of parables, and to preach upon the house-tops, boldly and publicly, what they had heard in the ear, the instructions imparted to them in private^t. And they did what they were commanded, in this, as well as in other instances. They kept back from their hearers, as they themselves, with conscious integrity, professed, nothing that was profitable for them; nor shunned to declare unto them all the counsel of God^u. Points of doctrine, or of discipline, which were of subordinate moment, might be afterwards taught, and errors might be confuted, as they should arise; but articles of essential consequence engaged their chief attention, and the first care of the wise master-builders was, to lay a firm foundation. The great atonement of the cross, as we learn from St. Paul, was a primary doctrine^x; and this was not taught, perhaps indeed could not be, without explaining the dignity of Him who made it. For a creature, however exalted, must owe, to his Creator, all possible ho-

^t See Matt. x. 27.

^u See Acts xx. 20. 27.

^x See 1 Cor. xv. 3.

mage; and cannot therefore pay for the transgressions of others.

But this momentous point was not left to uncertain inference. As by St. Peter in his first sermon, so likewise by the rest, it was explicitly taught. Belief in GOD, and belief in Christ, were inculcated by them, with equal earnestness, and in the very same form of words. “Repentance from dead works,” the confession and renunciation of sin, led the way^y. This was followed by faith, towards Him who had accepted, and towards Him who had made, through the eternal Spirit, a full propitiation. To these was added “the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of eternal judgement.”

Conformable to what the apostles taught was the declaration of faith, made by their converts, when they were admitted into the church. For they were required to profess, not only that Jesus was the Christ, but that he was likewise the Son of GOD^z; after which they were baptized, “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost^a.”

^y See Heb. vi. 1, 2. and comp. ix. 14. Acts xx. 21.

^z See Acts viii. 37.

^a Matt. xxviii. 19.

But to return from this digression ; if indeed, on the present occasion, it be a digression, to shew the order and manner, in which the gospel truths were communicated to mankind. Upon the miraculous accession of converts, on the day of Pentecost, a regular church seems forthwith to have been established. For they, who were baptized, “ continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, and” in “ fellowship” one with another ; they partook of the emblems of Christ’s blessed body and blood, and joined together in prayers^b.

As yet no sign, or none that is recorded, had been wrought by the apostles, if we except that stupendous one, of speaking with new tongues. But in the third chapter of the Acts, a miracle is recited, of which no instance is distinctly related, in any of the Gospels, as performed by our Lord^c; the healing of a man, lame from his mother’s

^b See Acts ii. 41, 42.

^c The man healed at Bethesda, John v. 2. &c. seems not to have been lame, but afflicted with some other bodily infirmity. Compare the 3d, 5th, and 7th verses. Cyril of Jerusalem, in a fragment on this miracle, calls the man a paralytic. See p. 311. ed. Oxon. 1703.

womb. Many that were lame were doubtless made whole (for so the evangelists in general words testify^d) by Christ himself; but as this man was laid daily at the gate of the temple, whither our Lord also daily resorted; he seems, in the divine disposal of things, to have been purposely reserved for this occasion.

Nor was this any hardship to him who endured it; even if we set aside, for a moment, the general consideration, that the most miserable among men suffer less than the best of men deserve. Two or three years more of painless infirmity were not worthy to be mentioned, when he was to be an instance, perhaps the first instance, of the wonderful power given to the apostles; and to be recorded, to all ages, as a glorious instrument of the increase and confirmation of the gospel. The ways of providence are oftentimes more especially gracious and merciful, where at first they may appear least of all to be so. "Jesus," saith St. John, "loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. "Therefore," it is added, even for this very reason, because

^d See Matt. xi. 5. with Luke vii. 21, 22. See also Matt. xv. 31. xxi. 14. in which last instance the miracle was wrought in the temple.

he loved him, he healed not his sickness, but made him an example of a greater miracle, and greater blessing, by raising him from the dead^e.

This illustrious miracle, of healing the lame man in the temple, was, on several accounts, of important use to the faith. In consequence hereof, and by the blessing of God upon the preaching of the apostles, “the number of the men” was now augmented to “about five thousand^f.”

It was likewise attended with another circumstance, of singular advantage to that, and every succeeding, age of the church. For Peter and John, who had publicly wrought this miraculous cure, being thereupon imprisoned, were brought before the high priest, and rulers of the Jews; that the doctrine of Christ crucified and raised from the dead might be scrutinised, in its very infancy, by those, who wanted neither means, nor inclination, to detect the forgery, had there been any in the case; nor zeal, nor power, to punish the contrivers, could they have convicted them. They were dismissed with threats; for their enemies, with whom the

John xi. 5, 6.

^f Acts iv. 4.

shadow of a proof would have been ample confirmation, could find nothing against them. They recognised their persons, and knew they had been with Jesus; and the man “above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed,” was standing by, and they could not deny it ^g.

The cause of truth having, thus at first, stood the test of a public trial, a second investigation was, for a while, less necessary. When therefore the apostles were, soon afterwards, apprehended, that providence of God, which doeth nothing in vain, and which, in the former instance, had suffered the truth, as it were, to defend itself; now sent an holy angel, and opened the prison doors, and brought forth the apostles, to preach early in the temple, that the work of salvation might not be impeded ^h. The day, nevertheless, did not pass over them, ere they were again arraigned before the council. But when they would have slain them, they were restrained from their purpose, by the advice of Gamaliel; who justly argued, that if the work were of men, it would come to nought; but if it were of God, it could not be overthrown.

^g Acts iv. 13, 14. 21, 22. 16.

^h Ibid. iv. 17. &c.

As we proceed, we perceive another mark of the increase of the church, in the appointment of seven deacons, to superintend the business of relieving the poor; but with authority also to preach, and to baptizeⁱ. One of this number, St. Stephen, disputing against his adversaries with irresistible power, and having, in the face of the Sanhedrim, proved, by a plain enumeration of facts, that they always opposed the truth; and that, as their fathers slew the prophets, who fore-shewed the coming of the just One, so they had now betrayed and murdered him; for these things, which they could not gainsay, he was put to death, and had the honour of being the first, who sealed, with his blood, the testimony of Jesus^k.

At this time, about the end of the year thirty three, there was a great persecution, against the church in Jerusalem^l; which however, like many subsequent persecutions, tended eventually, though not in the way sometimes represented, to the furtherance of the gospel^m. All, except the apostles, were

ⁱ Acts vi.

^k Ibid. vii.

^l Ibid. viii. 1. &c.

^m See Phil. i. 12. Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria in the third century, remarks, in the case of his own banishment,

scattered abroad ; and many, by this means, heard and embraced the word of life, who would not otherwise, or not so soon, have known it. Philip the deacon converted and baptized many of the Samaritans ; whereupon the apostles sent Peter and John, to confer on them the gift of the Holy Ghost. Others travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch ; “ and the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord ⁿ.” On this occasion too, an Ethiopian eunuch, a man of authority, and a profelyte, as it seems, to the Jews’ religion, being taught the gospel by Philip, carried the glad tidings into regions still more remote.

In the persecution of Stephen, and the more general one that ensued, Saul had acted with furious zeal ; but he “ obtained mercy, because he did it ignorantly, in unbelief^o.” As he was going towards Damascus, breathing threatnings and slaughter, at mid-day He,

that the word was, by this means, planted among some, who had not before received it ; and that, as if God had sent him for this very purpose, when he had fulfilled this office, He conducted him back. Vide Euf. H. E. L. VII. c. xi, et confer Chrysoft. in viii. Act. T. IV. p. 713. l. 35.

ⁿ Acts xi. 19-21.

^o 1 Tim. i. 13.

whom

whom he persecuted, revealed himself to him, arrayed with glory brighter than the sun^p. To the heavenly vision he was not disobedient, but was forthwith baptized, and adored that name, which before he blasphemed, and “preached the faith, which once he destroyed^q.”

Hitherto the church consisted of Jews, and of Jewish proselytes. That the Gentiles were to be converted to Christ, the apostles well knew; but the terms of their admission remained a mystery, to be disclosed in due time; and that time, in God’s gracious providence, was now at hand. The devout Cornelius was warned by an angel, to send for Peter^r; and Peter was taught, by a vision from heaven, henceforth to call no man common or unclean. He repaired, without delay, to the house of the centurion, accompanied with six brethren of the circumcision, to be witnesses of the whole transaction; and Cornelius had, on his part, “called together his kinsmen, and near friends.” While Peter was speaking, and preaching to them Jesus, the gift of the Holy Ghost was poured out upon them, as it was on the apostles and others, at the beginning; and this miracu-

^p See Act. ix.

^q Gal. i. 23.

^r See Acts x. xi.

lous effusion, in no wise superseding the necessity of baptism, but authorising its use, the apostle, in consequence, “commanded them to be baptized, in the name of the Lord.”

Having thus viewed the first planting of Christianity in the world, and remarked its growth, till the Gentiles were ingrafted into the same stock, and received life and vigour from the same holy root; we may finish what remains, in more general reflexions.

It is an early tradition of the church, that our blessed Lord, before his ascension, commanded his apostles to continue in Jerusalem twelve years*. Whether it were from the injunction of their Master, or from their zeal for the salvation of their brethren, or from the suggestion of the Holy Spirit; the fact itself, that Jerusalem was, for a considerable time, the place of their residence, is evidently countenanced by the sacred history of their Acts. We find some of them occasionally sent from hence, to impart spiritual gifts to those, who had received the word, by the preaching of subordinate teachers;

* Apollonius in Eusebius, H. E. L. V. c. xviii. And see Lardner's Suppl. to Credib. ch. vi.

and when they have fulfilled their their commission, and confirmed the brethren, they return to Jerusalem. To the synod at Jerusalem was referred the great question, respecting circumcision[†]; and “going to the apostles” seems, in one or two passages, to be a synonymous expression with “going up to Jerusalem[‡].”

When at last they were about to depart from this city, which had killed the Prince of life, and stoned his messengers, and still was impenitent; whether as some report, they determined by lot the parts of the world, into which they should severally go[‡]; or whether, as others think, the Holy Ghost, by imparting a particular language or dialect, directed each to his respective charge[‡]; we need not inquire. Whatever might be the mode of designation, it was, doubtless, not without the guidance of heaven; and the main point, that such a partition was really made, seems to be confirmed by various passages in the New Testament. For it is inti-

[†] Acts xv.

[‡] Compare Acts xv. 33. with verse 2. of the same chapter, and with Gal. i. 17. Acts xvi. 4.

[‡] Socrat. H. E. L. I. c. xix.

[‡] Chrysof. Serm. II. in Pentecost. T. V. p. 612. l. 36.

mated, that no man interfered with another's province; that there was a certain measure, or line, marked out, beyond which (for the bounds were sufficiently ample!) they did not, in the ordinary discharge of their ministry, ambitiously stretch themselves^z. However, as well after, as before this separation, they appear, almost invariably, to have taken along with them one or more inferior ministers, to assist them in their labours^a. Of this their Lord himself had set them an example, in sending them and the seventy, two and two. To this practice therefore they wisely adhered, not merely with a view to their own comfort, but that, in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word might be established.

It has been before remarked, that almost from the very first, the outlines of a regular church are observable. The word of life was taught by the apostles, the holy sacraments were administered, they prayed with one accord, and, as there was occasion, acts of discipline were exercised. Wheresoever the gospel was afterwards published, these

^z See 2 Cor. x. 13-16. Rom. xv. 20. and Dr. Tottie's second Charge, p. 349.

^a See Acts viii. 14. xi. 25, 26. xii. 25. xiii. 2. 43. 46. 50. xiv. 1. 20. xv. 2. 27. 39, 40.

points seem, in a particular manner, to have engaged the care of the apostles^b. Elders were ordained, in every city; to whom the rest of the brethren are enjoined to submit themselves^c. It is expressly said, “no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of GOD, as was Aaron^d;” and those, whom the apostles set over the Lord’s flock, are described as overseers, made, or appointed, by the Holy Ghost^e. Some of these, we find, had authority, in the absence of the apostles, to ordain others also to the work of the ministry^f. The example of the churches very soon became, and is several times urged as, a forcible argument, for decency, uniformity, and order^g. And in the beginning of the third century, Tertullian appeals, in confutation of the heretics, to the apostolical churches; in which the succession of bishops, either from some of the apostles themselves, or from one of their appointment, had been uninterrupted; whereas the heretics could not thus deduce their origin^h. Prove that

^b Acts xiv. 23. Comp. Philipp. i. 1. 1 Pet. v. 1-5.

^c Heb. xiii. 17. Comp. 1 Tim. v. 17.

^d Heb. v. 4. ^e See Acts xx. 28. ^f See Tit. i. 5.

^g See 1 Cor. xi. 16. vii. 17. xiv. 33. iv. 17. Compare 2 Cor. viii. 24.

^h De Præscript. Hæret. c. xx. xxi. xxxii. xxxvi.

this chain (and it might then easily have been proved, had it been true) prove that this chain had ever been broken, or that these churches had been governed, not by one individual, but by several rulers of equal authority; and the whole of his reasoning, which is so masterly on the foot where he places it, falls at once to the groundⁱ.

From St. Paul's exhortation to Timothy, to "hold fast the form of sound words^k;" and from other intimations of like nature, it is highly probable, that as there was from the first an appointed ministry, so was there likewise a prescribed form of worship. Many parts of our liturgy we are able to trace up to the apostolic age, yet without discovering the particular authors of them^l. This is therefore a presumption, that they were, as to substance at least, in use from the beginning.

These remarks, on the mode, in which the gospel was established in the world, ap-

ⁱ Vide Dodwell, Differt. I. in Iren. §. xliii.

^k See 2 Tim. i. 13, 14. Comp. 1 Tim. i. 16. vi. 20. Rom. vi. 17. Act. iv. 24. xvi. 25. 1 Cor. xiv. 26. xi. 15. Eph. v. 18-20. Col. iii. 16. Rom. xv. 6.

^l Vide Smith de Vet. Gr. Eccles. Hymnis, Cave Hist. Lit. Vol. II. Differt. II. p. 40. 42. and the Writers on the Common Prayer.

pear to be well founded ; but as to its extensive and swift propagation, the fact is indisputable, from the concurring testimony of inspired and uninspired historians.

Among the hearers of St. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, were men from the parts about Cyrene. The Ethiopian eunuch was soon afterwards converted ; and St. Mark, the evangelist, was constituted the first bishop of Alexandria^m. These circumstances, if there were no other, shew, sufficiently for our purpose, the publication of the gospel among the nations of Africa. Parthians and Medes were likewise present, on the day of Pentecost ; and St. Thomas is reported to have disseminated the word of life and salvation, in more distant countries of the eastⁿ.

Of the labours and success of all the apostles, what may we, or rather what may we not, infer, when St. Paul alone fully preached the gospel, almost throughout the wole Roman empire ? from Arabia to Damascus, from thence to Illyricum ; in Italy and Spain^o ? Scarcely a city of eminence in Asia

^m Cave. Hist. Lit. Vol. I. p. 14.

ⁿ Vide Euf. H. E. L. III. c. i. et not.

^o See Gal. i. 17. Rom. xv. 19. 24. 28. ὄρας αὐτον ἀπο Ἰερουσαλημ εἰς Ἰσπανίαν τρεχόντα· εἰ δὲ εἰς τὸσούτον μέρος τῆς οἰκουμένης κατέλαβεν,

Minor, in Macedonia, or Greece, that was not honoured with the presence, and enlightened with the doctrine, of this great teacher of the Gentiles. In Rome itself he bore witness of the truth; and in the palace of the emperor he was not without his converts^p.

Whether He, or whether any of the twelve apostles, visited Britain, cannot perhaps be determined with certainty; but Claudia, whom he mentions^q, was most probably born in this island; and that the gospel was preached here in the time of the apostles, is allowed on all hands^r; and in the beginning of the third century, Tertullian informs us, that even those parts of the island, which the Romans had not conquered, were, however, subject to Christ^s.

Of the number of converts, in the apostolic age, it is vain to form an estimate. But if, as we know, in a very short time, there

κατελαβεν, εννοησαν και οι λοιποι ποσα ειργασαντο. Chrysof. Hom. 75. in Matt. T. II. p. 469. l. 32.

^p See Phil. i. 13. iv. 22. and Chrysof. T. IV. p. 867. l. 39.

^q 2 Tim. iv. 21.

^r Vide Usher Brit. Eccles. Antiq. c. i. iii. Spelman Concil. Orbis Britann. p. 1. &c.

^s Britannorum inaccessa Romanis loca, Christo verò subdita. Adv. Jud. c. vii.

were many thousands of believing Jews^t; we may well suppose the whole multitude of the faithful to have been great indeed, and without number. The heavenly seed was sown in a good soil, and it brought forth fruit an hundred fold. On a lofty mountain, on the mountain of the height of Israel, was planted a branch, a tender one; it took root, and grew up, and was a goodly cedar; and in the shadow of its branches lodged all fowl of every wing^u. From mount Sion issued forth an overflowing stream, and lo! the stream became a river, and the river became a sea^x; the waters are the waters of life, and whosoever drinketh thereof shall live^y.

Here then we have, upon the records of history, an undeniable fact, that the religion of Jesus Christ did, in the space of forty years, overspread the earth, and in every people, and nation, get a possession^z. It is also true, that this came to pass, in exact conformity with the antecedent declarations of the Jewish scriptures. Had therefore not one miracle been wrought in proof of the gospel,

^t Acts xxi. 20.

^u See Ezek. xvii. 22, 23.

^x See Ecclus. xxiv. 31.

^y See Ezek. xlvi. 9. Rev. xxii. 1, 2, 17.

^z Ecclus. xxiv. 6.

whereas thousands were performed ; had no spiritual blessings gone along with the preaching of it, whereas they were, in fact, every where bestowed ; still it is certain, that it ought to be received, as the work of GOD, by all who believe the ancient prophecies. It is that very dispensation, that very religion, which Jehovah, the GOD of Israel, there foretold, and acknowledged for his own ; that new law, which he would write in the hearts, not of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also, who sat in darkness, and the shadow of death.

In saying this, I mean not, in the smallest degree, to disparage the miracles, which were wrought by our Lord, and his blessed apostles. GOD forbid ! They were expedient, and even necessary, for various reasons ; and for this, among others, because they were foretold, as a distinguishing mark, whereby the Messiah should be known.

Nor, again, do I abandon, as untenable, the fortress, which the church has, from the earliest age to this day, been in possession of, built upon the foundation of the miraculous progress of our holy faith. The argument has never yet been shewn to be invalid ; nor,
we

we may presume, ever will. If the gospel did indeed, without the help of miracles, without any supernatural aid from above, gain such footing in the world; this itself truly was, as St. Chrysoſtom has remarked, the greateſt of miracles^a.

The very idea, and deſign, of the firſt preachers of Chriſtianity, can ſcarcely be accounted for, to the ſatisfaction of an impartial judge, on any other ſuppoſition, but that the facts, which they aſſerted, were true, and that they were commiſſioned from heaven to teach them^b. Twelve illiterate men, of mean birth, lately deſtitute of courage, undertake, with a full view of dangers and of death before their eyes, to make all nations believe, that a perſon, given up, by the Jewiſh rulers, to the power of the Romans, and by them condemned to an ignominious death, was riſen from the dead; that he died, not for his

^a Tom. III. p. 272. l. 14. Serm. V. in 1 Cor. πως δε, εμη σημεια εποικεν, επειθον; ει μιν γαρ εποικεν (εποικεν γαρ) Θεε δυναμει ην το γινόμενον· ει δε μη εποικεν και εκρατειν, πολυ θαυμαστωτερον ην το συμβειν. Confer p. 276. l. 9. et Serm. I. in Act. Apoſt. T IV. p. 611. l. 11. Kidder on Meſſias, P. I. p. 50. Atterbury, Vol. I. Serm. IV. Grot. de Verit. Rel. Chriſt. L. II. ad fin.

^b See Chryſoſt. T. III. p. 272. l. 42. 285. l. 38.

own fins, but to make atonement for the fins of the whole world ; that he was the Son of God, and ordained to be the judge of all mankind. There are some parts of this plan, in appearance, fo mean, and some fo transcendently sublime ; there is something, in the whole, fo much out of the road, and beyond the reach, of human invention, that it is, in the higheft degree, improbable, it fhould have been devised by men ; as, on the other hand, it is certainly impoffible, that it could ever have been impofed upon the world, if it were not the contrivance of divine wifdom fupported by divine power.

What then is the iffue ? They proclaim the death and refurrection of Jesus, in a place, where thoufands could have contradicted them, had the facts not been true ; yet thoufands are convinced. They go abroad, and publifh the doctrine of the crofs, in the moft populous and moft learned cities of the world ; in Antioch ^c, in Tarfus ^d, in Athens, in Co-

^c Ἡ μητροπολις εστι της Συριας, μερεθας τε ενεκρα και της αλλης ευδαιμνιας, τριτον αδελφικως επι της υπο Ῥωμαιοις οικουμενης ερχασατο τοπον. Joseph. Bell. Jud. L. III. c. ii. §. 4. Confer Strab. L. XVI. p. 1089. ed. Amftel.

^d Τουρευτη δε τοις ενθαδε [at Tarfus] ανθρωποις σπεδη προς τε φιλοσοφιαι και την αλλην εγκυκλιον απαταν παιδειαν γεγενεν, ωσθ' ὑπερ-βιβληνται

rinth, and in Rome. Unlearned and ignorant men, the most tenacious of ancient customs, and least capable of being taught sublime truths^e, believe in the one true and only God, and Jesus Christ whom He had sent. The profligate forsake vice, and scorners embrace wisdom; nor are there wanting, among the sons of erudition and the men of opulence, those who join a persecuted sect, at the manifest hazard of wealth, of fame, and of life.

In the mean time, however, the soldiers of Christ did not, in order to secure their conquest, overturn, or take possession of, all the strong holds of the adversary, wherever they came. They erected their standard in the midst of their enemies; yet the work, which they raised, in the sight of the foe and the moment of danger, stood firm, as the rock of ages; force could not break down the impregnable walls, nor cunning undermine the solid foundation^f. Against the

βεβληνται και Αθηναις, και Αλεξανδρεια, και οι πικαι αλλων τοπων δυνατων ειπειν, εν ω χολαι και διατριβαι των φιλοσοφων γενησιν. Strab. L. XIV. p. 991.

^e See Chrysoft. T. III. p. 288. l. 17. T. IV. p. 813. l. 5.

^f *Ου γαρ στρατοπεδοι ιδιον ειχον, αλλα αυτοις ανεμιγνυντο τοις πολλοις, και ετως αυτων κραται· και εν μεσσις τοις εχθροις αναστριφμενοι διωλιθαινον αυτων τας βλαβας, και περιεγιντο και νικων. Chrysoft. Serm. IV. in 1 Cor. T. III. p. 265. l. 33. Confer Hom. 33. in Matt. T. II p. 229. l. 2.*

united opposition of ingenuity and power, of interest and prejudice, the faith of Christ crucified grew and prevailed; and believers were, every where, added to the Lord. As long, therefore, as we can argue from effects to their causes, as long as the work sheweth the workman, and the heavens and the earth declare the God that made them; so long may we conclude, from the miraculous manner, in which the gospel was first planted in the world, that it was, indeed, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

No, but, we are told, men died in its defence, and there is a wonderful propensity in human nature, which prompts us to espouse the persecuted party. Of this and other arguments, which have been framed to account for the success of Christianity, it may be observed, in general, that they by no means come up to the point. Whatever influence they might have, in promoting the subsequent propagation of the gospel; they had certainly none at all, in effecting its first establishment. There were thousands converted, before any were benefited by the liberality of the faithful; or one martyr died, in support of the cause.

But

But why, after all, was martyrdom an argument, in favour of Christianity? because it was true? or because it was false? When Elijah slew the prophets of Baal, why did not an host spring up from their ashes, to avenge the insulted honour of the god? When Jezebel put to death the prophets of the Lord, why did not the true worshipers multiply in Israel? and why was Elijah the only prophet left? What tends to the destruction of truth, as well as falsehood, cannot, in itself, be an argument for either^z.

