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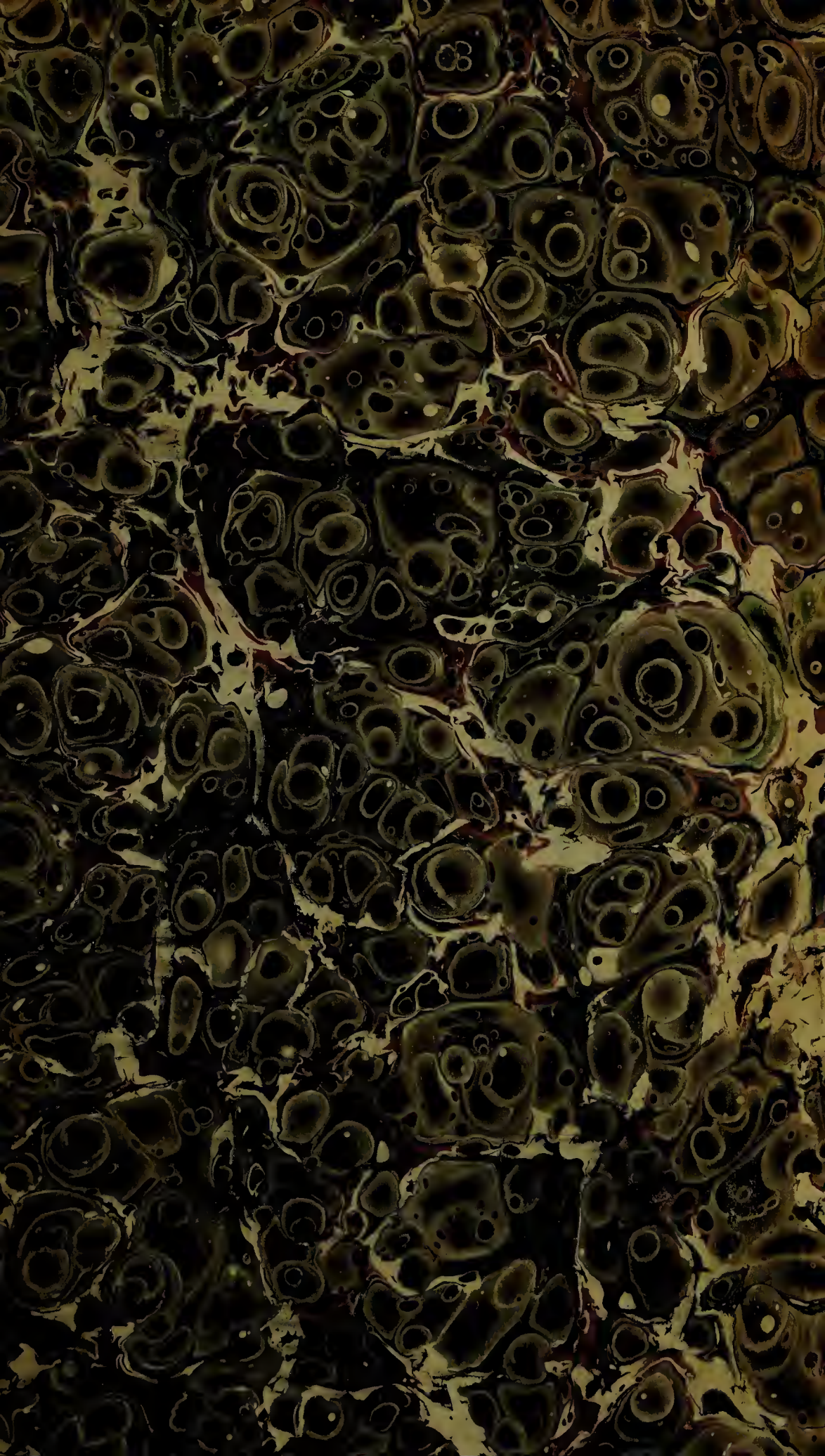
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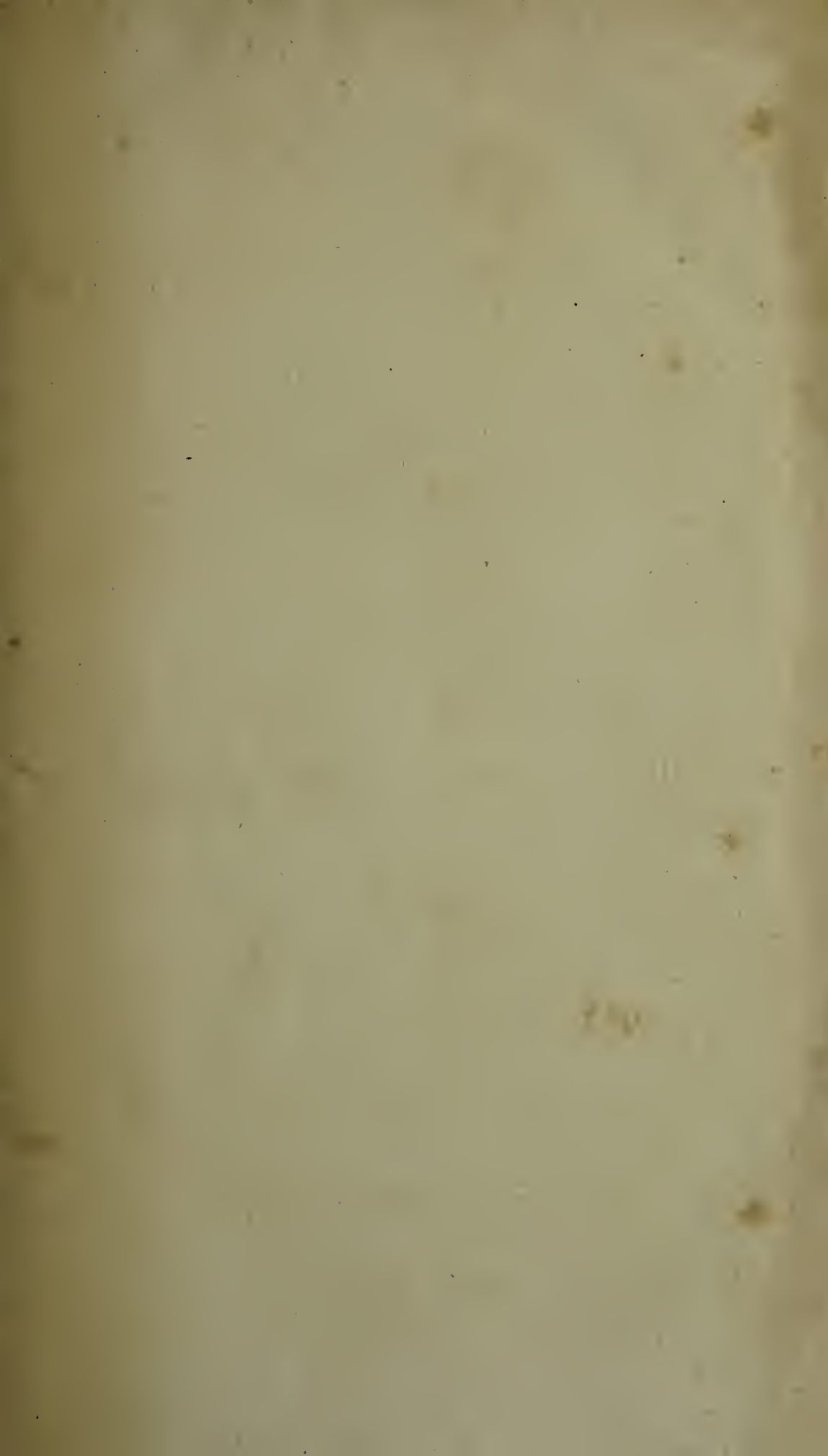
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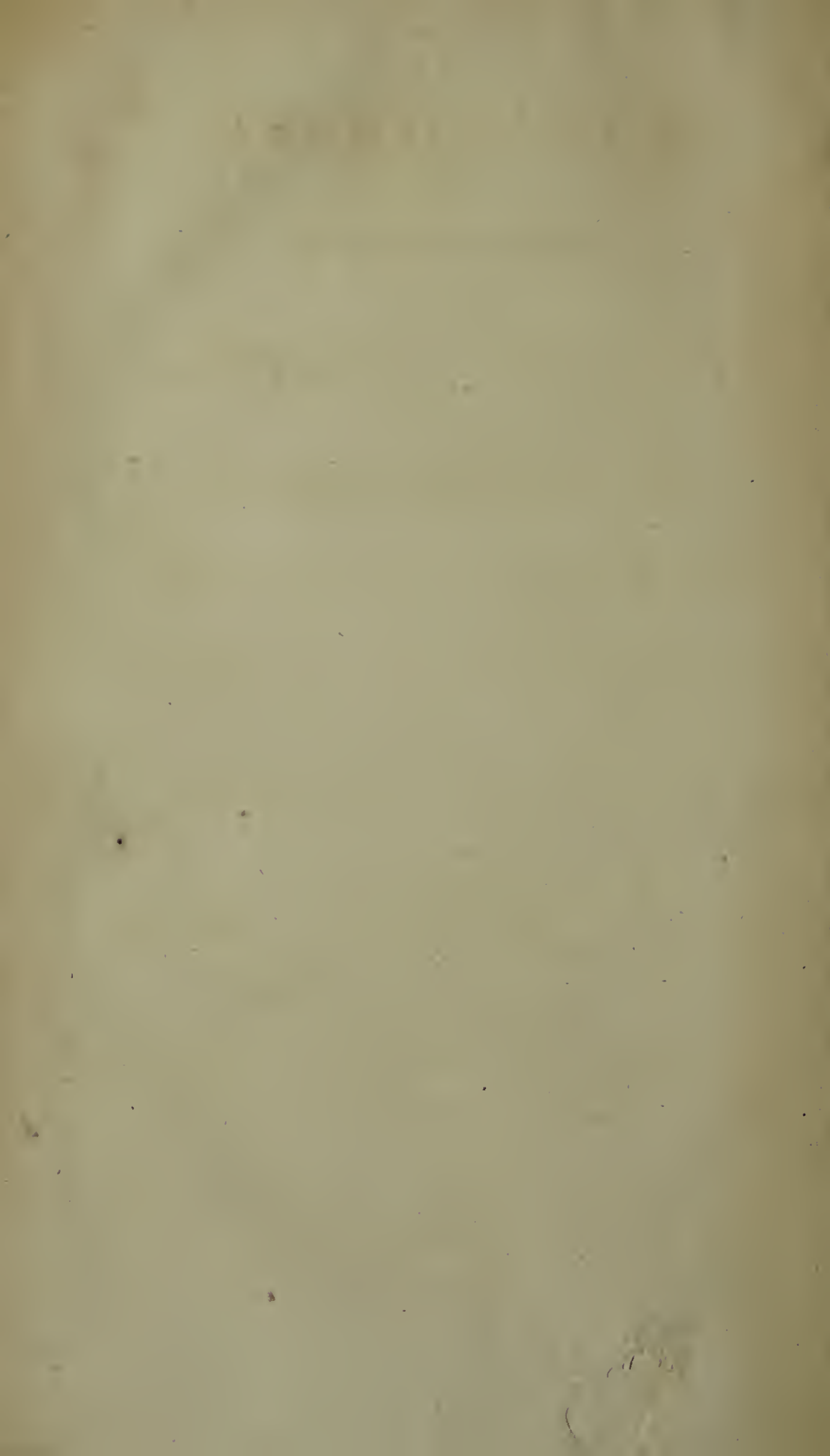
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A
PARAPHRASE
AND
COMMENT
UPON ALL THE
EPISTLES & GOSPELS,

APPOINTED TO BE USED IN
The Church of England
ON
ALL SUNDAYS AND HOLY-DAYS
THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

DESIGNED TO EXCITE DEVOTION, AND TO PROMOTE THE KNOWLEDGE
AND PRACTICE OF SINCERE PIETY AND VIRTUE.

By **GEORGE STANHOPE, D.D.**
LATE DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

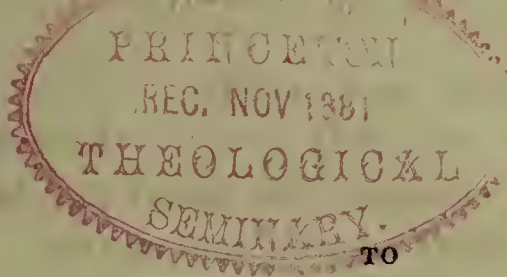
IN FOUR VOLUMES.—VOL. IV.
*Beginning with the Feast of St. Andrew, and ending with
Queen Anne's Inauguration.*

TENTH EDITION,
WITH THE REFERENCES CAREFULLY COMPARED AND CORRECTED.

London :

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AND MARSHALL.

1817.



THE QUEEN'S
MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.

MADAM,

YOUR Majesty hath already condescended, most graciously to accept my poor endeavours, upon the service of our established church, for the Sundays throughout the year.

The same excellent church, which your Majesty's piety so conspicuously governs, protects, adorns, and loves, hath wisely appointed devotions proper for the Christian festivals. And now, my labours to render these also useful and instructive, humbly presume to ask your royal countenance and favour. A pardonable presumption, I hope ; in regard such devotions were intended to do honour to those saints, whose doctrines and virtues are your Majesty's constant rule and pattern : those saints, whose memory is, as is also your Majesty's, worthy to be preserved with immortal respect : and among whom you, Madam, (with your late royal consort) will shine yet more gloriously, when translated from your earthly, to a better, and more durable, crown in heaven.

In the meantime (and, for your people's sake, may that time be long!) your Majesty continues a

living incitement, to the holy joys of those other solemnities, which celebrate the signal mercies of God, to this particular church and nation. For these mercies are every day growing upon us, by your Majesty's most gentle and auspicious government. May all your subjects pay their thanks to God and your Majesty for them, as the offices for those occasions direct: and may the *Father of mercies*, and the *God of all consolations*, so sanctify and support you, under the tender sense of an affliction, the weight of which all good men feel for you, and with you; that every fresh trial of your Majesty's virtue may render the influence of your example more successful here, and the degrees of your happiness more exquisite hereafter.

I am,
with all possible duty,
(may it please your Majesty)
your Majesty's most faithful,
most obedient, and most devoted,
subject and servant,

GEORGE STANHOPE.

Nov. 1, 1708.

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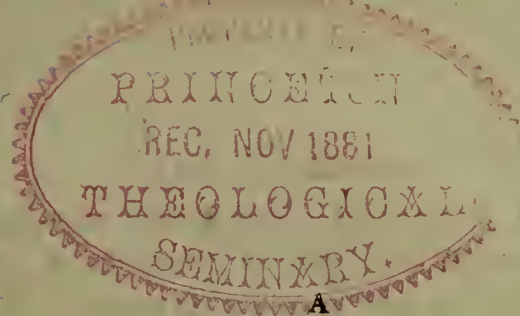
TO

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PARAPHRASE AND COMMENT

UPON ALL THE

EPISTLES AND GOSPELS,

USED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

St. Andrew's Day.

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF ST. ANDREW.

ST. Andrew was the son of Jonas, a fisherman of Bethsaida, and (by the ancients, Epiphanius excepted, believed to be the younger) brother of St. Peter. Of his education, his discipleship to the Baptist, his first and second call to Christ, and the effect which these had upon him, enough is said on the Gospel for *Sund. v. after Trinity*, and on that for this day. That coming to our Lord, and the early acquaintance with him, of which we read in the first of St. John's Gospel, gained him the title of the *First called*. And the bringing his brother Simon the first intelligence of, and conducting him to, the Messiah, is the reason of his being styled πέτρος, or *the rock before the rock*.

His brother and he seem to have dwelt together in the same house, where Peter's wife's mother lay sick. Though we do not read of him that he had the same privilege of being admitted to the privacies of our Lord, as his brother,

and James and John had; yet some passages there are, which may be thought to intimate a more than common interest in our Lord's favour. When five

Compare John vi.
5—9. with Mark
vi. 37, 38.

thousand were to be fed by a miracle, and our Lord had made an experiment of Philip's faith; upon his answering, how impracticable the refreshing so many in that place was, our Lord inquires into the quantity of their provision; of which Andrew was the person who gave the account; but withal, of the vast disproportion between so little food and so many wanting to be fed.

Some Greeks, at our Lord's last passover, desirous to see Jesus, but not presuming to approach him without

John xii. 20, 21, 22.

an introducer, apply to Philip; he communicates their request to Andrew, and both these together prefer it to our Lord. It is also worth our notice,

Mark xiii. 3. that this apostle is named as the fourth who attended his Master in his retirement to the Mount of Olives, and were present at the warnings he was pleased to give of the destruction of Jerusalem, and of his own last coming.

After our Lord's ascension, the part of the world assigned to St. Andrew's care was Scythia. He was not idle in his passage thither, but preached in Cappadocia, Galatia, Bithynia, and by the coast of the Euxine Sea, till he had penetrated into the desarts of that

Euseb. Hist.
lib. iii. c. 1.

Catal. Script.
Orat. in Arrian.
* Hom. in 12.

Apost. T. 5.
Orat. 168.
Hieron Catalog.
Script.

barbarous country. St. Jerom says, he preached at Sebastople, where the rivers Phasis and Apsarus run into the Euxine Sea. Nazianzen says the same of Epirus. He preached also in Thrace, Macedonia, and Achaia; correcting, as St. Chrysostom* expresses it, the wise men of Greece. At last in Patræ, a city of Achaia; Ægeas, the proconsul, enraged at this undauntedly persisting to publish the

doctrine of a crucified Saviour, condemned him to the death which he so much extolled. This he suffered on a cross; not of the usual form, but like the letter X, and since known commonly by the name of St. Andrew's cross. To make his death more painful and lingering, he was fastened to it not with nails but cords; on which, after having hung two days, all the while praising God for his martyrdom, and exhorting the spectators to the Christian faith, he is said to have expired the 30th day of November. Constantine afterwards brought his body to Constantinople, and interred it there with great respect: in which city also, St. Andrew is reported, by one of the succeeding patriarchs, to have planted a Christian church, and to have ordained the beloved Stachys, mentioned by St. Paul, the first bishop of it.

Niceph. C. P.
p. 309.
Rom. xvi. 9.

THE COLLECT.

ALmighty God, who didst give such grace unto thy holy apostle, St. Andrew, that he readily obeyed the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him without delay: grant unto us all, that we, being called by thy holy word, may forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfil the holy commandments, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

St. Matt. iv.
19, 20.
St. Mark i.
16, 17, 18.

THE EPISTLE.

ROM. x. 9.

PARAPHRASE.

9. *IF thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

9. The sum of the condition required of Christians, is a firm belief in Jesus, (in

that main article of his resurrection particularly) and an undaunted profession of his truth and of our dependance on him, as our Master and only Saviour.

10. This is the true justifying faith, this the confession that gives a title to salvation.

10. *For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

11, 12, 13. And this condition extends to all mankind, not to Jews only; as the prophets (Isaiah and Joel, particularly) have long since declared. See Isa. xxviii. 16. compared with Rom. ix. 33. and Joel ii. 32. compared with Acts ii. 16, to 21.

11. *For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him, shall not be ashamed.*

12. *For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all, is rich unto all that call upon him.*

13. *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

14, 15. Now as this invocation supposes faith, so does that faith instruction; and so again does that instruction a commission given to those that bring it. Such a one as Isaias prophesied of chap. lii. 7, 8.

14. *How then shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?*

15. *And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things?*

16. And if the subject of our preaching hath not been received as it deserved: this also agrees with another prediction of the same prophet, chap. liii. 1.

16. *But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report.*

17. All which makes it very evident, that though faith do not always

17. *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

18. And was this instruction wanting? No.

The publication of the gospel hath been as extensive, as those declarations of the divine honour, mentioned Psal. xix. 4.

18. *But I say, Have not they heard? Yes verily, their sound went out into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.*

19. *But I say, did not Israel know ; first Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you.*

dispensation at which they now take so great offence? No; Moses himself foretold it. Deut. xxxii. 21.

20. *But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not ; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me.*

21. *But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.*

ver. 2. ascribing the postponing of the Jews to their own obstinacy and unpersuadableness.

19. And can the Jews in particular pretend ignorance? Nay even of this dis-

20. And Isaiah yet more expressly chap. lxxv. 1.

21. Nor does he declare the thing only, but the cause of it too,

COMMENT.

ST. Paul had, in the beginning of this Epistle, proved at large, that the method, appointed by God for the justification of sinners, is faith in Christ, and obedience to his Gospel. This led him, in the chapter next before, to vindicate that surprising dispensation, whereby the Jews (God's once peculiar people) fell from the truth; and the gentiles (till then strangers to the covenant of promise) were admitted to partake of the privileges of Christianity. To this purpose he had explained those promises to the patriarchs; by a false interpretation whereof their posterity were misled into a vain imagination, that the truth of these, and the present manner of God's proceeding, could not stand together. He had argued from the freedom of God's grace, and shewed how absolutely he is master of his own favours. He had urged, how agreeable the distinctions, made upon this occasion, were, both to the divine justice,

iii. iv. v. &c.

ix. 6.

Ver. 14, 15, &c.
Ver. 21, &c.

and to the testimonies of their own prophets. In the former part of this chapter, he had compared the condition required by the gospel, with those of that law, to which the blind zeal of his adversaries adhered so pertinaciously. Afterwards he goes on, in the scripture now before us, to confirm what he had more briefly touched upon before, *viz.* That they who were rejected, had been so punished for their own fault; and they, who were taken in, were graciously rewarded for their ready compliance with, and eager embracing of, those terms of salvation, which it well became the Maker and Lord of all freely to provide for, and offer to, all.

Thus much may suffice for a convenient representation of the apostle's main design in his argument upon this point. The part hereof, made the subject of our present meditation, begins with that condition, which is now required in order to salvation: and, in regard a right understanding of this is evidently of the last importance to every Christian: here I shall fix my thoughts, as the principal, at least a very profitable, improvement of the Epistle for the day.

Now the matter, which I mean to treat of, we have in these words: *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved; for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

In discoursing on this matter, it will be proper to inquire into *three* things.

I. *First*, What is meant by that *righteousness* and *salvation*, which are here mentioned, as the ends of, or benefits to be obtained by, a Christian's faith in, and *confession* of, Jesus Christ.

II. *Secondly*, Of what nature and extent that

faith and *confession* are, which we find here enjoined, as means necessary in order to obtain those ends.

III. *Lastly*, Wherefore the apostle should choose, in this place, to comprise under these two the whole of a Christian's duty.

I. *First*, I begin with examining, what is the true sense of that *righteousness* and *salvation*, which are here mentioned, as the ends of, or benefits to be obtained by a Christian's *faith* in, and *confession* of, Jesus Christ. Now it seems very plain, that each of these words is made use of by the writers of the New Testament, in a different extent, and twofold sense: but both the one and the other sense may be applicable to this declaration of the apostle, and proper (I had almost said necessary) to be taken notice of, in a discourse upon it.

1. As for *righteousness*; this is sometimes intended to denote no more than justification, or an acquittal from sin past. Such is evidently the meaning of it, when *Abraham's faith* is said to be counted for *righteousness*; and when that expression is illustrated and explained, by *forgiving iniquities, covering sins, and justifying the ungodly*. Such again, when men are said, to *follow after*, or *submit to* obtain, or to *be made the righteousness of God*: and in general, such is the sense, where it is set to signify, not the act, but the benefit and reward, of embracing the gospel; and stands in opposition, not to the crime, but to the punishment, of unbelief and disobedience. And thus (to omit other instances at present) it seems to do, in the *sixth* of this Epistle, at the 16th; where men are called the *servants*, as of sin unto death, so likewise of *obedience unto righteousness*.

But the word does also denote the good actions and dispositions of holy men. Thus we read of

Rom. iv. 3. 5, 6, 7.

— iii. 25.

— ix. 30, 31.

— x. 3.

2 Cor. v. 21.

the way of righteousness, the works of righteousness, the fruit and effect of righteousness, and many other phrases of like importance. All which more especially concern the sanctification, and do not (like those of the former sort) belong so properly and immediately to the justification of Christians. And yet this righteousness also (as I have formerly shewed at large) is a necessary preliminary and condition of the other, when taken in its most exalted sense, and extended to our full and final justification. Which leads us to observe, in the next place, a twofold sense of the word *salvation*, also, as it stands here before us.