Still we deny not, nay we insist, that the blood of the martyrs was, as it has emphatically been called, the seed of the church. If any one, in modern days, suffers death, rather than relinquish his religious tenets; this may evince the sincerity of his belief, but does not shew the truth of What he believes. He

^z The insufficiency of the plea of martyrdom, simply considered, was seen and urged against the Montanists, in the second century; when, their other arguments being confuted, they had recourse to this, as an irrefragable proof of their impious pretences: Το δε εστιν αρα ως ειπικε παντος μαλλον εκ αληθειας. και γαρ των αλλων αιρεσεων τινες πλεισες οσες εχουσι μαρτυρας* και ε παρα τιστο δηπε συγκαταδησομεθα, εδι αληθειαν εχειν αυτες ομολογησομεν. Asterius Urbanus ap. Euf. H. E. L. V. c. xvi. prope finem.

dies professing a particular sense of the holy scriptures; and it is possible, that sense may not be the true one. But the primitive martyrs, at least the earliest of them, died in attestation of public Facts; touching which it was impossible, that they themselves should be deceived, and all the world saw, they could have no imaginable temptation, to deceive others. The martyrdom of such men was, indeed, a strong argument, in favour of their cause; to which their blameless lives, and unexampled fortitude, gave additional lustre.

Cicero has exhibited, with his usual vigour of imagination, and energy of language, a striking picture of Roman patience, in one who was publicly scourged, while not a groan was heard, not a word was uttered, during his chastisement, except “Civis Romanus sum^h.” But among the first Christians were many, of each sex and of every age, who, under much sharper tortures, possessed no less courage; from whose lips, after praying for their enemies, not a syllable could be extorted, excepting that name, in which they gloried even in death, *Χριστιανός εμί*ⁱ. They

^h “I am a Roman.” Vid. Cic. in Verr. L. V. c. lxii.

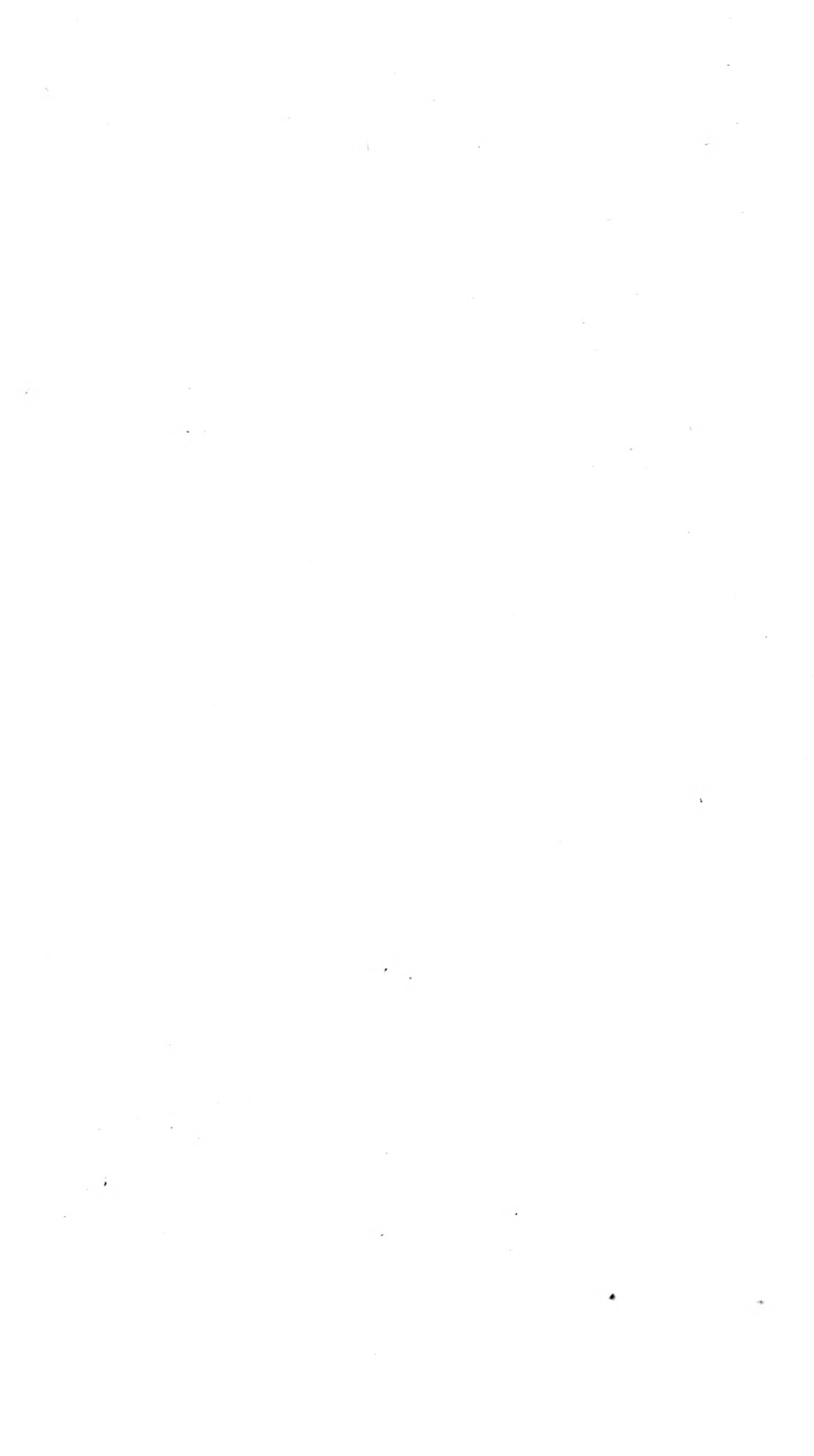
ⁱ “I am a Christian.” See an elegant and affecting letter, in Euseb. Hist. Eccl. L. V. c. i. giving an account of the martyrdom

evidently shewed, or rather, as it was on the occasion remarked, He who suffered in them, and supported them, shewed, *ὅτι μηδὲν φοβερὸν ὅπως Πατρὸς ἀγάπη, μηδὲ ἀλγεῖνον ὅπως Χριστὸς δόξα*^k. Their cause was the cause of truth; and the malice of the world, the machinations of infidelity, and the gates of hell, never did, nor ever shall, prevail against it. It is founded upon a rock, and that rock is Christ, “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever^l.”

martyrdom of some Christians in Gaul. See also L. IV. c. xv. p. 167. and L. VIII. c. iii.

^k “Where the love of the Father reigns, nothing can create fear; where Christ’s glory is the object, nothing can give pain.” See the letter, as above, p. 202. See likewise the Epistle concerning the martyrdom of Polycarp, Ibid. p. 162. n. 5.

^l Heb. xiii. 8.



S E R M O N I I I .

M A T T . XXIV . 4 , 5 .

Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

WE have considered one of the signs, which our blessed Saviour gave to his disciples, whereby it might be known, that the desolation of the temple, and the overthrow of the Jewish state, were nigh at hand. The gospel, it was foretold, should be preached in all the world; and then the end should come. However, from this mark alone, had no others been added, the time of the approaching vengeance could not have been discovered, with sufficient precision, to answer all those purposes of mercy, which the Redeemer of mankind graciously intended.

Before St. Paul had finished the course of his ministry, he himself informs us, that the “found” of the apostles was gone forth “into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world^a ;” that the gospel was “come,” or rather was “present^b,” had taken firm hold, and was bringing forth fruit, in all the world, having been preached to the whole creation under heaven^c. Here then was the accomplishment of our Lord’s prediction.

But although there now were believers in all lands; yet inasmuch as there were still, and long after this time, many adversaries, and hitherto perhaps some cities, or districts, where the faith had not been taught; it might have been doubted, by the Christians in Judea, who were most nearly concerned in the prophecies respecting Jerusalem, whether the gospel had been preached, in that fulness and extent, with which it was to be published, before the Jewish affairs should have an end. At least those among them,

^a Rom. x. 18.

^b Col. i. 5, 6. Τα ευαγγελια τα παροντος εις υμας, κηδως και εν παντι τω κοσμω.

^c Ibid. i. 23. It is not, as the common translation would lead us to suppose, κηρυχθεντος παση κτισει, but κηρυχθεντος εν παση τη κτισει, τη υπο τον ουρανον.

who

who had only the ordinary means of information, (and no other were granted where they were not necessary^d) could not soon be certified of this universal promulgation; or if they were, yet, from the words of this prophecy, they were not authorised to conclude, that the destruction of the temple should immediately ensue. A certain event was declared, before which, the final excision, whatever there might be of rumours abroad, or commotions at home, should not take place; but it was not said, that when one was fulfilled, the other might not still, for a short while, be delayed.

For these reasons therefore, our blessed Lord, besides the swift propagation of his gospel, was pleased to foreshew other signs of the times, peculiarly observable to the inhabitants of Judea, and some of them pointing out the critical moment, when flight would be the only means of security.

^d Οὐ γὰρ ἐπὶ μικροῖς τὸ Θεῖον τὴν ἑαυτῶν συμμαχίαν ὅς ἀν εὐνῆν ἢ διδάσιν· ἀλλ' ἐφ' ὅς ἀνδραπίνην ἐλπίδα μὴ βλεποὶ πρὸς τὸ κρείττον παρῶσαν. Jos. Ant. Jud. L. II. c. xv. §. 5. Vide et Chrysof. in Act. xvi. 10. T. IV. p. 804. l. 4. et confer p. 812. l. 1. 817. l. 25. T. V. p. 277. l. 33. et seqq. See also an admirable remark on St. Peter's deliverance from prison, in Dr. Townson's Disc. on the Gospels, p. 62. Lastly comp. 2 Cor. i. 5.

Of these local marks one was that, which is contained in the text: "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ," or rather, the Christ^e, "and shall deceive many." St. Luke, in the parallel passage, adds, "and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them." And the three evangelists, after mentioning another token, that of wars and tumults, have carefully recorded the caution to the disciples, not to be terrified; forasmuch as these things must, indeed, come to pass, but the end should not be yet.

^e Ὁ Χριστός. It is scarcely ever used absolutely in the Gospels. The contemptuous speech, προφητευσουν Χριστε, Matt. xxvi. 68. cannot be thought an exception. In Mar. ix. 41. the other words are so express, that the article seemed not necessary: εν τη ονοματι μου, οτι Χριστος εσει. In Luke xxiii. 2. if it is not an epithet of king, it is in apposition with it; and the one not admitting the article, the other could not have it. The only remaining text, where it stands alone, is John ix. 22. and here possibly it may have its common, not its appropriate, signification: "If any one should acknowledge him to be anointed, to have any divine commission, though not that of the Messiah." This seems to be confirmed by what follows; for the man was excommunicated for confessing Jesus to be a prophet. Compare verse 33. with 17. He afterwards (38) believed him to be the Son of God. In the Epistles the word Χριστός very frequently occurs, without any addition whatsoever. See Rom. v. 6. 8. vi. 4. 8, 9. viii. 9, 10. 1 Cor. i. 17. 23. ii. 16. iii. 1. ix. 21. xii. 27. 1 Pet. i. 11. ii. 21. iii. 16. &c.

After

After this, St. Matthew, at the twenty third verse, again takes up the subject of the false christs, in the following words, most of which are transcribed by St. Mark: "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall rise false christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders, insomuch that (if it were possible) they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before."

This passage is, by some, applied to a different race of impostors, from those, who are characterised in the beginning of the chapter; to the deceivers, who, as they suppose, shall precede the second coming of our Lord. It is not necessary here to enter upon the great question, whether the whole of this important chapter does, or does not, relate to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the concomitant circumstances of that event. On either supposition, I see no good reason, why the passage before us should not be understood of those days.

St. Luke has entirely omitted it^f; which he would probably not have done, had it been

^f He has however, in another place, a passage altogether similar, which evidently relates to the Jewish calamities. See *6. xvii. 23.*

totally distinct from the foregoing predictions. His Gospel being designed for the use of the Gentiles remote from Judea, he is less minute and circumstantial, than the former evangelists, in describing those signs, of which few or none of his readers were likely to be eye-witnesses. But against the lying prophets, if such there shall be, in the last days, it was expedient for the whole church, for the Gentile as well as the Jewish converts, to be forewarned; and the book more adapted for general instruction would probably have contained the more generally necessary caution.

Moreover, some parts of the description, especially in St. Matthew, are evidently local, and seem particularly to point out pretenders to the Messiahship; and whatever false teachers may have been in the church, or shall hereafter arise, we can hardly suppose, any of them will be bold enough, to assume a character more exalted, than that of a prophet.

The discourses of our Lord, as recorded by the evangelists, if they have not a critical arrangement of parts, are not however void of order and method. Being less artificial, they

they have perhaps, for that reason, more of dignity and weight; but there is certainly a connection, which is wise and good, and commonly apparent. In the chapter before us, our blessed Saviour does not give a direct and immediate answer to the inquiries of his apostles^s; which they made, it is probable, from curiosity and concern for their native country, but with little apprehension of danger to themselves. The warning that was most requisite is therefore given first. They are cautioned, and their converts through them, not to be led away by impostors, who should appear, and, with too much success, study to deceive. The beginning of sorrows, insurrections and tumults, famine and pestilence, are next mentioned; and the Christians, under their peculiar afflictions, which are then foretold, might derive perhaps some degree of patient firmness, from the consideration, that they suffered, when sufferings were common; but they would undoubtedly feel inexpressible joy, in the enlivening reflection, that what they underwent was for the name, and for the sake, of Christ. They are likewise assured, in express words, that who so endured

^s See verse 4. &c. and S. Chryostom on the place.

to the end should be saved ; and further still, that, in this very season of alarm and danger, notwithstanding the various perils from without, and the coldness and apostacy of many within, the gospel should go forth, and prevail over the earth.

Thus forewarned, and thus fortified, a sign is given them, whereupon They, who had so long in vain endeavoured to convert their brethren, should now betake themselves to instant flight ; lest they should be consumed in the destruction of the wicked, of which a most affecting account is exhibited.

Still, however, the description of the seducers, who, before the war, and during its continuance, should be the ruin of multitudes, was not so minute and full, as the holy Jesus, in compassion to those who believed on him, and to those who did not, saw to be expedient. This point therefore he graciously resumes ; and, in the verses already quoted, and some which follow, delineates the impostors, with such particularity, that they, who had read the prediction, and it was published early, that all might read it, must have been blind not to see its accom-

accomplishment, if it ever was accomplished, and mad to be deluded, if they did behold it.

The admonition of Christ was, “If they shall say unto you, Behold he is in the desert, go not forth^h.” And the historian Josephus, as if it had been his design to illustrate this passage, informs us, that false prophets and impostors prevailed on multitudes, to follow them into the desert, promising to display there prodigies and signs; but that those, who listened to them, suffered the just punishment of their folly, and were either slain, or dispersed, by the Roman governorⁱ.

If they say, “Behold, he is in the secret chambers, believe it not,” was another part of the warning in the Gospel. From Josephus we learn, that in Jerusalem itself, and during the siege, there were many deceivers, who lied against God, and promised their

^h Matt. xxiv. 26.

ⁱ Ant. Jud. L. xx. c. viii. §. 6. Soon after our Lord's ascension, Dositheus, a Samaritan, endeavoured to persuade the Samaritans, that he was the Messiah of whom Moses prophesied. See Origen contra Cels. Of Simon Magus, the countryman and contemporary of Dositheus, an account may be seen in the same author, and in others. It seemed not necessary to my design to mention any impostors besides those who appeared in these days in *Judea*.

countrymen peace and safety. Even at the last, when the temple was in flames, multitudes of all ages flocked thither from the city, upon the proclamation of a false prophet, that God enjoined them to go up to the temple, where they should receive the signs of deliverance; and of six thousand assembled there, on this occasion, not one escaped the fire, or the sword ^k.

“ I am come,” said Christ to the Jews, “ in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive ^l.” The true disciples of our Lord were few, though in one instance four, and in another, five, thousand were miraculously fed by him ^m. But a Jew, who afterwards came from Egypt, with no other credentials, but self-confident boasting, led away to mount Olivet, as Josephus informs us, no less a number, than thirty thousand deluded followers ⁿ; and though, as far as appears, neither he, nor any of his brethren in imposture, actually assumed the title of

^k B. J. L. VI. c. v. §. 2, 3.

^l John v. 43.

^m See Matt. xv. 38. xiv. 21.

ⁿ Ant. Jud. L. xx. c. viii. §. 6. B. J. L. II. c. xiii. §. 5. He says of these deceivers just before (§. 4.) *προσηματι θειασμους — δαιμονων το πληθος ανεπειδον.*

Messiah;

Messiah; yet their general conduct sufficiently shewed, to what their ambitious views aspired. They styled themselves prophets, and professed to act under the immediate influence of heaven; and they likewise undertook to deliver the people; and this twofold character, of a victorious prince and an inspired prophet, was what the Jews, in that age, universally expected to find in their Messiah°. The impostors therefore, if not in express words, at least by the exploits, which they engaged to perform, severally declared, “I am the Christ.”

This character, and these promises, it is probable, no deceiver ever held forth, till the true Son of David had conversed among men, and wrought a deliverance, not from temporal, but spiritual, enemies. Judas of Galilee, mentioned in the Acts^p, who opposed the enrollment, asserting, that God was the only governor and lord, was the founder of a new sect among the Jews, but did not challenge, in support of his schemes, the authority of heaven, or the title of a prophet. The pretensions also of the Theudas, of whom Ga-

° See Grot. on Luke xxiv. 21.

^p v. 37. See A. J. L. XVIII. c. i. §. 6. L. XX. c. iv. §. 2. B. J. L. II. c. viii. §. 1.

maliel there speaks, were, it is likely, of a fimilar nature. And when our blessed Saviour fays, “ All that ever,” or rather, All as many as, “ came before me, are thieves and robbers^a ;” his words feem to point at the pharifaical and other avaricious fhepherds, who, in thofe days, led aftray, and then plundered, the flock ; but did not arrogate to themfelves the office of Mefiah. The truth therefore may, in this probably, as in other inftances, claim the honour of priority to error and falfehood^r.

On this, however, it is not neceffary to lay much ftrefs : there is another point, which requires fome confideration. Among the various falfe prophets, mentioned by Jofephus, and their various boafts, he has not recorded the achievement of any one extraordinary feat, which they promifed. How then, it may be afked, does this agree with our Lord’s prediction in the cafe ; they “ fhall fhew

^a John x. 8. πάντες ὅσοι πρό ἐμοῦ ἦλθον, κλεπταὶ εἰσὶ καὶ ληστῆς. Ita autem agebant tunc Judæorum doctores, qui, Chriflum gregem fibi colligere obfervantes, ipfum prævertebant, ovæque ab ipfo ad fe pertrahere conabantur, feque proinde pro janua ovium in ecclefiam venditabant Wolf. in loc.

^r In omnibus veritas imaginem antecedit ; poft rem fimilitudo fuccedit. Tertull. de Præfcript. c xxix.

great signs and wonders; infomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect^s ?

This seeming difficulty we might perhaps remove, by saying, They might possibly strengthen their illusions, by some less important works; but failing in the essential point, the decisive proof, as it was to be, of their mission, the historian has passed over their inferior practices of deception, and related only what was a sufficient confutation of their haughty claims. But an argument drawn from the silence of an author, however probable, is always uncertain. Let us see therefore whether the words of the prophecy itself, when attentively viewed, will not furnish a better answer.

They shall shew or give signs, *δωσουσιν σημεια*, says the evangelist; and I believe it will be found on examination, that the word, which very frequently occurs in the New Testament, and not seldom on this very subject, is never used absolutely, where the performance of a real miracle is intended.

^s Matt. xxiv. 24.

In the prophecy of Joel, quoted by St. Peter in his first sermon, the expression is indeed the same with that before us, "I will shew wonders in heaven above †." But here, besides that the passage, like that in question, is promissory or predictive, God is the speaker, and the work is His; there is no visible agent, neither man nor angel, employed to effect it. When that is the case, or in other words, when a miracle, in the proper acceptation of the term, is wrought, the phrase is different. "The works," says our Lord, "which the Father hath Given me to Finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me". In like manner, we read of Paul and Barnabas, that they spake boldly in the Lord, who "Granted signs and wonders to be Done by their hands *."

The word therefore, when used simply, means to give out, to assign, or appoint; but whether what has thus been promised is afterwards accomplished, this must be collected from other circumstances.

† Acts ii. 19.

‡ John v. 36. Comp. xvii. 4. Rev. xiii. 5. 14, 15. xvi. 6. 8. See also, for the sense here given of *διδωμι*, Deut. xiii. 1. in the Septuagint, and Farmer on Miracles, p. 303. &c.

* Acts xiv. 3.

And lest any one should suppose, that in the words of St. Matthew, which are translated “inasmuch that they shall deceive,” it was implied, that the success of these impostors should arise from their doing some extraordinary works; St. Mark, in the parallel passage, seems purposely to have adopted a phrase of more certain and different import. They shall shew or give signs, he says, *προς το αποπλαναν*, in order to seduce, or with a view to seduce^y. The same, therefore, is the meaning of St. Matthew; and this is perfectly consonant to the truth of facts. For the wretched people, as the historian describes them^z, in the midst of their calamities eagerly catching at every shadow of hope, and inattentive to those plain signs, which fore-shewed their destruction, were deluded by the promises of these audacious miscreants, till the issue, but too late, convinced them of their folly.

When Joshua was the leader of the armies of Israel, the walls of Jericho fell down before them, and made a way for the ransomed to pass over. But, in the day of Judah’s misery, the walls of Jerusalem, for the fall

^y Mark xiii. 22.

^z B. J. L. VI. c. v. §. 2, 3.

whereof the Egyptian, at the head of thirty thousand men, solemnly pledged himself, stood unmoved; a proof to all ages, that neither the Lord, nor the Lord's anointed, was to be found in that mighty host^a. An immense multitude were prevailed on by Theudas, to follow him to Jordan, for he said, that he was a prophet, and that the stream, divided by his word, should open an easy passage for their escape; but the river flowed on, regardless of His voice, who possessed not the spirit, nor the mantle, of Elijah. The haughty pretender was taken and beheaded; and of his followers many were slain, and the residue dispersed, or made captives^b.

We do not mean to fritter away the force of an objection, because, in its more formidable shape, it may be unanswerable. The interpretation, here given of our Lord's prediction, is, I believe, just and true. But if the exposition, more generally received, should be thought to stand on a better foundation; or if any one should doubt, whether the passage does not at least imply the possibility of certain works, apparently miraculous, being

^a A. J. L. XX. c. vii. §. 6. B. J. L. II. c. xiii. §. 4.

^b A. J. L. xx. c. iv. §. 1. He was a different person from the Theudas mentioned Acts v. 36.

performed by those, who do not derive their authority from heaven ; it may be proper to consider this matter a little further ; especially as the difficulty may seem to be increased by the words of Moses : “ If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder cometh to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods (which thou hast not known) and let us serve them ; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams^c.” If the prophet of idolatry is suffered to give a sign, which must, in this case, have the force of a prediction ; and if that sign is accomplished, which would then carry with it a miraculous appearance ; it may be asked, How are miracles, or prophecy, a demonstration of the true religion, when, as it seems, they may be pleaded, sometimes at least, in support of the false ?

To remove this objection, we may first take a separate, though concise, view of the respective cases of prophecy and miracles ; after which, if some remarks occur applicable to both, with them it is proposed to close this discourse.

^c Deut. c. xiii. 1-3.

“Known unto God,” said the holy pastor of the first Christian church, “are all his works, from the beginning of the world^d.” Every deed, every word, and every thought of his creatures were surveyed by Him, before they were formed. Such excellency of wisdom we do not presume to explain or comprehend; nor, with the scanty line of the human understanding, attempt to fathom the depths of Omniscience. It is enough for man to know, what the scriptures manifestly teach, that the divine foreknowledge is perfectly consistent with human freedom.

“Whom he did foreknow,” says the apostle, “he also did predestinate^e.” In the order, therefore, of these unsearchable ways of God, the decree does not precede, but follow, prescience^f. How then are they foreseen? in the abstract, as men? or as individuals, distinguished from one another by their respective characters? As individuals, most assuredly, with all their good, and all their bad, qualities; with every circumstance of their whole life. Because it is foreseen, therefore,

^d Acts xv. 18.

^e Rom. viii. 29.

^f Vide Chrysoft. T. V. p. 779. l. 10. 32. It is not certain that the oration is S. Chrysoftom's; but, whoever the author was, it well deserves an attentive perusal.

that

that they will believe in Christ, and obey the gospel, it is the Father's good pleasure, that they shall be made like the Captain of their salvation, and reign with him in mansions of bliss and glory. But from this mysterious subject, on which it is evident, that every term, which we use, must necessarily be inadequate and figurative^g; let us retire with reverence, and set our feet on less perilous ground.

Of created beings, if we may judge from analogy, and the probability of the case, the most exalted must still be capable of improvement in knowledge; of receiving new ideas, or new combinations, as the counsels of providence are more and more unfolded to their view, and furnish fresh matter for celestial songs. This notion, which reason might suggest, the scriptures of truth seem to confirm beyond a doubt. We there read, that "the angels desire to look into"^h the wonders of redemption; and that "now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, is known, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God"ⁱ." If these things are

^g Ου γαρ φθασει προσανάβαινει ὁ λογος ἐπὶ τον αψαυτον και αναφη παντη Θειον, ἀλλ' ὑπονουσει και ὑποξει, κυριαις ονομασιν αδυνατων επι-βαστρα χρησθαι κ. τ. λ. Philo de Leg. ad Caium, p. 546.

^h 1 Pet. i. 12.

ⁱ Eph. iii. 10.

fo, we may fafely fuppofe, that, fublime as is their knowledge, complete as is their blifs, they cannot however anticipate the events of remote futurity, when the Father of light has not, in heaven or on earth, exprefsly revealed them. ^k.

It is apparent from hence, that prophecy muft be a very dangerous fubject for impof- ture to meddle with. The profpect is too obfcure for the prince of darknefs to defcry ; the maze is too intricate for his minifters to unravel. The rebellious fpirits, cut off, by their apoftacy, from the living fountain of beatitude and truth, can know nothing more, than what their own experience may teach, or fagacity dictate. The responses therefore, which at times they have given forth, or their fervants have forged for them, totally unconnected one with another, have ufually been ambiguous, often erroneous, and fometimes, perhaps, true. In this latter cafe, if it was not merely a lucky chance, the fubject has however either been a tranfaction carrying on at the fame time, but in a different place, which we may readily conceive obvious to

^k Vide Chryfoft. in 1 Cor. ii. 7. T. III. p. 279. l. 36. &c. et in Col. i. 26. T. IV. p. 113. Conf. S. Ambrof. de Fide, L. IV. c. I. and the author of 2 Efdras, iv. 52.

spiritual,

spiritual, though depraved, intelligences; or else some event on the verge of accomplishment.

If no instance occurs, or none that may be deemed of unquestionable authority, we may be allowed to suppose one. When Satan had licence to tempt holy Job, to spoil him of his substance, and afflict him in his body; had he been suffered to speak, by himself or his agents, he could, it may be imagined, have told, that these disasters should quickly befall. The restraint, which controuls the malignity of his nature, being for a moment suspended; he was not ignorant, what purposes of iniquity, or deeds of mischief, when left to himself, he would hasten to perpetrate.

Setting aside therefore such cases, if such there may possibly be, in which an event, not actually accomplished, may have been disclosed, when the wicked one himself was to be the agent, or the proximate cause, whatever it might be, had begun to operate; we may safely affirm, that no remote and fortuitous transaction ever was, or ever will be, foreshewn by the father of lies, or his spirit, which worketh in the children of disobedience.

In fact, the mode of operation, in these attempts to deceive, when compared with the manner of the heavenly Spirit, has commonly afforded no obscure indication of a different origin ¹.

The Holy Spirit of God enlightens, exalts, and purifies the faculties; but does not destroy the freedom of action. The apostles and evangelists, men of slow apprehension, and of no acquired talents, surpass in an instant, when inspired from above, the most consummate philosophers, in those very excellencies, which may seem within the reach of human ability, improved by instruction, and corrected by habit; in the power of reasoning, in the order, the connection, and perspicuity of their narrative; in reciting at large, or framing an abridgement of, their Lord's discourses; in selecting the main circumstances of a miracle or transaction to be recorded; and, with a matchless simplicity,

¹ This argument is discussed by S. Chrysostom, Serm. XXIX. in 1 Cor. T. III. p. 429 and by Epiphanius against the Monothelists, Hær. XLVIII. c. ii. &c. In the same controversy, Miltiades wrote a treatise *περι τῆς μὴ εἶναι προφητικὴν ἐν ἐκστάσει λαλῆιν*, Euſ. H. E. L. V. c. xvii. see also c. xvi. For the different meanings of the word *ἐκστασις* Philo may be consulted, Vol. I. p. 508.

which

which pervades the whole, giving, at the same time, a commanding dignity to the humblest subject, that passes through their hands. What is imparted for man's use is communicated in a way agreeable to his nature, though superior to it. "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets," obedient to their controul, whether to speak, or keep silence; and when the will of GOD is revealed to several, at the same time and place, they "may all" however "prophecy one by one." "For GOD is not the author of confusion, but of peace^m."

Such are the gifts of the Spirit of truth: what is the shape assumed by the enemy? Inspiration and madness are here, in general, only different names for one and the same thing. The miserable patient, labouring in vain to throw off the overpowering god, is compelled to utter words, of which he is not the author, and knows not the meaning. Furious as the whirlwind, and black as the tempest, is the appearance of Satan; bright as the day, and refreshing as the dew, is the Spirit of Jehovah. If the Lord descend in thunder, and mount Sinai tremble; the Israelites hear his voice from the midst of the

^m 1 Cor. xiv. 32. 31. 33.

fire, and he talketh with Moses, as a man talketh with his friendⁿ. If a great and strong wind rendeth the mountains, and breaketh in pieces the rocks before the Lord; it is a still small voice, that visiteth Elijah^o. On the day of Pentecost, with a sound as of a rushing mighty wind, and with the appearance of fire, the Holy Ghost came down from heaven on the apostles; and as many as were blessed with his divine influence spake with wisdom and power, with truth and with soberness^p.

There are, indeed, instances, where the Lord hath, in a different manner, made known to his servants what should come to pass. I “saw this great vision,” said Daniel, “and there remained no strength in me; for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption^q.” “I knew a man in Christ,” saith St. Paul, speaking of himself “(whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell; God knoweth) such an one caught up to the third heaven^r.” And when the beloved disciple, who was wont, in sacred familiarity, to lean on Jesus’ bosom; when He, in the

ⁿ See Exod. xix. 16. &c. Deut. iv. 11, 12. Exod. xxxiii. 11.

^o 1 Kings xix. 11-13.

^p Acts ii.

^q Dan. x. 8.

^r 2 Cor. xii. 2, 3.

Revelation, saw the same Jesus, his countenance shining as the sun in his strength, he “fell at his feet as dead^s.”

But what are we to infer from cases of this sort? that they were illusions, or not distinguishable from the arts of deceivers? God forbid. It is usually noted, on these occasions, that He, whose presence was too awful for feeble mortality to sustain, strengthened, with his right hand, his favoured servant; and enabled him to see clearly what it was his gracious pleasure to disclose. When scenes of future glory had thus been represented, the holy prophet, in retirement and at leisure, but his heart still burning, and his imagination glowing with the images portrayed there, under the guidance of the same good Spirit, wrote the vision, and made it plain for his own generation, or sealed it up for succeeding ages.

Thus, then, it appears, that prophecy will, in every view, and in every part, bear the strictest examination, and prove itself to be the gift of God. Though distinct from the natural powers of man, it takes not away

^s Rev. i. 16, 17.

their exercise, or their use; like the fire in the bush, it is a flame which enlightens, without consuming. But imposture often overdoes her part, by destroying the reason, which she pretends to exalt; and the events foretold do not obey her vain predictions.

So it has ever been, and so it must be; for prescience is the peculiar prerogative of Jehovah. The things of God knoweth no one^t; he is God, and there is none like him, declaring the end from the beginning^u; and the word which he sendeth by his servants the prophets, he himself confirmeth in its season, so that age after age strengthens their testimony, and bears witness to the truth.

Let us now proceed to the case of miracles; on which, though less connected with our general plan, the particular subject of the present lecture makes a few words necessary.

It cannot be doubted, that He, who created man, can, in a supernatural manner, reveal his will to him; of which revelation the person thus honoured may be as fully

^t 1 Cor. ii. 11. *scilicet*.

^u Is. xlvi. 9, 10.

convinced,

convinced, as he is of his own reason or existence. Conscious, beyond a possibility of doubting, that certain ideas are his own; he may be equally assured, that certain other ideas are not his own, but communicated to him. His private conviction, however, is no demonstration to those around him; and they may reasonably demand, in an affair of such moment, some other evidence, besides his own assertion. Miracles, in some cases perhaps the only proof, are, at all times, a direct and cogent proof. The teacher whom we see perform the works of GOD, we readily believe to speak His words; and acknowledge the divine wisdom, where we behold the divine power.

Nor need we hesitate to give our assent, because we are not able, in every instance, to fix the boundaries of human capacity; much less to determine the sphere of spiritual agency. Some miracles there are, which, from the things themselves, and others which, from the manner and circumstances of the case, we may safely pronounce to be the works of Omnipotence. When the maimed are made whole, and the dead restored; or when the lame and diseased are healed in a moment; we may truly say, with the Jewish

H

ruler,

ruler, No man could do such things as these, unless God were with him *.

Yet we do not affirm, that every true miracle is, according to our way of speaking and of judging, an equal display of supernatural power. Our blessed Saviour had manifested his glory by many mighty deeds, when he said to the Jews, "The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth; and he will shew him Greater works than these, that ye may marvel^y." The disciples, as it is testified, believed on Jesus, when they had beheld the beginning of his miracles^z; but their faith increased, as they saw these wonders daily repeated. It was confirmed when disease forsook his prey, and still more when death gave back his prisoners.

This foundation being laid, we may, without endangering the cause which we defend, allow, that some works, above the ordinary reach of man, have at times been performed by those who came not with authority from heaven. But then we may be assured, both from natural reason, and

* John iii. 2.

^y Ibid. v. 20. comp. i. 51.

^z Ibid. ii. 11.

from past experience, that the just and faithful Governor of the world will not suffer us to be led by strong delusion into dangerous error, if we do not first abandon the love of the truth. For it should not be forgotten, that these lying wonders never were exhibited, unless when there was a true prophet present to confound the deceivers, or a written test to try their pretensions.

The magicians could smite, but they could not heal; their rods became serpents, but the rod of Aaron swallowed them up. The plagues were upon Them, as well as the Egyptians; they could not stand before Moses and Aaron; and were enforced to acknowledge the finger of God.

In the days of the Messiah, when the legion of unclean spirits, as we read in the Gospels^a, entered into the herd of swine, the effect which ensued might be considered, perhaps, as bearing some similitude of a miracle; but it was suffered to take place, for far other purposes, than to countenance iniquity, or to ratify error. By this

^a Matt. viii. 28. &c. Mar. v. 1. Luke viii. 26.

single instance, our blessed Redeemer was pleased to shew the restless malevolence, but limited power, of those wicked spirits; their eagerness to assail the brute creation, when restrained from devouring nobler prey; yet their inability to injure the meanest of God's creatures, without the sufferance of Him, who controuls all moral as well as natural agents, and upholds all things with his holy arm.

Indeed, it seems not to have been without the particular providence of God, that the delusions of evil spirits, and arts of wicked men, were, at the beginning of the gospel, suffered to abound. Our Lord himself has informed us, that some infirmities and diseases then happened to this end, that "the works of God might be made manifest"^b in the miraculous cure. We may suppose the same reason to hold in the present case. The adversary of mankind had great wrath, because he knew his time was short. But his rage tended only to his own destruction; and the truth of the gospel, which prevailed over all the power of the enemy, became more conspicuous, than if it had had no dangers to encounter, nor foes to cope with; but

^b John ix. 3. comp. xi. 4.

had every where been received, with open arms, and a credulous faith.

Laſtly, however, be it remembered, that whether oracles are delivered, or wonders wrought, on whatever ground is challenged the awful character of the meſſenger of GOD; the internal evidence muſt always ſupport external demonſtration. He, who gave us reaſon for our guide, condeſcends to ſpeak to us as endued with reaſon; darkened, indeed, and depraved, like our other faculties, yet ſtill retaining principles, whereby to judge of propoſitions that are offered to us, and capable of diſtinguiſhing truth from falſehood.

An implicit faith is what religion diſdains: we are invited, nay commanded, to examine the credibility of what is propoſed to us. “Why even of yourſelves judge ye not what is right^c?” “Try the ſpirits whether they are of GOD^d.” “Prove all things; hold faſt that which is good^e.”

We know there is a GOD, and that he is holy, juſt, and true. Whatever therefore

^c Luke xii. 57. Comp. Matt. xvi. 3.

^d 1 John iv. 1.

^e 1 Theſſ. v. 21.

comes from Him, must be worthy of him ; not only consistent in all its parts, but, where former revelations have been made, agreeing with them likewise, adopting their ideas, unfolding their mysteries, carrying on the same design, tending to the same end, the glory of GOD, and the instruction, improvement, and welfare of man.

Here, then, we have a test, for the confutation of error, and illustration of the truth; a criterion, to which the holy prophets appeal with fearless integrity, and to which all those, who usurp the name, must submit their pretensions. Does their doctrine bear the stamp and impress of heaven ? Is it pure and spiritual, just and good ? suitable to the nature and exigences of man, conformable to the adorable attributes of GOD, and agreeing with antecedent declarations of his will ?

In the passage before quoted ^f from Moses, the Israelites were commanded, not to hearken to that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, even though the sign or wonder, given by him, came to pass ; if he taught them to go

^f See p. 103.

after other gods, and serve them. In the New Testament, St. Paul says, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed ^ε." Thus does holy scripture forewarn us on this subject; and, for our greater security, supposes cases, which it probably was foreseen never should happen. It cannot perhaps be shewn from the Jewish history, that any teacher of idolatry ever wrought among them a real miracle; but most certainly, as St. Paul seems to intimate, as soon might it be proved, that an angel from heaven, as that one of the apostles, preached a gospel different from the rest. But granting, for a moment, that either of these cases had been realised in fact, that a wonder had been performed by a servant of Baal, or another gospel taught by an apostle; still God is true, and the author of truth; the doctrine therefore, which opposes his will already made known by a well attested revelation, or directly contradicts those principles which are implanted in man, is indubitably false, and the teacher a liar ^h.

^ε Gal. i. 8.

^h Irenæus adv. Hæres. L. IV. c. xiv. quotes the following declaration of Justin Martyr: *αὐτῶ τῶ κυρίῳ εἰδ' ἂν ἐπιστῆν,*

Before this tribunal, none of the pretenders to divine inspiration, that ever stood up to delude mankind, can maintain their cause; much less can those, with whom we now are concerned, the impostors who appeared among the Jews, just before the final overthrow of the state; of whose audacious claims, besides that the exploits, which they promised to exhibit, never were performed, this alone was a sufficient confutation; that their designs, as Josephus testifies, were more impious, their attempts more pernicious to the welfare of their country, than the outrage of those, who, in the midst of the city, and in open day, murdered their brethren; and profaned the festivals, and polluted the temple, with the blood of assassinationⁱ. That which tended to destroy peace upon earth, most assuredly did not come down from heaven.

Groundless, however, as the pretensions of these deceivers really were, there is nevertheless one reflexion, which their appear-

αλλον θεον καταγγελλοντι παρα τον δημιουργον. It is also preserved by Eusebius, H. E. L. IV. c. xviii.

ⁱ B. J. L. II. c. xiii. §. 4.

ance, together with other the peculiar circumstances of that age, seems to justify, with which I shall conclude; namely, that with regard to the evidences of truth, as well as in other views, God is no respecter of persons. It is not meant, that the proofs of revelation are, in every age, altogether the same, in kind and degree. This is not necessary, nor, perhaps, morally possible. With different men they will have different weight; and in proportion as they are viewed by a mind of larger powers and with greater attention, the more complete and satisfactory will be the general conviction. But, at the same time, the force of the proofs themselves seems to vary less than some have imagined.

“I bless myself, and am thankful,” said an excellent, but sometimes fanciful, author of the last century, “that I lived not in the days of miracles;—then had my faith been thrust upon me; nor should I enjoy that greater blessing, pronounced to all that believe and saw not^k.” But he seems not to have surveyed, with sufficient attention, the features of those times; or not to have rated,

^k Rel. Medici, §. 9.

fo highly as he ought, the proofs afforded to later ages.

The faith of a Christian, as it is this day, fo was it always, a rational affent. At the outfet of the gospel, miracles were wrought; without which, undoubtedly, it never could have made any progrefs in the world. There were fuccefsful impoftors, there were deep-rooted prejudices, and every motive of a temporal nature, which can influence man, combined to oppofe it; and thefe difficulties could not have been furmounted, but by the cleareft, moft convincing, and, as it were, fenfible demonftration.

Such was the cafe of the primitive church, and the earlieft converts. We, their fuccefsors in later generations, are not only freed, by the bleffing of providence, from the hardfhips and perils, wherewith they were preffed; but enjoy, moreover, many advantages to them unknown. The difcourfes which they heard, and the miracles which they faw, are recorded for our inftruction, in a well attested book; which, by means of modern inventions, is accefsible to all; and we have alfo the additional and increafing light of prophecy. It may therefore be regarded

garded as a most certain truth, that in those, who resist such accumulated proofs, the evidence of no former age would have wrought conviction. They would not have been persuaded, had they beheld, with their own eyes, one rise from the dead¹.

¹ See Luke xvi. 31.



S E R M O N I V .

M A T T. XXIV. 8.

All these are the beginning of sorrows.

THE Jewish polity is sometimes represented as having been of such a peculiar nature, so different, in its form, from all other governments which the world ever saw; that neither maxims of civil prudence, nor rules of private conduct, applicable to the members of any other state, can be drawn from the history of this extraordinary people. Temporal rewards and temporal punishments being the avowed and immediate sanctions of the law of Moses; and the execution of these laws being directed by a constant and particular providence; the public measures of the nation, and the actions of individuals, assumed, it is said, from the genius of the constitution, a certain colour
and

and character, of which history affords not a similar instance, and from which all conclusions, if applied to other men, are fallacious and vain.

If we allow, as we may, that the Jews of old were, in many respects, so circumstanced, as no other nation ever was, or can be; we may deny the inference deduced from that diversity. It ought, on this occasion, to be well remembered, that although the people, collectively considered, were prosperous and happy, when they obeyed the Lord, and oppressed with calamity, when they rebelled against him; yet, with regard to individuals, such an exact discrimination did by no means take place. The prosperity of the wicked was a subject, which perplexed more than one of God's holy prophets^a; and it was observed by Solomon, that no man knew "either love or hatred, by all that was before them^b."

Civil societies, which, as such, are creatures of this world only, are ever under God's especial providence. The nature of man likewise is the same in all ages; the same lusts and passions, which occasioned wars and bloodshed in ancient generations, kindle them

^a Jer. xii. 1. Pf. lxxiii. 16.

^b Eccles. ix. 1.

now; and that fear of God, which inspired love and harmony in the days that are past, will, wherever it is cherished, produce the like fruits.

The events, which befell the Lord's chosen people, happened to them for examples; and were written for the admonition, not only of them, but of the ends of the world^c. If, in the sacred account of these great events, we are led, as it were by the hand of inspiration, to the real source of success, or of misery; and if no signal blessing, no heavy calamity, comes upon Israel, which was not fore-
 shewn^d; these wonderful circumstances cannot, surely, make the history either less interesting, or less instructive. If our faith is confirmed, while our knowledge is extended, we shall, without doubt, by the blessing of heaven, become better men, and better citizens.

Let us go on, therefore, with the subject, which we have undertaken: and if that part of it, with which we now are concerned, shall be little more than an historical detail, and that too of facts which are well known; it will not however be forgotten, I trust,

^c 1 Cor. x. 11.

^d Πάν, είτε αγαθόν είτε φάυλον γίνεται παρ' ἡμῶν, ἥτις τὴν ἐκείνων [πρῶφητων] ἀποβαίνει πρῶφητεῖαν. Α. J. L. x. c. ii. §. 2.

that they are the judgements of God ; from a survey of which in the mirrour of past ages, as well as from beholding them abroad in the earth, we shall, if we are wise, learn righteousness^e.

The words of the text have a general reference to various signs, mentioned in the foregoing verses, as so many preludes to the approaching dissolution of the Jewish economy. The appearance of false prophets, which was one of those signs, we have already considered. The other particulars claim our present attention ; and it will be most convenient, to state them in a different order, from that which is observed in the Gospels.

St. Matthew says, “ There shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places^f.” To this account, which in St. Mark is nearly the same, St. Luke adds, in the parallel passage, “ fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven^g.” The three evangelists agree in placing these signs in the same part of their narrative, at the close of the events preceding the war ; the reason of which arrangement perhaps might be, that some of the circumstances, here foretold, were not to receive their full

^e Isaiah xxvi. 9.

^f Matt. xxiv. 7.

^g L. xxi. 11.
accom-

accomplishment, till Jerusalem was shut up, and surrounded by the Romans. They were therefore introduced, where, from their situation, they might seem to have respect to the days of the war, as well as to those before it began. In this latter view, as marks of impending woe, we are now to consider them; and some of them happened several years before the actual commencement of troubles.

To the completion of part of this prediction the Acts of the Apostles bear witness; where we read, that the famine, foretold by Agabus, came to pass in the days of Claudius Cesar^h. If this famine was not, as many imagine, confined to Judea, the chief scene of the prophecies under consideration; there, at least, it appears to have been most severely felt: and as we are informed by St. Paul, that the converts from Gentilism, in various countries, sent on this occasion liberal contributions, for the relief of the brethren among the Jewsⁱ; so we learn from Josephus, that an eastern queen and the king her son, proselytes to Judaism, with generous alacrity and princely munificence,

^h Act. xi. 28.

ⁱ Rom. xv. 25. &c.

laboured to alleviate, in the same time of need, the distress of those whose religion they had lately espoused^k. In the same emperor's reign there were also other famines, which afflicted Italy^l and Greece^m.

Of pestilence, in these times, except at Romeⁿ and at Ephesus^o, I find no distinct memorial. It is the usual attendant of famine; and might perhaps visit Jerusalem, during the famine just mentioned; when,

^k Izates and Helena. *Jos. A. J. L. XX. c. ii. §. 6.* Their bones were afterwards deposited in the sepulchral pyramids which the queen had caused to be erected near Jerusalem. *Jos. Ibid. c. iii. §. 3. p. 886.* Pausanias (*L. VIII. c. xvi.*) celebrates the tomb of Helena, which he says remained at Jerusalem, though the city was rased to its foundations by the Romans. Eusebius (*H. E. L. II. c. xii.*) informs us that the pyramids were to be seen in his time.

^l In the II. and XI. of Claudius. Usher ad A. C. 42. He and others place the famine of Judea in the IV. of Claudius, A. C. 44.

^m IX. of Claudius, Euseb. in Chron.

ⁿ Suetonius says (*Nero, c. 39.*) 30,000 died of this pestilence in one autumn. Orosius has transcribed the passage, *L. VII. c. vii.*

^o Philostrat. in *Vit. Apoll. L. IV. c. iv. x.* This was probably in the reign of Claudius. Tacitus (*Ann. L. XII. c. 50.*) mentions something of this sort as happening, the XIth year of the same emperor, in the army of Vologeses, in consequence of a severe winter and scarcity of provisions; and Josephus says, there was a pestilence or mortality (*φθόρα*) among the Jews at Babylon in the time of Caligula. *A. J. L. XVIII. c. x. §. 8.*

notwith-

notwithstanding the charitable donations from abroad, multitudes perished for want of sustenance. In the siege at least, if not before, these two calamities created such dismay, and made such havoc, that the bare recital would appall the heart, that never had melted at human misery. But the beginning of sorrows, not the extremity of woe, is the object of our present inquiry.

The earthquakes, which are next foretold by our Lord, happened as they are described, “in divers places;” at Miletus and at Rome^p, in Campania^q and in Crete^r, in Macedonia and Achaia^s, at Laodicea^t Hie-

^p V. of Nero, Euseb. in Chron. There was also an earthquake at Apamea in the time of Claudius. Tacit. Ann. XII. 58.

^q IX. of Nero, Tacit. Annal. L. XV. c. 22. Seneca (Nat. Quæst. L. VI. c. i.) places it in the Xth.