By salvation then, we are sometimes to understand that state of complete safety and happiness, into which those pious souls enter, who (to use this apostle's expression elsewhere) *shall be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*. Accordingly we find it called *eternal salvation*; we are advised to *take for a helmet the hope of salvation*: we are said, *to be kept through faith unto salvation*; to *receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls*; and told, *that Christ shall come a second time without sin unto salvation*.

But, at other times, it is evidently to be interpreted, not of the end and perfection, but of the way and means to that salvation. So I understand our blessed Lord, when declaring to the woman of Samaria, that *salvation was of the Jews*; and to Zaccheus, that *salvation was that day come to his house*: and St. Peter, that *baptism doth now save us*; and St. Paul, that *God saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost*; and that the Ephesians were *saved by grace through*

Prov. viii. 20.
1 John iii. 7.
Phil. i. 11.
Heb. xii. 11.

Epist. xiii. Sun.
after Trin.

1 Cor. v. 5.
Heb. v. 9.
1 Thess. v. 8.
1 Pet. i. 5.
Ver. 9.
Heb. ix. 28.

John iv. 22.
Luke xix. 9.
1 Pet. iii. 21.
Tit. iii. 5.
Eph. ii. 8.

faith; and sundry other places, which clearly signify, not the actual accomplishments of, and attaining to, everlasting happiness and salvation: but partaking of the means, and being put into the right way, which if persisted in, will certainly lead men to the full possession of it.

II. Let us now proceed, in the *second* place, to examine into the nature and extent of that *faith* and *confession*, which are here enjoined, as means necessary for obtaining that righteousness and salvation already explained.

In a former part of this work, I took occasion to observe, that the first and most obvious sense of faith is an assent of the mind to some truth, upon authority of testimony; and, that divine faith is an assent to some truth revealed and testified by God. Thus *believing in the heart* that God raised Jesus from the dead, is a firm persuasion, that this was done in such time and manner, and for such reasons and purposes, as the word of God, in the Holy Scriptures, hath described and declared to us. Agreeably to this constitution, *confessing the Lord Jesus with the mouth* will import an open acknowledgment of Jesus, as the Son of God and Saviour of the world; vested in all the powers and prerogatives, the authority and dominion, which the title of Lord is designed to signify to us.

Epist. xiii. Sun.
after Trinity.

But it was farther observed, in the place before referred to, that the faith so highly commended in Scripture, hath generally, not some truths barely speculative for its object, but precepts and promises also: and, that its act is of a federal nature, solemnly engaging for some conditions required, in view of some considerations offered, and rewards annexed unto them. And thus *believing the Lord Jesus with the heart* is owning him for our Lord by covenanting to be his servants; and *confessing him with the mouth* is very properly applied to those

solemn declarations of the Christian faith, usual at baptism; the sacrament, which lists us in his service, and strikes the covenant made between God and man in Jesus Christ.

Again, as this covenant engages the person for term of life, so the belief and confession, upon that occasion, implies a firm purpose of heart to persevere in the same persuasion, and to perform the terms required on man's part, faithfully and constantly. And hence it comes to pass, that the whole of a Christian duty is frequently comprehended under this single instance of faith. How properly and justly, I am now about to make appear, by enquiring in the

III. *Third* place, wherefore the apostle should choose, in the passage before us, to mention this *belief* and *confession*, as the whole of that condition, which entitles a Christian to all the privileges and rewards, implied here by *righteousness* and *salvation*.

That this is an extent of the faith, to which our complete justification is usually ascribed by St. Paul, might be made abundantly manifest, from those passages in his writings, which speak of *faith*

working or actuating *by love*; of the inefficacy of the former, even its highest degree, when not crowned with the latter; *of the obedience of faith*, and that declared to be an *obedience both in*

word and deed; and from the very many other texts, enforcing and declaring the necessity of piety and good works. Proofs of this point, which have already been insisted on so largely, that referring my

reader thither, I shall content myself with observing, that such, in all reason, must be the meaning of *faith*, in the place at present before us.

Now of this, I think, we have good intimation from the context; which makes *believing in the Lord*, at the 11th verse, and *calling upon the name of*

Gal. v. 6.

1 Cor. xiii. 2, 3,

Rom. xvi. 26.

—xv. 18.

Vol. III. xiii. S.

after Trin.

the Lord, at the 12th and 13th, expressions illustrating and equivalent. As it does also, at the 16th verse, set *not obeying* and *believing*, as terms of direct opposition to each other. It being very sure that *calling upon God*, as well as *obeying* his word, is oftentimes put in Scripture to signify a man's duty and virtue in its utmost latitude; and in contrariety, not only to irreligion or unbelief strictly understood, but to all manner of ungodly practice and vicious conversation.

Psal. xiv. 4.

—— lili. 4.

—— lxxix. 6.

—— lxxx. 18.

Jerem. x. 5.

To confirm this yet more, let it be considered, what *confession with the mouth* must needs have imported, at the time of writing this Epistle. The gospel of Christ was then had in the utmost contempt; the professors of it were not only derided, but most barbarously persecuted; and all, that the men of the world esteem most dear, was made the price of their fidelity to this Lord. Hence it is easy to perceive, how different a thing the *confessing Jesus Christ* was then, from that which too many make it now; a matter of mere form and course, the complying with fashion and custom, and carrying an empty title, with very poor, if any regard to those obligations, implied in the name and character of Christians and disciples. This is a cheap and easy service; when all the temporal encouragements and advantages, which the countenance of government, and credit of the world can contribute, conspire to promote and recommend it: in comparison of that, which was bidding open defiance to imminent danger, and general opposition. That was a degree of resolution, scarce conceivable to be attained, without long and serious deliberation: and such, as with rational agents, can hardly be separated from strict holiness and virtue. For surely they, who are not disposed to live to Christ, can scarce be imagined capable of being content to forsake all, and to die for him. Here was no room for hypocrisy and

time-serving; when all, who took upon them this religion, were sensible they did it at their utmost peril. They, in their very baptism, declared war, not only with the devil, and the flesh, but in the very strictest speaking, with the world too; the malice and menaces, no less than the pleasures, and vanities, and allurements, of it. As therefore such solemn profession at first implied a prospect and purpose of encountering these difficulties: so the actual performance of, and unshaken perseverance, in, that holy purpose, is a virtue so exalted, as may very well be presumed to include a good life; and to proceed from such assistances of divine grace, as cannot but determine the person under its influence, to all other instances of obedience whatsoever. And, as it is thus in the reason of things, so was it then in fact and in experience. Orthodox believing and careless living are absurdities at all times; and such as do not, in those times, seem as yet to have met together in the same person. Although, therefore, at the rate Christians now behave themselves, (I am sorry to say) there is too much occasion for wondering that belief and confession should imply a life exactly suitable to our principles; yet in those early and better days, this sense of the words was not at all surprising. For then the zeal and vigour of Christians was so conspicuous; that every man's actions and shining example were so many demonstrations of the power of his faith, and ornaments to the doctrine, which wrought so sudden and thorough a change in as many as received it.

Thus much I thought expedient, to shew what ground the scripture now before us ministers for interpreting St. Paul here, not of a naked faith, and formal confession of Christ; but in a sense, (so usual in his writings) which, by the mention of one principal part, intends the whole of our duty as Christians. And, I think, it must be granted, that no one part could so properly have this latitude of

signification attributed to it, as that of faith, upon the several accounts that follow.

1. If we respect the nature of faith in general. A little reflection upon the springs and principles of human actions may suffice to shew, that all things without, affect and excite us, not according as they really are in themselves, but in proportion to the notions we entertain, and the concern we apprehend ourselves to have in them. Now faith, being a firm persuasion of the truths contained in the gospel; (the precepts and promises, as well as the articles of doctrine) it follows, that this must needs be first, not only in time and order, but also in the quality of a foundation, and cause, and root, fitted to shoot out, and produce all other Christian virtues, as its proper fruit and genuine effects. These effects it does not necessarily produce; because it is not always lively, but rather a dormant, principle: for men are often negligent in exerting its powers. But yet they so naturally follow from thence, that if we carefully attend to it, and do not suffer the motive suggested by it to have their due force obstructed, it will not fail to prevail for the making us in all points the persons we ought to be. The Scripture, therefore, when magnifying the efficacy of faith, speaks of it, as it is in its own nature; and upon a presumption, that the persons possessed of it, do their endeavours to keep its impressions always lively and strong, and its objects familiar to their thoughts. And where this is done, the inducements to obedience will be found so powerful, and the conditions of obtaining them so reasonable and necessary; that an assured expectation of the former will draw after it a careful discharge of the latter. It is therefore of the utmost importance, to be rooted and grounded in this common principle of goodness. A principle, so suited to the operations of rational souls, and whose influence upon our whole behaviour is so universal; that we may say of its efficacy,

with regard to the good or evil of our lives, as our Saviour did with regard to his miracles, *according to the strength or weakness of our faith, so shall it be unto us.*

2. To comprehend our whole duty under this general term of *faith*, was very useful for St. Paul's design; which is, to give his converts a right understanding of the gracious condescensions of the Christian covenant. There are two errors, with regard to this matter, which one may plainly discern, he found above all others necessary to be refuted. The former supposed it possible to be justified by works, done without the grace of Christ: the other, that men by good works, of any kind, were capable of meriting at the hands of God. In opposition to both which he proves; First, that the condition now required is far more easy and practicable, than any insisted on before: and then, that this, even when made good in such a manner as now will be accepted, leaves yet no place for confidence in our own merit; but teaches us to be thankful for our reward, as the grace and free gift of God.

The former of these points St. Paul is actually upon, in the passage now before us. For having, at the fourth *verse*, mentioned the advantage of *Christ being the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth*: he proceeds, in the fifth and three following verses, to compare the Mosai- cal with the Christian dispensation. This comparison proceeds upon the different conditions of obtaining justification, under each of them. That of Ver. 5. the law saith, *The man who doth these things shall live by them.* That is, an exact performance of all the precepts then enjoined, was necessary, to entitle men to the blessings and rewards then covenanted for. But this of the gospel saith, Ver. 6, 7, 8, 9. *Say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into heaven? that is to bring*

down Christ from above: or, who shall descend into the deep? that is, to bring Christ again from the dead. But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart, that is, the word of faith, which we preach. That, if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. The true importance whereof I conceive to be thus much: that what Moses had spoken concerning the moral law (for this is the subject of his discourse there, and not the ceremonial) is much more applicable to the gospel. If the will of God were then plain and easy to be understood, (for of understanding the law it is that Moses speaks) much more it is so now, after so full a revelation of it by the doctrine of Christ, and the propagation of that doctrine by the preaching of his apostles. But then the gospel hath this manifest advantage; that the law, though easy to be known, was yet exceeding difficult to be performed; and never was or could be fulfilled, by any abilities of its own furnishing. For the gospel does not as the law did heretofore, propose such terms of obedience, as the strength of human nature, unassisted by grace, must needs find insuperable difficulties in. And yet this, the reader hath formerly seen, was manifestly the case of the law which proposed justification by works: in regard, that a man might be abundantly convinced of the reasonableness, of the necessity, of the obedience required; might watch, might diligently apply himself to it; might lament, and most earnestly struggle with his infirmities; and yet never be able either to conquer those infirmities he continually strove against; or, through the impotence of his condition, to attain that perfection of obedience, which he sincerely desired, and earnestly laboured after.

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But with the gospel the case is quite otherwise. For this suspends all our blessedness, upon the belief in, and disciplinship to, Jesus Christ; an holy trust in his truth and merits; and a firm assurance of his resurrection. All which are easy, in comparison of the other; because all of them possible to every one, who will act rationally and wisely. And such they manifestly prove themselves to be, whether we consider the duty to be performed, or the motives inciting to it. In both which regards, the evangelical righteousness hath vastly the advantage above the legal.

The hardship of the legal is abundantly plain, not only from the reasoning of St. Paul in sundry places of this Epistle, (which prove the universal corruption of human nature, and consequent thereupon, the impossibility of punctually discharging either the moral or the levitical Law;) but also, by his using here those words of Moses, Deut. xxx. 11, 12, 13, 14. *ascending into heaven, and descending into the deep.* For these are, in the Hebrew tongue, proverbial expressions, denoting invincible difficulties. On the contrary, *being nigh* in people's *mouths and hearts* are phrases in that language, as commonly known to import, that the thing so spoken of is practicable and easy. And such is the faith and confession here mentioned. This requires no more than a diligent and unprejudiced application of the mind to objects revealed by God; a firm assent, upon sufficient evidence of such revelation; and a careful practice of those virtues, which that assent (if duly attended to, and pursued through all its consequences) will naturally enforce, and carry believers into. All this no man can reasonably complain of, or demur to; because it expects no more from any, than all are capable of: even fair dealing, and consideration, sincerity and constancy, receiving principles established upon good grounds; and acting in

agreement and consistence with them, when so received and solemnly professed.

Again, as this is a condition of happiness, which men are better qualified for discharging; so it is such as they must in all reason be more powerfully disposed for undertaking, than that enjoined by the law. It is with that of religion, as with all other service and labour. The toil and trouble of the duty is evermore lessened, in proportion to that spirit and vigour of expectation, which the prospect of a recompense inspires. As then the certainty and the value of that recompense rise; the difficulty of performing the condition preparatory to it, will not fail to sink. Now the circumstances of the law and the gospel are as different in this regard, as time and eternity. The former contracted expressly for temporal felicities only; the latter promiseth a reward of bliss, more truly and eminently so, than at present any of us is able to conceive. And all we can say of it (which yet is more than enough to command the utmost of our endeavours and the eagerest of our desires) is, that God hath designed to render us complete in that state to come by the provision of a happiness, which can never have any interruption, any abatement, any conclusion. Consequently, the faith, which assures us of such a reward, must needs be a duty more practicable than a law of works was; since that imposed a heavier burthen, and yet did not come furnished with advantages, in any degree comparable, to support men under it.

2. I come now to observe, how suitable the comprehending our whole Christian duty under the name of *faith* is, to another part of St. Paul's design; that of destroying all confidence in any merit of ours, which such obedience might be falsely supposed to have. To this purpose it is, that we find the apostle setting so often in direct opposition to each other, not only faith and works, but also

the law and the promise, and frequently asserting the inconsistency between them. *If they* (says he)

Rom. iv. 14. *which are of the law, be heirs; faith is*
Gal. iii. 18. *made void, and the promise made of none*
Rom. iv. 4. *effect. And, if the inheritance be of the*
——— 16. *law, it is no more of promise. And,*
——— iii. 27. *to him that worketh, is the reward not*
Eph. ii. 8. *reckoned of grace, but of debt: there-*

fore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; and where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith. And, by grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. To make these, and sundry other texts of like importance, appear in their full force, it must always be remembered, that the works so zealously disclaimed by this apostle, are such, as men were therefore apt to value themselves upon, because they were supposed to perform them by their own proper strength. Herein agree all virtues done in conformity to the law of nature (the discovery and the motives whereof proceeded from a right improvement of natural reason.) Herein all acts of obedience of the law of Moses too; because, though directed by God, yet they had not the promise of any supernatural assistance: and therefore, as to the discharge, could that have been punctual and full, they must be allowed the person's own entirely, though, in respect to the knowledge and discovery, they were not entirely his.

But now the obedience meant here by *faith*, is the very reverse of all this. The foundation of it is laid in a belief of such truths as mankind must for ever have remained in ignorance of, had not God of

Col. i. 26, 27. *his mercy made known the riches of his glory, and the mystery which had lain hid from ages and generations. The motives to it*

2 Pet. i. 4. *are those exceeding great and precious promises, which no obligation lay upon him to make; we can therefore ascribe them to no other*

cause, but to his own free goodness: and a love, as undeserved as it is unconceivable. And which is yet more, the effectual assent to that mystery, and the compliance with these motives, are consequences of that *Spirit* and his *grace*, which enables and disposes us to obedience, and leaves us no part in our best actions, but that of a dutiful and diligent concurrence with those operations, from whence *all our holy desires, all our good designs, and all our just works, do originally proceed.* And what glory, what merit, can accrue from those actions, whose beginning, progress, end, and efficacy, are all from another hand? Surely to Him alone belongs the whole honour, who hath wrought the whole work in us; and without whom we could neither have known, nor desired, nor done, nor obtained acceptance or reward for, any thing that is commendable or good: for nothing can so truly be called our own, as our follies and sins, our neglects and our infirmities.

1. Once more, I observe, that, as the whole duty of a Christian is very properly comprised in *faith* and *confession*; so is the whole object of that faith and confession very significantly intimated, by specifying that single article of our Lord's resurrection from the dead. The intent whereof would be very much mistaken; should we from hence infer, that nothing more than the hearty belief, and public profession, of this article alone was in those days required. For it were easy, at this rate of interpreting, to argue, that even this article was not necessary to be solemnly confessed of every Christian; by comparing and sticking perversely to the letter, where the baptisms on the day of Pentecost, of the eunuch, of St. Paul, of the jailor at Philippi, and of the disciples at Ephesus, are related. And yet in all these cases,

Acts ii. 38. 41.
 ——— viii. 37, 38.
 ——— ix. 18.
 ——— xvi. 31. 33.
 ——— xix. 5.

cluding, that the resurrection, and sundry other articles not expressly mentioned, were openly assented to before, and in order to baptism. As therefore *calling on*, or owning the name of Jesus, or declaring a belief that *he is the Son of God*, or the like, are not exclusive in those passages; so neither is his resurrection, in this now before us, exclusive of the rest. The truth is, all these are compendious ways of intimating, and a sufficient implication of all other (and these seem to have been several) fundamental points of Christ's religion, to which a public assent was solemnly declared by every proselyte, then received into it.

Contenting myself therefore with this brief admonition, in how large a sense some scriptures are to be understood: where, by an usual figure of speech, the whole is intended, though some principal part only be mentioned: I shall assign a reason or two, why Jesus being *raised from the dead* should be chosen by St. Paul, to imply that faith, which is *believed unto righteousness with the heart, and confessed with the mouth unto salvation*.

Now this might be chosen, *first*, because so unanimously opposed by adversaries of all sorts, that the asserting it was a certain test and character of a Christian. The death of Jesus was the boast of Jews, and no matter at all of controversy with the Gentiles. But still the former judged that death inconsistent with his Messiahship; and, as they were infidels in the end and purpose of his death; so were mankind in general, in the point of his rising again. This therefore the apostles laboured chiefly to establish. The necessity of a proper choice to supply the place of Judas, is laid upon having a person competently qualified, to join his testimony with the eleven, concerning our Lord's resurrection.

Acts i. 22.

— ii. 24, &c.

— iii. 15, &c.

— iv. 10, &c.

The same is urged as a demonstration of God's *making Jesus both*

Lord and Christ, in the several accounts of people converted to the faith by the preaching of the apostles. The constancy of those apostles, and the attestation of miracles vouchsafed them, in that office, are styled *giving with great power witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*. The subject of St. Paul's discourse at Athens, was *Jesus and the resurrection*. And, to mention but one instance more, how distinguishing an article this was then esteemed; after professing an agreement with the Jews in other tenets, he resolves the difference between them into this; *Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question*. An expression home to our present purpose: for himself explains it thus before Agrippa, that he acted conformably to the prophets, who declared, *Christ should be the first that should rise from the dead*.

Acts v. 30, 31, 32.

— x. 41.

— xiii. 30, &c.

— iv. 33.

— xvii. 13.

— xxiv. 21.

— xxvi. 23.

2. This article was very fit to imply all the rest, by reason of the light and evidence it reflects upon them all; and the mighty importance attributed to it, for assuring to us the benefits and comforts of the gospel. By this we prove the divine, as well as human, nature of our Saviour. *Jesus Christ our Lord, made of the seed of David, according to the flesh, is declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*. By this, the end and efficacy of his death; for, as he *was delivered for our offences, so he was raised again for our justification*. By this, his ascent and exaltation to the throne of God; for *the same mighty power which raised Christ from the dead, did also set him at God's own right hand in heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, might, and dominion, that every name that is named,*

Rom. i. 3. 4.

— iv. 25.

Eph. i. 19, 20,
21, 22.

&c. *And hath put all things under his feet, and given him to be head over all things to the church,*

&c. This gives us the certainty of a future judgment; for God hath appointed a day, in which he

Acts. xvii. 31. *will judge the world, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he*

hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. Hence we learn the divinity of the Holy Ghost; because he, who is so

1 Pet. iii. 18. *often said to be raised by God, is also said to be put to death in the flesh, but*

quickened by the Spirit. By this (as I shewed before) Christ became the head of the church: by

this we hope to gain that remission of sins, which is conveyed in the sacraments of the church; for

Ver. 21. *baptism doth now save us (says St. Peter) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and we*

are therefore buried with him in baptism, (says St. Paul) that like as Christ was raised up

Rom. vi. 4. *from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

By this again we are certified of our own resurrection; for Christ is risen the first-

Col i. 18. *born from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that sleep: and we*

1 Cor. xv. 20. *know that he which raised up Jesus, shall also raise us up by Jesus.* And lastly, by this

all good Christians are assured of everlasting life and happiness; for himself declares, that he is

gone to prepare a place for such; and that he will

John xiv. 2, 3. *come again, and receive them to himself, that where he is, there they may*

Heb. vi. 19, 20. *be also.* Thus the author to the Hebrews styles him our forerunner, who is entered

into heaven for us. And St. Paul in like manner,

1 Thess. iv. 14, 17. *If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so also them which*

sleep in Jesus shall God bring with him, and so shall they be for ever with the Lord.

From hence it appears, how broad a foundation this article of our blessed Redeemer's resurrection lays, and how spacious and weighty a superstructure it is capable of sustaining. Insomuch, that a Christian hath little else to wish, for the settling his mind, and determining his judgment, in the principles of this religion; but evident proofs of that essential point, which in effect and by plain consequence, proves and illustrates the whole scheme. And in this regard, it is our glory to have the fullest and most incontestible satisfaction, that any matter of this nature can afford. Attestations the best grounded, the most impartially examined, the most clearly delivered, the most miraculously confirmed, the most constantly persisted in, the most carefully transmitted to succeeding ages, that ever any fact could pretend to. In a word, such as all who stand out against must stand self condemned; because it cannot be any rational uncertainty or doubt, that detains them in error or unbelief; while, at the same time, they make no difficulty of venturing their all, in other matters of highest importance, upon the credit of testimony infinitely weaker, and prospects of advantage infinitely less engaging. To which purpose I add,

3. *Thirdly, and lastly,* As the examples, mentioned under the *last* particular, do all conspire, in shewing the fitness of extending the belief of our Lord's resurrection to all the articles of our Christian faith; so do those last-mentioned, more especially, prove the fitness of extending it to faith in the largest sense of the word, as that includes all parts of Christian practice. Thus St. Paul, speaking of being *risen with Christ* in Col. ii. 12. holiness of life, attributes this effect to the belief of *the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead*. And St. Peter says, 1 Pet. i. 3. *God hath begotten us again to a lively, hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead:*

1 John iii. 3. even that *hope* which (as St. John observes) *every one that hath, purifieth himself even as he is pure.* In a word, the firm persuasion of our Lord's resurrection infers the certainty of our own. And the state, to which the Scriptures promise we shall rise, is so perfectly happy and glorious; that no man, who diligently considers, and is stedfastly assured of it, can think any thing too hard to be done, or endured, in order to attain it. Faith is called, by the author to the Heb. xi. 1. *Hebrews, the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen:* that is, such an assurance, as the mind could not rest upon, even in possession, more firmly; because things distant and future are thus rendered always present to it. And is it to be imagined possible for men (think you) to value any thing comparable to, or to decline any undertaking, any suffering for, the joys of eternity, supposing they had a distinct sight and feeling of them? Possible for any, not to flee from sin, and dread every guilty approach toward it, more than racks, and fires, and crosses, the most exquisite tortures, and worst of deaths; did but the ghastly scene open, and set before their eyes the pains and anguish, the insupportable and everlasting wrath, which the damned endured? Would any temptation, though otherwise never so insinuating, be able to make its way, and seduce one, in despite of such sensible demonstrations as these? It is not to be conceived. And yet all, that would be done this way, might (and if we were not wanting to ourselves, would) be done without it: even by the shield of a true, considerate, lively, and vigorous faith; which, though proceeding upon another sort of evidence, can yet no more deceive us, than the evidence of sense itself.