^r Philostrat. in Vit. Apollon. L. IV. c. xxxiv. For that at Miletus, vide ib. Ep. Apollon. lxviii. The earthquakes which Grotius mentions (and Whitby from him) at Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, and Samos, on the authority of Philostratus, if he alludes to L. IV. c. vi. where the same places are mentioned and in the same order, either happened according to the note there (ed. Olearii) in the time of Aurelius, or possibly in the reign of Trajan, when Orosius says (L. VII. c. xii.) four cities in Asia and three in Galatia were overturned.

^s Seneca Nat. Quæst. L. VI. c. i. the year before that in Campania.

^t VII. of Nero, Tacit. Annal. L. XIV. c. xxvii. Eusebius, who adds the two other cities (and so Orosius L. VII. c. vii.) places it in the Xth of Nero.

ropolis and Colosse; in all which places the calamity might be noted both by Jews and Christians residing there. In Judea itself, when the war was begun, but before the city was besieged by Titus, in one fearful and tempestuous night, furious winds, impetuous rain, frequent lightning, and tremendous thunder, conspiring from above with the dreadful noise of the tottering earth, presented, to the Jews within and the Idumeans without the walls of Jerusalem, such a scene of horror, as was scarcely ever seen by guilty mortals; and though the infatuated people misinterpreted this, as they did all the other signs of wrath, it was evident, says Josephus, that the system of the world was shaken for man's destruction, and that it portended no mean event^u.

Indeed, so wonderful were the signs and prodigies, which preceded the capture, that they are mentioned by Josephus, when he proposes, in his exordium, the general subject of his history^x; and, in the course of his narrative, he assigns an entire chapter to the enumeration of them^y. A star like a sword, he informs us, stood over the city;

^u B. J. L. IV. c. iv. §. 5, 6.

^x Proœm. §. 11.

^y L. VII. c. xii. ed. Rufin. in Hudson, L. VI. c. v. §. 3. &c.

and a comet blazed a whole year. Before the revolt, when the people were assembled to celebrate the passover, such a light shone round the altar and the temple, that, for the space of half an hour, the night was like day. At the same feast an heifer, when led to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb; and the eastern gate of the temple, which was of solid brass, and was with difficulty shut every evening by twenty men, and secured with strong bolts, was seen about midnight opened of its own accord; of which when the guards had informed the captain of the temple, they were scarcely, with his assistance, able to shut it. Not many days after this, before the setting of the sun, chariots and armed troops were seen in the clouds, over the whole land, investing the cities.

At the feast of Pentecost, the priests going by night, according to custom, into the inner temple to perform their sacred offices, perceived, at their entrance, a motion and a noise; and then heard a voice, as of a multitude, saying, Let us depart hence.

Four years before the war, the city enjoying peace and plenty, a rustic named Jesus, at the feast of tabernacles, on a sudden exclaimed,

“A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds; a voice against Jerufalem and the temple, a voice against bridegrooms and brides, a voice against all the people.” This was his cry, in the streets of the city, by day and by night; and when chastised for uttering such words of omen, he never once varied the subject of his lamentations. To those who buffeted him, and to those who relieved him, he gave the same mournful answer, Woe to Jerufalem. This was his practice, especially at the feasts, unwearied and unintimidated, for seven years and five months; when, as he was going round the walls, with his usual tone of Woe to the city, to the people, and the temple, and adding last of all, Woe to myself, a stone from an engine ended at one stroke his sorrows and his life.

These are the presages, recorded by Josephus^z; which I see no reason to disbelieve

^z He mentions also another prodigy (τερας. B. J. L. V. c. ix. §. 4.) that Siloa and the fountains without the city, before the coming of Titus, failed, so that water was sold by measure; but that they flowed so copiously on the approach of the enemy, as not only to serve their army and their cattle, but likewise to water the gardens. The same, he says, happened before the king of Babylon took the city. Dion on the contrary says (L. LXVI. e Theodos.) the Romans were
much

or dispute. Those, who are persuaded of the inspiration of holy writ, may assent at least to the general account, from our blessed Saviour's prediction of fearful sights, and great signs from heaven. If there are any, who are inclined to give more credit to the witness of men, than to the testimony of scripture; they may learn, from the completion of what was foretold, to think with due reverence of the oracles of truth.

Josephus informs us, that the people, as if destitute both of sight and understanding, disregarded or misconstrued the warnings of heaven; but that they doubted the facts, he gives no intimation. On the contrary, of the certainty of these prodigies, which, he says, plainly foreshewed the future desolation, he appears to be most fully satisfied; and he probably related nothing of this kind which he had not either himself beheld, or received on the authority of eye-witnesses. He observes also, with great truth, that the calamities which ensued were worthy of the signs.

much distressed for want of water, but that the besieged were plentifully supplied by means of subterraneous canals brought into the city from a great distance. Possibly this might be spoken of some later period of the siege; if not, where the two accounts vary, the testimony of Josephus, who was on the spot at the time, should doubtless be preferred.

Of this doubtless we may be assured, that in committing to writing these marvellous appearances, it was as much his design to illustrate the prophecies of the New Testament, as it was the intention of Caiaphas to foretel that Jesus should die for the nation^a. They both were, in this respect, involuntary instruments in the hands of providence; and as the high priest uttered, but without being conscious of it, a truth on which depends the salvation of the world; so the historian recorded the fulfilling of predictions, which he was not acquainted with, or did not believe. It may be added, that Tacitus^b, who never was accused of being over-credulous in affairs of this nature, has likewise mentioned most of the prodigies recited above.

Such then were the previous indications of vengeance; let us next view the rise of the tribulations themselves.

“Ye shall hear,” says our Lord, “of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet^c.”

^a John xi. 49. &c.

^b Hist. L. V. c. 13.

^c Matt. xxiv. 6.

If it were necessary to apply these words to events totally different from those alluded to in the following verse, we might understand them of wars and commotions in parts of the empire remote from Judea; which engaged the attention of the Romans, and were one of the causes that incited the Jews to make a revolt^d. But it is better perhaps, with Grotius, to refer the passage to the Jewish affairs in various countries at this period.

In the reign of Caligula, the Greeks and Syrians who inhabited Seleucia, and lived in perpetual feuds and animosities, conspiring together for the purposes of slaughter, killed of the Jews above fifty thousand^e. About the same time they were likewise miserably harassed in Egypt; the Roman governors, and the emperor himself, conniving at, and even encouraging, every outrage done to this despised and insulted people^f. A positive command was also issued by the emperor, to erect his statue in the temple at Jerusalem^g;

^d Vide Procem. B. J. §. 2.

^e A. J. L. XVIII. c. x. §. 9. Other calamities, which befell them in Babylonia, are related in the same chapter.

^f Ibid. c. ix. §. 1. Philo de Leg. ad Caium, Vol. II. p. 562. &c. ed. Mangey.

^g A. J. L. XVIII. c. ix. §. 2. &c.

and though the execution of the order, at the earnest intreaty of the Jewish nation, was for a while delayed, and finally prevented by the emperor's death; yet the circumstances of the attempt were such as might well alarm them. If they did not voluntarily comply with the idolatrous injunction, which it was their duty to oppose; the president of Syria, to whom the business was entrusted, was advancing towards Judea, and had reached the confines, with power sufficient to enforce obedience: and, in the eye of the Jews, every thing wore the appearance of immediate war.

The Christians, in the mean time, while the heavens grew black, and the tempest was coming on, possessing in patience their own souls, and fervently praying for, and labouring to effect, the conversion of their brethren; were taught, by that sure word of prophecy which they saw gradually unfolding, to expect other events, before the storm burst, and poured forth its fury on the devoted land. They themselves had had their share, an early and a large share, in afflictions and persecutions; for so it was foretold them: "Before all these;" before the troubles, whereof we have been speaking, were to come upon the Jews, "they shall lay their hands on you, and

and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake^h." Accordingly the Jews were not only their first, but their most bitter and implacable enemies. They scourged them in their synagogues, and arraigned them in their councils; they imprisoned and stoned them. Their malice pursued them even to foreign citiesⁱ. They stirred up the Gentiles to insult and oppose them; and through Their means it was chiefly, that they were brought before governors of provinces, before kings and emperors. If in exquisiteness of pain and variety of punishment, their cruelty did not equal the barbarity of a Nero; it was wider in its range, and longer in duration.

But, under all this pressure, the hope of the faithful was firm and steadfast; "for as the sufferings of Christ abounded in them, so their consolation also abounded by Christ^k." They were supported and comforted by that blessed Spirit, whose gracious assistance, pur-

^h Luke xxi. 12.

ⁱ Justin Martyr says the Jews of Jerusalem sent out men into all countries calumniating Christianity as an impious heresy: *λεγοντες αιρεσιν αθρειον Χριστιανων πεφασθαι*. ap. Euf. H. E. L. IV. c. xviii. And see Lardner's J. and H. Test. Vol. I. c. ii.

^k 2 Cor. i. 5.

chased for us by the Son of God, is ever proportioned to human exigence. They rejoiced in the testimony of their own conscience; which assured them, that they suffered in the cause of truth, and for the glory of God. They knew moreover, that a day of redemption to them was approaching; but that the calamities of the unbelieving and unmerciful Jews, though at present not small, were still to increase. For our Lord had added, in describing their sorrows, “nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom¹.”

These words appear to be very justly explained by the commentators, not of the hostilities of one nation of men against another, but of divisions and insurrections within the states themselves; and those states such as consisted, entirely or in part, of Jews. Indeed, the phrase of “rising against” seems more properly to indicate civil commotions, than a regular war; and “a house against a house,” which occurs in St. Luke^m, and is a mode of speech perfectly similar to those before us, denotes what is expressed, in the other Gospels, by The division of a house

¹ Matt. xxiv. 7.

^m xi. 17. compared with Mar. iii. 25. Matt. xii. 25.

against itself. According to this interpretation therefore, thus authoris'd, let us observe the accomplishment of our Lord's prediction.

The Samaritans, the ancient enemies of the Jews, fell upon the Galileans, as they were passing through their country to one of the feasts; and the slaughter of this onset, not great in itself, brought on worse havoc and a train of evilsⁿ.

At Cefarea there were dissensions between the Jews and the Syrians; which did not totally cease, till at last there were slain of the former more than twenty thousand in one day^o.

In short, (for it were endless to recount all the particulars) so grievous were the tumults, and so remarkably were the words of our blessed Saviour verified, that every city, throughout all Syria, was divided, Josephus says, into two armies; in most places the Jews combined against the aliens, but in some they assailed their brethren the Jews. The only security for either party was to be the aggressor; the days were spent in slaugh-

ⁿ A. J. L. XX. c. v. and B. J. L. II. c. xii. §. 3.

^o A. J. L. XX. c. vii. §. 7. 9. B. J. L. II. c. xviii. §. 1.

ter, and the nights in fear. The cities were filled with unburied corpses of men and of women, of hoary age and of helpless infants. One wretch, of more hardened guilt than his fellows, murdered his parents, his wife, and his children; and then, that his exploit might be the more conspicuous, standing on their bodies, he plunged the yet reeking sword in his own bowels ^P.

Still however Judea, the chief in iniquity, was the chief also in suffering. Bands of robbers for more than twenty years ravaged the country, plundering the inhabitants and burning the towns. Many of the same lawless tribes, going to the feasts armed with daggers, stabbed some out of hatred and others for hire, within the walls of the city and in the temple itself, without punishment and without horror ^P.

Those, in the mean time, who should have been promoters of peace, as well as patterns of holiness, were the fomenters of discord. The high priests, whose rapacity and avarice were not less than their other vices, robbed and oppressed their inferior brethren, so that

^P B. J. L. II. c. xviii. §. 4.

^q A. J. L. XX. c. vii. §. 5, 10. B. J. L. II. c. xiii. §. 2.

many of them died of absolute want^r. Yet, with the same views of plunder, they were by no means unanimous among themselves; the disposal of the high priesthood was made the occasion of mutiny, and they had other broils.

Indeed, of the corruption of these men we need no greater proof, than what the case of St. Paul affords; when they authorised a desperate band of conspirators to take away the life of one, against whom they could not make good a single accusation. But let them alone, let them fill up their guilt, for their day is coming; and he who countenanced an unjust conspiracy against the apostle, shall himself, by the righteous judgement of heaven, be slain in a conspiracy raised by his own son^s.

^r A. J. L. XX. c. vii. §. 8. c. viii. §. 2. 4.

^s B. J. L. II. c. xvii. §. 9. Manahem, son of Judas of Galilee, was now at the head of this sedition; but it was begun (Ibid. §. 2.) by Ananias's son Eleazar, captain of the temple, who persuaded the officiating priests to receive no gift or sacrifice from a stranger. And this, Josephus says, was the source of the war; for they rejected the emperor's sacrifice for the Romans. Manahem, upon his success, growing insolent, Eleazar's party, who before were his friends, rose upon him in the temple and slew him. As to Ananias, in the reign of Claudius, before Felix was procurator, he was sent in chains to Rome, in consequence of a dispute between the Samaritans and Jews. Through the interest of Agrippa,
who

By the same righteous judgement of Him who makes even the wicked execute his purposes, it seems to have been ordered, that those who were sent in these days from Rome, to preside in Judea, were more fit to have been leaders to a herd of banditti, than civil magistrates, to administer with justice the affairs of a nation.

The orator Tertullus complimented Felix, as the author of peace^t; and he did, indeed,

who was then at Rome, the Jews had a fair hearing, and the emperor gave judgement in their favour (A. J. L. XX. c. v. §. 2, 3.) Hereupon we may suppose, though Josephus does not particularly mention it, Ananias returned to Jerusalem, and presided afterwards at the trial of St. Paul, whether in the capacity of high priest or not, it seems not material to determine. In these days of confusion, when there was a new high priest every year or oftener, the title was continued to those who had once held the office, as Ananias certainly had (A. J. L. XX. c. iv. §. 2.) and perhaps given to some who never had that honour. (See A. J. L. XX. c. vii. §. 8. c. viii. §. 2. 4.) Josephus says expressly (Ibid. c. viii. §. 2.) speaking of a time subsequent to St. Paul's trial, "*The high priest Ananias* daily increased in reputation and honour and the good will of the citizens; for he used means [and those as the sequel there shews the most unjust and oppressive] to get money, and daily *conciliated* Albinus and *the high priest* with gifts;" to connive, no doubt, at his iniquitous practices. This note was the more necessary, because Whitby on Acts xxiii. 3. speaks as if Ananias was deposed and sent bound to Rome *after* St. Paul's imprisonment, whereas it was in fact *as stated above*, several years *before*.

^t Acts xxiv. 2.

when he came into the province, suppress the robbers, who had for a long time infested it. But alas! what availed this specious beginning, when soon after, by one complicated act of iniquity and ingratitude, he made assassins of those, who before were but robbers? The high priest then in power, by his interest at Rome, had been instrumental to the appointment of Felix; and, on the merit of this service, he presumed to recommend to him an equitable and salutary administration. But the pride of the Roman could brook no advice from his benefactor and friend. He therefore suborned certain men among the robbers to dispatch the obnoxious high priest; and this bloody deed being suffered to go unpunished, the assassins increased daily in audacity, and in numbers^u.

And here, if for a moment we might be indulged in a digression, we might well ask, What was it that, under such a governor, saved Paul from destruction? for He likewise preached to Felix on the subject of justice, and on certain other topics by no means pleasing to a guilty conscience. What then, it may be asked, protected the prisoner, when,

^u A. J. L. XX. c. vii. §. 5. B. J. L. II. c. xiii. §. 2, 3.

in a similar case, the high priest perished? It is true, St. Paul was a Roman; but this plea would probably, before such a judge*, be little regarded. A successor of Felix chastised and even crucified men who were not only Romans, but of equestrian dignity†. It is not likely therefore, that the governor would for this reason have spared Paul; especially as his death would have pleased the Jews, whose good will, when it was for his interest, he was solicitous enough to conciliate. But he was restrained, in this instance, from gratifying their wishes, by a higher cause, though to him unknown.

When the apostle was first imprisoned, “the Lord,” even Jesus, in whom he be-

* Felix—Judææ impositus, et cuncta malefacta sibi impune ratus, tanta potentia subnixo. Tacit. Ann. L. xii. c. 54. It is said (Acts xxii. 29.) that the chief captain was afraid upon finding that Paul was a Roman; and so he had reason to be; for He was amenable for his conduct to the governor, who very possibly would have punished in another the offence, which he himself would have committed without remorse. But the authority of the governor in his province was absolute; and the death of Paul would not have been, in the eyes of the Jews, a grievance for which they would have sought redress from the president of Syria, whose usual residence was at Antioch (A. J. L. XVII. c. v. §. 7) nor would it have been added to the charges which were afterwards exhibited against Felix at Rome. See A. J. L. XX. c. vii. §. 9.

† E. J. I. II. c. xiv. §. 9.

lieved, “ stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul ; for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome^z.” Shielded by this promise he escaped the conspiracy, which the Jews formed against him ; and by this was he safe, when in the hands of the governor ; and Felix, though he trembled, durst not smite.

The same holy promise was the apostle’s protection under the successor of Felix ; of whom indeed, as he lived not long, no memorable act of injustice is recorded, except his not releasing him whom Felix, with wanton but interested cruelty, left in chains.

But if Festus was remiss in the business of depredation, his successor Albinus made ample amends. He plundered individuals, and oppressed the state. Those, who were imprisoned for crimes, he set free for hire ; and they alone were confined, who were not able to bribe. He licensed for reward the leaders of sedition ; and omitted, in a word, no species of fraud^a.

Yet even this monster, if compared with his successor, would appear, says the histo-

^z Acts xxiii. 11.

^a B. J. L. II. c. xiv. §. 1.

rian, a pattern of virtue^b. Diffimulation in Albinus, in Florus was triumph; and if the one robbed families, the other spoiled cities. He resembled an executioner armed to inflict punishment, rather than a magistrate sent to govern. Where he should have blushed, he was most impudent; and where he should have had compassion, he was most cruel. Under him therefore the war broke out; and that with some circumstances so remarkable, that they must not here be passed over in silence.

By the law of Moses, the Jews were commanded to worship the Lord, in one place, at three public feasts; and as the country would, at those times, be in a defenceless state, to the precept was added a particular promise, that no man should desire their land, when they went up to appear before the Lord^c. But now they had forsaken the rock of their salvation, and the things, which aforetime were their glory and their strength, proved unto them an occasion of falling.

^b B. J. L. II. c. xiv. §. 2. *απεδειξεν — αγαθωτατον κατα συγκρισιν.*

^c Exod. xxxiv. 24. with xxiii. 27. xv. 15, 16. Deut. xi. 25. and see Josh. ii. 9. v. 1. 2 Chron. xiv. 14. but particularly 2 Chron. xvii. 10. Comp. also Gen. xxxv. 5. Act. xviii. 10.

From the time of the Maccabees, the rigour of the sabbath had been relaxed; and it was deemed lawful for them to defend themselves on that day against an aggressor^d. But the arm of flesh was a feeble support, when it did not fight under the shield of the Almighty; and to shew more visibly, that He had rejected them, the days consecrated to his honour and service, which of old were days of peace and of joy, were now marked, above others, with calamity and woe. The war itself was begun on the sabbath, and in consequence of an insult offered to their law, by an opprobrious sacrifice at the entrance of a synagogue in Cesarea^e. On another sabbath they massacred in Jerusalein a Roman garrison, that surrendered on terms to them^f; and while they were imbruing their hands in the blood of unarmed men, who attempted no defence, and used no supplication, but only called out on their violated oaths; the self same day, and the very same hour, as it were, says Josephus, by a particular judgement of providence, more than twenty thousand Jews were killed at Cesarea^g.

^d 1 Maccab. ii. 41. A. J. L. XII. c. vi. §. 2. L. XIV. c. iv. §. 2.

^e B. J. L. II. c. xiv. §. 4, 5.

^f B. J. L. II. c. xvii. §. 10.

^g Ibid. c. xviii. §. 1.

At the feast of tabernacles, Cestius marched with an army against Jerusalem; and appearing before the city on the sabbath day, the Jews rushed out against him with mad but unavailing fury^h. Not long before the war, twenty thousand Jews perished at the passover, in a tumult in the templeⁱ: and at the same feast, in a subsequent year, the city was finally invested by Titus^k.

If these things are but the beginning of sorrows, O thou afflicted daughter of Zion, how shalt thou endure the extremity of pangs, and the bitterness of death? Cast off by thy God, forsaken by thy friends, thy mighty men armed against each other, who shall support, or who shall comfort thee in the day of indignation? In vain wilt thou spread forth thine hands to the Lord, in vain wilt thou offer to him thousands of rams; he hath no delight in thy burnt offerings, his soul abhorreth thy solemn feasts, in them he multiplieth affliction upon thee.

Jerusalem hath grievously sinned, she hath sinned against the most High; she hath slain

^h B. J. L. II. c. xix. §. 1, 2.

ⁱ A. J. L. XX. c. iv. §. 3. B. J. I. II. c. xii. §. i.

^k B. J. L. V. c. iii. §. 1. L. VI. c. ix. §. 3.

within her walls his servants the prophets; she hath shed the blood of the just and holy One. Yet now, even now, if it be not too late, turn unto the Lord, and to his Anointed, “with all thy heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning¹.” For “the lion is come up from his thicket, the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate, and thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant^m.” For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

¹ Joel ii. 12.

^m Jer. iv. 7.



S E R M O N V.

L U K E XXI. 20, 21.

When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains.

THE disputes among Christians are by some writers set forth as the ground of an objection against Christianity; and from the mistakes or prejudices, the weakness or wickedness, of particular men, is inferred the uncertainty of the general system. The argument, if it proved any thing, would prove a great deal too much. If whatever has been doubted was in consequence to be thought doubtful, there is no proposition, however evident, that must not be questioned; no truth, however certain, that must not be abandoned.

abandoned. But it does not follow, because many are corrupt, that therefore there is no such thing as virtue upon earth; nor because various opinions are entertained among men, even on points of the greatest moment, that it is therefore impossible or difficult to discover the truth, if search is made by a teachable mind, with fervent prayer to the Father of lights, and with sincere resolution obediently to follow whatever shall appear to be his will.

Inconclusive however as this argument is, if we allow its utmost scope; it does not seem to stand on so broad a basis as some have represented. A great part, perhaps the greater part, of that diversity of opinion which prevails in the world, respects such points as cannot afford the shadow of an objection either against the truth, or the perspicuity, of the gospel; such as neither tend to corrupt good manners, nor to overturn the common faith.

There are not, it may be, two individuals, that on any subject think perfectly alike. Agreeing in the more important articles of belief, and in the sense of those clear and unequivocal passages, which establish these articles; some nevertheless will not
deem

deem them deducible from texts wherein others see or fancy they see them. Or if not in these, at least in other matters, not immediately connected with faith or with practice, from difference of capacity or of acquired talents, from habits of reflexion or means of information, there ever will arise a variety of sentiments; yet, if other causes conspire not, without violating charity, or dividing the church.

This apology will be indulged me, I trust, in its fullest extent, if in the course of these lectures some points have not been viewed in that light, in which they before have appeared to men of exemplary piety and consummate erudition. As it is not my aim to say any thing merely because it has been said by others; so neither is it my wish to differ from them, where I can satisfy myself with the reasons, which they have advanced. But if, investigating the subject with an earnest desire of information, and with that portion of judgement which God has given me; I have, in one or two instances, been obliged to recede from the more usual interpretation, and to admit another, of the justness of which, though reluctantly adopted, I have been at last fully convinced; I must, for I cannot in
the

the presence of GOD and of this audience dissemble, I must maintain with firmness what I offer with respect.

To the ensuing discourse this introduction would perhaps be superfluous, were it not that a very learned and respectable author has lately proposed an application of the texts now to be considered, which seems less satisfactory than the usual hypothesis^a. But if I have been pardoned in opposing some notions commonly espoused, I shall be excused, I hope, in contending, at present, for what the generality have heretofore received.

The evangelist St. Luke, in many parts of his Gospel, but especially in that with which we are more immediately concerned, seems, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so to have formed his narrative, that it should serve as a comment to the other two. With regard to the text now under notice, it is evident, I think, as well from the place where it is introduced, as from the admonition of flight in the latter part of it, that it must correspond with the passages in St. Matthew and

* See Bishop Newcome's Observations on our Lord's Conduct as a Divine Instructor, and on the excellence of his Moral Character, p. 219. &c.