This faith will therefore be an active principle, always exciting and invigorating our obedience;

and by the force of so excellent a reward in prospect, not only equal, but (if duly attended to) infinitely exceed, all difficulties and obstructions, which might otherwise discourage the performance of our duty. Because it will shew so vast a disparity, between the service enjoined and the recompense in reserve for it, as allows no manner of comparison between the poorness and imperfection of the one, and the infinite value and complete felicity of the other. But, having touched upon this argument already, I shall only make one short reflection, from the heads so largely insisted on, and with that conclude this discourse.

Now from hence, I most heartily wish, that men would take occasion seriously to consider their duty, rightly to understand the privileges of their high calling, and particularly to guard against two very different and dangerous opinions, which unwary people have fastened upon this, and sundry like places of Scripture. All which, I conceive, were easy to be effected, by having due regard to those distinctions, laid down under my *first* and *second* heads.

How warm hath been the dispute, in this part of the Christian world particularly, concerning the sufficiency of faith, and the necessity of good works, in order to salvation? And yet, all might be amicably composed, and errors in both extremes prevented, by attending to the different senses, and subjects, to which the same words are applied in Scripture; so as not to confound these, or bring them in evidence, for consequences, quite out of the purpose of each of the places respectively.

A man, for instance, may observe *faith* to be (as to be sure it often is) used for the assent to, and federal confession of, the truths revealed by Christ, at entering into the gospel covenant: and he shall at the same time find *righteousness* and *sal-*

vation attributed to such faith. And yet he will see no ground from thence to infer, that faith without good works, after baptism, can save him: if he withal remember, that by *righteousness* is sometimes intended no more, than the remission of sins past before baptism; and, that *salvation* sometimes means no more, than being brought into the true and right way, which will at last be sure to save all, who continue in it to the end. For there is a manifest difference, between God's releasing all former debts, and admitting us to a new contract with him: and requiring no account how we perform that contract afterwards; the conditions whereof we, at entering into it, did, by our own act and deed, bring on as a subsequent and voluntary debt upon ourselves.

On the other hand, a man may discern, that *righteousness* and *salvation* are sometimes set to signify the sanctification of persons, and the final everlasting happiness prepared for the faithful in heaven. In consequence of this, he may clearly see, and boldly assert, the necessity of good works done in the covenant and with the grace of Christ. And yet he may be far from thinking those works the meritorious cause of our salvation; or derogating in the least from any of those glorious effects, ascribed to faith in Scripture. The reason is, because, as those others are, so is the word faith also, sometimes taken in a very large extent. And then it does very properly and very naturally include all Christian virtues and graces whatsoever. And, in this more extended sense of *faith*, and in that more exalted sense of *righteousness* Psal. i. 25. and *salvation*, it is certainly true, that none but such as *order their conversation aright, shall see the salvation of God.*

I close this remark with the words of our excellent church, whose judgment and prudence, and great temper, I would to God all her adversaries

would impartially consider, and all her members carefully imitate.

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and full of comfort. But then observe what follows. Albeit good works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, nor endure the severity of God's judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known, as a tree discerned by the fruit.

Artic. of Relig. xi.

Artic. xii.

THE GOSPEL.

ST. MATT. iv. 18.

PARAPHRASE.

18. **J**ESUS walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon, called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: (for they were fishers.)

18. To understand the whole procedure of our Lord upon this occasion, the reader

need only cast his eye back on the Gospel for v. Sunday after Trinity, Vol. III.

19. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20. And they straightway left their nets and followed him.

21. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.

22. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

COMMENT.

THE passage now before us gives an account of our Lord's calling four great apostles, (to the memory of one of which this festival is sacred) and

of their ready compliance with that call. The design of that call was to make them powerful instruments of instructing and profiting others; to enter them into a profession, for the due discharge whereof all their time and pains would be little enough; and therefore it was expected they should give themselves wholly to it: a profession whose end it is to wean our affections from the present world, of which each of them hath set us a noble example in ridding himself presently of all secular interests and incumbrances, and by an entire application to his new Master's business. For that's the meaning of *immediately leaving their nets*, their ships, and their father, *and following Jesus*; that they, from thenceforth, became his inseparable attendants; sharers of his labours and his fortunes; no longer solicitous for themselves, or their families, but entirely depending on his bounty and blessing for their future provision and subsistence.

The manner of my treating this subject shall be,

I. *First*, To shew the motives, which, we may reasonably presume, induced the persons here to this compliance.

II. *Secondly*, To observe the virtue of that obedience. And,

III. *Thirdly*, To consider, how far they, in so doing, are a proper pattern for our imitation.

1. The motives, which seem to have induced the persons mentioned here to this compliance, are such as follow.

1. Of the apostle of this day in particular it is certain, from the first chapter of St. John, (and of the rest it is highly probable) that John i. 36—40. they had been trained under John the Baptist. Now the very intent of John's being brought into the world, and living in it after so uncommon a manner, is expressly declared to Luke i. be, that he might *prepare the way for Jesus*, by preaching the doctrine of repentance, and turn-

ing the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. To this eminent person God manifested his Son by the vision of a dove, and a voice from heaven; of which he bore so constant and faithful testimony, that neither the admiration of the Jews, nor the emulation of his own disciples, could ever prevail with him either to suppress it, or to take to himself those honours and opinions which might prove any diminution to the Messiah. From him were evidently derived the first notices which Andrew and his brother Peter had of Christ: nor is it to be conceived, that any retainers to him should continue ignorant of that person's character, whose preference above himself John took such care perpetually to inculcate, and so to raise a due veneration for, and turn his hearers at last over to, a far greater and better Master.

2. But, besides what these disciples might have learnt from the Baptist, they had other motives of obedience even from Jesus himself; for he was, before this call, sufficiently distinguished by his miracles and his doctrine. St. Matthew indeed, agreeably to his usual conciseness, places his action next after our Lord's entrance upon his public ministry, and gives only a short and summary account of it. But St. Luke, whose manner is more large and express, informs us of many preachings in the synagogues, many devils cast out, many diseases healed, great and frequent concourse of admiring crouds; and, which might more contribute to the gaining these fishermen, the scene of all those actions lay in Capernaum, and other towns bordering upon the Sea of Galilee, where they trafficked and inhabited.

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Add to all this the circumstances of the call itself; of which (as hath been formerly demonstrated) Christ did not make the experiment, till he had first informed their judgments, by teaching the multi-

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trudes out of one of their ships, and had brought the power of his doctrine home to their senses, by commanding a miraculous draught of fishes, in the very place where they had toiled all night and caught nothing; so that, after a reputation so established, instructions so divine, wonders so astonishing, and the impressions of one, in their own way, so fresh upon them, these fishers might very well justify their entering into the service of such a Master. And we should have more cause to wonder at their declining, than we can have at their forwardness, to *leave all* and *follow him*. The accounting for which, in the manner you have seen, I take to be much more satisfactory than ascribing it to any such commanding lustre in the person and countenance of our Lord, as some have imagined. For asserting that I know not that the Scriptures give us an authority: and the arguments here alleged seem to render it as unnecessary as the word of God hath left it uncertain.

I cannot let this particular quite go without one reflection, naturally rising from the method now taken in proof of it. From this instance, I mean to observe, how useful it is to interpret Scripture by reading, considering, and diligently comparing, the several parts of it together. Most errors in religion, and either accidental or wilful misconstructions of the evangelists and their writings, had been prevented by this care. How vain, for the purpose, are the pretended absurdities, and insolent reproaches of *Porphyry*, upon the instance now before us, grounded on St. Matthew's relation alone? Where is the suspicion of falsehood in the historian? Or, allowing him to say true, where is the blind enthusiasm, and frantic zeal, which he charges this action with, when St. Luke is also taken into the account, and the order of the whole proceedings rightly stated from them both? The apologies of the fathers shew the case to be much the same, with

all the bitter invectives against which they defended the faith; the only confutation, then ordinarily needful, was to set the matter in its true light, by that evidence and mutual illustration, which several passages treating of the same subject do mutually contribute to each other. It is certainly a great instance of the wisdom and goodness of Providence, that the doctrine and deportment of Jesus are transmitted to the world by several hands: and an argument it is also of their dealing truly with us, that, although writing at times and places far distant, yet all of them should so express themselves, as never once to contradict, but frequently to clear and assist each other. Would therefore all, would even the unlearned, improve in the helps afforded them in the margin of their Bibles, by consulting the parallel texts referred to there, they would soon feel that each evangelist is best understood by the study of the rest: and at last so just an harmony would result from all together, that, notwithstanding any seeming harshness from little discords, no necessary truths would be undiscovered, no dangerous errors entertained, no inconsistencies or difficulties of moment remain incapable of being fairly reconciled, by such readers. So short, so easy, and withal so useful a way to divine truth, I thought this a fit occasion to recommend: which I do yet more earnestly, because the most satisfactory and full of assurance of any whatsoever. The commentaries of learned men may be very entertaining and instructive, but we can never sit down with so perfect acquiescence in the meaning of God's word, as when the Holy Ghost condescends to comment and expound upon himself. All, therefore, who sincerely desire to have Scripture truly and fairly understood, labour to establish this sort of explication, by which the light divine, falling on different points, is, by drawing them into a proper position, reciprocally reflected from each upon the other. That of St.

Paul to the Corinthians being applicable to this case also: *As no man knoweth the*

1 Cor. ii. 11, &c. *things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him; even so the things of God knoweth none save the Spirit of God.* He alone could at first reveal them: He is the sure guide in all our studies of the truth so revealed; and his own dictates are incomparably the brightest evidence to form our notions upon.

II. From this digression (if it deserve to be thought one) I come now, in the *second* place, to observe the virtue of these apostles in obeying the call of Jesus. Without just and sufficient inducements, we may allow this *following* to be rashness and folly, for no action can be virtuous which is not rational. God certainly deals with us as he made us, and requires nothing at our hands, of which a good account may not be rendered to any considering and impartial mind. But herein lies the virtue: when difficult and distasteful cases offer, to preserve the mind free and clear, the judgment open and unbiassed, the affections regular and flexible, and the whole man ready and resolved to submit and act, as his conscience, after all due care for informing it aright, shall declare to be necessary or fit for him. Look upon the gospel at its first setting out; look upon the different successes of it ever since; you shall find the entertainment and influence of its doctrine constantly to have answered to the failure or the discharge of its hearers duty in this point. The same Jesus who with a word of his mouth prevailed upon these apostles to follow his person and his fortunes, did yet work miracles without number, and multiply sermons and conferences among the Jews, with very little effect. The reason is, these men were not only well instructed, but well disposed; and, through the efficacy of his grace, content, nay glad, to leave the world for him; whereas the scribes and pharisees, whose hearts

were set on secular and dishonest advantages, resisted that grace, and determined not to believe him at any rate.

The rich young man came much better (and, as he thought, sufficiently) prepared to undertake any condition requisite for attaining eternal life. His breast reproached him

Matt. xix. 16, &c.

not with the express breach of any precept in the moral law; and yet he, whose former diligence to live well had made him confident of his own innocence, when brought to the trial, was found far short of perfection. *Go sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come and follow me*, was a command too hard of digestion. And yet a positive promise of *treasure in heaven*, in recompense for the possession to be abandoned upon earth, was added for his encouragement; and an admonition, that he was not invited to loss, but to a wise and profitable exchange.

So much below these fishers was even the man who could say, *All these have I kept from my youth up*: nay who, as if that

Matt. xix. 20.

had been a virtue too low for the greatness of his mind, aspires after nobler degrees of goodness, and asks eagerly, *What lack I yet?* It may perhaps be answered, that this *young man had*

Ver. 22.

greater possessions, and so more to endear the world to him than these apostles. But when it is considered, that they readily left their all; be that all less or more, we should injure their character not to think that the difference of circumstances in this comparison was not near so great as that of dispositions; and that, whatever their estates had been, they would cheerfully have given the same proof how far they preferred the service of God before that of *Mammon*. Ease and prosperity must be allowed to knit the net stronger; but all, whose condition is not perfectly deplorable and indigent, get a good conquest over themselves when they

break through it by shaking hands by fortune or employment, which, though somewhat inferior, hath yet any comfort and competency in it; and therefore it was no vulgar virtue in these fishers to quit a trade laborious indeed, but yet a creditable and honest subsistence, and to cast themselves and their families at once upon the future care and providence of one, who openly disclaimed the world, and had not, of his proper possession, so much as *where to lay his head*.

III. Having thus spoken to the case of the apostles, I come, in the *last* place, to the profit we should make of it; by considering, how far this behaviour of theirs is a pattern fit for our imitation.

That it is not such in all points is most evident; by reason our condition in many regards is not, and in some cannot be, parallel to theirs. Our *first* step therefore toward improvement by this example must be to distinguish wherein our circumstances differ, or agree; and the next is, from the correspondence still between us, to form a judgment of such calls, and prepare our hearts for such compliances, as, in the present state of the gospel, and of our own affairs, we continue capable of.

As to the former of these particulars, there is a manifest diversity between our calls to Christ, and that of these fishermen, both for the manner and the matter of them.

1. For the manner: We have not now the happiness of conversing with Jesus in the flesh; our ears are not charmed with the sound of his gracious words, nor our eyes entertained with the wonderful operations of his divine power; and so our motive to obedience is not the very same with theirs, whose evidence of sense wrought first astonishment, and then firm belief. We read, and hear, and receive these things by a distant report, they were present to them; a difference, by some thought material enough to excuse men from yielding, at this

time of day, an assent like theirs heretofore, who are pretended to have been under so much more forcible means of conviction.

But this is a poor evasion ; for I take leave to say, that we have, in some regards, so much the advantage even of them, who conversed with Jesus and saw his mighty works, as must, I conceive, render our infidelity and disobedience in no degree less inexcusable than theirs. The apostles saw Christ's state of humiliation, and they saw that only, at the time when this call wrought upon them. We have known not that only, but his glorification also ; the power of his resurrection from the dead ; the punctual accomplishment of his terrible threatenings against the Jewish city and nation ; and that most amazing of all miracles, the firm establishment and vast extent of his kingdom, by the propagation of his gospel, and perpetuity of his church, in despite of all the subtilty and undermining arts of disputers and deceivers, all the treachery of hypocrites and false friends, all the implacable rage and bitter persecutions of malicious and avowed enemies. All this we see, and feel, and enjoy the effect of still ; and such events they are as no less cause can account for, than the peculiar favour and irresistible power, and stupendous wisdom, of an almighty God, evidently asserting and sustaining his own institution.

Farther yet. Though we do not now see the lame strengthened, nor the blind enlightened, nor the lunatic and possessed restored, nor the dead raised in our villages and cities, yet, even for these works which demonstrated Jesus to be the Son of God, we have all the evidence that is proper, all that is possible, for matters of this nature. The constant testimony of men in all ages and conditions, too many to be imposed upon, in interests too different to combine for imposing upon others, and in a cause

which ministers no temptation for any such imposture, admitting it to have been practicable. This is sufficient to convince reasonable and unprejudiced persons, and the unreasonable and prejudiced nothing will convince. To such we find the now so much extolled evidence of sense was not effectual; nor did the daily wonder of our Saviour convert an equal part of all that saw and stood astonished at them; from all which I presume we may infer, that they, who are now called to Christ by the impressions of his written word, by the voice of his ministers, by the ordinances and sacraments of his most holy religion, and by the secret motions of his grace, working in and with, and by their own wills and consciences, are strictly obliged to hearken to such calls; for though the method of calling be not the same to all, yet the evidence of that call is to all so full, as, at their utmost peril, to engage their obedience.

2. Again, as the call of these apostles differs from that now ordinarily vouchsafed, in the manner of making it; so does it likewise, in the matter, or thing required by it. They were drawn off from their secular employments, and commanded so to follow their Master, as to depend upon his provision for the future: but the generality of
 Ephes. iv. 28. Christians are required to *work with*
 1 Cor. vii. 24. *their own hands; to abide in their respective callings with God*; in short, not to quit their professions, but to do their duty in them. And this duty is well done, by an honest industrious care for ourselves and families; when that care is not suffered to get so far within us, as to shut out those measures of living, which justice and decency, beneficence and charity, the offices of religion, and the placing our treasure and hearts in heaven, demand from us. The world may be our concern, provided it be not our only, nor our chief concern; and the comforts of it may be esteemed good, so they be not

mistaken for our supreme good. So plain it is, that the call, which our church, in this day's service, prays God that we may be ready to obey, is vastly different from that, vouchsafed to the saint of it and his companions. Let us in the *last* place look, what correspondence there is, which still continues to affect us: and for that I beg your attention to the two following particulars:

1. *First*, The case of these apostles is so far our pattern, that, whatsoever is enjoined us by Christ in his word, we should immediately submit to it; whether it be any truth commanding our belief, or any precept calling for our practice: such a submission, be sure I mean, as agrees with the character given of these apostles, in the former part of this discourse. Such, as is the result of wisdom and deliberation, a reasonable service and a well-weighted choice; all heat and precipitance apart on the one hand, all obstinacy and prejudice on the other. Nor is this necessary to be urged upon them only, who have as yet not received, or are not well acquainted, with the principles of Christianity: but even they, who profess and know the best, are not always so happy, as to attend to every part of them justly. How greedily do men take an opinion, wherein their whole affairs are not concerned; and yet stand out against much stronger evidence for others, which happen to cross their interest, or bear hard upon some beloved error, with which they have been long prepossessed? How quick and sagacious are most of us in discerning, how severe in judging, how ingenious and officious in exposing and rebuking, the faults and failings of our brethren; and at the same time how blindly partial, how slow in discovering, how subtle in extenuating, nay, how zealous in justifying, the very same in ourselves? How many Herods have we, who hear their preachers gladly, and are content to do many things of their advising; but when the point of Herodias is

Collect.

touched; when any favourite lust, or darling pleasure is reprov'd, then the *deaf adder stops her ears, let the charmer charm never so wisely*. That pass shall be maintained at any rate: and they are not, cannot, will not, be persuaded. Now what a mighty difference is there, between a perverseness so inflexible as this, and the easy yielding temper of these apostles? Would they, can we think, have been detained by any single obstruction, who so cheerfully devoted to Christ themselves, and their all at once? Sure then we little consider their behaviour, or have considered it to little purpose; if it do not draw us so far at least towards an imitation, as to hearken patiently, and go in dutifully, to any one unpalatable doctrine for his sake.

2. Once more. This example shews, how loose the things of the present world ought to sit about us. The command of *going and selling all we have and following Christ* is what very few are put upon; but yet it is that, which every one ought to be provided for. Now the best preparation for abandoning that, which cannot be kept without guilt, is to employ it innocently and virtuously, while we have it. It is not wealth, but the inordinate love of wealth, that justifies the comparison of the camel and the needle's eye: for how small is the appearance, that a sordid wretch, who cannot find in his heart to spare a part of his superfluities to pious or charitable uses, will be brought to sacrifice the whole even of his necessities, to God and a good conscience?

1 Cor. vii. 31, *Using this world therefore, as not abusing it*, a constant thankful sense of all we have being lent us from above, enjoying it with modesty and meekness, dedicating a portion of it to the service of the great Proprietor, consulting the honour and dignity of his service, the decency and beauty of his house, laying out our pains and our possessions upon public benefactions, for increase of arts and sciences and honest industry; and studying to

render the talents intrusted with us the most instrumental that may be to the benefit of others : these dispositions and actions are a good step towards being well content, nay glad, to purchase a distant treasure in heaven, with a surrender of all our substance upon earth. And, if we be so resigned, as to *take up our cross and follow Christ* ; that is, to strip off every comfort, even life itself, when called to it ; then have we attained to the grace of these apostles. And as oft as God by his providence orders matters so, that a man's honours or riches, or employments, cannot be preserved with a good conscience : in a word, when any Christian is reduced to an unavoidable necessity, of either sinning or suffering ; then is he called by Christ ; then ought he to understand the obligation to be as great, and the command as express and peremptory as if (like this apostle) he had heard the voice of Jesus sounding in his ears, *Leave all and follow me*. Some indeed have thought it the most eminent and acceptable obedience to this call, to run away out of the world, and to shake hands with all business and avocation at once, by devoting their persons to a cloister, and their whole substance to piety. Far is it from my purpose, to derogate from any methods, proper for promoting heavenly-mindedness and contempt of the world : but doubtless such a resolution, like all others that are full of zeal, ought to be well regulated, founded upon true principles, and tempered with great discretion. It is not for every man to renounce an active life, and deprive the public of a serviceable member, in a station of care and trust : nor are any man's possessions so entirely his own, but that his family and his friends have some right to share in them. We see, our Lord highly condemns the *Jewish Corban* of corruption and hypocrisy : and what was that, but making over to pious uses, that which ought to have sustained fathers or mothers ; those, to whom nature hath, either made

as debtors already, or given an equitable expectation of being profited by us?

Let those then, who are desirous to imitate these apostles in leaving all and following Christ, be careful especially to imitate that first circumstance, of staying till he call them. But call them he does not, till all things are so ordered, that no relation or capacity where they stand, no duty or benefit justly expected from them, shall come under a necessity of remaining unsatisfied, by means of such a choice.

Now this being a case, which happens much seldomer than men are aware; it shall suffice for us, and for Christians in general, to use what the bounty of God hath given us conscientiously; to promote, and as we can, be liberal and rich in pious and good works; not to be guilty of any evil thing for the greatest advantage; if our dearest enjoyments cannot be preserved with innocence, to give them up cheerfully; and, how low soever reduced, to take every appointment of the divine Providence patiently and contentedly; trusting to God for the present supplies, and for a future reward. This is

Collect.

Collect iv. Sund.
after Trinity.

truly to give ourselves up obediently to fulfil his holy commandments: and they who thus pass through things temporal, shall not fail in the end of things eternal: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

ST. THOMAS'S DAY.

A short Account of St. Thomas.

THE name of this apostle, (and Didymus the interpretation of it) signifies a twin. Of his descent and country, Scripture makes no mention: nor of his education and business; except from the company and employment we find him in, at the xxist of St. John's Gospel, we should infer, as some have

done, that he was a fisherman, and concerned with Peter in carrying on that trade.

Three of the evangelists take no other notice of him, than what regards his call to the apostleship. St. John alone is particular concerning him: He first acquaints us with his behaviour, upon our Lord's determining to go and raise Lazarus. The other disciples, upon making this motion, remind our Lord of that implacable malice, which lately appeared in the Jews attempting to stone him; and, since he thought that a just occasion for withdrawing beyond Jordan, they could not suppose, he would think it proper, so soon to put himself in the way of so much danger again. Our Lord had, at the 9th verse of that chapter, given them a parabolical intimation, that his hour was not yet come. But this, being either not understood, or not effectually applied; after other discourse to set this journey aside, upon our Lord's saying, *Lazarus is dead—nevertheless let us go to him: Thomas said unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.* John xi. Ver. 14, 15, 16.

St. Chrysostom makes this an argument of greater cowardice in Thomas, than in any of the rest: others look upon it, as an instance of affection and resolution. The most natural interpretation seems to be, that though he saw nothing but death like to follow, upon their going again so near Jerusalem; yet if Jesus were determined to hazard his person, it would ill become them to desert him, whatever the consequence might be. This sense appears to be necessary, if by dying with him, he meant of Jesus; and the *dying with Lazarus* carries so much of irony and poignancy, as was neither decent in respect to our Lord, nor at all agreeable to this apostle's manner; for, how full of other good qualities soever he might be, he seems to have been slow enough of apprehension. This appears not only from the meaning of

our Saviour, at the 9th and 10th verses, not being understood ; in which his brethren were equal with him ; but more so, from another instance, in the xivth chapter, where our Lord's words are Ver. 5. more intelligible. And most of all, by that unpersuadeable stiffness in the point of Christ's resurrection, which makes the subject of this day's Gospel.

Euseb. L. III.
C. 1. Hom. in 12.
Apost. Orat. in
Arrian.
La Sueur ad
Ann. Chr. 60.

The province assigned to this apostle's labours, was Parthia. St. Chrysostom adds Æthiopia ; Gregory Nazianzen, India. Some learned men of late doubt of this last : at least they think the name of St. Thomas Christians no evidence at all ; and ascribe their original to one of the same name, many centuries after. But it hath generally been received, that St. Thomas did not only preach, but suffer martyrdom in India : and that he was lanced to death by the people ; whom the idolatrous Brachmans had instigated thus to dispatch a dangerous opposer of their idolatrous worship. The account of him in St. Jerom's catalogue is so short, that I will conclude with it : " Thomas the apostle, as the common tradition goes, preached our Lord's Gospel to the Parthians, Medes, Persians, Germans, Hyrcanians, Bactrians, and magi, and died at the city Calamino in India." If this authority be good, why may not the magi explain to us what sort of Æthiopians St. Chrysostom means ? Those probably of the same country, (near Chaldea) from whence they came, who worshipped our Saviour in his infancy : whether those very persons, let the reader, who is disposed to inquire, believe as he shall see cause.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who, for the more confirmation of the faith, didst suffer thy holy apostle Thomas to be doubtful in thy Son's resurrection; grant us so perfectly, and without all doubt to believe in thy Son Jesus Christ, that our faith in thy sight may never be reprov'd. Hear us, O Lord, through the same Jesus Christ, to whom with thee, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore. *Amen.*

St. John xx.
24—30.

THE EPISTLE.

EPH. ii. 19.

PARAPHRASE.

19. *NOW therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God:*

19. By virtue of Christ's blood and faith in him, not only Jews but Gentiles, indeed the

whole company of believers, are no longer under any restraint or distinctions, like sojourners; but rather like inhabitants, persons of the same community, who stand equal in all privileges, and, like those of the same family, have free access to the master of it, even God.

20. *And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.*

20. Nay, like parts of the same building, ye all stand upon the

doctrine of the apostles under the New, which is exactly of a piece with that of the prophets under the Old, Testament. And Jesus Christ is the key-stone and centre of union.

21. *In whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:*

21. In him it is, that every part of this foundation and superstructure

both rests. Nor is this a common house, but one consecrated to God for holy uses.

22. *In whom ye also are builded together; for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

22. Even a temple, where he dwells by the presence of

his Spirit; a Spirit of unity and peace, in which the edification of his church properly consists.

COMMENT.

I HAVE had frequent occasions to observe, with what indignation the Jews received the admission of the gentiles to a partnership in the knowledge of the gospel. They, to whom alone the oracles of God were formerly committed, bore themselves so high upon this most valuable privilege, as to imagine that method injurious to them, which enlarged the extent of any new revelation, beyond the limits which had bounded the legal one. And even, when the conversion of Cornelius and some others, warranted by visions and miraculous gifts, had abundantly declared God's gracious design of granting to the gentiles also *repentance unto life*; yet did their vanity still suggest a notion of some necessary reserves in that grant. They fancied, some distinctions must be still kept up, between such as before had been termed the heirs of promise and the children of the kingdom; and others, called to this light from the grossest darkness, and raised out of the very dregs of mankind. This opinion the converts from the law brought along with them into Christianity. Which turned, both to their own mighty prejudice, from the natural effects of so false a confidence; and to the great discouragement of those, who had come directly over from heathenism, without any regard at all paid to the *Levitical* institution.

Of this latter sort were the Ephesians. To whom St. Paul addressing, labours to make them sensible of the happy change they had made; who, from the lowest and most deplorable estate, of men *without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenant of promise, without hope and without God in the world*;

were not only *made nigh*, but in all points equal, to the persons, who had shared in those covenants and advantages before. This equally of advancement is proved, *first*, from the universal redemption wrought by the death of Christ; and *then*, by the unity of that body, into which the whole assembly of believers are thereby compacted. In proof of these, he makes use (1.) Of some allusions borrowed from the old law; (2.) Of the extent of that commission, by which the gospel is preached; and (3.) Of several figurative representations. To these I must at present confine my thoughts, because they make the substance of the Epistle for this festival.

Ver. 13.

Ver. 14.

—15.

—16.

Ver. 14.

—15.

—17.

—19,&c.

It is not my design to treat here of the unity of the church, in the utmost latitude of that important point; but only to observe, so far as the expressions in this Scripture lead us, what sort of union that is, by which the several parts of it are knit to each other; and then, what are the uses and practical inferences, fit to be by us collected from such representations.

This union is sometimes illustrated by the allegory of natural, sometimes by that of civil, and at other times by that of artificial, bodies. Of the *first*, as the apostle here makes no mention; so neither is it needful for my purpose to make any, after so large an explanation of it, as hath been given heretofore. The *two* others lie now before us. That of a civil body, at the 19th verse, where the Ephesians are said to be *no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God*. That of an artificial body, in the verses following, *ye are built*, &c.

Epist. for i.S. after Epiph.

As to the former of these; it may be proper to consider, that it was usual with the Jews, to permit men of other nations to join themselves to the God

of Abraham, and to allow them both civil and religious advantages, in proportion as they were content to oblige themselves, to more or less of their laws and customs. But even they, who undertook the whole, were not esteemed to stand upon the same foot with the natural stock of Abraham; and, as a mark of the difference between them, went therefore still by the name of *strangers*. With regard to this distinction, the apostle may reasonably be supposed to acquaint his Ephesians, that those titles, and differences of advantage, were now at an end. And that, in Christ, it mattered not, whence any man was descended; since the Ver. 14. *partition wall was broken down*, and the benefits of the gospel thrown open to all the faithful in common.

It is also notorious, that in every city, many persons are permitted to enjoy the protection, mutual conversation, friendships, and sundry other conveniencies, of inhabitants at large; who yet, having no concern in the municipal laws and customs, exemptions and advantages of the corporation, continue *foreigners* to the constitution, though not to the place. These are properly the *παροικοι*, or *foreigners*, spoken of here by St. Paul. In opposition to whose precarious state, he assures his *heathen* converts, that even they come in to a full claim of every immunity and benefit, granted to the *saints*, to any of the faithful, whatsoever. That all are now upon the same level, and hold by the same charter, notwithstanding some before were detested, as vile and impure; and others of them dignified with the character of a *holy nation*, and *peculiar people*.

But we may very lawfully indulge a greater latitude of construction: and, without regard to converted Jews and heathens, apply the word *saints*, to believers not of all countries only, but of all ages too. And what a spacious view does this open? How glorious a society is that which consists of the spirits of all the just men, that

ever were, or ever shall be, made perfect? What freedoms, what honours must those be, which these shining lights are exalted to? And, (as the immunities and benefits of bodies corporate are not confined to dwellers upon the spot, but follow the free denizen, whithersoever he goes) what an encouragement is it, in our present sojourning, that even at this distance, we have a right to the same privileges, and are making forward to the same full enjoyments? In a word, the noble hopes which this consideration should inspire, the generous emulations of their virtues which it should provoke, the conformity to the manners and usages of that heavenly city, which it should effectually persuade, are subjects which I should reckon it both a pleasure and a duty to enlarge upon; had not that been done in another part of this work, to which I beg my reader's leave to refer him.

Epist. xxiii. S.
after Trin.

To bring this union yet nearer, Christians are said here to be *of the household of God*. Fellow citizens have indeed a very profitable and engaging relation to each other, in point of properties, and commerce, and mutual interests: but even the nearest of these must give place to theirs, who compose the same family. Especially, when our capacity in the family is considered, that *we are no longer servants, but children*. And consequently this implies all the ties of blood, the sonship, the adoption, the inheritance. Concerning which I again refer my reader to two former discourses upon that subject.

Epist. Sund. after
Christm. and viii.
Sund. after Trin.

The next resemblance, made use of by the apostle, is that of an artificial body; and signifies the unity of the Christian church, by comparing it to a building. In which he is strengthened by St. Peter also; who says of them, who have received the faith, that *they come to Christ, as unto a living stone, and are themselves, as lively*.

1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

stones, built up a spiritual house. The expressions of *lively stones*, and a *spiritual house*, do sufficiently intimate the boldness of metaphor; and forbid too critical an inquiry, after the agreement of the similitude in every circumstance, with the thing figured by it. It will therefore be an instance of our wisdom, as well as modesty, to contain our thoughts within the compass of such circumstances as St. Paul hath thought it proper to ground this comparison upon.

Now the first argument before us, of the church's unity, is taken from its having the same foundation. So the 20th verse, *Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.* The same apostle elsewhere

compares his labour in propagating the gospel to *building*; he gives to the brethren in commission with him at

Rom. xv. 20.
1 Cor. iii. 9-10.
———ii. 12.

Corinth, the style of *labourers together with God*; and to the disciples converted by their doctrine, that of *God's building*. He distinguishes himself by the title of a *wise master builder*, who had *laid the only true foundation, even Christ Jesus*. He warns all others against advancing unsound and hurtful doctrines, by bidding them look well, what materials they lay upon this foundation. Now, by comparing these texts, it will be easy to discern the meaning of St. John's description of the heavenly *Jerusalem*, by a *city, whose wall had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*. And again, how Jesus Christ being declared the only foundation, can agree with this assertion, that the church is *builded upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets*.

Rev. xxi. 14. 19.

The apostles, though later in time, are yet first named, because superior in dignity to the prophets. These only saw, and foretold, at a great distance, those blessed events, of which the other saw and

recorded the entire accomplishment. These had the graces and miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost more sparingly: which the other had, in the most plentiful and astonishing measures, imparted to them. These laid the first imperfect ground-work of that spiritual fabric, which the apostles carried up and put the finishing hand to. And both the one and the other are called the foundation of that faith, in which they, by their preachings and writings, were the instruments of building men up. But Jesus Christ is styled the foundation, because he is materially and primarily, not only ministerially or instrumentally so. That is; the wonderful economy of his incarnation, all that he did and suffered for mankind, and all the noble ends and effects of it, are the adequate object of a Christian's faith. And the laying this foundation was a work common to prophets and apostles both. Both agreed in the same design of their ministry; both delivered doctrines in substance the same; the difference between them lay only in the manner of propounding this object. For, according to the different periods, in which they lived and taught, the same Jesus was represented; as yet more obscurely, in expectation, and to come; or else explicitly and fully, as in possession, and already come. And hence he is called the *corner-stone*; as that, in which the several parts, not of the building only, but even of the foundation also, centre and are supported. This renders Jews and Gentiles both one house; this renders prophets and apostles both one foundation. And, the faith being one and the same, as to the subject-matter of it; the church of God, built upon and distinguished by, that faith, is consequently one and the same, from the beginning to the end of the world. It being always true, with regard to the ordinary methods of grace and salvation; that there *is not*, nor ever was, *any other name under heaven given unto men, whereby they must be*

Acts iv. 12.

saved, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. In a word, as the church, with regard to this object of its faith, is termed the one church of Christ, he being the material and efficient cause of it ; so, with regard to their doctrine and ministry, who were thus the subordinate and instrumental cause, it is styled the one apostolic church.

Such is the church's unity with respect to its faith and foundation. Next follows that, which concerns the carrying up of the structure, ver: 21. *In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth, &c.* This *fit framing*, to which the improvement of the church is attributed, denotes that union of charity and mutual assistance, which, in the parts of a building reciprocally sustaining and sustained by each other, make both the strength and beauty of the house.

Chap. iv. The argument is farther illustrated in a following chapter to these Ephesians, under another metaphor serving to the same purpose. Of Epist. St. Mark. which intending to treat more largely hereafter, I forbear this part of the allusion now, and proceed to observe the nature, end, and use of this building ; signified in those words, which affirm it to *grow unto an holy temple in the Lord*, and in *him, to be builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

The tabernacle and temple, under the law, were successively types of our blessed Lord, and his church, under the gospel. Of our Lord, with regard to his own person ; and that, as upon other accounts frequently intimated in the New Testament ; so particularly, in respect of that shechinah, or glorious presence of the divine Majesty, which manifested itself by visible tokens in the sanctuary ; but dwelt in the human nature of Christ, *fully and bodily.* Col. ii. 9. But it farther represented our Lord, considered in conjunction with, and as head of, his mystical body, the church ; who have also their part in the figure. Thus every part of the legal sanctuary, being formed and ordered by divine ap-

pointment, denotes the church entirely founded upon, builded in, and finished by, God himself. The whole of that, being dedicated to his immediate service, insinuates the holiness required from *every living stone of this spiritual house.*

1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

Ephes. ii. 18.

The necessity of offering acceptable sacrifices there only, implied, that it is through Christ alone, and by virtue of our relation to him, that any man can have access to the God and Father of the spirits of all flesh. The diffusing that glory sometimes, in a most illustrious manner, so as to fill the whole house; and the constant residence of it there, to assert God's property and peculiar favour; these were lively images of that Spirit, and his graces, shed upon the Christian church: sometimes in most exuberant bounty by gifts miraculous, and operations altogether supernatural and amazing: always in those ordinary and sufficient assistances, by which believers may be distinguished to be his, and rendered conformable and well-pleasing to their Head; as partaking of, and acted by, his own Spirit, of whose fulness they receive, as he sees fit to distribute them. These are, and sundry other particulars might be, properly brought, to justify the resemblance and relation, between God's material house under the law, and his spiritual one under the gospel. Concerning which I observe farther, from the passage now in hand, that the holiness of this house, or its being a temple, depends altogether upon the concern which the Holy Spirit hath in it. *In whom ye are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

Col. i. 19.

John i. 16.

Ver. 22.

Those last words, *through the Spirit*, though in a true sense applicable, and by some applied, to the former part; do yet seem much more naturally to belong to the latter part of the verse. For they acquaint us, not so much by what means Christians are built into an house, as how that house, so built,

becomes a *temple* to the Lord. To the like effect this apostle hath expressed himself elsewhere,

1 Cor. iii. 16, 17. *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy; for the temple of God is holy,*

— vi. 19. *which temple ye are.* And again, *Know ye not, that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?* And, once more, exposing the absurdity of communicating in heathen rites, he

2 Cor. vi. 16. *asks, What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* The force of all which

reasoning lies here: that, by the communication of his sanctifying graces, God abides in the hearts of Christians: that the peculiar residence of God in any place distinguishes it from those of common use and esteem, and gives him the sole property in it: that the reason holds equally with spiritual, as with the outward and material, dwellings of God. And therefore those persons, of whom the church of Christ is composed, are every one of them, as strictly separated to its use, as firmly asserted to be his, by the inhabitation of that divine Spirit,

Eph. iv. 30. *(which is elsewhere in this Epistle emphatically styled his seal upon them)* as ever the Jewish sanctuary was of old; in which the visible tokens of the divine Majesty declared his peculiar presence and inviolable right.

From this short illustration of the words, in the order they lie before us, it may be of use to make the following remarks:

First, We may learn from hence, as was hinted before, that the church, as that signifies a true mystical body of Christ, is, and can be, but one. Because the same essential terms of uniting mem-

bers into it have always been, and always shall continue, unalterable. They must be so, as to the matter and substance, though not as to the measure and circumstances, of them. This is the same city, to the privileges whereof men of all ages and places are admitted: this is the same house and temple, into which all the living stones are compacted: this the same company of persons, however named or distinguished, before, or under the law, and entitled Christian under the gospel. No time, no people is excluded from this society. And therefore the same arguments, which prove this church to be *one*, do likewise prove it to be *Catholic*, or *universal*. From whence again,

Secondly, We may infer, that, howsoever we read of several churches, in Holy Writ, or elsewhere, these are no other, than so many distinct parts of the church, in its most proper and extensive sense. They are all members of this body, all apartments of this great house, all companies in this populous city. And, though all these are conveniently considered as separate, with regard to the places where they are situate; the limits of dominion, which circumscribe them; the temporal constitutions, with which they are incorporate; and the several jurisdictions, they have right to exercise: yet still, (all difference in those and any other regards of less importance notwithstanding) they are but one in the main; and can no farther deserve the title of churches, than as they agree in all essential parts with that universal church, diffused over the face of the whole earth. An obvious image hereof we have, both in cities or boroughs, in the same kingdom; and also in those societies, into which different mysteries or professions, are respectively formed, within the same city. Their discipline, authority, by-laws, and exemptions, have full force upon the members of their own distinct body: but yet all those less are united into one greater and compre-

hensive body; and all bound to act in subordination, and agreement, with the fundamental laws of that. The company is included in, and controlled by, the city; the city or borough, by the nation; and, as each member of the former is privileged and concluded, as a citizen; so is each citizen, as a subject of the state, concluded in matters essential to the constitution of that general society, into which the rest are at last all resolved.

Thirdly, The passage we are upon may serve to instruct us, what those essential matters are which make the band of unity in the Christian church.

Of these the *first*, is an acknowledgment of, and belief in, Jesus Christ. It is *in him*, that we are built up into this holy temple; *in him*, that we are framed and grow up; *in him*, that we are made partakers of the Spirit which is the common cement of this building, and constitutes it one, by an union more close and strict, than any image taken from sensible objects can fully represent. Nothing can come more near it, but that which was the cause of it; even the union of our human to his own divine nature, designed to bring us nearer to him, as God; than we, if he had not vouchsafed to become man, could have possibly been. And thus the church is united in the chief corner stone, their *one Lord*.

The *second* tie, or band of union, mentioned here is the doctrine of the *apostles* and *prophets* concerning him. This in effect is what we find in Scripture

2 Tim. i. 13. styled, *The form of sound words, the*
 Rom. vi. 17. *form of doctrine to which* proselytes at
 Jude 3. *their conversion were delivered, the*

faith once delivered to the saints, and,
 that, which, as an ancient father expresses it, *the*

Iren. L. i. Cap. 2, 3. *church, having received from the*
apostles and their disciples, though
dispersed far and wide, does yet preserve; as though
all were contained in one house, and embrace alike,

as though all had but one heart and one soul. Less than this will not make us Christians; more than this ought not to be required. And therefore, wheresoever the apostle's doctrine is preserved and maintained, there is the unity of the *foundation*, that of *one faith*.

3. There is yet a *third* ligament, taken notice of here, the *one Spirit*: of which our Lord himself hath told us, that of *it* and *water* we are born again, by a birth necessary to our entering into the kingdom of God: and this apostle, that by *it* we have all been made into one body, that we have all been made to drink unto it, that we are adopted, quickened, sanctified, sealed, and joined to the Lord by it, and that they, who have it not, are none of Christ's. This, even when shed forth in extraordinary and miraculous powers, was so far from superseding, as only to evidence the fitness of the persons, and to be esteemed a qualification for that sacrament which Christ had instituted, as a federal rite of admission into his church. And this, being conveyed in and by the sacraments, in the ordinary distributions of his grace, doth establish the necessity of that other instance of unity meant by St. Paul, when in the *fourth* of this Epistle, to *one Lord*, and *one faith*, he adds *one baptism*. For men may be believers, but Christians or members of the church they are not, till that rite have passed upon them; by which the head of this body commanded all nations to be *discipled*, and made his covenanted people.

John iii. 5.

1 Cor. xii. 13.

Rom. viii. 11. 15.

2 Thess. ii. 13.

Ephes. iv. 30.

1 Cor. vi. 17.

Rom. viii. 9.

Acts x. 47.

—xi. 15, 16, 17.

Matt. xxviii. 19.

These three seem to be essential, and absolutely needful, to the constitution of a Christian church. They are marks, by which those, who are members of it, may be plainly discerned from them who are not so: and, for that reason, the company who

have them are named the visible church. Many other things are requisite to the well-being, the purity, and the perfection of the church. But still, grievous errors in opinion, enormous wickedness in practice, horrible corruptions in worship, shameful remissness in discipline, or irregularities in government, notwithstanding; they, who hold to the foundation, and have the seal of the covenant, be they single persons, or be they societies, must not be denied to be members, though unsound, and maimed, impure, and even scandalous members of the one catholic church, as that signifies the visible church of Christ.

But, alas! to such as these, that membership is a poor privilege; for it comports with those circumstances of the church only, which render a *vine*, a *net cast into the sea*, a common *field*, and a *threshing-floor* proper comparisons to represent her. Charity indeed will always think the best, and we must wish and hope for the internal efficacy, where there are the outward means, of grace. But what will it

profit to hang upon the *vine* an unfruitful branch, whose end is to be cast away, and withered and burned? Or to be found in *the net*, when at the same time that the good are gathered into vessels, the bad are sure to be thrown away? Or how are the tares the

John xv. 6.
Matt. xiii. 47—50.
xiii. 37—42.
iii. 12.

better for standing with the wheat, or the chaff for lying among the corn at present; when a day of distinction is coming; and one, who cannot be deceived with forms and false appearances, shall separate the one from the other; gather the grain into his garner, and burn the refuse with fire unquenchable? Let us not, therefore, suppose that these, though in profession members of Christ's visible, are yet in truth members of his mystical, body. For I think it plain,

Fourthly, That the church, intended here by St.

Paul, is vastly different from that last spoken of; and that it is, in the strictest sense, the city and dwelling of God. It is that, Eph. ii. 19. which hath fellowship and a denizen-right with the saints, such as none but truly good men can have; for of all others, be their persuasion what it will, it is declared, they shall never enter into the kingdom of Christ, and of God. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. It is that church which are the household of God; but such are only those servants who *cleanse themselves from all filthiness both of flesh and Spirit, perfecting holiness in his fear*, and those sons who are *followers of him, as dear children*. It is that church which is built up in Jesus, and grows into a temple; but so do only they whose superstructure is answerable to their foundation, a Christian life erected upon a Christian faith. It is that church wherein God dwells by his Spirit; but such are only they who reverence the Deity within them, keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body, reckon their persons no longer their own, but make it their whole business, 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. by all their actions, words, and thoughts, to glorify Him to whom they are dedicated. This is the church, of which such glorious characters are given, to whom such precious promises are made; the spouse of Christ, all glorious within, *without wrinkle and without spot*; the noble assembly of Eph. v. 27. Heb. xii. 23. the first-born in heaven, and the spirits of just men made perfect, from the beginning of the world to the end.

And yet the word *church* is generally meant of that visible body, and with very good reason; because of this body mystical (and to all but God invisible) the means of salvation administered in the visible body are designed to make us truly members. To it, by them alone, we can be ordinarily

brought; in it by a right use of them we shall at last certainly be found; and therefore we can never be sufficiently thankful for the precious opportunities we enjoy in the word, the sacraments, the purity of both (in this best reformed church especially;) never sufficiently fearful of increasing our own condemnation by the neglect or abuse of our religious advantages; never too diligent to possess our *vessels in sanctification and honour*, that those bodies be not desecrated by sensual and vile lusts which God hath chosen to inhabit by the Spirit of holiness. In a word, we can never be too importunate, in the prayer made this day by our wise and holy mother, that our *faith in the sight of God may never be reprov'd*; which it will as effectually be, by a conversation vicious and unworthy of it, as by any doubt or error destructive of it. From all which God in his mercy deliver us, and keep us for ever truly and savingly united to his dear Son, to whom (our Head) with the Father, and blessed Spirit, be all honour and glory, henceforth for evermore. *Amen.*

THE GOSPEL.

PARAPHRASE.

ST. JOHN XX. 24.

24. Thomas, one of the apostles, happened to be absent at that time.

24. **T**HOMAS, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

25. This man was so far from believing the report of his brethren, as to declare, he would never be persuaded that it was Jesus without the utmost evidence, that all his senses, capable of judging in such a matter, could receive.

25. The other disciples therefore said unto him, *We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*

26. *And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.*

27. *Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing.*

Sunday after Easter) and after the usual salutation said to Thomas.

28. *And Thomas answered, and said unto him, My Lord and my God.*

and sensibly convinced, acknowledged, that a person able thus to know his words and thoughts, and to raise himself from the dead, must needs be his very Master Jesus, and very God.

29. *Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.*

faith of thine, which yielded to the sight and feeling, which leave no room for doubt to any who will trust to their own senses, in comparison of theirs, who shall assent to truths, in reason credible, though such as neither are, nor can be, in this manner demonstrated to them?

30. *And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.*

31. *But these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through his name.*

hoped, sufficient to produce; though these that are told, be in number far short of those which Jesus had really wrought.

26, 27. This evidence Jesus vouchsafed to give him; for the next Lord's day, (or first of the following week) he came to them again as before, ver. 19. (See Comment on Gospel i.

28. He being thus accosted in his own words,

29. To which our Lord replied to this effect: How small a commendation is due to this

30, 31. And this belief, (viz. of Jesus being the Messiah, and only begotten Son of God) the miracles related in this Gospel will be, it is

COMMENT.

IN the Scripture now before us, there are three things especially, which require our consideration.

I. The *first* is, Thomas, his unbelief.

II. The *second*, The means made use of for removing it.

III. The *third*, The efficacy and success of those means. To these I shall speak particularly, and will endeavour to render them as useful as I can, by drawing proper reflections and inferences from each of them, as it shall come in order before me.