St. Mark, where the same mode of escape is inculcated; and that consequently the compassing of Jerusalem with armies, in St. Luke, must respect the same time, and denote the same thing, with the abomination of desolation in the two former Gospels^b.

Whether the language of St. Luke on this occasion is his own, giving the sense, but not the exact words, of our Saviour's prediction; or whether our Lord himself might, in this as in many other instances, first express himself in the figurative words of St. Matthew and St. Mark, and then in the clearer terms of St. Luke; it would, even if it were possible to determine, be needless to inquire. Either supposition equally suits our present purpose, if the case is as above stated, and as it appears to be, that the intention of the three passages is one and the same.

“The abomination of desolation,” in St. Matthew and St. Mark, is quoted from the celebrated prophecy of Daniel^c, which has often employed the labour and ingenuity of learned men. If besides this expression, there is any other part of the passage in the pro-

^b See Matt. xxiv. 15, 16. Mar. xiii. 14.

^c ix. 27.
phet,

phet, with which we are at present concerned; it is that which in the common translation is rendered "the overspreading." The word is well known to mean literally "a wing;" and, by an easy metaphor, to be used for the border or extremity of any thing; and whether we here take it for the wing of an army, whose standards should carry abominable ensigns, and come to make Jerusalem desolate; or whether we understand it of the border of the city or temple, so as to point out the place, where the hostile forces should appear; either interpretation is sufficient for our purpose. Should the latter be preferred, it will be the same in effect with what St. Matthew calls "standing in the holy place," and St. Mark "where it ought not."

But how, it may be asked, does this appear? We may answer, that from the omission of the article in St. Matthew, and from St. Mark's variation of the phrase, it is evident that it ought not to be translated "*the* holy place," as if it related to the temple; but "on a holy place," or "on holy ground;" where, on account of a degree of sanctity for some reason belonging to it, the abomination of desolation, whatever were meant by it, ought not to be seen.

The

The Jews attributed to different places different degrees of relative holiness^d. The several cities of Judea were deemed holy; for in them were synagogues, wherein were deposited copies of the law, which on every sabbath was read to the people. Jerusalem possessed a higher degree of holiness; for the temple itself, where the more solemn acts of religion were performed, was within her walls; and the Lord Jehovah had there given his blessings, and manifested his glory. An army therefore encompassing Jerusalem, which St. Matthew himself has not scrupled to call “the holy city^e,” might, according to Jewish notions, very properly be said to stand on holy ground, or where it ought not.

But what is the import of those other terms, “the abomination of desolation?” Every image of a man, we are told by good authority^f, was in the eyes of the Jews an abomination; but every idolatrous image they held in still greater detestation and abhorrence.

When Herod had built a theatre in Jerusalem, and adorned it with the trophies of

^d See Kidder on the Messias, P. I. p. 115.

^e Matt. iv. 5. xxvii. 53.

^f Chryf. Serm. II. adv. Jud. T. VI. p. 333. l. 19.

nations vanquished by the Romans, the Jews were not a little enraged at his conduct; because under the spoils they supposed were concealed images of men^s. When Pilate was governor he sent by night some troops into the city, bearing on their standards the emperor's image; which was no sooner perceived than the Jews in a body repaired to the governor, far more willing to undergo death, than to suffer this public violation of their laws^h.

An army therefore, carrying these offensive and idolatrous ensigns, for we are expressly told that the Romans sacrificed to their standardsⁱ, might justly be styled an Abomination; and for the other part of the description, That, it is evident, marks the design of these hostile appearances, to lay the city and the temple desolate.

From what has been said, we seem fully authorised to understand the prediction of an army with ensigns of idolatry or abomina-

^s A. J. L. XV. c. viii. §. 2.

^h Ibid. L. XVIII. c. iv. §. 1.

ⁱ They did so upon taking possession of the Jewish temple. See B. J. L. VI. c. vi. §. 1. *Religio tota castrensis signa veneratur, signa jurat, signa omnibus diis præponit. Tertull. Apol. c. xvi.*

tion furrounding Jerufalem ; and fince this was given as a fignal for the Chriftians to prepare for flight, it muft doubtlefs relate to the firft time, when fuch an army fhould be feen before the walls, after the prophecy itfelf was delivered ; for otherwife no reafon can be affigned, why it fhould be applied to the fecond attack, rather than the third ; or to the third, rather than any fubfequent invafion. We have only to inquire therefore when the city was firft encompassed by pagan forces ; and our inquiry needs not be long.

In the year of our Lord fixty fix, the firft of the war, Cestius Gallus the prefident of Syria, with an army of Roman and auxiliary troops, marched againft Jerufalem, as was before mentioned^k, at the feaft of tabernacles. Having encamped at Scopus, within feven furlongs of the city, he waited three days, in hopes that the Jews, feeing danger fo near, would propofe terms. None being offered, on the fourth day he advanced to the walls ; and the feditious in confternation retired into the inner city and the temple. Cestius now mafter of the lower city burnt fome parts of it, and pitched his camp oppofite the royal palace ; and had not fome of

^k Serm. IV. p. 150. See B. J. L. II. c. xix.

the officers, bribed by Florus to protract the troubles, diverted him from his purpose, he might on that very day, by a vigorous assault, have taken the city, and put an end to the war.

In the mean time, many of the more honourable and peaceable inhabitants invited Cestius to the gates ; which they would have opened to him as their common benefactor ; but the seditious perceived and prevented the attempt. The Romans therefore assailed the walls on all sides¹ for five days. On the next day Cestius, with some chosen men, attacked the northern part of the temple ; the tortoise was formed, the wall was undermined, and they were ready to set fire to the gate of the temple. At this critical moment, when the factious were seized with dismay, when many privately escaped from the city, as if it would instantly be taken, and when the smallest perseverance would really have carried it ; at this anxious moment, the commander on a sudden called off

¹ παντοθεν επιχειρησαι κ. τ. λ. This seems sufficient to justify the words of St. Luke in the text : κυκλωμένη υπό στρατοπέδων. When he speaks of the final siege, he uses the more expressive compound : περικυκλωσασαι σι. See Luke xix. 43.

his men, and most unexpectedly withdrew from the city^m.

The historian, in his reflections on this strange retreat, attributes it to the anger of heaven; which would not suffer the calamities of that race of sinners to come to so speedy a termination. This might be a part, but it was only a part, of the divine counsels respecting this remarkable event. It was designed not merely to shew the severity, but likewise to manifest the goodness of God.

Our blessed Saviour had promised his faithful followers, that notwithstanding they should be persecuted even to death, both by Jews and Gentiles, at other times; yet, in the general desolation of Judea, not a hair of their head should perish. Of this holy band some perhaps as inhabitants, and others come up to celebrate the feast, abode still in Jerufalem; a bulwark stronger than the valour of her sons, or the pride of her battlements wherein she confided. Against those, as against another Sodom, the destroying angel had received commission to smite; but as yet, peradventure, there remained fifty righ-

^m παραλογωπιται απο της πολεις ανεζηξεν, are the expressive words of Josephus.

teous within the city, and he could do nothing till they were escaped to their Zoar. The Roman therefore, having experienced no loss, met with no disappointment, at the moment when victory seemed to beckon him on, felt a sudden panic he knew not why, and founded a retreat. That night he lodged unmolested in the camp; but in his march through the country, the following days, the greater part of his army was cut off by his pursuers; that They, by this success, might be led on to their ruin, and that the Christians might retire with more security.

After this defeat of Cestius, Josephus says, “many of the noble Jews swam away from the city, as from a ship that was sinkingⁿ.” If this description does not include the Christians, most of whom, it is probable, were of the lower ranks in life; yet at least their retreat, being at a time when many others fled, would be less observable, and more safe.

In the dealings of God with his peculiar people in various ages there is often a remarkable similarity of circumstances. The day, once made memorable by some public blessing, is again celebrated with songs of

ⁿ B. J. L. II. c. xx. §. 1.

joy for a fresh deliverance ; and the day, that has brought on distress and misery, increases the calamities, and heightens the sorrows, of a succeeding generation. Josephus has observed, that Jerusalem was taken on the same day by Herod and by Pompey^o ; and that event, which we now are considering, seems to have had its parallel in a former period of the Jewish history.

In the ninth year of Zedekiah, the king of Babylon came up, he and all his host, and pitched against Jerusalem^p. Forts were built against it, and the siege was made strong ; when tidings were brought, that Pharaoh, king of Egypt, was advancing with an army to assist his ally, the king of Judah. The Chaldeans therefore, with a view to encounter their enemies separately, raised the siege, and departed from Jerusalem.

We have here an event with the usual concomitants of human operations, probable motives and corresponding measures. But the providence of God by the free and uncontrouled actions of men is wont to execute his purposes of wrath and of mercy ; and

^o A. J. L. XIV. c. xvi. §. 4.

^p See 2 Kings xxv. 1. Jer. xxxvii. 5.

those purposes, though commonly unknown to the immediate instruments employed to effect them, the sacred records for the most part declare. In the present instance, the prophet Jeremiah, who beheld the event, points out the deliverance, which it was intended to accomplish.

By the express command of Jehovah, before the Chaldeans broke up the siege, if not before its commencement, he set before the people “the way of life and the way of death. He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey³.”

When the enemy was gone, he again exhorted both the prince and the people not to be deceived by this temporary respite⁴. He assured them, that the war should soon be renewed, and the city inevitably burnt with fire. To encourage them by example, as well as by words, to save themselves from impending destruction, he then “went forth

³ Jer. xxi. 8, 9.

⁴ Ibid. xxxvii. 6. &c.

out of Jerufalem—to separate himfelf thence in the midft of the people.”

The prophet indeed, whom the Lord had made as “an iron pillar and brafen walls^s,” to fustain immoveably the fierceft fhock of perfecution, was on this occafion feifed by the guard, and detained in the city; for the mercy of heaven had other meffages ftill to deliver by his hands to the ftiff-necked people. But it is probable, that others, perfons perhaps of lefs note and eminence, were permitted to efcape, or might retire unobferved, at this favourable moment; and were in the number of thofe, whom Nebuchadrezzar fuffered to dwell quietly in the land, or carried away in peace to Babylon^t.

Thus in the beginning of the Chaldean war, as well as the Roman, the fiege of the city was for a while intermitted, in a manner equally fudden and furprifing. Both events hardened alike the rebellious and the obftinate; and both were defigned by a gracious providence for the prefervation of thofe, whether many or few, that feared God and obeyed his word.

^s Jer. i. 18.

^t See Jer. lii. 15, 16. xxxix. 9, 10.

² Kings xxv. 11, 12.

But in the retreat of the Christians there are other particulars which demand our attention.

We are informed by Eusebius^u, that the disciples in Jerufalem, in consequence of a revelation made to the faithful there before the war, removed to Pella, a city of Perea. This passage seems in its obvious sense; as well as from the corresponding but more explicit testimony of Epiphanius^x, not to allude to the written monitions in the Gospels, but to a subsequent warning from heaven; and I see no ground to question the credibility of the fact, or condemn it as a superfluous expence of miracles.

Our blessed Saviour prophesied of famines to happen in that age; yet, for the benefit of the church, Agabus was afterwards moved by the Holy Ghost to resume the subject, and foretel a famine which was then nigh at

^u H. E. L. III. c. v. It is not certain whether the words "before the war" belong to the warning or to the retreat. I have here given what seemed the more probable meaning of the passage; but below, that I might not interpret what was doubtful in favour of my hypothesis, I have taken the other construction.

^x De Mensur. et Ponder. c. xiv. Confer Hær., XXIX. c. vii. XXX. c. ii.

hand^y. In the case before us, it may be presumed, that the signs described by our Lord would mark, by their accomplishment, the time of escape with sufficient exactness. But when the day approached, it might seem good to providence to point out, what before was not known, the individual city to which they should withdraw; and as it lay on the other side of Jordan, and had lately been plundered by the Jews^z, it was less likely to be again attacked by them, or by the Romans.

If it should be questioned whether the date which Eusebius assigns to this event agrees with the account given above, that the retreat was not before the commencement of the war, but upon the flight of Cestius, at the close of the first campaign; this at least will probably be granted, that it is less inconsistent with the present hypothesis, than with that which delays the escape of the Christians near four years longer, till the final siege was begun by Titus.

But the truth is, the historian, giving here a summary view of the principal transactions respecting the church, from our

^y Acts xi. 28.

^z B. J. L. II. c. xviii. §. 1.

Lord's ascension to the utter extermination of the unbelieving Jews ; is anxious rather to record facts, than to determine dates. It is evident, moreover, that the admonitions in the Gospels belong to a time posterior to the first beginning of troubles. For the believers in Christ are forewarned to flee, not when destruction hovered round the coast, but when danger had reached the walls of Jerusalem.

But let us leave the historian, and return to the written word of God. The disciples were commanded by their blessed Master to pray that their flight might not be in the winter, nor on the sabbath^a. Both petitions were, no doubt, preferred by the faithful ; and both, we might presume, were graciously heard. But let us not conjecture, if we can prove.

With respect to the time of the retreat, whether it was at the beginning of the siege by Titus, or when Cestius retired from the walls, the inclemency of winter would not, in either case, preclude their escape, or retard their speed. This however may be observed, that if the season alluded to was the spring,

^a Matt. xxiv. 20. Mar. xiii. 18.

the usual time when kings go out to battle, there may seem to have been less necessity of commanding them to pray that their flight might not be at a period so unlikely in itself and so far off. But if, on the other hand, the standard of abomination was to be erected in autumn, there was reason to implore heaven, that it might not continue till winter came on; and the sudden departure of Cestius in November, when the season was yet mild and favourable for travelling, will appear, in this view, peculiarly striking.

Of the other petition the ground is less certain. The reason of it is by some deduced from the unbelieving Jews; but by others, and with greater probability, from the Christians themselves.

Whether the ceremonial law was totally and immediately superseded by the death of Christ, or whether its obligation continued while the temple stood, it may not here be necessary to inquire. It were sufficient perhaps for our present purpose, if the Mosaic institutions were still considered as binding the conscience, from that principle to which the first Christian converts, with so much honour to themselves and advantage to the church,

church, invariably adhered; to do nothing whereby unbelievers might be hardened, or weak brethren misled. But there seem to be, in this instance, plain intimations of a higher obligation.

“ I testify,” says St. Paul, “ to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law ^b.” If this were the case with those who should afterwards receive circumcision, surely it held equally with respect to such as had already received it. Hence, no doubt, sprung that earnest desire which we see in this apostle, to celebrate, when the indispensable duty of disseminating the gospel in distant parts would allow him to celebrate, the Jewish festivals at Jerusalem. Hence too his zeal, in conjunction with the apostles there, to shew that the reports, spread abroad concerning him, were not true; but that he walked orderly, and kept the law ^c.

The believing Jews were not perhaps bound to circumcise their children, after the new law had been authoritatively promulged on the day of Pentecost; but certainly not after the destruction of the temple. The church of the circumcision therefore would gradually

^b Gal. v. 3.

^c See Acts xx. 16. xxi. 24.

ceafe. But fo long as there were converts from Judaifm, and fuch there were later than the Jewish war, fo long and upon them the law of Mofes feems to have been in force; and confequently, as a part of it, the precept which forbade them to travel beyond a limited and fhort journey on the fabbath.

If befides this, their feparating themfelves and retiring in a body or in numbers, on the day when others were at reft, would be more obfervable; and might induce their enemies to follow after and fall upon them in their march, when the fabbath was ended; thefe were additional and powerful motives to them to offer up the petition, which the Lord had taught them, with frequency and fervor. The fuccefs of it let us now obferve.

The unexpected retreat of Cestius above mentioned was on tuesday evening the fourth of November. But the efcape of the Chrif- tians, if it were now poffible, which may reasonably be queftioned, was however an enterprife which prudence would not direct them to attempt. The enemy were ftill within fight of the walls; and what route they would purfue, if it was their intention totally to abandon the place, was as yet uncertain.

certain. They might make for Perea, the nearest country that was friendly to the Romans; towards which the Christians, when the way should be opened for them, were to shape their course. But while there were two contending armies near, and each hostile to them, it was not safe to move, and perhaps scarcely possible.

During the assault upon the city, the people were not suffered to approach the gates or ascend the walls, the custody of which was in the hands of the predominant faction^d. And when the siege was broken up, and free egress given to their own armed multitude; it is probable they let none go forth of the opposite party, who, by informing the Roman commander of the general disposition of the people for peace, might encourage him to return and renew the attack.

The Christians therefore, restrained by force or guided by prudence, remained still in Jerusalem; holding themselves however in readiness to depart, whenever the favour-

^d Those who fled (*διεδιδρασκον*) when they thought the city would be taken, were of this party, as appears from what follows: *τον δε δημον συνεβαινεν επι τριστοις θαρρειν, και καθο παρεικοιεν δι πονηροι, προσησαν αυτοι ταις πυλαις ανοιξαντες.* B. J. L. II. c. xix. §. 6.

able moment should offer, which every thing now led them to expect, and which accordingly soon arrived.

The Jews, having slain of the enemy above five thousand, returned to Jerusalem with songs of triumph towards the end of the following sabbath. The circumstance of the day, it is not unlikely, increased their joy, and was blindly regarded as a sure prognostic of future success. The apprehension of danger being now removed, the gates, it may be supposed, would be thrown open, and a free passage afforded to all; and if the words of our Lord, where he speaks of the escape of the Christians by night^e, are to be understood literally, this may well seem to be the very night; when the seditious, intoxicated with joy, were congratulating one another upon the victory which they had gained, and ceased to molest the quiet inhabitants.

Of this we may be certain, that as the signal had been given, and the way was now clear, they would lose no time to consult for their safety; and that good providence, which, as we have already shewn, ordered that their

^e See Luke xvii. 34:

flight should not be in winter, granted likewise, as we here see, that it should not be on the sabbath; but that they should have an entire week before them to complete their journey.

At the same time and perhaps together with the Christians who fled from Jerusalem, those who were in the country likewise escaped^f; and none of them returned, when they had once quitted the place, either to take any thing thence, or to celebrate there succeeding festivals. Some probably were variously dispersed in the neighbouring provinces; but Pella, as we have before observed, was their chief rendezvous.

This city, which was distant from Jerusalem about an hundred miles, was under the jurisdiction of king Agrippa^g; who was not only an ally of the Romans, but was also, as has been remarked on the occasion, “providentially disposed to countenance the Chris-

^f “Let them which are in the midst of it [Jerusalem] depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.” Luke xxi. 21. See also xvii. 31. Matt. xxiv. 17, 18. Mar. xiii. 15, 16.

^g All Perea was given him by Caligula. A. J. L. XVIII. c. viii. §. 2. p. 820. l. 19. with §. 1.

tians ^h." Here therefore they enjoyed an undisturbed and peaceful habitationⁱ, while Judea was a theatre of slaughter and confusion, and the metropolis itself, torn by intestine discord and tumults, before the Romans finally besieged it, exhibited the scene of a ruining city^k.

Such then was the deliverance vouchsafed from heaven to the faithful in Judea, and to the church of Jerusalem, the mother of the universal Christian world. Let us pause for a moment to reflect on the blessing.

^h Dr. Townson on the Gosp. p. 124.

ⁱ The province of Perea was not totally exempt from the horrors of war; but it is probable that the city of Pella was. Josephus having mentioned the reduction of Gadara the metropolis, and one or two other places, says, Thus all Perea either voluntarily submitted or was taken by force. B. J. L. IV. c. vii. §. 5. As he does not mention Pella on this occasion, though it was one of the chief cities (B. J. L. III. c. iii. §. 5.) it is highly probable that it was in the number of those which making no resistance experienced no hostilities. Perhaps the inhabitants were few of them Jews. See A. J. L. XIII. c. xv. §. 4.

^k Το κατὰ σῆμα τῆς πόλεως πρὶν ἐπιλθεῖν Ῥωμαῖς ἢ ὄιον ἀπολαβμεικῆς. B. J. L. II. c. xxii. §. 1. Josephus also says, speaking of an early stage of the war, that when the city was harassed at once by war, by tyranny, and sedition, the first of these seemed the least evil of the three; and he adds, that [even then] there was no part of Judea, which did not participate the ruin (συναπωχλυτο) of the principal city. B. J. L. IV. c. vii. §. 1, 2.

In all the severer judgements of God upon the sons of men, it has been his gracious pleasure to give intimations beforehand of the impending stroke, that the righteous might be saved, and the wicked might repent. When the flood was to be brought upon the world of the ungodly, the longsuffering of God waited an hundred and twenty years; and Noah, in the mean time, was stirred up to be a preacher of righteousness, as well as commanded to build an ark for the preservation of himself and his family¹.

To Niniveh, though in a remote and pagan land, the prophet Jonah was sent to warn the inhabitants that at the end of forty days the city should be destroyed. But the Ninivites repented, and the doom was reversed.

Before every captivity, every chastisement, that befell the chosen but rebellious houses of Israel and of Judah, the most pressing calls to repentance, the most tremendous denunciations of wrath, were held forth by those holy and undaunted men, whom the Lord raised up and sent among them; and when

¹ See 1 Pet. iii. 20. 2 Pet. ii. 5. Gen. vi. 3.

Judah for her sins was finally to be cut off from being a nation, forewarnings of vengeance were given without ceasing, by the Son of God himself and his apostles and servants, for the space of forty years. They were exhorted, were intreated with tears of love, to flee for protection to God their Redeemer.

By day and by night, in the temple and the synagogues and from house to house, the prophecies which demonstrated Jesus to be the Messiah were expounded to them; miracles were publicly wrought in his name; their sin in crucifying him was brought home to their consciences; for which, and for their other iniquities, the extreme and inevitable ruin, which should come upon that very age of unbelievers, was foreshewn and described.

These predictions, moreover, were committed to writing, that they might be weighed and considered in the calmness of retirement, by those who were afraid or ashamed of listening to the public discourses of the leaders of a hated and persecuted sect. And lastly while the total overthrow of the state, together with the desolation of the city and temple, was foretold and lamented, the faithful were comforted with a promise of deliverance

from the midst of these troubles, and the manner of their escape was minutely prescribed and earnestly recommended.

In these extraordinary interpositions of heaven, as well as in the more usual course of providence, He who made man and knoweth what is in him, dealth with him as a frail, yet still as a rational and free creature. He setteth before him life and death; but as he doth not willingly inflict the one, so neither doth he forcibly obtrude the other.

When the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire, he had mercy upon Lot; and the angels, while he lingered, laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters. They brought them forth without the city, and put safety in their power; and said to him, "Escape for thy life, look not behind thee." Yet one of the party, small as it was, became a monument of disobedience to all future generations^m.

In the siege of the Chaldeans, and in the war of the Romans, deliverance was promised to those that were obedient; but no

^m See Gen. xix. 15. &c.

refcue was miraculouſly effected for thoſe who did not believe the declarations of heaven, or did not ſeiſe the opportunity of eſcape which providence afforded.

When Paul was imprifoned, the Lord ſaid unto him, “ Be of good cheer ; for as thou haſt teſtified of me in Jeruſalem, ſo muſt thou bear witneſs alſo at Romeⁿ.” When afterwards in the voyage they were toſſed with a tempeſt many days, and all hope of ſafety was gone ; he was again certified by an angel of God, that neither himſelf, nor any one of thoſe with him in the ſhip, ſhould periſh^o. Yet even this repeated aſſurance of heaven was not deſigned to ſet aſide the uſe of ordinary means and human prudence : “ As the ſhipmen were about to flee out of the ſhip,” leaving none on board who could navigate the veſſel, “ Paul ſaid to the centurion and the ſoldiers, Except theſe abide in the ſhip, Ye cannot be ſaved^p.”

Thou ſhalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Thou ſhalt not throw thyſelf headlong upon danger, when he hath not promiſed to keep thee from falling. Thou ſhalt not tarry in

ⁿ Acts xxiii. 11.

^o See Ibid. xxvii. 22.

^p Ibid. 30, 31.

the tents of the ungodly, when he hath commanded thee to flee away, lest the earth open her mouth and swallow thee up. Such calamities as it seemeth good to the just and merciful Disposer of all things to bring upon the world, he will, if we trust in him, direct us to escape, or enable us to bear. “ In famine he shall redeem thee from death; and in war from the power of the sword^a.” Under his wings thou shalt fear no evil, his faithfulness and truth shall be thy shield and buckler. “ For who is GOD, save the LORD? and who is a rock, save our GOD? The LORD liveth, and blessed be our rock; and exalted be the GOD of the rock of our salvation^b.”