1. I begin with Thomas, his unbelief; by which hard term far be it from me to insinuate, that this apostle's dissatisfaction proceeded from affected or hardened infidelity: had the case stood thus, God would most probably have forsaken him in it: the Scriptures no where (that I know of) furnish an example of particular and extraordinary measures, afforded for the conviction of such men as had wilfully and resolutely set themselves against the truth. But the gentlest thing we can say of the instance now in hand, is, that it discovered weakness to a very high degree, and a hardness to be persuaded, which (in an apostle especially) must needs deserve great blame.

A resurrection from the dead, 'tis confessed, was new and strange; an event, which the generality of mankind held altogether incredible: but in the case of Jesus, and the circumstances of Thomas, the disbelief of it seems incapable of excuse. The ancient prophecies concerning the Messiah had spoken so

fully to this point, *That thus it behoved*
 Luke xxiv. 46, *Christ to suffer, and to rise from the*
 21. *dead the third day;* that our Lord, in

his conversation with the two travellers to Emmaus, charges them with *folly* and *slowness of heart*, for not being convinced upon this testimony alone. He had frequently, during his abode upon earth, given the apostles warning of it: he had told the Jews,

that, whenever they should *destroy the*
 John ii. 19. 21. *temple of his body, in the compass of*
three days he would set it up again. He never men-

tioned the sufferings, appointed for him to accomplish at Jerusalem, without remembering to close that melancholy subject, with the comfortable promise of returning to life again: that thus he ought, and thus he intended to do, no doubt could remain; and, that this promise, great and surprising though it were, was yet possible to him, Thomas might well be satisfied. He might be so, from the other miracles, which he saw daily wrought by him; by the reviving of Jairus's daughter; which he could not but know: but especially from the raising of Lazarus, of which himself was an eye-witness: and indeed that wonder seems to have been reserved to the conclusion of our Saviour's life; that it might both crown all that went before, and, by being fresh in the memories of men, smooth the way for the belief of his own resurrection, which came to pass within the space of very few days after.

Matt. xxvi. 21.

— xvii. 23.

— xx. 19.

Matt. ix. 25, 26.

Luke viii.

John xi.

What more now could be expected in reason, but competent evidence, that a thing so often promised, so clearly foretold; a thing, of which Jesus had proved himself so capable, was actually performed? And was this wanting? Had he not the testimony of the *women at the sepulchre, who saw the vision of angels*? Had he not *Mary Magdalen*, who saw our Lord himself? Had he not the two travellers, who heard him discourse, and saw him break bread? Nay, had he not the unanimous assertions of his *ten brethren*, recounting to him all the passages of our Saviour's appearance to them? (For so no doubt they did at large, though it was not necessary for St. John's purpose here to say more, than that they told him, *They had seen the Lord*.) Were these persons likely, were they under any temptation to deceive him? and was it not altogether as extravagant an imagination, to suppose

Luke xxiv. 9.

John xx. 18.

Luke xxiv. 33.

John xx. 25.

they could be deceived themselves? Was not their long and intimate acquaintance with Jesus sufficient to distinguish his from any other person? And was there not abundant care taken to satisfy them, that

Luke xxvi. 39, 40. this was no airy form in his shape, by having his *hands and his feet*, his *flesh and bones* handled; by eating with them, and

talking to them? Did not his very discourse speak him what he was? The calling his own former sayings to remembrance, the opening their understandings, the expounding and arguing out of Scripture; did they not all savour of that peculiar authority,

John xx. 22. with which he always taught: and the breathing upon them, giving them the

Holy Ghost, and commission to preach and act in his name, and his Father's, were characters as plain, that this person was their own Master, the very Christ of God.

These were such arguments, as the generality of believers in after-ages have rested upon; whom our

—— xx. 29. Saviour pronounces *blessed*, for not refusing their assent to that, which they did not, could not see. And therefore, when Thomas insisted upon sensible demonstration; it is no wrong done to the virtues of that apostle, to call this unbelief; but justice requires, that we should both condemn him and admire his Master. That Master who, when he indulged his weakness so far as to satisfy his grossest senses, did not do this because the former evidences of himself had been insufficient, or to warrant the rejection of them in others; but, out of infinite goodness, and particular condescension to the present stupidity of this unpersuaded man; and for other excellent reasons, of which I shall have occasion to say more by and by.

In the meanwhile, I would be glad to improve this *first* particular, by desiring, that what hath been said upon it may be fixed upon men's minds with these reflections.

1. *First*, That men would observe the immediate occasion of St. Thomas his falling into this unbelief; which was his absence from the rest of the apostles, when Christ appeared to them. It seems most likely, that those assemblies, held secretly for fear of the Jews, were always employed to religious purposes. And, from the advantage which Thomas lost by not being there, we may and ought to take warning against the neglect of God's public worship. It is in his own house, and in the congregations of the faithful, that Christ exhibits himself. There we are to expect the enlightening of our minds, the purifying our actions, the convictions of his truth, the assistance of his grace; for the giving us a right understanding of our duty, and for the disposing us to practise it, when we do understand it. These are the means of growing in goodness, which God hath ordained; and it is usual and just with him, to suffer their virtues to fade, and wither, and perish, who will not come hither for strength and refreshment. How many have been lost, for not seeking God where he may be found? What numbers of souls lie now tormented in hell, whose first step towards ruin was, the not frequenting the church, slighting the prayers, and sermons, and sacraments, and other mighty helps and comforts, which might have been had in this place? Had Thomas been with his brethren, he probably had been satisfied, as soon and as easily as they. Oh, let this then prevail with men, to be constant comers to the house of God; lest they, like him, fall into unbelief; and, by a wilful neglect of ordinary means, lose all pretensions to their own happiness. When sloth, or contempt, or a light indisposition, or a pretence of business, tempts you to be absent, think with yourself—It may be, God this day may, by his minister, tell me some necessary thing which I knew not before: it may be, he may drive some powerful exhortation home upon my conscience,

which may make me a better man ever after : it may be, some lurking sin may be discovered, or some domineering lust subdued, by the advices prepared for me at this very time : it may be, my zeal, my devotion, my charity, may be inflamed, by joining in prayer with my fellow-Christians. But why do I say, it may be? For some of these certainly will be. God hath commanded his blessing to wait at his own house ; and no man ever came hither as he ought, but he went back better than he came. No man ever prayed, or heard, in public, with a true Christian temper of soul, who prayed or heard in vain : but either his own, or some other's, condition the safer and better for it. This is the only place that sends no good man empty away. And they, who die for want of spiritual food, are only such as have no appetite, and take no pains to be fed. On the other hand, can it be thought strange, that God should suffer such as perish with hunger, as obstinately and wilfully starve themselves? Why may we not expect, that those who despise him, he will despise? And accordingly we see that the beginning of profaneness and shameless vice commonly centres here. Men first neglect, then are ashamed and afraid, to come hither, for the awakening their consciences ; and so by degrees they fall into desperate hardness of heart. The reasons and the truth whereof I might lay before you past all dispute. But at present I shall only refer you to this one argument ; that, of all the vile wretches, whom murder, or robbery, or other scandalous crimes, bring to public and a shameful death ; there are scarce any, who die with any sense and confession of their sins, but acknowledge, that absenting themselves from the public worship was the cursed beginning of all their profligate conversation. Such testimony does every gaol, and every gibbet, bear to that method of God's dealing with mankind, *That when people will not hear*

his voice, nor endure his reproofs, he gives them up to their own hearts lusts, and lets them follow their own imaginations. But God will love them that love him, and they that seek him early, (that is, diligently and constantly) shall be sure to find him. Prov. viii. 17.

2. *Secondly*, From the instance before us I would briefly take notice, what benefits and uses are to be made of the faults and failings of eminent persons, recorded in Scripture. When these apostles do so freely and fully transmit to all future ages such blots as the denial of St. Peter, the unbelief of St. Thomas, the fears, and cowardice, and heaviness, of all their brethren; this may satisfy us that they were men of integrity; that it was not their study to magnify themselves, or to impose upon the world, or promote any thing but the very truth. For a private design would have tempted them to disguise, and excuse, and conceal, any blemishes in their own characters. And therefore this frankness is a great motive to our belief of their writings; since them, who would not dissemble, when their own credit lay at stake, we have no reason to suppose false in other matters.

Again, these spots in the very saints themselves teach us, that no mere man whatsoever is in all points so perfect, that we should rest upon his example, or blindly make his behaviour the rule of our own: that the law of God is the only true standard of our actions: and that even the best of men, when weighed in this balance, have been found wanting. Consequently, that this consideration should make us humble and meek; especially, since most of us have so unequal a mixture, so many more and greater vices, for an allay and embasement to our so many less or fewer virtues. It is an argument of great vanity for any man to say, he would not have fallen with David, or have forsworn Christ with St. Peter, or the like: alas! we are but

little acquainted with their circumstances, the violence of their temptations, or the infirmities of human nature in general: and, least of all, with our own; who perhaps fall, if not so deep, or so notoriously, yet more frequently, and upon less provocations to sin; and whose sins, though they be more, yet our relentings for them are slighter, and our repentance infinitely less exemplary, than theirs.

And therefore (*lastly*), this should inspire great tenderness and caution, how we presume to censure and judge others. But, above all, it should hinder our taking upon us to determine any thing concerning their spiritual and future state, upon the account of any very ill action, which appears to us, or which in reality hath been done by them. For, if prophets, if apostles, if other shining lights, who are now so many *suns in the kingdom of heaven*, have had these misfortunes; and yet, by the grace of God, and their own better consideration, have recovered their station, and come forth, like the morning light, with double lustre, after darkness and error: who are we, that we should set bounds to the grace of God, or despair even of the worst of our brethren? He can raise them that have been long *dead in trespasses and sins*, to a life of righteousness and immortal hope. And our duty is, to wish and pray that he would do so; and to contribute ourselves the utmost in our power, towards the furthering and preparing sinners for the workings of divine grace. Now this is best to be done by methods of meekness, and kindness, and long-suffering; by winning them over to a better sense, and patiently contending with them for their good. Whatever severity and rigour is necessary in these cases, that is the business of authority, and a public act. But all, that private Christians have to do, is to love, and to admonish; to persuade, and to treat bad men courteously; to watch favourable opportunities of doing them service; and not presently to give over,

if they perceive no improvement; to allow time for cool and sober thoughts; and to accommodate, as much as may be, ourselves and our arguments, to the disposition of the persons with whom we are to deal. All these things, as they naturally offer themselves, upon the contemplation of good men's failings in general; so do they more particularly, from the pattern now before us. For here we find the apostles eager in informing their absent brother of the Lord's resurrection, and yet patient towards him, though their testimony was despised. Nay, notwithstanding this obstinate dissent from them in so material a point, and the reflection this dissent might cast upon their wisdom, or their integrity, as if they had been false, or credulous and easy to a fault; yet he was suffered to continue, and was found, in their friendship and their company, at our Saviour's next visit: which was indeed a visit of compassion to this positive mistaken man. And the mention of that brings me to my *second* head.

II. The means used for convincing Thomas, and removing his unbelief. Now these were the very same which himself had desired. For, though our Lord express it by *Behold my hands*; yet *seeing* and *beholding* are often used with regard to perfect and distinct perception, by the mediation of which soever of our senses that knowledge is conveyed to us. There seems, therefore, little doubt to be made, but Thomas used all those methods for his own conviction, which our Lord intended to afford: that he contented not himself with the view only of Christ's crucified body, the marks and scars of the wounds received upon the cross; but that he handled and searched them, and employed all the evidence of his several senses. This was fit, if not to remove all remains of unbelief and doubting, yet, in obedience to his Master, who had taken him at his word, and determined thus to convince all who should hereafter dispute the reality of his resurrec-

tion, that that was not capable of any sort of proof, which had not been already given of it. For how could the most cavilling infidel expect or ask more, than to see and handle the body of Jesus; to be assured, not only that it was a true body, but that it was the very same, and could be no other body, than that which had been wounded and expired upon the cross? This is all that could possibly be required for the proof of our Saviour's rising from the dead. And this is such a proof as must in reason be supposed to take away the very jealousy of delusion and deceit. Since, then, the means of removing Thomas his unbelief were so very proper, and so fully answered their purpose; nothing more is necessary upon this head, than only to leave it with a reflection or two; which naturally offer themselves, and are fit to be attended to upon this occasion.

Now, *first*, We may assure ourselves from this passage, that, whatsoever changes our Saviour's glorified body might undergo after his resurrection, yet it was not altered, as to the properties of a body; but still such as the senses of men were competent judges of. To these senses it is that our Lord appeals: by these he composes the terrified disciples who feared a phantom; by these he satisfies the doubtful and incredulous; by these the apostles make it their business to persuade the world: affirming, that they had *eaten and drunken with him*, and *seen*, and *heard* him, and that they went upon sure grounds, having several such demonstrations as they could not possibly be deceived in. But now, if the body of our Saviour be not subject to the same laws with all other corporeal substances; if it may be, where our senses can discern nothing of it, though no other body can be so; then, what satisfaction had Thomas by this indulgence of our Lord? Why should he lay aside his scruples for the seeing and touching that body,

Acts x. 41.

which our senses may be, and are very often, deceived in? How poor an argument was that of St. John, that he declared to his proselyte, *That which he had seen and heard, and his hands had handled of the word of life;* ^{1 John i. 1.} if neither eyes, nor ears, nor hands, are to be trusted in their judgment of this matter, nor can with any safety or piety be depended upon?

2. But, *secondly*, Let us, upon this occasion, observe and admire the marvellous love and condescension of our blessed Saviour, who stooped to the infirmities of our doubting disciple, and would not give him over to his unbelief, though that unbelief were most unreasonable. He had (as I have taken notice before) convinced the rest of the apostles sufficiently; and their testimony ought to have convinced Thomas, as his afterwards did them, who believed through his preaching. The demanding to have one's senses satisfied, in every article of faith, is a thing most unreasonable. None but they who lived while Christ was in the flesh; and, of them again, none but those few, who had opportunities of seeing and conversing with him, were capable of such methods. And, how very inconsiderable a number are these, in comparison of the multitudes, which must needs want them? Upon such terms, the Christian religion could have been but of one age's continuance at most; and even at that age, it must be very far from being entertained by the generality of mankind. So that there was reason enough, to have denied Thomas the satisfaction he insisted upon. But yet we see this good Shepherd sought and found his lost and wandering sheep; and, by so doing, he hath assured us, it is not his will, that any of his little ones should perish. The state of glory and immortality, upon which Christ is now entered, though very different from that humble guise of flesh and blood, in which he dwelt among men, hath yet made no difference

in him. His dispositions are the same, his mercy and tender affection the same, the yearnings of his bowels over wretched mortals the same, and his compassion for their weaknesses and sufferings the same, in the midst of majesty and bliss unconceivable; as when himself felt and endured the frailties, and poverty, and other afflictions, of human nature. So justly may we all apply to ourselves that comfort of St. Paul, *We have not a high priest that cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, and may therefore come boldly to the throne of grace for the obtaining mercy.* Heb. iv. 15, 16. His height and greatness does not render him disdainful and difficult of access: the distance of his dwelling sets him not far off, that we should not be able to reach him with our prayers. But he is still the same loving Jesus, hath still a tender concern for poor sinners and weak Christians; and therefore approach him, all ye humble and contrite ones, with reverence, and a holy hope. For he will enlighten your understanding, and give liberally that knowledge, which is necessary for your salvation: he will strengthen your feeble knees, restore your lame and withered hands, and enable the willing to do his work, and to walk in his way. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smouldering flax; but comfort the broken-hearted, and encourage the beginnings and imperfect essays of goodness. In a word, to all them that err, or are hindered; out of infirmity, and not out of perverseness, he will be a mighty and a merciful Saviour. Like his apostle in my text they shall be pitied and cherished, and settled in the truth, and *find grace to help in time of need.* But

3. *Thirdly,* We must take care to understand this favour to Thomas aright, so as not to be led into false expectations from it. For, though every Christian may, upon this example, build a sound

hope of all necessary grace, and of the good intentions of our kind Saviour to all his weak and wandering ones ; yet there is no foundation at all in it, for their depending upon some sensible demonstration, or miraculous methods of conviction, who pretend to be dissatisfied in the faith, at this time of day. The reason is, because these evidences are not, nor can be, needful now ; and, consequently, they come not within the compass of necessary grace. I have shewn indeed, that the satisfaction Thomas was allowed, was not strictly necessary ; because he might, and ought to have been satisfied without it : and more is not necessary than is sufficient. But if our Lord, in particular condescension and indulgence to the infirmities of one disciple, be better than his word, and afford an extraordinary favour ; this gives no right, no claim, to the rest. They can only be sure of stated and ordinary means, and have all the reason in the world to be contented with those means.

Besides, there can never be the same motives, the same occasion, to incline God's mercy for any particular person, who lives under the dispensation of the gospel now, as there was for this manifestation to Thomas. It might indeed be urged before that our Lord had not yet given all the proofs of his resurrection, that the thing was capable of. But, when here every sense was appealed to, and all concurred in their verdict ; when nothing was left unasked, and the most sceptical doubter could pretend to desire : when the very apostles themselves had one of their number, that held out a while ; and they preached not this doctrine, till his scruples were removed : when even this doubter himself was no less vigorous and positive afterwards, in asserting the truth of a point, which nothing but demonstration could make him believe : this takes off all imputation of credulity and easiness ; this shews, that, as these disciples could have

no temptations to deceive others, so they went upon sure grounds, by taking all possible care that they might not be, and they durst be confident that they were not, could not be, deceived themselves. All which, as it might well justify the church, in

Collect for the Day. saying, *that God in his wisdom suffered Thomas to doubt for the more confirmation of the faith;* (Christian religion

gaining some advantages by these doubts which we do not see, how it could have had without them) so it certainly renders the doubt of others much more inexcusable. For, whatever objections can be now pretended, they have been answered and baffled already. If ever demonstration was necessary, it was necessary but once, This disciple doubted, and was satisfied for us all; and his former unbelief adds such strength to the cause he pleads, and makes him a witness so much above exception; that the scruples, which in him were weakness, in those that follow him, and know his story, will be wilfulness and resolved infidelity. Consequently, no other man's circumstances admitting of the same alleviations, which those of Thomas did; no other man can be equally an object of compassion for his unbelief, or can reasonably hope, that God will condescend to use the like extraordinary methods, to convert and persuade him to the truth.

Thus what in Thomas might appear to be want of evidence, will be found in modern unbelievers to be want of good disposition. And how great a hand the mind and will of a man have, in his believing or rejecting the truth, our blessed Lord has given us an occasion to consider, in those words to John xx. 27. St. Thomas, *Be not faithless, but believing.* It seems by this, that the very sight and feeling of Christ's body, the particular proving those wounds received upon the cross, the finger in the print of the nails, and the hand in the

side which the spear had pierced, had not superseded all occasions for this advice. Nor is this the only intimation given us in Scripture, that evidence of sense itself will not always convince; but that, after the utmost proof has been made, that any, even the most sceptical man can wish, it is not impossible, for a corrupt and perverse mind, not to believe even yet. Of such perverseness the apostle of this day was manifestly innocent: for, no sooner were the difficulties he had formed to himself, concerning a true and proper resurrection, satisfied according to his desire, but he surrendered immediately. And though slower in assenting to it, yet was he more lofty and noble in the manner of acknowledging it, than any of his brethren. Which leads me to the

III. *Third*, and last head. The success of the means used by our Lord, for removing Thomas his unbelief, expressed in the 28th verse. And *Thomas answered and said, My Lord, and my God*. I call this the noblest confession; because the Catholic interpreters of Scripture have understood by it, that St. Thomas did not only recognize Jesus for the Messiah, the very same Lord, to whom he had been a servant and companion during the space of his ministry; but that he moreover owned his divine nature, and drew the consequence to himself, which St. Paul did afterwards to the Romans, *That the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and the power he exerted in it, did* Rom. i. 4. *abundantly declare him to be the very Son of God*. Accordingly, the original here is in terms so strict, and with such an addition of the Greek article, as the very heretics and enemies of the truth confess to be a character of the word God being taken in its proper and natural sense, and intended of the *only true God*. And indeed, when they go about to make these words a note of admiration only, they do not leave them a sufficient force for ex-

pressing Thomas his conviction. For expressions of wonder, though they properly speak astonishment and surprise, yet they do not always imply belief; and may therefore import the strangeness, without inferring the truth, of the thing. But our Lord (you see in the next words) accepts this, as a full and sufficient declaration of assent: *Thomas, because thou hast seen, thou hast believed.* And to make it thus, we must allow that paraphrase, which some ancient translations supply it with, by reading, *Thou art my Lord, thou art my God:* which is but in effect to say, what our Saviour had before pronounced concerning himself; that the truth of those declarations was now apparent, *Destroy this*

John ii. 19.

— x. 18.

temple, and in three days I will raise it up. No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again.

Now no mere man can do these things; none but God can have that power. So mighty, so sudden a change do we find in this apostle; that the person, whom so lately he could not be prevailed upon to think otherwise of, than as a dead man; lost to all hopes, all possibility of returning; he now adores and admires, as the almighty and the ever-living God.

From hence let every disciple of Jesus learn, with all becoming reverence, to contemplate this resurrection of our Lord, and to adore the glories and the wonders of him and it. Let us take all possible care, to confirm ourselves in the assured belief of this, and of all other mysteries of the Christian faith. Let us observe, and be thankful for, the wisdom and goodness of our God and Saviour, who converted the failings of an eminent servant, to such excellent advantage; that not only his own mind, like a broken bone well set, was better established from his own doubts; but that gainsayers should be more effectually put to silence by them,

and out of his weakness all succeeding believers should be made strong. Let us again, with St. Thomas, be ready to lay aside all our scruples upon sufficient conviction; and zealous to make some amends by our after-acts, for any offence, which those scruples might have given, while we entertained them. Above all, let us beg the grace and assistance of the holy Spirit of God, to keep us always in that sincere, teachable, meek disposition of soul: and likewise in that due regard and observance of all virtues and good works, agreeable to the principles we profess, *that our faith in his sight may never be reprov'd*. But that, from a perfect and active belief in his Son Jesus Christ here, we may be at length received to the sight and ravishing enjoyment of him; and be, and live, and reign, with our dear Lord for ever in the heavens. Which God of his infinite mercy grant, for the same Jesus Christ's sake. To whom, &c. *Amen*.

Conversion of St. Paul.

AN ACCOUNT OF ST. PAUL.

ST. Paul (as himself informs us) was of the tribe of Benjamin, and a citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia. A place, which, for healthful situation, good building, and to omit other its excellences, the fame of its university, might with good reason claim the title, which her denizen gives her, that of *no mean city*. We have not any account of St. Paul's relations; St. Jerom makes them to have been inhabitants of Giscala in Judea, and to remove to Tarsus after the birth of this son. Wherein he differs, not only from other interpreters, but even from St. Paul's own account of himself, who declares, that he was born at Tarsus; and St. Jerom in-

Phil. iii. 5.
Acts xxi. 39.

Catal. de Scrip.
Eccl.

Acts. xxii. 3.
Com. in Philem.
23. on those

words, Epaphras
my fellow prison-
er.

deed elsewhere mentions that other;
as a report not to be depended upon.

In that city he was trained up; and had the usual accomplishments of an university, the knowledge of philosophy, and other liberal sciences. His father, being a pharisee, took care that he might, upon this foundation, proceed to the building a fair superstructure of divine learning, and the knowledge of the Mosaic rites and ceremonies. Which, the better to effect, he was sent to Jerusalem, and became a scholar of Gamaliel; a person celebrated for wisdom and authority, above most of the then members of his sect.

Gosp. xi. S.
after Trin.

Of these pharisees, and their zeal,
some account hath been formerly given.

What influence this education had on St. Paul, the following discourses on this day will shew. To which my reader is referred for that part also of his story, which relates to his miraculous conversion; and the no less vigorous efforts of his better directed zeal, for the advancement of the Christian faith. This began immediately to appear, by entering publicly into the service of it; by reth-

Gal. i. 17.

ing out of Damascus, and becoming the first preacher of the gospel in Arabia

Petræa. From hence, after two years, he returned to Damascus, and preached Christ publicly in the synagogue there. The malice of the

Acts ix. 22—25
2 Cor. xi. 32.
33.