^a Job v. 20.

^b 2 Sam. xxii. 32. 47.

S E R M O N VI.

L U K E XIX. 41, 42, 43, 44.

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

IT has often been observed, by those who have viewed with attention the affairs of the world, and the various revolutions in civil
M 4 life,

life, that when providence is pleased to humiliate or destroy a kingdom or people hardened in sin, a certain blindness or fatality seems to attend them in all that they do; which hinders them from seeing their true interest, and the means by which it may be secured. To those who look on from a distance, and to some few perhaps in the devoted state, the approach of danger and the way of escape may be clearly discernible; but the great body of the nation, and those to whose care its welfare is entrusted, perceive not their situation, till retreat is impossible and ruin inevitable; or else by the very measures adopted to avoid it, do but rush more precipitately into the jaws of death and the pit of destruction.

If this observation is well founded, and the page of history in various ages shews its truth; never, without doubt, since kingdoms have subsisted on the face of the earth, was it more deplorably and strikingly verified, than in the final subversion of the Jewish polity civil and religious. In the wonderful account, which the historian has faithfully and feelingly recorded, as, on the one hand, you discover at every step and turn, that the wrath of heaven is upon this people; so, on the

the other, you behold, with silent astonishment, the almost incredible infatuation which has seized upon all ranks, the ruler and the judge, the prudent and the ancient, the man of war and the honourable counsellor ; how insensible they are of their alarming situation, when all nature seems to be armed against them, and conspires with the enemy to involve their country in one common overthrow and general devastation.

But amazing and unparalleled as the case really is, it could not be otherwise ; for prophecy had foretold that so it should be. He who gave them laws and founded their state, set before them at once the blessings which they should reap, while they diligently walked in the commandments of their God ; and the curses which should follow them, when they did not hearken to him, nor obey his voice. “The Lord,” says he, “shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart^a.” And what Moses thus predicted, the Son of God confirmed ; and at his last and solemn approach to Jerusalem, testified publicly with tears of compassion, that the things of her peace were now hidden from her eyes.

^a Deut. xxviii. 28.

As a nation, their blindness was already begun, when they rejected the message of peace and salvation, which the Beloved of the Father brought down from heaven, and implored them to accept; and those who cast away from them the word of life and terms of reconciliation, which still by his messengers for almost forty years he held out unto them, no balm of Gilead, no discipline or remedy beneath the sun, could heal of their blindness. Experience and disappointment, which teach others wisdom, served only to heighten their pride, and augment their misery; and where one calamity ended, another began^b.

Their Messiah and King they nailed to the cross, lest the Romans should take away their place and nation^c: His death was the cause of their complicated sufferings and final destruction^d. The wonderful works, which the Son of God daily performed in their sight, they would not believe: by those who did no miracles, nor made good one of their

^b B. J. L. III. c. viii. §. 6.

^c John xi. 48.

^d Thus the prophecy was fulfilled: "I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them." Is. lxvi. 4.

boastful promises, they were repeatedly and fatally deluded.

If the sound of war was heard in their gates, and their enemies, in all lands, seemed resolved to extirpate the very name of Jews; still they flattered themselves with the brightest expectations; still they trusted, a king should rise among them, under whose victorious banner they should trample on the necks of all that hated them, and obtain a kingdom of boundless extent, and perpetual splendor.

When the solid earth and the troubled sky gave signs of woe; these portended confusion to their foes, and to themselves deliverance. When their festivals were marked with aggravated distress, as well as aggravated guilt; when the sword of the assassin murdered his brother, and the house of GOD was the scene of slaughter; they nevertheless were a holy people, the favourites of heaven, and the GOD of Israel would make bare his arm in their cause.

When the enemy, instead of seizing the victory which was within his grasp, on a sudden broke up from before their city, that the Lord's prisoners might come forth in safety, and the wicked even yet might have
space

space to repent; this was the interposition of providence in their favour, a certain prelude to future success, and they who had once fled, should for ever flee before them.

Thus did they grope, and thus did they stumble, when the light shone around them, in the morning of their calamities, which we have already surveyed; nor did they rouse from their slumber, nor once lift up their eyes to the hand that smote them, till the day declined, and their sun set upon them in the darkness and horror which we now are to contemplate, when we shall have considered one circumstance, that requires our previous attention.

It was foretold that the vengeance, great in the extreme, should be swift in execution. "Except those days should be shortened," said our Lord, "there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened".

That by the Elect here we are to understand the Christians, there can be no doubt; and as the word is not limited, in itself or

* Matt. xxiv. 22.

the context, it is not perhaps necessary to confine it to the believers residing in one land. The whole body of the faithful, in this as in other instances, after the blessed example of their Lord, prayed for their enemies; that if it were the gracious will of heaven, the judgements inflicted upon those who had killed the Prince of life, and were the most active and sanguinary among the persecutors of his church, might not however cut off the entire house of Israel; but that a remnant might survive the general overthrow; some of whom, taught by what they had beheld, and what they had suffered, might repent of their sins, and be converted and saved.

At the same time nevertheless we may reasonably suppose, that those who were themselves of the stock of Israel, would, above others, be frequent and fervent in supplications to heaven for their unbelieving kindred. And if the comfort and safety, and perhaps even the lives, of some of those Christians who had lately fled from Judea, but still were on the borders, depended, under providence, on the speedy termination of the Jewish troubles; these considerations of personal security might allowably blend themselves with those
which

which concern for their brethren suggested; might inflame the heart, and prompt the lips, which would not otherwise have been uninterested or silent.

To return to Jerufalem, and settle there, could be no object of desire, even to those who were natives of the place. To have gone thither, where not a tree, not a vestige of beauty, for twelve miles in circuit, was now to be seen; the city itself so totally demolished, that a late inhabitant could scarcely have known the place where it stood, save perhaps from the sight of three solitary towers, the silent monuments of former magnificence; to have visited the seat of their fathers' sepulchres, thus spoiled of its honours and laid level with the ground, could only have excited severe regret, and unavailing sorrow^f.

Besides we are informed, in regard to fact, that half a century afterwards, before the city was rebuilt by Adrian, and received a new name from him, there were only a few houses, and one small church, on the spot which was once the glory of Israel, and the praise of the earth^g.

^f B. J. L. VI. c. i. §. 1. c. ii. §. 7. L. VII. c. 1. §. 1.

^g Epiphan. de Ponder. et Mensur. c. xiv.

But

But if the Christian exiles did not go back, at least not in numbers, to Jerusalem itself, unless it were to view and weep over the ruins; they might however, when the war was ended, return and dwell in other parts of Judea, which had suffered less than the rebellious city. During their retirement likewise, though they were exempt from the horrors of war, their situation probably was such as, on many accounts, rendered the restoration of peace greatly desirable.

When Judea was the theatre of contending armies, provisions may be presumed to have been scanty on the confines^h. The ground must have been cultivated in fear; and the conveyance of supplies from a distance, at all times inconvenient, must then have been extremely insecure and hazardous; especially to those, who, as Jews, were obnoxious to the Romans, and, as Christians, were still more abhorred by the Jews.

Moreover had the Romans, by a prolongation of the war, been further exasperated,

^h The Roman army was supplied with necessaries from Syria and the adjacent provinces. B. J. L. V. c. xii. §. 4.

they

they might, in conclusion, have carried their victorious arms to exterminate those, whom, at Pella and elsewhere, they before had suffered to dwell in quiet. For though at present they appeared to be friends to the Romans, and studious of peace, this conduct might be attributed to the impulse of fear, rather than to principles of duty; and as their language, and habit, and exterior manners, marked them for Jews, suspicions might arise, that they would be prone to rebel, when no longer intimidated by superior force.

For these or for other reasons, which, if less obvious now, were apparent at the time; it might concern the welfare of the Christians themselves, that the flames, which desolated the country from which they had fled, but still were in sight of, should not be suffered to rage there long; lest they should extend to the mountains, and burn up their Zoar.

But to us at this day perhaps the reasons of the case are not such interesting objects of inquiry, as the fact itself. Was that, which was foretold, literally verified? It was indeed; and the circumstances are not a little remarkable.

The country of Judea, mountainous and rocky, though not large in extent, did not promise, even to the most experienced commander, an easy victory, or speedy triumph. Not long before the Roman war, a public robber, protected doubtless by the strength of his holds as well as the desperate valour of his associates, committed depredations with uncontrouled success for twenty years; and was taken at length only by stratagemⁱ.

But though nature had done much, she had not done all. The assistance therefore of art was called in, to complete what was imperfect, or correct what was wrong. In the reign of Claudius, Agrippa had projected, in defence of Jerusalem, walls of such strength and such altitude as might bid defiance to human force^k; and though he was not suffered to finish his designs, no means or opportunity was afterwards neglected, to put both the metropolis and the other cities in a posture to make a vigorous resistance.

Upon the defeat of Cestius, when the war was inevitable, the engines and weapons

ⁱ A. J. L. XX. c. vii. §. 5. comp. B. J. L. I. c. xvi. §. 4. And see Judges vi. 2. 1 Sam. xiii. 6.

^k A. J. L. XIX. c. vii. §. 2. Tacit. Hist. L. V. c. 12.

taken from him were carefully preserved¹; and others were provided. Commanders were appointed, and their respective departments allotted them^m. In Jerusalem the sage Ananus, though a friend to peace, prepared every article necessary or useful for carrying on war or sustaining a siege. And the prudent Josephus, who commanded in Galilee, not only fortified the towns and advantageous posts, but likewise raised an army of sixty thousand men, whom he laboured with indefatigable industry and skill to inure to military discipline and the use of arms.

These circumstances seemed to prognosticate an arduous enterprise, worthy of the fame and fortune of Vespasian, aided by the active and intrepid bravery of his son. Nor indeed was the success, though the exertions were great and the troops powerful, such at first as might be called rapid. Two campaigns were employed in reducing the remoter parts of the province; and hostilities in the east were during the third year suspended by commotions at Rome. To gain victories abroad, there was small incite-

¹ B. J. L. II. c. XIX. §. 9.

^m Ibid. c. xx. §. 2. &c. et c. xxii.

ment, when it was uncertain, whether the empire itself might not, in the mean time, be lost at homeⁿ.

But when Vespasian was invested with the imperial purple, and Rome solicited the return of Titus to share his honours; the war was carried to the walls of Jerusalem, and pushed with a vigour that is almost incredible.

The effects of famine, though sure, seemed tedious; and the splendor of a conquest, purchased at the expence of a long blockade, would be much diminished^o. Modes of assault therefore, which might give them immediate possession of their wishes, were forthwith planned and resolutely prosecuted. These however were rendered abortive, as well by the strength of the place itself, as the ferocious courage of those who defended it^p. But the spirit of Titus was not to be daunted. Holding a council of war, he recommended a work, the magnitude of which might excite our wonder, were not the dispatch, with which it was executed, far more astonishing. A wall in circumference almost five miles,

ⁿ B. J. L. IV. c. ix. §. 2. Tacit. Hist. L. V. c. 10.

^o B. J. L. V. c. xii. §. 1. Tacit. ut supra, c. xi.

^p B. J. L. V. c. vi. §. 2. &c.

entirely surrounding the city, and fortified with thirteen spacious garrisons, was begun and completed in three days ⁹.

Such were the operations on the part of the Romans to accelerate the capture. But the besieged themselves contributed much more effectually than the enemy without to hasten their destruction.

The patriotic Ananus would either by his vigilance have protracted the siege, or by his moderation and authority have made terms with the Romans: he therefore was slain ^r. The city, though crowded with inhabitants, was stored with corn and other provisions, which would have sufficed several years: these therefore were burnt by the seditious ^s. When other parts of the city were reduced, there still remained towers of impregnable strength: these therefore the tyrants abandoned ^t.

By these means the city, which in the time of Zedekiah had endured a close siege of more than twelve months, was taken by the Romans in less than five. Titus himself,

⁹ B. J. L. V. c. xii. §. 2.

^r Ibid. L. V. c. i. §. 4.

^s B. J. L. IV. c. v. §. 2.

^t Ibid. L. VI. c. viii. §. 4.

on surveying the scene of his past labours and future renown, acknowledged it was GOD who had delivered into his hands places invincible by human power or mans device^u. He assumed therefore no name from the country which he had vanquished; and though, in conjunction with his father, he accepted a triumph, he professed himself not worthy of the crown of victory which was offered him^x; declaring, That he had only been the instrument of divine vengeance.

Thus then did GOD, in confirmation of the promise made by his beloved Son, evidently shorten these days of wrath, that peace might revisit the habitation of his chosen, and that even that rebellious and stubborn generation might not be totally cut off from the earth, by mutual slaughter, by the extremity of famine, or the sword of the Romans.

But in order to illustrate other parts of the prophecy, it is necessary, for a moment, to cast our eyes back on the days of the siege; and though the spectacle there exhibited may

^u B. J. L. VI. c. ix. §. 1.

^x Philostrat. Vit. Apoll. L. VI. c. xxix. He probably did not entirely reject the honour. See B. J. L. VII. c. v. §. 2.

be painful to behold, it will not however be unprofitable, if from contemplating what the Jews *suffered*, we are careful to avoid the remotest resemblance of what they *did*.

Of all the calamities which the Almighty, in his righteous judgement, suffers to fall on human society, perhaps the most grievous is division and discord. Here therefore the sorrows of Judah, which were to exceed all other sorrows, first began; and this was also the latest cause of mourning.

In itself indeed the evil was not peculiar. The daughters of Jerusalem were not the first, neither have they been the last, who have had occasion to bewail the dire effects of civil dissension. In one respect however the case is perhaps without a parallel. In these days alone was the disease so malignant, that it could not be healed by a foreign sword and common danger. Had they all been peaceable, they all had been happy; had they been unanimous in revolt, they might have withstood their enemies. But their mutual animosities and unconquerable hatred doubled their plagues, and hastened their ruin.

When the Romans, by regular and successful war, were breaking down their fenced cities,

cities, and laying waste their land; the zealots and feditious plundered and slaughtered the aged and moderate, their dearest friends as well as secret foes, with such merciless fury, that to be captured by the enemy seemed to the sufferers the more desirable alternative^y.

Sated at length with ravaging the country, they fought in the capital a nobler prey. Jerusalem, accustomed of old, when at unity within herself, to receive into her bosom all her sons, to celebrate her feasts and partake her joy, still admitted every Jew without examination: for she hoped they came to relieve her distress, and to give no less than to receive protection. But instead of administering help or comfort, they resorted to her only to embitter her pangs, and insult her in death.

They styled themselves Zealots, as if they were actuated by a regard for religion; but they despised its sanctions, and trampled on its ordinances^z. They boasted that they were the benefactors and deliverers of their country^a; though they slew without remorse the noble and the brave, who in vain exhibited

^y B. J. L. IV. c. iii. §. 2, 3. ^z Ibid. §. 6-9. c. vi. §. 3.

^a Ibid. c. iii. §. 5.

the honourable scars received from the Romans, and supplicated in vain for the rites of burial^b.

As a protector against these monsters, Simon was in an evil hour admitted into the city; notwithstanding he had, in his march through the country, spread desolation wherever he came. His entrance, instead of producing peace, caused more general havoc and carnage^c.

When Titus was absent, the favourable moment for fomenting discord was eagerly seized; and the city now saw within her walls three separate and powerful factions, ranged under their proper leaders, contending daily with obstinate courage and mutual hatred, and unanimous only in destroying those who best deserved to live^d.

On the approach of the Romans, the seditious for a while were awed into harmony; and rushed out, with resistless fury, on the common foe^e. But the struggles within were soon renewed with unabated ardour; and fire was employed to make room for the

^b B. J. L. IV. c. vi. §. 1.

^c Ibid. c. ix. §. 7, 8. 10. &c.

^d Ibid. L. V. c. i. §. 1-5.

^e Ibid. c. ii. §. 4, 5.

sword^f.

sword^f. Captivity was a blessing devoutly to be wished for, if compared even with their present sufferings; but their cup of sorrow was not yet full, nor was sedition the sole ingredient.

The Roman commander, with a generous clemency, that inseparable attendant on true heroism, laboured incessantly and to the very last moment to preserve the place. With this view, he again and again intreated the tyrants to surrender and save their lives. With the same view also, after carrying the second wall, the siege was intermitted four days^g. To rouse their fears, as well as interest their hopes, prisoners to the number of five hundred or more were crucified daily before the walls; till space, Josephus says, was wanting for the crosses, and crosses for the captives^h.

But neither terror could alarm, nor pity soften, the heart of the tyrants harder than adamant. Terms of mercy were rejected with disdain, and threats of vengeance treated with contempt: "God was with them, and He would preserve the habitation of his

^f B. J. L. V. c. vi. §. 1.

^g Ibid. c. ix. §. 1.

^h Ibid. c. xi. §. 1.

glory¹."

gloryⁱ." Desertion to the Romans was guarded against with a more watchful eye, than the admission of the enemy; and even the shadow of a suspicion was a sufficient reason for instant death^k. If any eluded the vigilance of their keepers, and fled to the Romans; the defection, when discovered, was cruelly revenged on their helpless relations who remained behind^l.

Many however, under all these disadvantages, effected their escape; and being treated by Titus with the kindest humanity, and suffered to enjoy their religion and liberty, the numbers increased^m. But no means of safety was to be a blessing to this devoted people. Many who had fled, impelled by hunger, found in satiety a more speedy dissolution; and it being at last discovered, that they had swallowed their money, the day disclosed to the enraged Titus two thousand fugitives ript up by his army in one nightⁿ.

Such was the scene before Jerusalem. But the prospect is pleasing, if compared with the

ⁱ B. J. L. V. c. xi. §. 2.

^k Ibid. c. x. §. 1.

^l Ibid. c. xi. §. 1.

^m Ibid. §. 2. L. VI. c. ii. §. 2, 3.

ⁿ Ibid. L. V. c. xiii. §. 4, 5.

view within the walls. Violence and strife there went about; deceit and guile did not depart thence. There the pestilence walked in darkness, and there the famine destroyed at noon day.

At the feast of the passover, the same whereat lately they had crucified the Lord of glory, the Roman army came up against the city; and an innumerable multitude of Jews, from all quarters of the earth, were in consequence shut up, as within a prison°. First therefore the straitness of room proved pestilential; and the stores being in great part consumed by fire, the effects of hunger soon were apparent^p. There were many who parted with their whole substance for a single bushel of wheat, or of barley; and what was thus obtained was eaten in secret, and often unprepared. To the power of famine all the passions yielded, but shame was totally extinguished by it. “Women forced food from their husbands, children from their fathers, and even mothers from their infants: they snatched it out of their very mouths:

° B. J. L. VI. c. ix. §. 3, 4. So punctually was our Lord’s prediction fulfilled: “As a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.” Luke xxi. 35.

^p B. J. L. V. c. x. §. 2-4.

and while the sucking children were wafting away in their arms, they scrupled not to take from them the drops which fupported their lives¹.”

As the famine increafed, the audacity of the feditious, though they themfelves were not in want, increafed likewise. They burft into houfes in fearch of provifions; and where any thing was found, the family were beaten, as if they had denied it; if nothing was difcovered, they were handled more cruelly for the fupposed concealment. The moft horrid and atrocious tortures were inflicted, to extort the confeffion of one loaf of bread, or a handful of meal. They neither fpared fex, nor revered age, nor commiferated childhood; but dafhed the infants againft the ftones. Under cover of the night fome of the befieged ventured over the walls, towards the Roman camp, to gather wild herbs; and on their return, when they thought they had efaped the hands of the enemy, they were met by the feditious, and robbed of all their miserable booty. In vain did they intreat, even by the awful name of

¹ Ep. Newcome on our Lord's Conduft, &c. p. 223. Of this Writer's elegant tranflation of the paffages which he quotes from Jofephus I have in fome other instances on revifing the lectures availed myfelf. For the felection and arrangement of particulars I am anfwerable.

Jehovah, that they might be permitted to have part of what they had brought at the hazard of their life. It was a favour, if those who had plundered, did not murder them.

To these proceedings the tyrants gave sanction by their own example; and while their men spoiled the lower ranks, they themselves oppressed the rich and the noble. Those stript by Simon were sent to John; and those whom John had fleeced, Simon received. Thus they drank, as it were, to each other the blood of the people; and contending for superiority, were confederate in crimes.

When by the building of the wall before mentioned all egress was cut off, the famine gathered strength, and devoured whole families^r. The houses were filled with corpses of women and children; and the men of gray hairs lay in the streets. The young men, like spectres^s, wandered about in the public places, and fell where death overtook

^r B. J. L. V. c. xii. §. 3, 4.

^s ὡσπερ εἰδῶλα. Eusebius has the same allusion in describing the effects of a severe famine and pestilence in the time of the emperor Maximin: ὡσπερ εἰδῶλα νεκρὰ ὡδὲ καί κισσι ψυχόρρα-
ζοντες. H. E. L. IX. c. viii.

them. The sick were unable to bury their friends, and the healthy were deterred by the number of the dead, and fear for themselves. Many expired upon those whom they were interring; and many went voluntarily to die in the tomb.

In these calamities there was neither complaint nor lamentation heard; but the living beheld, with tearless eyes and a ghastly smile, those who found refuge in death before them. Silence reigned in the city by day, and death and terror alarmed the night.

The robbers however were the heaviest plague. They rifled the dead with unfeeling laughter; and in horrid sport tried the edge of their weapons both upon the deceased and those who were yet alive. But those who prayed to receive at their hands the fatal stroke, they scornfully left to pine away with hunger. In their last moments, seeing the seditious still in health, they fixed their eyes on the temple and expired.

At first, to remove the intolerable stench, the dead were interred at the public expence. When this could no longer be done, an easier mode of getting rid of them was devised; and

and in less than three months from the beginning of the siege, above a hundred thousand were thrown over the walls^t. The compassionate Roman sighed at the spectacle, and with uplifted hands called God to witness, that the deed was none of his.

Unutterable sufferings still ensued^u. The besieged were compelled to eat their belts, their shoes, and the skins of their shields. Withered grass was even sold; and things which before offended the sight, were now carefully sought for, and greedily devoured^x.

Nay, says the historian, I must record a fact, such as Greeks or barbarians never heard of. There was a woman, named Mary, of honourable birth, whom the robbers had daily plundered and harassed; but would neither in resentment of her provocations, nor compassion for her sufferings, when they deprived her of subsistence, deprive her of life. Hunger at last piercing her bones, in rage and despair she seized her son, an infant

^t B. J. L. V. c. xiii. §. 7. From the 14th of April to the 1st of July. There were cast out in the whole six hundred thousand.

^u Ibid. L. VI. c. iii. §. 3-5: ^x Ibid. L. V. c. xiii. §. 7.

at the breast, and “For what,” she cried, “in the midst of war, and famine, and sedition, should I preserve thee, my unhappy babe? With the Romans if there be safety, there is also servitude. This servitude the famine anticipates, and the seditious are fiercer than either. Come then, be thou food to me, a Fury to the seditious, and a tale in life, what alone is wanting to complete the sum of Jewish calamities.”

With these words, she slew her son, and having prepared him for food, she devoured half, and carefully laid up the remainder. The horrid repast was scarcely ended, when the vultures of sedition, lured by the smell, came and threatened death, if she concealed what she had provided. But of menaces there was no need; she produced what was left, boasting she had reserved it as an honourable portion for Them. The seditious, till now unacquainted with horror, were here alone seized with trembling and astonishment. But the mother exclaimed, “The child is my own, and the deed is mine. Eat, for I have eaten. Be not Ye more tender than a woman, more compassionate than a mother. But if ye reject the victim, I who have eaten half, will eat the remainder.”

This

This atrocious act^y was soon divulged in the Roman camp; and in some excited pity, but in more abhorrence; and now at last the commander, though still solicitous to save the temple, resolved however not to leave the city, wherein such things were perpetrated, in the fight of the sun.

To enumerate all the distresses, or all the crimes, of the Jews in this age, were both an impossible and superfluous task. We may conclude the matter with the testimony of Josephus, “That no city ever suffered such things, nor did there ever exist, since the world began, a generation of men more fruitful in wickedness^z. So that, continues he, had the Romans delayed to chastise the finners, I think the earth would have swallowed them up, the city would have been swept away by another flood, or else consumed, like a second Sodom, by fire from heaven^a.”

^y For the predictions respecting it, See Deut. xxviii. 53. Lev. xxvi. 29. Jer. xix. 7-9. Lam. ii. 20. iv. 10. A similar instance is recorded in the account of the siege of Samaria, 2 Kings vi. 28, 29. and perhaps the same happened also in the former siege of Jerusalem. Compare Ez. v. 10. with Baruch ii. 3.

^z B. J. L. V. c. x. §. 5. Conf. Procem. § 4.

^a Ibid. c. xiii. §. 6.

But it pleased God to employ, in this case, human agents, and not the elements, as the immediate instruments of his just vengeance; and the destined period was now at hand. On the tenth of August^b, the same day that the former temple was burnt by the Chaldeans, the temple was set on fire, without the knowledge of Titus, and against his will; and his utmost efforts to extinguish the flames were of no avail. The enthusiastic rage of the soldiers, though at other times they were checked in a moment, could not now be controuled by words or signs. The prevailing flames seemed as if they would consume not only the temple, but the very foundations of the mount whereon it stood^c; and the shouts of victory and wailings of sorrow, echoed back from the distant mountains, increased the horror and confusion of the scene^d.

The upper city still remained; but it did not long survive the temple. On the sab-

^b B. J. L. VI. c. iv. §. 5. &c.

^c The words are remarkable: *τον μεν γε τε ιερα λοφον εκ ριζων αν τις εδοξε βρακτιοθαι, παντοθεν τε πυρος κηταγεμοντα.* Compare Deut. xxxii. 22. Lam. iv. 11.

^d B. J. L. VI. c. v. §. 1.

bath day, the eighth of September, it was desolated in its turn with fire and sword^c. Of the almost infinite multitude of Jews not one in ten escaped destruction. The number of captives during the war was ninety seven thousand; but there perished in the siege alone eleven hundred thousand^f!

Who then art thou, among the kingdoms of the earth, that puttest thy confidence in the multitude of an host, in the strength of thy fortresses, or the abundance of thy treasures? Cast thine eyes upon the desolation of Judah, and learn humility and the fear of God. Where is now the vine of the Lord's planting, the branch which he made so strong for himself? It is burnt with fire, the hedge is broken down, the vineyard laid waste^g.

The hill of Sion was a fair place, the joy of the whole earth^h. Jerusalem was great among the nations, and princess among the provincesⁱ; she was a crown of glory in the

^c B. J. L. VI. c. viii. §. 5. Dion Cassius says Jerusalem was taken three times on the sabbath, by Pompey, by Sosius, and by Titus. Vide L. XXXVI. p. 37. XLIX. p. 405. LXVI. p. 748. ed. Leunclav.

^f B. J. L. VI. c. ix. §. 3.

^g Pf. lxxx.

^h Pf. xlvi. 2.

ⁱ Lam. i. 1.

hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of her GOD^k. But when she exalted herself, she fell; she fell, and there was none to help her. For she said, “ I dwell on high, my habitation is among the rocks^l; who shall bring me down, or make me afraid? The GOD of Israel is my strength and my safeguard; he will give me a king, who shall subdue my foes, and establish my walls in peace. My right hand shall wield a glorious sceptre, my dominion shall be wide as the earth, and its duration as the days of heaven.”

This was her folly, and she perished; for she was blind in the day of her visitation. She knew not the Prince of peace; the Messenger of the covenant she slew, and would not receive his ambassadors. Therefore there was no salvation; among all her sons, none could deliver her. Her men of war are faint, her virgins cry out for food; for the corn and the wine is consumed; the famine devoureth the widow and the orphan, the young and the old together. The heathen possess her strong holds, they enter into her sanctuary; her children are led captive into all lands, and she is overwhelmed with 'itterness and mourning.

^k Is. lxii. 3.

^l Obad. 3.

Yet rejoice not, O Rome, at the ruin of Jerusalem, nor insult her in her fall; lest trouble should come upon thee also, and thou grieve for thine own desolation. If thy sins do not equal the sins of Judah, thy punishment, though less than her's, may be greater than thou canst bear. If the Lord spared not his own people, take heed lest he also spare not thee^m.

For who art thou, that thou shouldst be delivered? Dost thou inherit a better kingdom? or dost thou possess a stronger borderⁿ? Let not the pride of thy heart deceive thee. Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, there is One that even thence can bring thee down^o. Think of Him, and be at peace, lest a nation come against thee from far, a great and a mighty nation; lest the north send forth her sons, who shall deluge thy plains with blood; who shall overthrow thy walls, and demolish thy palaces, thy magnificent temples and triumphal arches, and make immortal Rome a name in the earth. Happy are the people, that fear the Lord; yea blessed are the people, who have the LORD for their GOD^p!

^m Rom. xi. 21.ⁿ Am. vi. 2.^o Obad. 4.^p Pf. cxliv. 15.



S E R M O N V I I .

R O M. XI. 25, 26.

I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery (lest ye should be wise in your own conceits) that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved.

THE history of the Jews is, in every part, singular and astonishing. From their first designation as a peculiar people to the present hour they stand forth a conspicuous proof of God's special providence and constant direction of the affairs of men; a glorious example of the blessed fruits of faith and obedience to the will of Heaven, and a stupendous instance of the dreadful consequences,

quences, even in this life, of stubbornness and fin.

Their unparalleled sufferings in one age we have surveyed at large. We have seen their calamities commencing at the time and in the manner which our blessed Lord had foretold, and daily multiplying, till the sword of the Romans finished what their own dissensions began, and their heinous offences merited; till their land was laid waste, their beauty consumed, and the city of their solemnities burnt to the ground.

But although the exact completion of our Lord's prediction, in all the particulars of this amazing series of events, is abundantly sufficient to demonstrate the inspiration of those holy Gospels which contain this important prophecy, and to establish, in consequence, the truth of that religion which is therein taught; yet we cannot here conclude our meditations. Beholding, amidst the revolutions of empire and vicissitudes of fortune, this extraordinary people still subsisting, at the distance of more than seventeen centuries from the final desolation of their country, we cannot look upon them with indifference. Spread as it were on the surface of the ocean, but not blended with its waves,
scattered

scattered through the mass of mankind, but still preserved distinct, like the bodies which in the heart of the earth remain as tokens of an universal deluge, they shew that they once belonged to one common state; they shew that those scriptures must be divine, which foretel their dispersion and preservation; events that none but the Allwise could foresee, and none but the Almighty could bring to pass. We cannot therefore but inquire, whether those same scriptures, to the truth of which they are living though involuntary vouchers, have declared the future will of Heaven concerning them; what calamities are yet behind, or what blessings still in store for them.

To this interesting inquiry, that same prophecy of our Lord, which has been the subject of our late meditations, directs our present thoughts; when it informs us, that “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled^a.” Had the Jews, in any age since Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, been suffered to rebuild their city and temple, and to settle there; or were the Gentiles universally converted to Christianity, the Jews still continuing in unbelief; on either supposition,

^a Luke xxi. 24.

this prophecy would appear to be defeated, and consequently would merit no serious attention. But neither of these events has yet taken place.

In the time of Adrian, when the Jews were gaining strength, and under the auspices of a pretended Messiah were seating themselves in Judea, many thousands of them were slain; and they were expressly forbidden by an imperial edict to set their feet on the land of their forefathers^b. In the next century, when an apostate emperor attempted to perform for them what they were unable themselves to accomplish, to rebuild their temple and restore their worship; the impious undertaking, zealously as it was prosecuted, was soon interrupted and finally defeated by fire bursting forth from the bowels of the earth^c. “The children of Israel” therefore “abide,” as it was predicted of them, “many days without a king, and

^b Euseb. H. E. L. IV. c. vi.

^c This attempt of Julian was A. C. 363. and is recorded by Ammianus Marcellinus, a contemporary pagan historian, L. XXIII. c. i. It is mentioned also by several Christian writers of the same century. See Chrylost. Hom. 4. in Matt. T. II. p. 20. l. 16. Hom. 41. in Act. T. IV. p. 389. l. 7. Orat. 2. in Babyl. T. V. p. 470. l. 19. Greg. Naz. Orat. 2. contr. Julian. Ambros. Epist. xvii. But for a full proof and vindication of the miracle by which the attempt was defeated, See Bp. Warburton's Julian.

without a prince, and without a sacrifice^d," sifted and dispersed among all nations^e.

On the other hand, though the gospel was, at its first outgoing from Sion, rapidly spread throughout the world, and believers in all lands were added to the Lord; we do not find that, either in the first or any succeeding age, the fulness of the Gentile forces has come in, and fought under the banner of the cross. The state of the world therefore is not such as to preclude the accomplishment of the foregoing prophecy in either of its parts; if that which seems the most obvious, shall, from other more explicit passages of scripture, appear to be its genuine and true interpretation.

In search of these passages it is less necessary to recur to the books of the Old Testament, because if we grant for a moment, what may perhaps hereafter be proved, that the Jews shall one day be converted to the faith of Christ; between us and them, on the present question, there is no dispute. The great controversy is concerning the person and character of the Messiah; who he is and when to appear, whether he has already been

^d Hof. iii. 4.

^e Am. ix. 9.

in the world, or whether his coming is still to be expected. Here the veil is unremoved; this is now, as it was of old, the stone of stumbling. But that the Messiah's kingdom shall comprehend the house of Israel, the sons of Israel do not question; all who believe revelation believe it. This ray, this single ray, cheers their hearts and guides their steps in their present state of wandering and wretchedness.

But though this article is embraced by the Jews as a certain truth, it is not universally received among Christians. As long, it is argued, as the church can raise up faithful servants to God, so long it shall be permitted to continue. But the best and purest dispensation of heaven loses its effect upon the stubborn and ungrateful heart of man. The kingdom of grace declines more and more, and the empire of Satan is erected on its ruins; and when the Son of man shall be revealed in fire to judge the world, as when he sent a flood of waters to destroy it, he shall scarcely find faith on earth.

Such is the gloomy picture held up to our view; but possibly the similitude is not exact. Sinful as the world may be at present, and as
we

we must with shame and trembling confess it to be; it does not follow that it shall always be so. Small and despised as may be the temple of the Lord, it does not follow that her walls shall never be built with larger extent and brighter splendor. The holy mountain may still be established in the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills, and all nations, in the fullest sense, may flow unto it and worship God. Lastly if this glorious scene shall hereafter be realised, it does not follow that it shall remain for ever. While men are fallible, that is, while they are men, they must be liable to spiritual as well as bodily infirmities; they may apostatise from faith and virtue, and infidelity and vice may once more overspread the earth.

Admit the truth, whatever it shall appear to be, neither dismayed by the present state of things on the one hand, nor fearful of remoter consequences on the other. What it is not unworthy of God's mercy to reveal, nor of his goodness to bestow, his wisdom can contrive, and his power can execute. If when we look around, affairs in our sight seem not propitious; if the earth is obscured with clouds of ignorance or mists of error; He "who commanded the light to shine out
of

of darkneſs^f,” can diſpel the gloom of the moral world ; can bid the glorious fun of the goſpel cheer and invigorate thoſe regions of ſorrow, where a glimpe of his beams is now ſcarcely ſeen ; can make every future age, as he has made every paſt, confirm the teſtimony of his ſervants the prophets, and diſplay his majeſty, benignity, and truth. There is perhaps a day coming (and oh ! that it may be nigh at hand) when together with our faith and love, our knowledge alſo ſhall be enlarged, and our views extended ; when we ſhall ſee order and conſiſtency ſpring out of apparent irregularity ; when the light, which has hitherto lightened the Gentiles, ſhall likewise be the glory of the people of Iſrael^g ; when the will of God ſhall be done on earth as it is in heaven, zealouſly and faithfully by all men, as it is univerſally and inceſſantly by all holy angels.

But let not our hope go beyond our faith, nor our faith beyond the written word of God. Let us ſee whether from the infallible oracles of truth, theſe events, which are ſo ſtupendous and ſo deſirable, may with confidence be expected.

^f Cor. iv. 6.

^g Luke ii. 32.

Now although, as we said before, it is not necessary to quote for this purpose particular passages from the prophets; yet thus much may be observed of them in general; that they speak of the church of GOD, which in the latter age should be established upon earth, in such terms as no event, which the world has yet beheld, either equals or justifies. They extol not merely the inherent excellence, but wide extent, of the heavenly kingdom. Whenever the prospect rises before them, and it was often presented to their view, their heart glows with instant rapture at the splendid scene; the powers of language are exhausted to convey their lofty conceptions of those days of gladness, when all nations whom the Lord hath made shall turn unto him, and walk in the light of his holy word. We do not assert, that in order to warrant the expressions used on this occasion, it is necessary that every individual of the human species should serve GOD with a pure heart and faith unfeigned; but if the whole race shall not hereafter be, what they have not yet been, visible members of the church of Christ, language is useless, and words have no meaning.

With

With the Jewish scriptures the writings of the New Testament, on this as on other points, perfectly harmonise. When St. John wrote the Revelation, which Jesus Christ by an holy angel gave unto him, Christianity had obtained, in extent of dominion, if not in the number of converts, an amplitude which to this day perhaps it has never exceeded. In this book, after a series of other predictions literally expressed or shadowed by vision, we read, that “there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever^h.” This rejoicing, which, at such a time and under such a state of the church, was seen afar off by the beloved disciple, is unquestionably the rejoicing of the heavenly host for an event still future; for that universal conversion, which the prophets of old had foreshewn. Now if all the kingdoms of the world shall hereafter believe in Christ, surely the Jews, as included in those kingdoms, though not a part of them, must be comprehended in the general blessing.

But let us attend to the reasoning of St. Paul in that part of his Epistle to the Ro-

^h Rev. xi. 15.

mans whence the text is taken; and if we will suffer his words to bear their genuine and obvious sense, the doctrine of the future conversion of the Jews, however improbable to human foresight, cannot be more clearly taught. The apostle discourses to the saints at Rome, converts from heathenism, of their calling and election into the gospel, and of the rejection of the Jews. The Gentiles were called by the free and unmerited grace of God; the Jews, as the scriptures had foretold, were cast off by his just severity upon their unbelief. There was therefore no ground for boasting, but reason to tremble before that God, who was not only plentiful in goodness, but at the same time fearful in judgement.

In all this argument what is the import of the word "Israel," which often occurs? It sometimes confessedly means the unbelieving Jews; and unless they are the sole object, or at least included as a part, whenever Israel is opposed, as it frequently is, to the Gentiles, it will not be easy to make the holy apostle reason, as he does on all other occasions, with consistency and pertinence.

It cannot mean believers in Christ, whether Jews or Gentiles; for he speaks of the

Blindness of Israel. Besides, in this view, between Jew and Gentile there was no distinction; the names were lost in that more honourable and endearing appellation of Christian. The middle wall of partition was broken down, and they were all one in Christ Jesus¹.

Neither, again, can it mean the unconverted Gentiles; for they are never so denominated, and they are also included in the fulness of the Gentiles, which, it is here said, was to come in.

It remains therefore, that it must either, in a large sense, denote the whole race of Jews, those who had and those who had not embraced the gospel; or else, exclusively, the family of unbelievers; and both interpretations, as to our present purpose, amount to the same. For they whose conversion the apostle in the text describes as future, were doubtless at that time not converted: "and so all Israel," even the posterity of those who then were disobedient, "shall be saved."

No, it is said, the term has here another acceptance; and does not express the har-

¹ Eph. ii. 14.

dened Jews, but “the true Israel of God.” That an idea so widely different from the former should so soon be substituted for it, is not very probable; but admit for a moment, that, unlikely as it may seem, it is nevertheless true: how then stands the argument? “The universal multitude of the faithful shall be saved by the partial but perpetual blindness of the Jews.” Is this the reasoning of the apostle of the Gentiles? or if it be not, and it surely is not, what other sense shall we put upon his words?

Shall we suppose him to declare, for it has been supposed, that “though the Jews in their collective and national capacity were rejected in consequence of their unbelief, and though that unbelief and that rejection should continue to the end; yet the true seed of Abraham, the chosen of God, whatever their number, whatever their birth, whether Jews or Gentiles, should not perish, but should come in and be saved?” Was it then a mystery to the saints at Rome, that all who believed in Christ should be saved by Christ? And if the Gentile converts were likely to give way to overweening conceits, when they considered, that they were admitted to the gospel blessings, in preference to the heirs of

God's former covenant; would they abase themselves upon being told, that this preference should endure for ever? These things cannot be. But if all God's ways were equal, and he was no respecter of persons; if those now reprobated for their incurable obstinacy, should hereafter repent, and be received into favour; this was a proper consideration to remove the suggestions of pride; a mystery worthy of Heaven to reveal, and of the apostle to communicate to the church.

In confirmation of this important truth, he quotes, from the Old Testament, a prophecy wherein it was promised, that the future Deliverer should "turn away ungodliness"—it is not said from Esau or the Gentiles, though that was in part the purpose of his mission, but—"from Jacob^k;" that is, from his descendants the Israelites. Accordingly he represents them as enemies indeed at present, yet still, as touching the election, beloved for the fathers' sakes: and lastly he assures us, that as the Gentiles, in times past, did not believe God, but had now obtained mercy; even so the Jews, though now unbelievers, should hereafter obtain mercy^l.

^k Rom. xi. 26.

^l Ibid. 30, 31. Perhaps the latter verse is mistranslated. The words "through your mercy" appear to belong to the first,

If, desirous to establish this point, we have bestowed upon it more words than the clear language of St. Paul seemed to require; it is hoped the importance of the subject, and the doubts of some learned men respecting it, will be a sufficient apology.

It being therefore evident, that, when St. Paul wrote, a general conversion of the Jews was, at some future period, to take place; and it being certain from history, that, between his days and the present, no event of this nature has ever happened; it remains, that we look for it, with full assurance of hope, in the generations to come.

first, not to the second clause. The apostle represents the return of the house of Judah, which should one day be brought to pass, and the conversion of the Gentiles, which was already begun, as proceeding both of them from the free grace of God in Christ. But the gospel, as to the order of preaching, was first to be tendered to the Jews; and when they were sufficiently instructed, or when, as it more frequently happened, they obstinately cast from them the word of life, it was to be offered to the heathen. See Acts xiii. 46. In a certain sense too the belief of the Gentiles was the occasion of the Jews' unbelief; for they were offended because the apostles went to men uncircumcised, and the multitude of Gentile converts instead of kindling their emulation or softening their hatred, inflamed their rancour and increased their stubbornness.

But here, certified of the fact and anxious for its accomplishment, curiosity perhaps will ask, When shall it be? and how shall it be brought about? Of the minute circumstances of future events, the existence of which may from the word of prophecy be past a doubt, it becomes us to speak with cautious diffidence. Led on by the hand of the Almighty, they may advance upon our wondering sight, as in the ancient ages they often have, in such order and so attended, as from the intimations beforehand was by no means expected; yet conformably in every point to those intimations, when the facts themselves cleared up what before was dubious, and reconciled what had seemed inconsistent.

In the present case, though it were sufficient to say, that He who revealed the gracious design, will hasten it in his own appointed time; yet there are, in the predictions concerning it, some circumstances which admit a probable and safe interpretation, if we consider them as only probable, and regard for certain, what alone is certain, the event itself.

In the first place then, since the return of the Jews and the coming in of the Gentiles

are

are mentioned together by St. Paul, as they had been before, though less explicitly, by our blessed Lord^m; we may hence infer, that these two mighty revolutions shall happen in one and the same age. When many of the Jews, the natural branches, were broken off from the holy olive, the Gentiles were grafted in; and they shall never more, we humbly trust, be dissevered from the living root, but receive perpetual vigour from it. The church that nurtured with fondest care her first born son, but cast him out for his wayward stubbornness, shall embrace with a mother's love the returning penitent, without ejecting the younger brother. The dew of heaven, which has hitherto been on the fleece alone, on the little flock of Israel and of Christ, shall refresh hereafter all the earth, and there shall be one fold under one shepherd.

If we examine further the connection of these two events, and inquire which, if either, shall pave the way for the other; perhaps it may appear, that the Jews shall be the means of bringing in the residue of the Gentiles, rather than that the universal belief of the Gentiles shall precede and set forward

^m Luke xxi. 24.

the conversion of the Jews. The words of the text will, in the original, easily admit this senseⁿ; and another passage in the same chapter seems to require it: “If the fall of them,” says the apostle, “be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness^o?” This question, which is equivalent to a direct assertion and the meaning of which the former words suggest, evidently implies, that the fulness of the Jews, their general obedience to the gospel, shall, in a degree far above their fall and diminution, be the enriching of the world and the Gentiles: “If when the collective body was cast off, the few, comparatively, who believed, were the means of converting so many thousand Gentiles; how many more shall the universal host of the dispersion, who perhaps for this very reason among others are by a gracious providence scattered abroad; how many more shall they, when their sins are forgiven and

ⁿ *ακρις ε̄ το πληρωμα των εθνων εισελθη.* See how this word or other words in the same or corresponding tenses are used in the following passages: Matt. x. 11. with Mar. vi. 10. Matt. xxiv. 34, 35. with Mar. xiii. 31. and Luke xxi. 33. Matt. xxvi. 41. Luke ix. 4. with x. 5 8. John v. 15. vii. 27. with 31. and viii. 14. Acts iii. 19. And see Mr. Mede, p. 483. 596. 760. on Rev. xi. 7.

^o Rom xi. 12.

their backsliding healed, gather together to Him who has had mercy on them, even Jesus Christ?"

Be it so, that these things are marvelous in our eyes, and that we discover no traces of their approach. Is any thing too hard for GOD? or shall aught appear marvelous in His sight? Shall not his counsel stand? and shall he not perform his good pleasure? What if their iniquity shall be removed in a day^p? and a nation born at once^q? What if the Holy Spirit shall breathe upon the slain, and they shall live; and each shall stand up in his place, a great and innumerable army^r?

When the Son of GOD, in the days of his flesh, came unto his own, his own received him not^s; and their obdurate heart ages of suffering have not mollified. He will therefore forgive them and love them freely; and, at this second time, he will make himself known to his brethren^t. Then peradventure shall be accomplished what cannot without violence be understood either of the destruction of Jerusalem, or of the day of universal judgement; then shall they look on him

^p Zech. iii. 9.

^q Is. lxvi. 8.

^r Ez. xxxvii. 9, 10.

^s John i. 11.

^t Acts vii. 13.

^u John xix. 37.

with Zech. xii. 10.

whom

whom they pierced^u, and say, “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord^x. Blessed is He who hath been gracious unto us, who hath put away our iniquity, and remembered our sins and offences no more. This is He whom our fathers knew not, whom while on earth they nailed to the cross; but he hath revealed himself to us from heaven. We will rejoice in thy name, we will walk in thy truth, and thou, O Son of David, shalt be our King for ever.”

In that day the envy of Ephraim^y and of Judah shall cease, and they shall love those whom before they abhorred. The Christian of the Gentiles shall be dearer than life to them; and those who believe not they shall labour to convince. They shall proclaim the honour of the Lord, and shew forth the mercy, which they themselves have experienced. The people of the Gentiles shall willingly offer themselves; they “shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you^z.” “They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward^a.” Jerusalem shall no longer be trod-

^x Matt. xxiii. 39.

^y If. xi. 13.

^z Zech. viii. 23.

^a Jer. l. 5.

den under foot, but in righteousness shall she be established. She shall call her walls Salvation and her gates Praise^b. In every land shall be a temple to the Lord, and all flesh shall behold his glory. Peace shall be extended to them like a river^c, sorrow and mourning shall flee away^d; they shall serve the Lord with songs of joy, and in unity and love together.

Here then a scene is disclosed, to which, amidst the anxious cares, the storms and tempests of life, we may look forward with steadfast faith, and devoutly pray for its approach. Next, surely, to the glory of God, and the eternal inheritance of his heavenly kingdom, there is no object more worthy of perpetual meditation, none that we should more ardently long for, none that we may with greater confidence expect, than the universal kingdom of the Messiah in this world. Our ideas of this blessed state may at present be inadequate; the city of our God may be more glorious than the sublimest imagination, aided by the lofty representations of scripture, is able to conceive; but her beauty shall one day be visible, her walls shall assuredly be raised.