Jews, being incensed for having lost so considerable a champion, pursued him close. They contrived all possible

means to dispatch him; and, after many other stratagems, in vain, made their request to the governor under Aretas king of Arabia Petræa (into whose hands, by the defeat of Herod's army, that city had now fallen) that he would gratify them in his destruction. The gates were day and night most strictly guarded, to prevent his escape; but the disciples let him down over the city wall in a basket: which

place is still said to be shewed to travellers, near a gate called St. Paul's Gate. After three years from his conversion, he went up to Jerusalem to see Peter; who about this time returned from confirming the Samaritan converts. His conversion being made known by Barnabas, he was, after some fear and scruples, received by the apostles and disciples, and had the right hand of fellowship given him by them, after fifteen days stay with Peter. In this time the Grecians, against whom he disputed, endeavoured to kill him. But the brethren sent him away for Cæsarea and Tarsus. He preached in Syria and Cilicia: and, after two years labour in those regions, returning again to Tarsus, he was fetched by Barnabas to Antioch, there to assist him, in the conversion and confirmation of that city. Here it was, that they first obtained that honourable title of Christians; of which more hereafter.

Gal. i. 18.

Acts ix. 26, 27.

Ver. 29, 30.

Gal. i. 21.

Acts xi. 25, 26.

Epist. St. Barn.
Day.

It is observable, that in all this time St. Paul had declined, as much as was possible, every place, where any Christian churches were begun. Of which the reason given to the Galatians is, that he might not be thought to receive his instruction from men, but by revelation from Christ himself. Therefore, even when in the neighbourhood so long, he went not of his own accord to Antioch. But now after a year's stay there, the Christians made choice of him and Barnabas, to convey the charity of the converts to the brethren at Jerusalem; upon intimation of the great famine, which shortly after afflicted those parts. (This journey is not mentioned in the Epistle to the Galatians.) From hence they returned to Antioch again, and brought with them Mark. Here the Holy Ghost separated them for the work of the gos-

Gal. i. 15—24.

Acts xi. 26.—
30.

Acts xii. 25.

— xiii. 2.

2 Cor. xii. 2, 3,

4.

Acts xiii. 4—12.

pel. About this time St. Paul is thought to have been caught up to heaven. Leaving that city, they came first to Seleucia, then to Cyprus, and preached particularly at Salamis: afterwards at Paphos, where they found the proprætor Sergius Paulus, a prudent man, and one, who after good deliberation, received the faith. This conversion was chiefly occasioned by the judgment of God, which, immediately upon St. Paul's words, fell upon Elymas the sorcerer, who strove to prevent the proconsul. From

Hier. Catal. this conquest our apostle is by many af-
Script. firmed to have had the surname of

Paul: not unlike to the Roman custom of giving new names, after remarkable victories. Though by some it is thought to have been imposed with his other name: it being the custom to do so, and the former opinion ill consisting with the exemplary humility of the person. Hence they went

Acts xiii. 13, to Perga in Pamphylia, (where John
14. 50. 51. Mark, left them) and afterwards to

Antioch in Pisidia. Here, after a long and eloquent sermon made by St. Paul, the Jews, envious at their good reception, raised a tumult in the city, applied themselves to the honourable women chiefly, and by their means forced the apostle's departure to Iconium; and, after some stay here, their malice pursuing them thither also, caused them to hasten to Lystra. Here, by an eminent

Acts xiv. 2—6. miracle performed upon a cripple, the
Ver. 8—18. people were transported, as to think
them gods. Bringing therefore sacri-

fices, they would needs have honoured them therewith. Calling Paul, as chief speaker, Mercury; and Barnabas, perhaps for his age and gravity, Jupiter. They knew and believed that there was a divine power manifested in these miracles, but applied it to the instruments, not to the Author. The perverse spite of the Jews followed them again hither; and did so alter the people's sentiments,

that the very person, whom but even now they would have adored with the most humble prostrations, they now drag out of the city, and stone him. Being left therefore for dead, when

Acts xiv. 19.

Ver. 20—23.

the disciples came probably to inter his body, he rose up, went back into the city for that night, and the *next day departed with Barnabas* to Derbe. Hence, after conversion of multitudes, they returned to Lystra, and the rest of the cities forementioned, confirming them in the doctrine they had lately received, and ordering elders in every church. Then, returning through Pisidia, and Pamphylia, after preaching again at Perga, they went down into

Ver. 24—28.

Attalia. From thence at last they came to Antioch; staying with the rest of the disciples of that place a considerable time, full of joy and thanks for the success of their ministry. During their abode in this city, rose that dissension concerning the necessity, or indifferency of observing the Mosaic rites, which gave occasion to the great synod at Jerusalem. The proselytes, therefore, desiring to be well satisfied,

Acts xv. 1.

—————29.

and go upon sure grounds; as also the humility of Paul and his fellow-labourers, being not content to rely upon their own judgments in this affair; it was proposed; that the decision of this question might be referred to the general assembly of apostles at Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas carried the message; whose coming caused great joy among the disciples, and converts throughout Phenice and Samaria, as well as at Jerusalem. And the success of their preaching among the gentiles, seemed a good argument of God's approving the faith of the gentiles, although uncircumcised. This is the journey to Jerusalem, mentioned in the second to the Galatians, ver. 1. The event of all was, that the gentiles should be obliged to no more observances, than those, who are generally called pro-

selytes of the gates; which consisted chiefly in the seven precepts of the sons of Noah. Paul therefore and Barnabas were dispatched to Antioch, with the decrees of the council. Hither shortly after Peter also came, at which time happened the sharp contest between him and St. Paul, mentioned hereafter in St. Peter's life.

Judas and Silas (called elsewhere Silvanus) were by the apostles sent to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Antioch. The former returned to Jerusalem; but the latter, willing to continue with St. Paul, was by him chosen a companion of his travels. For now they were preparing for a fresh expedition; in which Barnabas, upon a dispute concerning Mark, left Paul, and betook himself to his native island, Cyprus. St. Paul, after he had been recommended to the blessing and assistance of God, by the prayers of the church, makes a visit to the several places, where he had planted Christianity. Going therefore to Syria and Cilicia, hence, as is most probably conjectured, it was, and about this time, that he passed over into Crete: but, not being permitted to stay there long, he constituted Titus bishop of that place; whom he had taken with him instead of Mark, when he, leaving them, went from the work at Perga.

Afterwards he returned to Derbe and Lystra, where he met with Timothy; who, by his innocency of life and conversation, had obtained a good report of the brethren there. And being, by his education, and especially his knowledge of the Scriptures, qualified for that employment; St. Paul took him as his coadjutor in the propagation of Christianity. But willing, in ceremonies and in different customs,

Acts xv. 30.

Gal. ii. 11—14.

2 Cor. i. 19.

1 Thess. i. 1.

2 — i. 1.

Acts xv. 36—40.

Ver. 21.

Acts xvi. 1, 2.

See 2 Tim. Chap.

i. 5. and iii. 14,

15.

rather to conform to persons of a contrary persuasion, than by punctually asserting his privilege, uncharitably to cause dissensions and widen breaches; that he might not give offence to the Jews in those parts, he circumcised Timothy, who was now his fellow-traveller through Galatia and Phrygia. They would have continued their journey as far as Asia, but were by God diverted. Being come therefore to Mysia, and attempting in vain to go into Bithynia, they came to Troas; where St. Luke seems to have joined him. From hence Paul by a vision was directed into Macedonia. At Philippi they had great influence upon their auditors, more particularly one Lydia, a seller of purple; who entertained them during their abode in that city.

Acts xvi. 3.
6.
Ver. 7—10.

Ver. 12—28.

Here happened to be a maid possessed with a devil, who by divination had brought her masters considerable gains. She, meeting Paul and his companions, as they went to one of the proseuchæ, or oratories, declared them to be, as indeed they were, the servants of the most high God, and preachers of the way of salvation. He, well knowing that Christ's religion needed not the testimony of hell to confirm it, (though it can extort even that) by healing the demoniac, and taking away the cause, from whence her masters received their beloved gains, was presently assaulted by the enraged people. They were not more ready to execute, than their magistrates were to give, an unjust sentence. Therefore after a severe scourging and other barbarous indignities, they cast the apostles, though unconvicted, into prison; and, not content with confining them there, the dungeon and stocks were appointed for their portion. Their vain malice was presently defeated by an earthquake, which opened all the prison-doors; and, by a sudden light, which conveyed joy and praise in the apostles hearts, in the midst of darkness and

iron. The fright drove the gaoler to despair ; and had made him prevent the sentence, which would ensue upon the prisoners escape, by self-murder, had not Paul assured him of their yet being safe in custody. He, who was now their captive, with all the offices of courtesy and gentleness, soon changed his former disposition ; and gave such evident proofs of faith and repentance, as to be baptized himself, and to bring his whole family over proselytes to this persecuted religion. The magistrates next morning would have dismissed the apostles ; but St. Paul, willing to shew them, how great their injustice had been towards him, and what dangers themselves were become liable to, by committing such violence upon denizens of Rome, did not accept of the discharge ; till they had first made acknowledgment and public retraction of this their fact. Which done, St. Paul, after some conference with the converts at Lydia's house, departed.

Hence he passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, and came to Thessalonica the metropolis of Macedonia ; where he disputed in the synagogues of the Jews, mightily convincing them of the truth of his doctrine. Their restless malice raised a commotion, which, for want of the apostles, wreaked itself upon their landlord Jason ; he however, upon security for his good behaviour, was dismissed ; and Paul and Silas were by the brethren (fearing greater disturbances and dangers) conveyed by night to Berea. Here their preaching met with good success ; the persons being such, as are fittest for its reception. For neither did their obstinacy make them, like the Jews, deaf to this new doctrine ; nor a temper too credulous and easy incline them to embrace any thing, that was not well weighed and very rational. And indeed the Christian religion is so reasonable an institution, that no man can be so well persuaded of

it, or adhere with so great satisfaction to it, as he, who grounds his faith upon sound reason. From hence also the Thessalonian Jews forced them to retire; wherefore Paul was sent privily to Athens, leaving the rest of his company, with orders to follow him thither speedily. From Athens he sent Timothy to Thessalonica, and, whilst he was here alone, for his diversion 1 Thess. iii. 1, 2. probably, and to satisfy his curiosity, he went about to several parts of the city, to see the rarities of it. He found abundance of superstition and ignorant zeal, for them- Acts xvii. 16. 33. selves knew not what deities; the Athenians being, by their own authors, as well as by St. Luke in this place, noted for great lovers of variety and novelty; which temper shewed itself in nothing more eminently, than the greedy entertaining of any upstart religion. St. Paul, perceiving the miserable condition of the inhabitants, thought this a fit place and time for him to apply himself to the discharge of his great work; and to try, if the true religion might find as favourable an acceptance at their hands, as so many false and absurd opinions had formerly done. But, alas! he was sure to find considerable opposition, when preaching doctrines so vastly different, and almost contrary, to whatever they had before been taught. The stoics pride could never bend to a Christian humility; nor the epicureans lusts endure a sober and severe life; nor their interest admit of a resurrection and judgment after this life. They therefore encounter him, and affording him no better terms, than that of *bab- bler* and a *setter forth of strange gods*, (supposing possibly Anastasis, or the resurrection, to be some new and as yet unheard-of deity) bring him before the senate at Areopagus.

Here, in a most excellent discourse, he endeavoured to convince them of their present errors and delusions; and to inform them, who that true God

was, whom they, under false notions, blindly worshipped. This he enforced by arguments out of their own poets; shewing them, how near, and how easy to be found he was, by every one that would feel after him. That this is the very person, whom they addressed themselves to by the name of *Ἄγνωστος Θεός*, or *unknown God*. They counted it a prerogative of the Divine Majesty, to give men but faint glimpses in the nature of itself. And accordingly we are told, that Ammon or Amun, the great Egyptian deity, signifies hidden: and thus Isaiah himself calls the God of his people; *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour*. His discourse to this senate had notwithstanding, some effect; and particularly upon Dionysius, of whom it will not be amiss to take this short account.

He is said in his youth to have travelled into Egypt, there to study astronomy: in which science that country was excellent. Together with him one Apollonphanes, a famous rhetorician of that age, was at Heliopolis in Egypt, at the time of our Saviour's crucifixion. Dionysius, astonished at the miraculous and altogether preternatural eclipse of the sun, which then happened, is said to have broke out into this expression,—*that* certainly at that time God himself suffered, or was much concerned for somebody that did. He, after his return, and conversion by St. Paul, being upbraided by his former companions, for revolting from his principles, and for the treachery of using the weapons of Athens against herself, her learning, to confute her false religion, replied, that this accuser rather might be found guilty of using divine things against God the author of them, whom that miraculous eclipse could not convert. St. Paul, having sufficiently instructed Dionysius, in the principles and duties

See Dr. Cave
in St. Paul.

required of him to believe and perform, (his learning, and other good accomplishments and virtues, qualifying him for the discharge of so great a trust) is thought to have consecrated him the first bishop of Athens.

The next stage of St. Paul's laborious life was Corinth, whither he betook himself upon his journey from Athens. Meeting here with Priscilla and Aquila, (who fled thither upon their banishment from Rome, by the edict of Claudius the emperor, against all Jews) he instructed them in the Christian faith. And, that he might give the less offence to his new converts, and be less disagreeable to them, he wrought with them at his own trade, in which he was brought up; that of a tent-maker. Nor ought it to seem strange, that this vocation should be joined to the more ingenious part of his education, that of philosophy and the law. For it was a received custom amongst the Jews, so to do. And one of their proverbial expressions is, that he that teaches not his son some trade, teaches him to be a thief. Hither Silus and Timotheus came to him, after whose arrival he seems to have written his first Epistle to the Thessalonians. Thus assisted, he attacks the Jews with greater vigour: but his ill success upon them caused him more especially to apply himself to the gentiles. A year and six months preaching had had considerable influence upon many of the Corinthians; particularly on the ruler of the synagogue and his family, and a heavenly vision had increased the apostle's hopes of a plentiful harvest.

This long calm promised no less, had it not been at last disturbed by the envy of the Jews. They, with great violence dragging St. Paul before the proconsul's tribunal, full of clamorous complaints, and accusations of having violated their law, were by him rebuked for bringing superstitious and impertinent causes, not

Acts xviii.

xviii. 12.

17.

fit for him to determine. Having therefore thrown their indictment out of the court, he was forced, if not to use, yet at least to admit and connive at, violence in return, without which they were not to be quelled. For, to shew his dislike, when the Greeks took Sosthenes the chief ruler of the Jewish synagogue, and a principal man in this tumultuous insurrection, and beat him; Gallio, the proconsul, (and brother to the famous Seneca) to shew his dislike of these appeals, did not offer in the least to vindicate him from the affront, *but cared for none of these things*. Some time longer the apostle staid here, and is thought then to write his *second* to the Ver. 18. Thessalonians. Having confirmed the brethren, he departed into Syria, designing for Jerusalem. With him were also Priscilla and Aquila, whom he took with him to Ephesus, and left them behind him there.

The history makes mention here of a Nazarite's vow, as is generally agreed. The nature whereof may be seen in the vith chapter of Numbers. But who the person was that shaved his head on account of that vow, is not so generally agreed. St. Jerom is said to have been the first, who understood this to be St. Paul's action and vow; who hath indeed been followed in that opinion by persons of great name. But others, and particularly St. Chrysostom, in Act. Homil. 39, 40. interprets it of Aquila. So does Grotius upon the place; giving this for a reason, why Priscilla is first named, because the connexion would be better preserved, when an action of Aquila was immediately to follow. And our learned and laborious Cave, notwithstanding the weight of authorities on the other side, says thus: At Cenchrea—Aquila (*for of him it is certainly to be understood*) shaved his head, &c.

* So likewise Heinsius in his exercitations on

Liv. of Apost. page 83.* This matter, since the text hath left it doubtful, the reader will be content to

have it continue so. I therefore go on to that which is of greater certainty and importance, viz. That St. Paul, while at Ephesus, disputed sometime in the synagogues, but would not be prevailed with to defer this journey, to Jerusalem by a longer stay there. Having therefore landed at Cæsarea, and saluted the church at Jerusalem, he returned to Antioch: and having, in his travels through Galatia and Phrygia, strengthened his converts, which he had gained to the Christian faith, he came again to Ephesus. In his absence, Apollos, by the instruction of Priscilla and Aquila, had made great progress in this new discipline: whose learning and persuasive eloquence rendered him afterwards, in an eminent manner, advantageous, and a very powerful adjutant to St. Paul in his great work. He accordingly went to Corinth, with commendatory letters from the brethren; and was there at the time of St. Paul's return to Ephesus. Here the apostle baptized several disciples, disputed three months in the synagogue, and afterwards for two years in the school of Tyrannus.

the place: De Aquilâ itaque non de Paulo, accipiendum. Ver. 23.

xvi. 6.

Acts xviii. 24. 28.

xix. 1—10.

The Jews had several incantations in use and veneration; which they held in greater credit, because of an opinion common among them, that these had been invented by, and were derived from, Solomon. The effect of these was (as their own historian relates) healing diseases, and dislodging evil spirits: and the persons skilled in them were distinguished by the title of *exorcists*. Some of these, observing the many miraculous cures wrought by St. Paul, to add greater force to their charms, presumed to change their form, by invoking the name of Jesus over a demoniac. It pleased God, upon this occasion, to put a visible difference

Joseph. Ant. Lib. viii. C. 2.

Acts xix. 13, 16.

between them who applied this powerful name regularly and with commission; and others who, of their own heads, and for ill designs, dared to usurp it. For the demoniac prevailed over these exorcists, to the hazard of their lives; and, at the same time, made an extorted confession of the efficacy of that sacred name, and the authority of his apostle.

Ver. 17—20. This event contributed to the raising

St. Paul's character yet higher; and had a very amazing consequence in the conversion of many from paganism, who had addicted themselves to the studies of magic, for which Ephesus was particularly famous. These men gave a costly testimony of their sincerity, by publicly burning the books that taught those black arts, to the value (as a Dr. Cave. learned author computes) of at least fifteen hundred pounds sterling.

St. Paul had now thoughts of visiting Macedonia and Achaia, by taking those places in Ver. 21, 22. his way to Jerusalem: after which, he purposed to go to Rome. In pursuance of that design, Timothy and Erastus were sent before him into Macedonia. Himself halted behind, detained probably by the necessity of answering a letter brought him from Corinth by Apollos, which is done in that Epistle, intitled his First to the Corinthians. He seems at this time also to have written his Epistle to the Galatians.

During this stay, that famous tumult happened, Ver. 23—41. of which we have a large description in the xixth of the Acts. It was begun

and fomented by men whose gain was godliness; and the reverence to Diana served for a popular 2 Cor. i. 8, 9, 10. pretence to secure the trade of shrine-making. The apostle's danger upon this occasion was so great, and the people's minds so inflamed, that it was not thought proper to delay

his intended journey any longer. Com- Acts xx. 1. ing, therefore, into Macedonia, he is sup-

posed to have written thence his Second Epistle to the Corinthians. After which, he passed three months in Greece; then, declining the way into Syria, upon intimation of a conspiracy against his life, he returned through Macedonia into Asia. At Troas, in his way, he brought Eutychus to life again. Thence, by several easy voyages, he arrived at Miletus, where the elders of the Ephesian church meeting him, received that admirable exhortation, contained in the xxth of the Acts: and not only that, but (certainly in the course of these travels related in that chapter) Timothy for their bishop too. So probably did the Romans also then receive the Epistle written to them; as may appear from his intention to see the Christians there mentioned before, compared with Rom. i. 10, 11, and the journeyings through Macedonia and Achaia, Acts xx. compared with Rom. xv. 19, and Acts xxi. with Rom. xv. 25.

Ver. 2, 3, 4.
7—12.

Acts xix. 21.

From Miletus, by several stages, set down Acts xxi. St. Paul came to Jerusalem; not at all diverted from his passage thither by the prediction of those sufferings which there awaited him. One part of his business was, to bring those charitable collections to the brethren; for which he so highly commends the liberality of the Christians in Macedonia; proposing them as patterns to the disciples at Corinth, and making an honourable acknowledgment of them to the Romans.

Acts xxi. 11. 15.
—— xxiv. 17.

2 Cor. viii. 10.
—— ix. 2.
Rom. xv. 25, 26.

Then it was that, after consulting with St. James, the bishop of Jerusalem, and recounting the wonderful successes of his ministry, he, to prevent offence, declared his compliance with the Mosaical rites, by a purification prescribed under the law. Some Asiatic Jews, who had known his doc-

Acts xxi. 18.

Acts xxi. 26, 27.

trine and conversation among the gentiles abroad, enraged the people; and had endangered his being torn in pieces, had not the captain of
 xxii. 24, 25. the Roman guard rescued and secured him in the castle. The method about to be taken for his examination, obliged him now again (as before at Philippi) to assert the privileges
 Acts xvi. 37. due to a denizen of Rome: whereupon he was brought before the chief priests and council. At this bar, having received an indignity from the
 Acts xxiii. high-priest, he remonstrated the illegality of the violence offered to him in terms, that seem most naturally imputable to the inadvertence of a resentment, too warm to attend to the character of his judge. At this appearance he found means to elude the malice of his enemies, by declaring himself a pharisee, and engaging those of the same sect on his side. But that which could not be done by process, was attempted by treachery; for, upon pretence of a second hearing, an ambush was laid to kill the prisoner in his passage to the court. The timely discovery of this plot occasioned his conveyance by night to Cæsarea; and made it necessary for him now to be impleaded before the Roman governor then residing there.

Here he was accused before Felix, who had five
 Acts xxiv. years sustained that character: a man, corrupt in his administration, and otherwise very dissolute in his morals. However, he forbore to give sentence against St. Paul, and to gratify his curiosity, had a mind to hear somewhat concerning the Christian faith. The apostle took that opportunity of discoursing upon such topics, as came home to the governor's case; who, with some stings of conscience, remanded him back into custody; and would have set him at liberty, had not the disappointed expectations of a bribe inclined him to do an acceptable act to the Jews, by conti-

ning a prisoner, who disdained to obtain his freedom by indirect means.

Festus had no sooner succeeded into this post, but the Jews renew their complaints against St. Paul. His cause, at their instance, was xxv. re-heard. At which time, upon a motion made of carrying him back to Jerusalem, the apostle found it expedient to appeal to Cæsar. This was a privilege also belonging to subjects of Rome; that, upon any suspicion of foul dealing, they had liberty to remove a cause out of any inferior court, and refer it to the judgment of the emperor in person.

Agrippa, Herod's successor in the tetrarchate of Galilee, came, with his sister Bernice, to xxvi. pay their compliments to the new governor. Festus entertained them with an account of St. Paul's case, and, at their request, ordered another public hearing. The apostle's account of his conversion was so surprising, and his vindication so strong; that Agrippa declared in his favour, and saw no reasonable objection to his release, except the impracticableness of it, after an appeal.

St. Paul's journey to Rome being thus determined, he was committed to the charge of xxvii. Julius, a commander in the emperor's own band. They took a ship of Adramyttium, (now L'Andramiti, or Endramiti) a port near Troas. The season of the year (it being now the latter end of September, or beginning of October), made sailing slow and dangerous; which induced St. Paul to advise wintering in Crete. But the centurion, over-ruled by the master, ventured to sea; Ver. 24. and shortly after came on so tempestuous weather, that the whole company, for fourteen days, gave themselves all for lost. Here again God signaled his providence; assuring the apostle, that, for his sake, all that sailed with him should be preserved. Which comfortable news he imparted to his companions, and the event proved accordingly.

xxviii. For, though the vessel was lost, not a soul in her perished; but all got safe to the isle of Melita (now Malta).

Here he was eminently distinguished again. First, by shaking a viper off his hand, without prejudice from the venomous creature; and then, by recovering from a fever and bloody-flux the father of Publius, the principal person in the island. Both which procured him general respect, and plenty of provisions for the remainder of his voyage. After three months, he set forward again, and being met by some Christians on the way, was by them conducted to Rome.

Upon his arrival, his first care was to stand well with the Jews there; as persons, to whose benefit he designed to apply himself immediately, and yet such, as were most likely to take offence, at his appeal, as if it were a reproach to the justice of their own nation. Having therefore removed this prejudice, and insinuated the cause of his sufferings to be that, which their own religion had trained them up in the belief and expectation of, he gained so far upon their affections, as to have a second conference by their own appointment, for explaining the principles of Christianity to them. The success of this was different; some yielding, others refusing

Ver. 16. to be convinced. Meanwhile St. Paul was treated with great courtesy by the government, suffered to dwell in a house of his own providing, only with one keeper; free access allowed to him; of which the proper use was made, by publishing to all his visitors the doctrine of the gospel. And this liberty of conversation he enjoyed, and improved, for two years together.