^b *Ih. lx. 18. with xxvi. 1.*

^c *Ibid. lxvi. 12.*

^d *Ibid. li. 11.*

What though sedition and tumults, fightings and war have not ceased? though the religion of harmony and love has been converted into an engine of mischief, and caused not peace but division? Has the truth of God therefore failed? or shall he not confirm his promises? The kingdom is one in all ages; and the blessings not yet bestowed shall without doubt be given hereafter. For her king is exalted in heaven, and thence will he subdue his enemies. “Truth shall” yet “spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven.” “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; — they shall not hurt nor destroy in all God’s holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

Philosophy hath tried her skill, and her sons have combined together. They have boasted they would extirpate the name of Christ, and destroy the horn of his kingdom.

* Ps. lxxxv. 10.

† Is. ii. 4. Mic. iv. 3.

‡ Is. xi. 6. 9.

But their rage is as vain as it is impious. Sooner might they arrest the earth in her course, or extinguish the lamp of day, than withstand the arm of the Almighty, or disappoint the least of his promises. The ways of Zion mourn; her cities are burnt with fire, and her mountains are a barren waste. Her fig tree is hewn down, and the withered branches are cast out in all lands; but the stock is still in the ground, and shall again spring forth and flourish. For the Lord shall water it from above, and pour down his spirit upon it. He shall deal graciously with his servants, he shall put away their iniquities, and manifest his glory to them.

Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Come to thy once chosen people, and remember thy holy covenant; the oath which thou swarest to their fathers, and the testament sealed with thy blood. By thy death thou hast atoned for their sins; let thy powerful intercession prevail for them. Forgive them, righteous Father, for they know not what they do. Take away their stony heart, and give them an heart of flesh^h, that they may be thy people, and Thou mayest be their

^h Ez. xi. 19.

God; that the remnant of Israel and the residue of the Gentiles may believe in Thee, and glorify thy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God blessed for evermore. Amen.

S E R M O N V I I I .

J O H N X I V . 29 .

*I have told you before it come to pass, that
when it is come to pass, ye might believe.*

IT was observed by Aristotle, and the justness of the remark and reputation of the author have often recommended the observation to others, that different subjects admit of different sorts and degrees of proof^a. The mathematician demonstrates the truth of his propositions; the orator endeavours by probable arguments to persuade his hearers; and the moralist, who is conversant with the variable actions of human life, deduces such conclusions as are generally true, and gives such directions as will seldom fail.

^a Eth. L. I. c. iii. vii.

Had this supreme master of philosophy and of criticism appeared in a later age, or in a different country, he would perhaps have given a name to a species of evidence, with which, at the time and place where he lived, he was not acquainted; the evidence, I mean, of divine revelation. By whatever term we may denominate this evidence; whether, from its own intrinsic excellence or from the object which it respects, we choose to style it Divine; or whether the proofs of what God has been pleased to teach us, but not in systematic order and method, shall pass, as hitherto, without a peculiar and appropriate appellation; whatever we may determine as to these matters, certain it is, that the proofs are infallible, our belief of them such as cannot possibly be erroneous. If there is a God, a Being of infinite wisdom and goodness, the religion which avows Him for its author, and which under that avowal He has in all ages supported, sometimes by making bare his holy arm to enforce it, and at all times by accomplishing its predictions and its promises; the religion, thus acknowledged and confirmed by God, must be, what it claims to be, the revelation of his will; or else we must believe, what it is equally
absurd

abfurd and impious to imagine, That the juft and holy Governor of the world has impofed upon the underftanding of his rational creatures a fyftem of delufion, carrying along with it fuch marks of authenticity, as compel the affent of the candid inquirer; fuch criterions of truth, as the pertinacious fceptic or determined infidel can never fhew to be doubtful, much lefs to be falfe.

To make good thefe assertions we need not have recourfe to multiplicity of arguments, from the figns and wonders openly wrought by Chrift and his apoftles, from the ferief of prophecies ftretching through all ages, or from other confiderations tending to eftablifh the fame conclufion. It will be fufficient to review thofe prophecies, neither few in number nor of fmall concernment, the particulars of which with their corre-fponding completions we have confidered at large; earneftly befeeching the God and Father of all to blefs to His glory, and to our benefit, the testimony which he has been pleafed to give to the everlafting gofpel of his beloved Son.

We have feen then, firft of all, that the various declarations and apparently incon-

Q

fiftent

sistent characters, which were at sundry times delivered to the fathers, respecting the promised Redeemer of mankind, met and concentrated in Jesus Christ. He was the prophet and lawgiver foretold by Moses; the offspring of David, and at the same time his Lord. He was the son of a pure virgin, compassed with a body of mortal flesh; and yet he was Immanuel, Jehovah God of hosts. He came to his own at the very time when first they began to expect the Messiah; and soon after his appearance, the sceptre, which former calamities had not broken, departed from Judah, and their civil and religious polity was destroyed.

The predictions uttered by this divine person, whether they had reference to things near at hand, or whether they respected unborn ages; whether they regarded the ordinary occurrences of life, or whether they concerned events the most splendid that the world ever saw; clearly shewed, that he was privy to the movements of universal nature; that the voluntary actions of men, and the mysterious counsels of God, were naked and open in his sight.

Did he intimate to his disciples, that some of them should, even in this life, behold a specimen

specimen of his future glory? Six days afterwards his words were verified, when he was transfigured in the presence of three of his apostles. Did he foretel his death, and describe the manner of it; and promise his disciples to return unto them, and comfort their hearts? The wonderful prophecy, in all its parts, in the proofs of power as well as instances of patience, was punctually accomplished. Did he, upon his resurrection, assure those whom he condescended to call his brethren, that all power was now given unto him in heaven and in earth? and did he, in consequence, promise, that not many days after his departure from earth to heaven, his mission should be authenticated and his kingdom established, not by human strength, or temporal splendor, but by the descent of the holy Comforter? The day of Pentecost beheld the miracle, when the celestial visitant, with the sound of a mighty wind and the similitude of fire, came down on the apostles; and forthwith the lips of Galilean fishermen spake the multiform languages of the peopled earth; the kingdom of Christ was erected in the hearts of men, and the bodies of the faithful were made living temples of the Holy Ghost.

Of these glorious appearances, at the outset of the gospel, we are certified by those who best could inform us, by the friends and followers of our blessed Lord; who beheld what they related, and risked their lives in support of their testimony. But to other events, of subsequent occurrence, which yet never could have happened, had not these earlier facts been true, the whole world is witness; the most bigoted opposers, and the most zealous advocates, of the Christian cause; those who drew the sword to cut off from the earth the odious sect, and those who dreaded neither danger nor death, if they might confirm the brethren, or gain fresh converts.

It was foretold by the prophets who lived in the times of the Mosaic dispensation, that the days were coming, when a new law should go forth from mount Sion; and the Gentiles, in all lands, should be admitted into covenant with the God of Jacob. These prophecies, our Lord intimated, on various occasions during his ministry, belonged to the doctrine which he taught; and at the moment, when, of all others, any such revolution was most unlikely to happen, when he was about to be forsaken and to suffer an
 igno-

ignominious death; at this inauspicious season, he declared in express words, that his gospel should be preached, in that very generation, and by the very persons whom he then addressed, throughout the world. We have seen the event, the greatest blessing that wretched sinners ever experienced, correspond with the prediction. At Jerusalem the new law was publicly promulged, and thousands voluntarily gave themselves to it; yet more, and more powerful thousands opposed it, blaspheming its author, and persecuting his followers. But Heaven, that inspired, miraculously delivered them; and the work of their God prospered in their hands. Having taught the word in Judea, they went forth among the Gentiles; and met, as with similar danger, so with similar success. Ignorance which philosophy never could subdue, and vice which laws never could restrain, vanished at the sight of heaven-born wisdom; the banner of the cross was erected on the ruins of idolatry, and the simplicity of the gospel triumphed over the pride of affluence and the pomp of power.

Thus was fulfilled one of the signs of the approaching dissolution of the Jewish economy: the kingdom of GOD was taken from the Jews, and given to a nation bringing

forth the fruits thereof^b. The time therefore was at hand, when they should cease to have a name among the kingdoms of the earth. But of this fatal day other marks were foreshewn, some to administer comfort and instruction to the faithful, and some to be a warning to the rebellious and obstinate, and all of them, in their accomplishment, conspiring to prove the heavenly mission and almighty power of the holy Speaker.

Before the calamities, and even in the midst of them, impostors should appear in the secret chambers and in the lonely desert, claiming immediate intercourse with heaven, and pretending feverally to be the expected Redeemer. At the time appointed, and with the character described, the false prophets came; and the wilderness and the city, which were the scenes of their folly, saw likewise the confusion of them and their adherents.

Signs from above and wonders below, concussions of the earth and roarings of the sea^c, pestilential air and barren seasons,

^b Matt. xxi. 43.

^c Luke xxi. 25. This, as Bp. Newcome has observed (on our Lord's Conduct, &c. p. 209.) was literally verified, when the inhabitants of Joppa, to avoid the Roman army, betook themselves

should prognosticate the approach of some great alteration. The stars in their courses fought against Israel; the wind and the storm fulfilled the word of the Son of man, and, when he called them, said, Here we are.

Rumours of wars, insurrections and tumults, should precede the commencement of heavier troubles. The cities of the east were filled with sedition; the Jews combined against the aliens, and the aliens united against the Jews; Jews also divided against Jews, brother against brother, the father against the son, and the son against the father. The eagle from afar scented the battle, and flew to devour; but he hovered in mid air, before he stooped to the prey and bathed his talons in blood. The chosen of the Lord, the faithful few who obeyed his voice, had not yet made good their retreat; for the signal to withdraw had not been given. The standard of abomination was to be reared on holy ground; and then they were to depart from Jerusalem and from Judea. The Roman commander therefore marched with an army to the walls of Jeru-

themselves to their ships; and a violent storm arising dashed the vessels against each other and against the rocks, and the coast was strewn with four thousand two hundred dead bodies. See B. J. L. III. c. viii. §. 2, 3.

falem; the Jews fled before him, he assailed the inner city and undermined the temple, and then abandoned the enterprize and abruptly decamped; for he had finished, though he knew it not, the work which he was sent to perform. He had set up, on the skirts of the sanctuary, within the precincts of the holy city, the abominable ensigns of pagan idolatry, and sounded the alarm of approaching desolation in the ears of the sons of Sion. Now therefore the Christians, possessing their souls in patience to the end, were in readiness to depart, when the moment should arrive; and He, who had taught them to pray that their flight might not be in the winter, nor on the sabbath, so ordered the event, that the gates were thrown open and a way prepared for them, when the mildness of autumn favoured their escape, and six successive days, without a sabbath intervening, gave space for their journey and for choosing their abode.

Thus the house of the unbelievers was left unto them desolate, their obstinacy was grown to the height, the measure of their iniquities was full, and vengeance, when it came, would find not one faithful remaining in the land^d, none but vessels fitted for destruction.

^d See Luke xviii. 8.

That the desolation might be more general, and that their sufferings might begin where the cause of them subsisted, among themselves, the success of the enemy for a while was not rapid; nor was the war pushed to the heart of the kingdom. But the day of slaughter was at last to come as a snare on the victims of wrath; and when they were assembled at Jerusalem, from all quarters of the globe, to celebrate the passover, on a sudden the gallant Titus appeared before the walls, and shut them up as in a prison.

The days were to be shortened for the elect's sake; and the two contending parties laboured without ceasing, one by consummate skill and fortitude, the other by their madness in cutting the nerves of their own strength, to fulfil the prophecy, of which both were ignorant.

A trench was to be thrown up, encircling the city, and keeping in the besieged on every side. The extent and nature of the ground, which was uneven and rocky, might seem to forbid such an attempt, or prevent its execution; but the work was completed in three days.

A woe

A woe was denounced upon those that were with child and gave suck in those days. More alive to pain and less able to bear it, they endured more; they saw their children expire before their eyes, and were even compelled, in the extremity of hunger, to eat the fruit of their own body.

The tribulation was to be such as had not been from the beginning of the world, nor ever should be. The blended horrors of war and sedition, of famine and pestilence, were grievous and astonishing, beyond example and beyond conception; and if we except the days when the deluge overwhelmed a whole world of sinners, never did there perish so many of the human race in so short a time.

The city, it was foretold, should be laid even with the ground. Her palaces were overthrown, her bulwarks demolished, and the seat of her glory could scarcely be known.

Of the house of the Lord, ample as were her courts and strong as was her border, not a stone was to be left, that was not thrown down. The conflagration, which was kindled contrary to the will of Titus and increased

creased in direct opposition to his command, raged with such fury, as if it would consume not only the temple itself to its lowest base, but the very foundations of the mount whereon it stood; and the place received afterwards the customary marks of hostile subjection, and “Zion,” according to the prediction of the prophet^e, “was ploughed as a field”^f.

Such, in brief, are the prophecies which we have contemplated; and such, so exact and circumstantial, was their wonderful completion. In this great variety of particulars, the illustration of some few points may perhaps be doubtful, or the application wrong. But the general outline is clearly marked; and the similitude is, in many the minutest features, striking and unquestionable.

Besides the passages which have been brought forward and examined in the course of these lectures, many others occur in holy scripture relating to the same days of bitter-

^e Mic. iii. 12.

^f By Terentius Rufus. See the authorities in Whitby, &c.
πρὸς δ' ἡ μεγάλη πόλις—ἡ τούτοις μὲν ἐρυμνὴ τειχῶν περιβολοῖς,—
μολὶς δὲ χαρῆσα τις εἰς τὸν πόλεμον παρασκευῆς,—πρὸς γεγενῆσθαι ἡμῖν ἡ
τὸν Θεὸν εἶχειν οἰκιστὴν πεπιστευμένη; προρρηξὶς ἐκ βαθρῶν ἀνηρασάει.
 Eleazarus ap. Jos. B. J. L. VII. c. viii. §. 7. p. 1322.

ness and sorrow. On these, which it seemed neither necessary to adduce, nor possible within our limits properly to discuss, we may remark in general, That they confirm the authenticity of this class of prophecies. Take away from each of the three Gospels our blessed Saviour's discourse respecting these events, the substance nevertheless will still remain. It is couched in metaphors, and taught in parables; it is conveyed in the bold and animated strains of oriental poetry, and delivered in clear and express predictions. That which forms so considerable a part of the sacred volume, which is the subject of its prophecies and ground of its hymns, which is inserted in its histories and introduced among precepts and moral instructions, never could be forged by friends or by enemies.

If in the discourse of our Lord, to which our meditations have chiefly been confined, there are one or two passages, where the intention of the holy Speaker may be doubtful; if it does not appear whether he had in view times that are past or days still to come, or whether he adapted his language to both; this circumstance by no means invalidates the argument drawn from those other passages, far more numerous, of which the meaning is clear

clear and the object certain. The perfections of the Almighty pass man's understanding. He covers round about, with the majesty of darkness, the bright and unapproachable effulgence of his throne. His will he hath revealed to us in the holy scriptures; and they speak, in general, a language that is equally plain and divine. The parts now obscure may minister more abundant comfort and instruction to future generations; nor will they, at present, be altogether unprofitable, if where they shew us to be ignorant, they teach us to be humble, and silently to adore, in the word of GOD as well as in his works, the wisdom which we cannot fully comprehend.

With regard to the events, by which these prophecies have been fulfilled, the foundations of the earth have been moved to produce them, and the creatures have been weapons in the hands of providence. The unruly elements and the tribes of men have conspired together, and performed the commands of the Lord of all things; nor have the blessed inhabitants of the world of spirits been unconcerned spectators, but sustained part in the wondrous drama, and shewn themselves the ready ministers of heaven.

When

When the apostles were preaching the doctrine of the cross among various nations, they knew that, in so doing, they were obeying the injunctions and fulfilling the predictions of Him who sent them ; but no possible objection can hence be raised against the prophecies on that important article. Had they not been assured of the truth of those facts, which they every where with so much boldness asserted ; and had they not been inspired with courage, as well as commissioned from above to teach them ; they never would have embarked in the perilous enterprise ; nor when they had undertaken it, could they ever have succeeded without the special aid and influence of Heaven. Those that planted therefore, and those that watered, were nothing in this respect, but God that gave the increase^s. He who vouchsafed to impart the prophecy, in his own good time and by his own mighty power wrought its completion.

In most other instances, perhaps in every one where human ability might seem competent to produce the effect, the immediate agents, totally ignorant or totally regardless of the voice of prophecy, were influenced by far

^s 1 Cor. iii. 7.

other motives, than those of evincing its authority by fulfilling its declarations. The desolation of Judah was neither in whole nor in part occasioned by Christians. The Jews themselves brought on their calamities; the Romans were the instruments of vengeance; and both, as well as Christians, have recorded the final issue of the war; which was such as no human sagacity could foresee, no conjuncture of affairs, no traits of character in either party, could lead to conjecture. Though the Jews were afraid, or to serve a purpose pretended to be afraid, lest the Romans should take away their place and nation^h; yet after the time when they expressed these fears as well as before, they experienced, at the hands of their generous lords, particular immunities and distinguished favours, both in Judea and in other countriesⁱ.

To extirpate a people, or demolish a city, was contrary to the practice and lenity of the Romans in war. Their whole history affords but one or two instances of exceptions in the case. The compliment of the poet, “*parcere subjectis*,” was the more valuable, because it was just: nor had their former hu-

^h John xi. 48.

ⁱ See A. J. L. XIX. c. v.

manity in this age forsaken them. During the siege of Jerusalem, the compassionate Titus was scarcely more solicitous to subdue the rebels, than to rescue the sufferers and save the city. The temple to the last he was resolved to preserve. But in opposition to heaven the endeavours of mortals are ineffectual, and their wishes vain. The city and the temple were burnt with fire, and rased to their foundations; and those who survived the calamities of their country were scattered and dispersed over the face of the earth; and by a subsequent decree, while every other land saw their obstinacy and observed their affliction, in Judea alone they were not permitted to set their feet. The blood of the holy One, according to the dread imprecation of their fathers^k, pursues to this day the wretched posterity. Their blindness is still unremoved, their heart is still obdurate; therefore they are wanderers and vagabonds in the earth, living monuments of the just but tremendous wrath of heaven, and involuntary witnesses to the truth of the scriptures and scripture prophecies.

Had these prophecies been forged, had they been produced yesterday and accommo-

^k Matt. xxvii. 25.

dated to the circumstances of all past ages; the face of things to day might bely the predictions and expose the impostor. Let this singular people be no longer different from other people; let them adopt the religions and become members of the states of the various countries, whether Christian, Mahometan, orpagan, wherein they reside; melt them down in the mass of mankind, and let them not be distinguishable from other men; or, if you choose, separate them from the midst of other nations, transplant them into some unoccupied region, colonise with them some uninhabited island, and let them there observe their religion and their laws. On either supposition (and either is possible, if the holy scriptures are not true) you demonstrate those predictions to be forgeries, which declare that their infidelity and dispersion shall be of equal duration; that they shall continue distinct, not till they swerve to idolatry, or sink into Mahometism, but till they look upon Him whom they pierced. Days and years roll on, and sweep away in their course the operations of men and the dreams of error; but truth is a pillar of adamant, immoveable as the poles of heaven. Seventeen centuries have passed over the sons of dispersion, and seen them the objects of con-

stant wretchedness; nor would seventeen thousand see them extinct or their situation altered, should they not in the mean time embrace the gospel.

The truth then of the scriptures of the New Testament, the prophecies whereof have been fulfilled and are daily fulfilling, being as certain as that GOD is true; there are two inferences from the whole of the argument, which claim our attention.

The first is, That it is the duty of every one, who sincerely believes the gospel, to extend its influence and power in the world; and, as GOD shall enable him, to set forward the salvation of all men. The heavenly treasure was committed to our trust, not that we should bury it in the earth, or lay it up in a napkin, but that we should employ it to the glory of GOD and the good of our brethren. There is, we trust, a day approaching, when “all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him¹.” This blessed æra we should not only pray for, but endeavour to hasten, by supporting the weak, confirming the wavering,

¹ Pf. xxii. 27.

and convincing those who at present oppose themselves^m.

From the general body of the once favoured people the veil, which has so long excluded the truth, is not taken away; but from individuals, in this as in former ages, it may, through God's mercy, be removed. Convince them that by the law, wherein they trust, they cannot be saved. Shew them that in its best state it never by its own excellence justified any who came to it, but only through faith in the sacrifice of Christ. Remind them that the law itself, which promises no aid to human infirmity, expressly pronounces every one cursed who continueth not in all things there written to do themⁿ. Teach them these plain and salutary truths, it may be they will cease to look for salvation where it never could be found, and will begin to inquire from what other source they may obtain it.

Expound to them then other parts of scripture; shew them that the prophecies respecting the Messiah were all of them fulfilled in the life and death, the resurrection and ascension, of the blessed Jesus. Instruct them

^m 2 Tim. ii. 25.

ⁿ Deut. xxvii. 26. Gal. iii. 10.

that God was in Him reconciling the world to himself; of which he gave proofs the same in kind but superior in degree to those which confirmed the mission of Moses. Signs and wonders and mighty deeds were wrought by both; and both delivered prophecies, which every succeeding age has verified.

In this manner and by arguments of this sort, not by suppressing any part of the truth, nor by giving it up to preconceived notions, thousands of Jews were in the beginning converted to the faith of Christ. The same mode of reasoning has proved successful in every other instance where success has been gained; and by the same, if wisely and seasonably urged, we may still, under the good influence of the Spirit of grace, hope to save some.

But, secondly, if we wish to persuade others to good effect, we ourselves should above all things be diligent, not only to search for and examine the truth, but likewise, when we have found, conscientiously to practise it.

The proofs of that pure religion, which we profess, are not less certain than the clearest demonstration; but demonstration itself is of
no

no avail if it be not attended to ; nor can moral evidence, however cogent, produce its effect, if we do not give it an impartial hearing. We are not easily convinced of what we are not willing to learn. If airy phantoms are pursued till we fancy them solid substance, if the grounds of our faith are seldom viewed or slightly regarded, if every imaginary or even real difficulty is made to overbalance positive proof, our doubts arise from some other defect than want of evidence.

To exemplify in our life the superior excellency of the gospel precepts is the best recommendation of our cause to others, and the surest means of drawing down the blessing of GOD upon us and our endeavours. He is wont of his gracious and unmerited goodness to bestow upon the world his choicest favours for the sake of his saints and faithful servants. “ Fear not, Paul” said the holy angel ; “ thou must be brought before Cesar, and Lo ! GOD hath given thee all them that sail with thee °.” If by the hatred, emulation, and strife, if by the carnal lusts and appetites, if by the coldness and indifference, if by any other sin, of those who

° Acts xxvii. 24.

name the name of Christ, the progress of his kingdom is obstructed, and the conversion of unbelievers hindered, we have reason to tremble before the Lord, and should endeavour to avert his righteous vengeance.

The study of our holy religion is the noblest exercise of our rational faculties; the practice of it is the brightest ornament of our moral capacities. The blessing promised from the fall, what patriarchs and kings have hoped for, what prophets and apostles have taught, what angels have ministered unto, and the Son of God died to obtain, must deserve the attention of man, should inspire his heart with gladness, and fill his lips with praise.

The present works of providence confirm our belief of the past, and establish our hopes of the future. He who "holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved^p," could animate the breathless clay, and can raise our body from the dust. He who guideth the sun in his course, and teacheth the moon her way, could stop the one in the midst of heaven, and the other in the chambers of the east. He who scattered,

^p Pf. lxvi. 9.

and yet hath preserved, the sons of Judah, the flock of slaughter, can reassemble, convert, and save them; can “say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Keep not back; bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth⁴.” He who from the foundation of the world hath confirmed his holy covenant and magnified his loving kindness, can fulfil the words which he hath spoken, and impart his appointed favours. At the right hand of God in heaven Christ Jesus our Redeemer is enthroned: thence doth he protect his church, and there he intercedeth for us. He prepareth mansions of bliss, which he promised to them that love him. His truth can never fail; he will come to his chosen servants, and where He is they shall be also, and reign with him in glory for evermore. Amen.

⁴ If. xliii. 6.

BAMPTON LECTURERS.

1780. JAMES BANDINEL, D. D. of Jesus College, and Public Orator of the University.
1781. TIMOTHY NEVE, D. D. Chaplain of Merton College.
1782. ROBERT HOLMES, M. A. Fellow of New-College.
1783. JOHN COBB, D. D. Fellow of St. John's College.
1784. JOSEPH WHITE, B. D. Fellow of Wadham College, and Laudian Professor of Arabic.



Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 01130 9319