Thus far St. Luke leads us in his book of the Acts. Towards the end of those two years, St. Paul having some prospect of a speedy release, writes his epistles to the Philippians, Ephesians,

Colossians, and Philemon. After which he went into Italy, where he waited for Timothy's coming, (who was set at liberty shortly after him) and then wrote his Epistle to the Hebrews. Upon his arrival, he prosecutes his long intended journey into Spain, and is probably thought, from thence to come and preach the gospel in Britain. Afterwards he went into Crete; and, having left Titus there in quality of their bishop, came from thence in company with Timothy to Judea. Thence into Asia; and, while Timothy went to Ephesus, he made his *first* visit to the Colossians, with an intention of spending some time among them. This appears from his desiring Philemon, a person eminent in that church, to provide him with conveniences for some stay to be made there.

Heb. xiii. 23, 24.

Parker's Antiq.
Cantuar. and
Stillingfleet's
Origin. Britan.

From hence designing for Macedonia, he desires Timothy to continue still at Ephesus.

Before this journey he excommunicated Hymeneus and Philetus. Arriving in Macedonia, he visited Philippi, and tarried a good while there, as he had given them expectations that he would, in his epistle to that church. From hence he is thought to have sent his first epistle to Timothy, and that to Titus. The time of writing both which, our learned bishop Pearson places in the 65th year of Christ.

1 Tim. i. 3.

Ver. 20.

Phil. i. 25, 26.

The winter following was spent at Nicopolis.

Hence he moved to Corinth, where Erastus staid behind him. After that to Troas, where he left the *cloak and parchments with Carpus*, which Timothy was afterwards ordered to bring with him. Then to Miletus, where he left Trophimus sick. And at last, the persecution of the Christians having ceased a considerable time before, he goes a second time to Rome.

Tit. iii. 12.

2 Tim. iv. 20.

Ver. 13. 20.

Here he is made a close prisoner, tried for his life by Helius Cæsareanus, whom he calls *the Lion*.

Pearson, Ann. Paul. 2 Tim. iv. 17. Ver. 14. 16. This man, Nero, at his departure into Greece, had left invested with exorbitant powers, which he exercised after as exorbitant a manner. At this trial he complains of Alexander the coppersmith's malice, and of being deserted by his friends: and, presently after it, the *second* epistle to Timothy was written; in which there are several presages of his approaching martyrdom.

Hieron in Catal. Script. See Dr. Cave. This crown he obtained the year following, together with St. Peter, though not by the same kind of death. For St. Paul, as a Roman citizen, could not be crucified, and therefore was beheaded with a sword. His body was buried in the Via Ostiensis near Rome. A stately church was built to the honour of his memory by Constantine the Great; which was afterwards enlarged and beautified by other of the succeeding Christian emperors.

The reader is desired to take notice, that this order of St. Paul's travels and sufferings proceeds upon the scheme of our most learned bishop Pearson, in his Annal. Paulin.

THE COLLECT.

Acts ix. 15.
Rom. xv. 19, &c.
2 Cor. x. 14. 16.
Coloss. i. 6.
1 Thess. i. 8, 9.

O GOD, who through the preaching of the blessed apostle St. Paul, hast caused the light of the gospel to shine throughout the world; grant, we beseech thee, that we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, may shew forth our thankfulness unto thee for the same, by following the holy doctrine which he taught, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

THE EPISTLE.

ACTS ix. 1.

1. **A**ND Saul yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest.

2. And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

at Damascus, who confessed Jesus Christ, that they might be made public examples for the terror of others.

3. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaen.

4. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice, saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

and they who were with him, being struck with the ground. Comp. Chap. xxii. 9, xxvi. 14.

5. And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

understood by the rest)

6. And he trembling, and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

7. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

the Greek word is often used in Scripture, particularly by this apostle, 1 Cor. xiv. 2, and thus the text here is very reconcileable with that Acts xxii. 9. where they are said not to have heard (not

PARAPHRASE.

1, 2. Saul, in the fury of his zeal, did not wait for, but addressed himself to the high priest and sanhedrim for orders to take up all Jews

3, 4. This light, that shone about him and his fellow-travellers, was brighter than the sun itself; at the glory whereof he, amazement, fell to

5. Saul said, in answer to the voice (which to him was articulate and distinct, but not un-

6. It cannot but be ill for thee, to contend with one so much mightier than myself.

7. They heard the noise, but they did not understand the words: for so

to have understood) the voice ; which yet in this they are said to hear, that is, to perceive the sound of.

8. The excessive strength of the light deprived him of sight, chap. xxii. 11.

8. *And Saul arose from the earth ; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man : but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.*

9. *And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.*

10. *And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias, and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.*

11. *And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street, which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas, for one called Saul of Tarsus : for behold, he prayeth.*

12. *And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias, coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.*

13. *Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem :*

14. *And here he hath authority from the chief priests, to bind all that call on thy name.*

15. This man, so remarkable for his zeal to suppress, shall be a most eminent instrument of advancing my gospel ;

15. *But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way : for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.*

16. And endure terrible persecutions, as he of late inflicted such : and yet the prospect of sufferings shall in no degree take off from his endeavours to propagate my truth.

16. *For I will shew him, how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.*

17. Hence some have thought it probable, that Jesus exhibited himself to Saul, as formerly to Stephen, in some glorious form ; but that is not a necessary inference from the words.

17. *And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house ; and putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord (even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest) hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.*

18. *And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.*

18. After Ananias had declared the message of God, and what

work he had chosen Saul to, Acts xxii. 13, 14, 15, 16.——

19. *And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.*

20. *And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.*

21. *But all that heard him were amazed, and said, Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?*

he came thither.

22. *But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.*

day; insomuch that the Jews of that place could not answer the proofs he brought, that Jesus is the promised Messiah, styled also the Son of God in their own Scriptures of the Old Testament.

21. This was a very great surprise to all his hearers, who knew very well, with how different a purpose

22. His knowledge, and success of his arguments grew greater every

COMMENT.

WE have here a particular account of St. Paul, before, in, and after his conversion. Of which I know not how we can profit ourselves more to the purpose of this festival, than by making some useful and practical reflections upon each of these circumstances, according to the description given of him, in this and other Scriptures taken into the service of the day.

Chap. xxii.
—— xxvi.

1. The consideration, which naturally offers itself from his temper and behaviour, while yet unconverted, is that of a misguided zeal; and what allowances we may hope God will make, for such designs and actions, as do really proceed from it.

That this was manifestly St. Paul's case, the apologies he makes for himself informs us. He frankly owns the fury of his proceedings; the barbarity of his intentions; and the indefatigable pains he took, by all means to drive those, who are already Christians, to apostacy; and to terrify others from taking upon them a profession, so ill treated in the world. But then he charged all this heat to the prejudices of his education, which had possessed his mind with more than ordinary veneration for the law and tradition of the Jews. And in regard our blessed Saviour had always been represented by *the rulers of the people, and the elders of Israel*, as a breaker and changer of the law; therefore this pharisee, (agreeably to the genius of that rigorous sect) *verily thought with himself, that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.*

In consequence of this persuasion he acted, as was natural to a man, sensible that the present dictates of every one's conscience are the next immediate light, by which the moral good or evil of our actions is represented to us. And, in regard he followed this light without any collusion or prevarication, he did what he did upon a notion of duty, and wanted not the regulation of his will, but only the better information of his understanding: from hence he takes upon him to affirm, that he had all along lived in *good conscience before God.* But how are we to understand this conscience to be good? Was it free from error? Or were the actions, done in compliance of it, void of offence before God? No such matter. For he elsewhere calls himself *blasphemer, injurious, persecutor, nay, chief of sinners*; and all for that very reason, *because he persecuted the church of God.* His conscience therefore

Chap. xxii. 4, 5.

— xxvi. 10, 11.

Gal. i. 13.

Acts xxvi. 4, 5.

Chap. xxvi. 9.

Acts xxiii. 1.

1 Tim. i. 13. 15.

was only so far good, as it could testify his integrity, and that he was an honest, though mistaken man. But his continuing under that mistake was a sin; and his doing so many violent inhuman outrages upon Christians, for no other provocation but difference of opinion, was a much greater sin. He might and ought to have considered this new doctrine, with all the wonderful attestations to it, calmly and fairly. And, had he done so, Jesus would have been found not a destroyer but a fulfiller of that law, for the honour of which he was so intemperately zealous. Though therefore ignorance were the ground of all his rage, yet even that ignorance was a sin; because the object of it was not the facts he was a doing, (in which case ignorance acquits from guilt) but it was ignorance of the rule he ought to act by. Now this very man is bound at his peril to know; and cannot be innocent, if, for want of such knowledge, he shall be carried away to do that which is amiss. This then was St. Paul's case, *he thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*. Whereas had the matter been fairly examined, (all prejudices apart) the result would have been, that *he ought to do every thing in his power, that could be any way serviceable to that very name*.

Meanwhile, all ignorance, which is not voluntary and affected, being not entirely a fault, but in some measure a misfortune, does without doubt render the person's case pitiable, and a proper object of the divine compassion. This is the mitigation, allowed by St. Peter to the wickedest of all facts, the crucifixion of the blessed Jesus; *Brethren, I wot, that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers*. Upon this our Lord himself grounds that prayer upon the cross, *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do*. And to this it is,

Acts iii. 17.

Luke xxiii. 34.

that St. Paul attributes his own pardon,
 1 Tim. i. 13. *I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.*

Herein however we shall do well to contemplate the absolute freedom of God's grace: who, when he might most justly have left St. Paul as he did those Jews under the power and punishment of obstinacy and unbelief, chose rather, for an example and encouragement to all well-meaning though mistaken men, to shew forth *in him*, as himself expresses

1 Tim. i. 16. *it, all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on him.* This

gives us a right notion of God's proceeding with our great apostle; and shews, that his conversion, and

1 Tim. i. 14. the happy consequences of it, were an effect of *exceeding abundant grace*; that his ignorance, and the facts owing to it, did plainly incline God to mercy, because the ignorance was not wilful: but still, that such ignorance could not engage or by any covenant-right lay claim to mercy; because, with due care and impartial application, it might have been first prevented, or afterwards cured: that the mercy, obtained by St. Paul, was first a thorough conviction of his error, and perfect knowledge of the truth; then fervent zeal, and fit opportunities put into his hands, to testify the sincerity of his intention, and to make ample reparation to that righteous cause, which he had before with equal zeal obstructed and persecuted.

All this, when rightly considered, is an excellent warning of how great importance it is to every man, that his conscience is rightly informed. That in all matters (those relating to religion especially) we should take all possible heed, not to be carried into any sinful excesses, by the prejudices of education, by the undue admiration of men's persons, by the violence of our own passions, by our affection to any party, by the prospect of any secular interest; or, in short, by any regards whatsoever, except

those, which shall be found strictly, and, upon calm and diligent inquiry, due to the will of God: and for this will we are to depend upon the testimony of his holy word, for matters there revealed; and, for others not mentioned here, upon the result of our own best reason, fairly representing to us the true state and merits of the cause.

Again, as the case of St. Paul before his conversion should induce us to prevent the danger of an ignorant and erroneous conscience; so does it teach us, how to judge of such actions, as are done for want of that timely care, and shews the great guilt and mischief of mistaken principles. The guilt is plain from hence; that moral good and evil depend upon reasons intrinsic to the things themselves, and cannot be changed, either as to their nature or degree, by the opinions entertained concerning them. If therefore an action be evil in itself, or declared so to be by any positive law; it is not the thinking it innocent or good, nor is it the ignorance of that law which pronounces it evil, that can acquit the party, who upon any present persuasion shall venture to commit it. Because this persuasion is founded upon a mistake; and might have been rectified, by attending to that rule which every one with due care may, and is bound at his peril to know. The mischief of such mistakes is unconceivable: for no wickedness is so black, but persons, who proceed upon prejudice, may by degrees be brought to esteem it, not only lawful, but even commendable and holy. Of this the barbarities executed by St. Paul are indeed an eminent, but far from the only instance: for almost every age hath felt by sad experience, that the rights of society have never been more dangerously insulted, nor the sacred name of religion more scandalously abused, than by the furious attempts of those seduced and unrelenting zealots, who sanctify all their avarice, opposition, and cruelty, with the false notions of

reforming abuses, vindicating religion, and doing God service. So fatal to a man's own self, so pernicious to other people, are those blind prepossessions, which naturally fly out into rage and violence; and, not having sound knowledge to temper their heat, rashly go into unwarrantable measures, which no goodness of intention can make atonement for.

But, in regard such intention was observed before to be a proper motive for inclining the mercy of God toward them, who unwarily acts amiss under its influence; the example of St. Paul may be farther useful, by giving us intimation, what sort of mercy that is; and upon what terms there may be ground to hope for it. Now this in his case (and we may judge proportionably of others) was a powerful awakening of his conscience; enlightening that judgment, which before had led him wrong; and turning that general disposition to serve God and promote his truth, into the right and acceptable way of doing both. Happy therefore are those mistaken men, who have (like him) the irregularities of their past proceedings pardoned, their former errors rectified, their well-intending minds informed; and, above all, their wills made ready to submit to, and comply with, such means as the ordinary methods of knowledge and salvation, seconded and set home by God's grace, shall furnish for those purposes. For we are not now to expect, that God should go out of the common way, and make miraculous conversions of every man, who does ill without designing ill. And therefore, in order to profiting effectually by the instance before us, it will be necessary, with some care to consider St. Paul in the next state propounded; that is,

II. *Secondly*, With regard to the time and circumstances of his conversion. And here are several things related on God's, and several on St. Paul's part, which require our consideration.

On God's part we may observe, *first*, The opening of this scene by that light from heaven, which shone round St. Paul and his fellow-travellers; a sudden a *great* light, a light *above* even the *brightness of the sun*; though it were then high noon, and the sun consequently in the full strength of his lustre.

Acts ix. 3.
 — xxii. 6.
 — xxvi. 13.

All this must be acknowledged very surprising, if considered barely in itself, and with regard to the nature of the thing; but, when we take in the condition and character of the persons concerned, there arises another consideration, which renders it more significant and extraordinary. Now these were Jews, all zealous for the Mosaic law, and conversant in the history of the Old Testament. They could not consequently be ignorant that such strong emanations of light as this, were the method usually made choice of by God, for exhibiting his glory and peculiar presence. * Many instances of that kind are recorded in the books of Moses, many in the prophetic scriptures which seem plainly to be intended, and were constantly understood, to this purpose. And those interpreters appear to have judged very reasonably of the case before us, who suppose the whole company falling on their faces to the ground, to have done so; as well by that act of prostration, to express their profound reverence of the dignity, whose glorious presence that brightness signified; and from the strength of a light, which they were not able to bear up against.

* Exod. xvi. 10.
 — xxiv. 16, 17.
 — xl. 34, 35.
 Levit. ix. 23.
 Num. xvi. 19. 42.
 2 Chron. v. 14.
 ———vii. 1,
 2, 3.
 Ezek. i. 4. 28.
 — x. 4.
 Maim More
 Nevoch. P. 1.
 Cap. 64.

Such,† it is evident, was wont heretofore to be the behaviour of holy men, when thus made sensible, that God was more immediately approaching to-

† Gen. xvii. 3.
 Lev. ix. 24.
 Num. xx. 6.
 Ezek. i. 28.

Ezek. xliv. 4.

Dan. vii. 17.

2 Chron. vii. 3.

ward them: and it is easy to discern, how exceedingly wise and proper an introduction this was to the miraculous conversion, now about to be wrought upon St. Paul. A zeal, so violent as his, would ask some uncommon and very forcible motives, to persuade and control it: and a change so strange, as that now ready to be made, from the bitterest of persecutors to the eagerest and most laborious apostle, would meet with greater credit and success, in proportion as it could be made appear, that God himself was at the bottom and beginning of it. Such uncontested marks of a divine presence and power, were therefore of infinite use to be imparted to his fellow-travellers in common; as so many witnesses of the terrors and majesty of Him, whose symbol that light was, appearing upon this occasion: and they were highly serviceable to St. Paul in particular; by giving a check to his fury, by striking an awe upon his mind, by awakening his attention, and disposing him, with all due submission and devotion, to be influenced by the following parts of the miracle, in which he was singled out from the rest: for, though even here he was chiefly, there he was wholly and solely, concerned.

For the next thing remarkable in this transaction, shews plainly, for whose sake the whole was meant. A voice directed to St. Paul alone, in words which speak the meekness and goodness, as the shining glory, from whence it came, declared the majesty of the Person uttering them: *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* are words, carrying rather the form of a gentle expostulation, than that of anger and reproach, from one, who had so just grounds of resentment given him, by the injurious treatment of this mistaken zealot. It expresses the infinite tenderness of this mystical Head, who, even in his glorified state, is a sufferer in his afflicted members; and, who esteems the wrongs done to any of them,

done to himself. It imports, that there could be no just provocation alleged, for all the outrages committed upon them that believed, purely because they believed in him: and therefore, it calls upon the committer of them, to recollect, and think better of a matter, which had not been sufficiently considered before. And meeting with a mind now calmed, and prepared for better impressions, it produced a desire of more perfect information, expressed in that question, who this Person was, that so kindly complained of such ill usage from him? To this our Lord replied in few, but very significant words, that he was *Jesus of Nazareth*. That very despised man, whom St. Paul thought an impostor, and as real and heinous a malefactor, as any that commonly died the scandalous death of the cross: and yet, he now appeared to him, with all the confessed evidences of the true God. Here therefore is implied the certainty of our Saviour's resurrection, of his living in heaven, of his sitting on the right hand of the Majesty on high, of his power and dominion as Lord of all: the truth of his doctrine and miracles; the reasonableness of that faith so barbarously persecuted; and especially, the danger of persisting in attempts against him, sure to be vain in themselves, and fatal to the undertakers: for thus much is manifestly designed by the last sentence, *It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks*. So comprehensive are the terms, in which our Lord delivered himself, when taken in conjunction with the other circumstances of this account: so powerful the effect of this short conversation, of which none but St. Paul was made partaker. And to him, who understood the true force of the whole argument, so strong and convincing; that, without any vindication of himself, or other reply, except such as requested and submitted entirely to any farther directions necessary for his condition; the mighty work was done in such a manner, as must have rendered it a miracle,

almost equal to that of his conversion, had he not been reduced and converted by it.

A *third* remark, proper upon this occasion, arises from the method, in which a change, so miraculously begun, was carried on to perfection. Now it is very observable, that St. Paul was referred to Ananias; and that by his ministry he received farther instruction and comfort, the sacrament of baptism, and the recovery of his sight. A significant emblem of his better information; as the blindness, he for three days laboured under, had been of the darkness and error formerly upon his mind. But the reflections, I would principally recommend from this manner of proceeding, are, *that* Almighty God, though he will not spare for miracles in extraordinary exigences, does not yet think fit to be profuse in them, where such necessity ceases: *that* even his uncommon appearances, in order to men's conviction, do not render the sacraments, and other established means of conversion and grace, either useless or needless: *that* it is one thing to be persuaded of the truth of Christianity, and sincerely disposed to obey it; and another to be actually a Christian: *that* baptism, administered to a convert under such circumstances, is a sufficient intimation, how guilty and fatal a neglect those deluded people allow themselves in, who treat this and other like ordinances with scorn and contempt; who vainly presume upon the privileges of the gospel, before the seals of the covenant have secured their right to them: and, *that* the more perverse abuse men can possibly make of this miracle, would be, to go on securely in sin, and defer their conversion, by neglecting to apply such means as are ordinarily necessary, and ordinarily sufficient; upon idle pretences of waiting for such awakening and extraordinary calls and illuminations, as that, which God vouchsafed to the apostle of this day. The mighty difference between his case and theirs will shortly

appear, when we come to consider the part, contributed by St. Paul himself, to the finishing that wonderful conversion, the success whereof our church is now thankfully commemorating.

Meanwhile, we must least of all omit to observe a *fourth* mercy on God's part, which in truth crowned all the rest; I mean, the powerful operation of divine grace upon his mind. Without this inward, the outward, though altogether miraculous, had wanted its effect: we have all the reason in the world to conclude so: not only from the present depravity of human nature in general; but from several instances, recorded in Scripture, of like wonderful appearances, with any visible success. Was the glory of God's presence manifested, and a voice from heaven uttered, to warn St. Paul, who Jesus was, and how necessary obedience to him is? Such glorious light was seen, such miraculous voice was heard by the Jews, at our Lord's baptism by John, and yet, among that multitude of hearers and spectators, we read not of one convert made by either. Was St. Paul struck down to the ground by the power of Jesus? so were the soldiers, who came to apprehend him in the garden; and they, 'tis plain, persisted in their wicked purpose notwithstanding. *Lastly*, was he smitten with blindness for three days? Elymas the sorcerer was so for a much longer time; who hath left us however no ground to believe, that he did not still continue *full of all subtilty and all malice, a child of the devil, and an enemy of all righteousness*. Now, what account are we able to give ourselves, why the same events, though all plainly miraculous, should have so different effects, but only this; that in some they were made successful, by those secret and divine influences from above, which the all-wise God, for just reasons known to himself, was not pleased to afford to others? So certain it is, that he is the author and

Matt. iii. 16, 17,

John xviii. 6.

Acts xiii. 10, 11.

finisher of all that is good in us : and, that no external remedies or helps, how powerful or affecting soever they may seem in their own nature, can take place, or answer our purposes, or our wants ; except the heart and will be prepared and moved, and the outward application be seconded and set-home, by the internal workings of grace upon the soul.

But we have not done justice to the virtues of this apostle, till it hath been observed, *secondly*, How far he was instrumental in his own conversion ; and what pious dispositions the history takes notice of, which might incline and render him a proper object for so wonderful a mercy.

Now the temper and deportment, suited to the several steps of this proceeding, are really admirable ; and such as abundantly declare the probity of his mind, by the manner of bringing him to a change of his measures.

The awful reverence expressed at the first display of our Lord's glory ; the ready submission to his call ; the entire resignation of himself, to his conduct in that noble question, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?* The severe mortification of a three days' fast, the fervent prayers, and all the testimonies of a sorrowful penitence during that time ; the devout engagement in the profession of Christ's religion, by baptism received at the hands of Ananias ; the many evidences of a generous and excellent spirit, which so speedily, and so thoroughly, vanquished the prejudices of education ; and went so resolutely into the service of the lately hated and persecuted name of Jesus, even when expressly forewarned, how great things he must suffer for his sake : the being content to enter upon a new course, directly opposite to his former opinions and practices ; and to encounter the scoffs and the malice of his friends and countrymen, which would naturally be more provoked and implacable, in proportion to the eagerness of his zeal, once exerted the quite contrary way : these

are such instances of sincerity and piety, as have no parallel in story. Such as undeniably prove, that humour and obstinacy, party and interest, and the world, had no part, either in his errors, or his conversion: they are such, as give immortal lustre to his character, and render the happy gaining of this apostle scarcely more wonderful on God's part, than commendable and virtuous on his own.

What was said in the close of my last particular, may suffice so to explain this, that, in magnifying the compliance of St. Paul, I may not be thought in any degree to derogate from the grace of God. It was under the constant influence and conduct of this grace, that every step of the good work was taken: to this was owing the generous probity of his mind; by this his very good inclination was excited; by this he was convinced, enlightened, established, and perfected. But still, I conceive, in such a way, as made the actions his, though the glory of them continued to be God's; that is, they were voluntary and rewardable in St. Paul, who very emphatically says of himself, that *he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision*: a hard and Acts xxvi. 19. seemingly arrogant expression, if that obedience were the effect of absolute necessity and force irresistible: but very well consistent with, and well becoming, such a concurrence of the will, as was wrought by most powerful assistances of grace within, no less than by the most miraculous evidences of truth from without.

I should now proceed to the *last* thing proposed, and consider such presages in the service of the day, as describe St. Paul's behaviour after his conversion. But so much as is needful of this kind, will presently occur to my reader, in my following treatise upon the Gospel for this festival.

All I add here shall consist in a reflection or

two, more immediately relating to the subject now in hand.

As *first*, The example before us furnishes a good rule, for judging of our own, or of other people's zeal. It shews the possibility of being under strong prepossessions, exceeding vehement for grievous errors, furiously bent against those of a different judgment, and yet, that all this may be consistent with honesty and a good meaning. And, ought we not to learn from hence to enlarge our charity, by forbearing to censure even our adversaries, nay even our persecutors, as wretches lost to all integrity and conscience? Such sentences are too often barbarous and unjust, and, in St. Paul's case, had been manifestly false. And doubtless we should do more real service to God and our cause, by believing the best, hoping almost against hope, pitying the ignorance, patiently contending with the prejudices, and praying for the pardon and amendment of the faults and furious oppositions of contradictors and persecutors; than by rashly impleading their integrity, pronouncing their intentions wicked, and accounting them all to be the children of hypocrisy and hell.

2. But the same example, which persuades such tenderness in judging others, is a very good argument for being exceeding nice and severe in judging ourselves. Men are too frequently imposed upon by specious appearances of zeal; and think thereby not only to excuse, but even to sanctify, many unwarrantable actions. Whereas, would they bring these to St. Paul's standard, the difference would soon be found between that, which is really a zeal for God, and that, which affects to pass for it. For, if men will not be brought fairly to consider; if they stick pertinaciously to their point, and refuse to submit to all methods of conviction; if, upon conviction, they do not effectually disen-

gage themselves from such prepossessions, as can no longer be justified; if the same affectionate and vigorous desires do not appear, in favour of truth lately discovered, as were used to exert themselves for beloved and inveterate errors: these persons have none of those marks to shew, which proved St. Paul's sincerity; and mistaken zeal is too tender a name in such cases. And it ought to be remembered that one, in much better circumstances, who had no partiality or indirect ends to be suspected of, did yet style himself *blasphemer, injurious, and chief of sinners*, for even those very things, which he did ignorantly, and *verily thought* himself *obliged to do, against the name of Jesus of Nazareth*.

Lastly, Let us admire and extol the wisdom of Almighty God, for the mighty advantages, which the Christian religion received by the conversion of this apostle in particular. For, (as an ancient father well represents it) “Who was Paul? Once a persecutor, but now a preacher, of Christ.

Cyril. Hierosol.
Catech. x. Sect.
8. Edit. Oxon.

And what made this change? Was he brought over? Alas! there was nobody disposed to bribe him to it. No, it was because he saw Christ, was convinced, and worshipped, and was caught up into heaven. He took his journey to Damascus, that he might persecute; and after three days did there commence preacher. And with what power! others, in matters concerning themselves, produce the testimony of their own friends and retainers; but I produce a witness, who was once an enemy. And can any doubt stick with you after this? The evidence of Peter and John are of great weight, 'tis true; but a man, disposed to be jealous, might object that these were companions and servants. But can any one question the truth of his evidence, who first was a professed enemy to Jesus, and afterwards died for him? I have, for my part, always

admired the wise management of the Holy Ghost on this occasion, in ordering that the epistles written by others should be few, but Paul's, the late persecutor, no less than fourteen. Not that Peter or John were inferior to Paul; but because his were more likely to persuade." And accordingly we read, *All that heard him were amazed, and said, Is not this he that destroyeth them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But now he preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in him. To the same God let us also give glory, for ever and ever. Amen.*

THE GOSPEL.

PARAPHRASE.

ST. MATT. xix. 27.

See the Comment.

27. **P***PETER answered and said unto Jesus, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?*

28. *And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

29. *And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*

30. *But many that are first, shall be last; and the last shall be first.*

COMMENT.

THE occasion of this discourse, between our blessed Saviour and St. Peter, was adminis-

tered by that rich young man, who is said, in the foregoing part of this chapter, to have rejected a promise of treasure in heaven, when clogged with the condition of abandoning his possessions upon earth. That refusal moved our Lord to make a reflection (very surprising to all that heard it) upon the great danger of riches, and the fatal obstruction they ordinarily prove, to such a resignation of mind, as true piety, and the virtues of a Christian state, imply and require: From that observation, St. Peter takes the advantage of magnifying that voluntary renunciation of the world, of which he and his brethren had set an example, insinuating withal, that some very great and glorious recompense must certainly be reserved for so uncommon an instance of heavenly-mindedness. To this our Lord agrees, in a prediction of peculiar honours intended for the apostles; which I shall have a fit opportunity to consider hereafter: but he adds a proverbial aphorism, whereof I shall at present choose to treat: because in it chiefly I conceive the matter to be couched, which renders this passage, now before us, a subject proper to be chosen for the Gospel of this festival.

Ver. 16, &c.

Ver. 24. &c.

Ver. 27.

Ver. 28, 29.
Gosp. for St.
Barthol.
Ver. 30.

All that would otherwise have been necessary for explaining what is meant by the *first being last, and the last first*, hath been already said at large; when the following parable concerning the labourers in the vineyard, by which this sentence is illustrated, came under consideration. My manner therefore of handling it at present shall be,

Gosp. for Septua-
ges. Sun. Vol. II.

I. To enforce some practical doctrines, which our blessed Master seems to have intended his disciples should gather from thence. Then

II. From an example, answering to each branch of it, to shew, how proper and seasonable truths

those were, for the apostle to be put in mind of.
And

III. *Lastly*, To make such application of these doctrines and examples, as may be suitable to the day.

I. I begin with some doctrines and practical reflections, naturally resulting from this sentence.

1. Now one of these I take to be; that all the outward advantages of life, most valued and admired by the generality of mankind, are not in the same esteem with Almighty God. And the plain reason is, because nothing is of any account with him, but inward holiness and virtue, which these of themselves cannot effect. For, it is plain, we are not one whit the purer or better for them. It is the glory of religion, to be calculated for all sorts and conditions of men. And it will one day greatly aggravate the condemnation of the wicked, that, as no circumstances of person or fortune can make us good, without our own care and pains; so neither can any render it impracticable, for them to be virtuous and good, who are well resolved, and seriously disposed to it. The ancient philosophers have therefore very pertinently styled the things of this nature *instruments of life*. For, like all other instruments, they do nothing of themselves, but depend entirely upon the hand of the artificer: and every thing they are employed about, will be well or ill finished, according to the skill or the ignorance, the neglect or the due application, of the person, under whose direction they fall.

This is manifestly the case with riches, and authority, and knowledge, and the rest of them.

For riches (*first*;) how manifold are the benefits of a plentiful estate, and how public a blessing may the possessor of it become to his own, and to future ages, provided he have the soul to make a

right use of it? If his heart and his hands be open to the distressed members of Christ; what stately habitations, what bright and incorruptible crowns may so fading a treasure ensure, by refreshing their bowels, and covering their nakedness? But if this shall be made, in the very worst and most literal sense of the words, the *mammon of unrighteousness*; if a man resolve to get it, though by means never so unjust; and will keep it, though by a management never so sordid; if the sufferings of the afflicted, and the cries of widows and orphans can be seen and heard without any impression; if he so far *make gold his god, and the fine gold his confidence*, as to place his affections and happiness there; then the wealth, which might have procured his exaltation, proves his snare and certain downfall. And such as these it is, that the rich young man gave occasion for saying, *A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of God.* And again, *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.* Matt. xix. 23, 24. So justly is the observation I am now upon, deduced from the passage in hand; in regard the conference with that young man, and the remarks of our blessed Lord upon his ill conduct, drew on the whole of this day's Gospel, which relates what passed between him and St. Peter, after so extraordinary an experiment of the influence riches have.

The same must be acknowledged most true, concerning reputation, and honour, and authority. For what are these, but so much power to do good; if they who have it, will exert that power, by leading their inferiors into virtue, who are generally disposed to follow persons of eminence and esteem? But, if such shall degenerate into mean designs and popular vices, if they set up for patrons of irreligion, and encourage wickedness by great examples; what hopes can be entertained, what

mischiefs may not be feared, from consciences so profligate and enslaved? This courting the opinion of others, at the expense of their character and their duty, is elsewhere alleged as the cause, that detained the scribes and pharisees in their obstinate infidelity. *How can ye believe*, says our Lord, *who receive and seek honour one of another, John v. 44. and seek not that honour which cometh from God only?*

But of all worldly advantages knowledge sure is the most truly manly and desirable. And of all knowledge, that which hath more immediately religion and our duty for its object. Yet even this, which may seem so directly to carry us to our proper happiness, is sometimes the occasion of greater perverseness in error and misery. This appeared most evidently at the first setting out of the gospel. The honourable and wealthy, nay the reputed wiser and better-prepared, were not only slower in embracing it, but more violent in opposing its progress, than those of meaner condition and attainments. So was it with the apostle of this day in particular. The reason of all which is one and the same; namely, that every temporal advantage is capable of an ill, no less than of a good use: and, where things may be turned either way, the corruption of human nature is extremely apt to turn them the worse way.

2. Another necessary instruction, which our Lord seems to have intended from these words, is, that good beginnings are of no service, except care be taken to bring them to perfection. Such beginnings have indeed their just value and commendation; but this chiefly depends upon the hopes we conceive, that what is begun well, will not fail to be finished so. For no virtue is safe, without a disposition to all virtue; nor any crown to be attained, without stedfastness and perseverance. It is in the Christian, as in every other race; he that

is beaten out at the last heat, loses the honour and the prize, as certainly, as if he had set out ingloriously, and never run well at all. Of this also the example of the rich young man gave but too sensible an experiment. For he, who had made the moral law his constant study and practice, and *kept all the* commandments

Matt. xix. 20.

from his youth up: nay, who was very zealous and aspiring after yet higher degrees of virtue, did yet never arrive to a complete good man; but gave out dishonourably, and forfeited all, at the last proposal of giving up the treasures of this world, in exchange for those of a better. So necessary it is, for every man to be thoroughly resolved, to keep the goal continually in his eye, and, from this prospect, to be quickened with the shame and danger of a relapse. The constant remembrance of all undertakings being crowned by the end, should spur us on; and we should do and suffer any thing in our great concern, rather than suffer ourselves to lose our past pains, by proving at last but *almost Christians*. For surely the bitterest remorse to a guilty lost wretch must needs be that of falling back into hell, from the very confines and gate of heaven. These I take to be practical observations, very naturally resulting from the former clause of our blessed Lord's aphorism, that *Many who are first shall be last*.

3. There is a *third*, which offers itself to us from the latter clause, that *the last shall be first*. And that is, a mighty encouragement to all such, as, either through want of a good education, or neglect to improve it afterwards, have not made the same prosperous beginnings, or not the same careful advances, in piety with their brethren. This is in truth a deplorable, but by no means a desperate case. For there is room still left for industry and zeal; and a possibility of those *last*, with regard to time and other advantages, becoming *first* in the

degrees of acceptance and reward. This much seems plainly represented by the following parable: in which the labourers called to the work at different hours of the day, were, notwithstanding, all made even at night; and the very latest, who had wrought but one hour, were esteemed not unworthy of the same wages, with those hired at the earliest hour of the morning. This dispensation, 'tis true, as figured there, appears to imply, both a ready compliance with the first offer, and an extraordinary application upon the closing with it. The different circumstances under which Jews and gentiles came into the gospel, are, without controversy, the primary intention of that parable. But, since God hath solemnly engaged, that *when*, or (as our Ezek. xviii. 27. old service-book reads,) *at what time soever the wicked man turns from his wickedness, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive*:—I cannot think any violence or wrong done to this passage, by saying, that it likewise administers comfort and great hope to them who, even in the midst of light, have continued under the power of darkness and error, and *held the truth in unrighteousness*. Let these then be persuaded to begin, though late, to live well, worthy of, and suitably to, their opportunities; and their repentance shall not be rejected. But let them remember withal, that this parable always supposes some space still left to work in. One hour of the day at least; wherein the labour may be so vigorous, as to fetch up, and in some measure to make amends for, long and many neglects. If by such proportion of life, so remaining, and so employed, their after-care approves the sincerity of their conversion, it can never come unseasonably. For, even in this sense also, they who labour vigorously, though they have stood almost all the day idle, shall find, that their *labour is not in vain in the Lord*.

Such are the practical doctrines, which we may reasonably presume this passage was designed to suggest. Let it now be observed in the

II. *Second* place, how very proper and seasonable these were, for the apostles to be put in mind of at that time. It hath been already said, that the occasion of this sentence was administered by an invidious comparison, made by St. Peter, in favour of himself and his brethren : who, much unlike to the young man spoken of before, had distinguished their love and obedience to Christ, by *forsaking all, and following him*. Now, amidst this sufficiency and self-satisfaction, it was very requisite to let them understand, that, as God had a just regard to those virtues, which one day should exalt them in his heavenly kingdom, far above the rich, and great, and worldly-wise, who were *first*, as to the accomplishments and advantages of the present life ; so they were to remember, that the most laudable beginnings are but beginnings : that the reward does not become due, till the work and the day be ended : and, as these advances, if proportionably carried on, would entitle them to a just pre-eminence above common Christians ; so, if their fidelity should warp, or their zeal cool hereafter, this would check and disappoint their hopes, and greatly abate, or utterly destroy, their fairest prospect.

Again, allowing their piety never so firm, and their elevation such as is fitly resembled by *sitting upon thrones* ; yet ought they Matt. xix 28. not to imagine those honours and distinctions so peculiarly theirs, that none, but the attendants upon Christ's own person, could be qualified to attain them. For God can, when he pleases, at any time raise up such instruments for his own glory and the salvation of mankind ; that their labours, and constancy, and sufferings, shall make large amends for any other circumstances, which might be thought

a lessening of their character. And so these *last*, in that respect, may become *first*. They may equal, I mean, if not exceed, those apostles themselves, in the good they do, and in the recompense they shall receive at the hand of God for it. For both these cases there were, shortly after, two eminent instances, so wonderful in their kind, and so awakening to these apostles, that a man may fairly presume our Lord to have had them in view: and thus to have foretold, not only what should be done to all the world in general, but what should be the condition of those two persons in particular.

The former of these is Judas: chosen into the highest and most honourable order; admitted to the constant conversation of his blessed Master: one, who daily heard the divine instructions, by which he enlightened the ignorant, encouraged the honest and willing, silenced the gainsayers, and put the obstinate and malicious to confusion: one, who had the most sensible demonstrations of his power and glory; equal, in all external privileges, to the rest of that noble fraternity, who exalted the name and kingdom of their Lord, and carried his cross triumphantly round the world: wanting no qualification to equal their virtue and renown too; except that which he was wanting to himself in, an honest and good heart. Yet did this man at

John vi. 70.

length prove a *devil*, a betrayer, and a murderer. His name is a reproach and a by-word to all ages and nations; and of him is declared, that

John xvii. 12.

Matt. xxvi. 24.

he was the *son of perdition*, and that *good were it for him if he had never been born*. So far are the greatest privileges

from securing any man's happiness and salvation, without the continuance of God's grace, and that of his own care and perseverance. So seasonable was this check to the confidence of these apostles; when, even of their own number, so dreadful an example would quickly be made, of a man, first in

the opportunities of being good and happy above common believers, but made *last* by his own fault.

As visibly was the latter branch of this sentence made good, in that saint, whose wonderful conversion the church, this day commemorating, hath, upon that account, very fitly appointed the Scripture before us to bear a part in that service. For, what could be more contrary to Christ and his kingdom, what in all human appearance more desperate and lost, what more distant from an apostle and martyr, than the injurious, the blaspheming, the persecuting Saul? And yet, behold and admire the merciful providence of God, and the amazing power of his grace! In the midst of all this spite and fury; in the very execution of those bloody commissions, mentioned in the offices for this day: this violent mistaken man was on the sudden enlightened, confounded, softened, by a vision and voice from heaven. Thus checked, he employs his journey to Damascus, to purposes most foreign from those it had been undertaken for. He becomes one of the converts to a religion, which he came to vex and persecute: and all the eager zeal, whereby men before were *compelled to blaspheme*, is turned on the side of the truth; exerted in every motive, that eloquence, joined with example, could inspire, for prevailing with his hearers to *count all things but dross and dung, so they might win Christ*; and generously to despise the troubles and terrors, of which himself had been hitherto the dreadful instrument, and merciless inflicter.

The holy indignation he conceived against his former practices, the admirable meekness and humility of his deportment, and yet, at the same time, the invincible patience and resolution of his mind. The indefatigable diligence in preaching, in disputing, in writing; the strength of his arguments, the charms of his rhetoric, the winning prudence of his address and condescension, and painfulness and

hazards of his travels, the undaunted courage before kings and governors, in threatnings and dangers, in chains and courts of justice, and the vast account these turned to for the advancement of religion, are never to be described, scarce ought to be attempted, by any pen or tongue, less divine than that of St. Paul himself. Observe therefore, what character he gives of his own ministry. *Scourged of the Jews*, to the utmost extremity their law would

2 Cor. xi. 24. &c. allow, *five several times; thrice beaten*

with rods, once stoned, thrice in shipwracks, a night and a day in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils by robbers, in perils by his own countrymen, in perils by the heathens, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils by false brethren: in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness; and besides all these, (which to be sure was by no means the least article of his sufferings) the care of all the churches: a fellow-feeling of the infirmities and afflictions of the saints, which could not but be a very tender concern, and daily oppression upon so affectionate a pastor. Thus he, who

1 Tim. i. 15. declares himself once *the chief of sinners, in that he persecuted the church of God,* became its glory and most shining light. He, who

1 Cor. xv. 10. was *not meet to be called an apostle, came in no wise behind the very chiefest apostles, but laboured and endured more abundantly*

2 Cor. xii. 2. *than they all: obtained equal favour*

with God; was caught up into the third heaven, was taught mysterious truths by immediate revelation; and after infinite toils, and sufferings, and prodigious successes, glorified the Lord Jesus, by shedding his own blood; and offering his life a most willing sacrifice, in vindication of that truth, for the confession whereof he, with such outrageous eagerness, hastened to spill the blood of all that should dare to avow it. So eminent an example is

he, above any other in the Christian history, of our Saviour's affirmation, that the *last should be first*.

It remains only now, that I conclude this discourse with two short inferences, suitable to the subject I have been upon, and the occasion of this festival.

1. Now, that *many who are first shall be last*, ought to be a warning to all those, who have had the happiness of instruction, imbibed good principles early, and made proportionable improvements; that they do not depart from the way in which they have been trained, nor suffer their latter end to be worse than their beginning. It should also prove an effectual prevention to all those intemperate overvaluings of our own virtue; than which no other temptations are more likely to destroy it, by betraying us into spiritual pride and security. How well aware was our great apostle of this rock? How careful to admonish others of the danger of splitting upon it? The vain confidences of his converted gentiles at Rome he takes down, with *Be not high minded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, the Jews, take heed lest he also spare not thee.* The falsely presumed indefectibility of his Corinthians he confutes, from the example of God's dealings under the Old Testament; and leaves this advice upon those who depend too far upon the privileges of the New—*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.* His Philippians he instructs, that the *salvation of a Christian is to be wrought out with fear and trembling*; and therefore declares, that he *counts not himself to have apprehended already*, but that, in order to it, he *kept on continually pressing forward to the mark*; as being duly sensible, that such only, who *continue faithful unto the end*, can have reasonable hopes of receiving a crown of life.

Rom. xi. 20, 21,

1 Cor. x. 12.

Phil. ii. 12.

— iii. 13, 14.

Rev. ii. 10.

2. As our Lord's declaration, that *the last shall be first*, is a gracious intimation of mercy on God's part; so is the example insisted on from it a good direction, what is fit and necessary on our part, in order to such advancement. That very large abatements in the account of past faults, and liberal allowances for passions, and infirmities, and mistakes, are made by our great Master and Judge, men are forward enough to infer, from the example of St. Paul: and they so far reason justly. But then they would do well to proceed a step or two farther; and to observe, from the same example, to what sort of persons such marvellous grace is extended: that they are such, as he was. They that bewail and forsake their past faults; that see, and are humbled with a sense of them; that conflict with, and, to the best of their ability, subdue their passions and infirmities. Hence again we learn, that late penitents, when truly and effectually such, will double their diligence, fetch up the time they have lost, and by an uncommon piety and zeal, testify the sincerity of their conversion, and the thankful esteem they have of it. In a word, that nothing will be more at the heart of such men, than making reparation to the world for any past offences given; and not only wiping out the scandal of a bad example, but exerting all the power and lustre of an eminently good one.

To all which purposes I know not what better expedient to advise, than a devout compliance with the church in the solemnity of this day; by endeavouring to make the apostle of it more and more our pattern, from lively remembrances of his conversion and following life. Both these are most deservedly commemorated by the church in general, because an invaluable blessing to all the Christian world: but more particularly so to us of this nation, whose once blind and barbarous region was most

probably enlightened by his presence and ministry in Britain.

Let us therefore beg most earnestly of God to give *us his grace*, and labour, (as the church hath taught us to pray) *that we may shew forth our thankfulness, by following the holy doctrines which he taught.* So shall we at last obtain a *crown of righteousness laid up*, not for him only, but for all them, who, like him, serve the Lord Jesus, and *love his appearing.* Collect.
2 Tim. iv. 8.

To whom with the Father, and Holy Spirit, three persons and one God, be all honour and glory for evermore.

Presentation of Christ in the Temple, commonly called the Purification of St. Mary the Virgin.

THE COLLECT.

ALmighty and everliving God, we humbly beseech thy Majesty, that as thy only begotten Son was this day presented* in the temple in substance of our flesh; so we may be presented unto thee, with pure and clean hearts, by the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* * Luke ii.22.

THE EPISTLE.

MAL. iii. 1.

PARAPHRASE.

1. **BEHOLD**, *I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple: even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts.*

1. The wicked reflections made by some (Ch. ii. 17.) shall be proved to have no ground. For notwithstanding miracles and

other prophets cease, yet I will in due time send one, more than any prophet, even John Baptist, as a harbinger before me; and the Messiah shall be seen in his temple: even he, who is your general expectation and joy, and in whom the covenant of grace is ratified.

2. But that coming of his will be a very trying time, and make plain distinctions between the wicked and righteous, the hypocritical and sincere.

2. But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's sope.

3. Thus shall he by his doctrine, at his first coming, purify men from their dross, and qualify them for serving God acceptably, by an offering, the use whereof shall never be abolished.

3. And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

4. The services and devotions of his church shall then be pure and acceptable, as any that ever were offered up by the holiest patriarchs, or purest ages of worshippers heretofore.

4. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

5. Of all which, so strict account shall be taken, and punishment so exemplary inflicted on the wicked and profane; that none shall then have occasion to say as some now scoffingly

5. And I will come near to you to judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of Hosts.

do, (Chap. ii. 17.) *Where is the God of judgment?*

COMMENT.

WHAT differences soever the Jews, or other infidels, may take in the interpretation of this prophecy; Christians, who acknowledge the authority of the New Testament, can remain under no reasonable doubt, to whom it should be applied.

Mark i. 2.

Matt. xi. 10, 11.

Luke vii. 27.

The very words are quoted by three several evangelists. And the messenger, mentioned here to go before

the face of the Lord, is, by our blessed Saviour himself, declared to be John the Baptist. This is the fore-runner, referred to in the ivth chapter, under the title of Elias; and (as hath been largely proved heretofore) means, not the very person of that prophet; but one, whose resemblance to his character and circumstances was reason sufficient, for foretelling him under that name.

Matt. xi. 13, 14,
— xvii. 12, 13:
Luke i. 17. comp.
Malac. iv. 5.
See Gosp. for 4th
Sunday in Ad-
vent. Vol. 1.

As little ground can any one have, who considers the Scriptures here referred to, to question, whether the Lord, whose face the messenger was sent before, be the Messiah. But in regard the Scriptures take notice of the twofold coming of the Messiah; it cannot but be proper to inquire, whether of those two may be concerned in this prediction. The rather, because some passages before us have been thought a very lively description of some circumstances, with which we are elsewhere informed, his second shall be attended; but not so naturally to belong to those of his first coming.

Such in particular are that question, *Who may abide the day of his coming*, or be able to stand *when he appeareth*? The comparing him to a *refiner's fire*, and *fuller's sope*: the description of his *sitting like a refiner and purifier of silver*: and the threatening, that he shall *come to judgment*, and *be a swift witness* against several enormous crimes, specified in the close of the scripture now before us.

Mal. iii. 2.
Ver. 3.
— 5.

But all this, notwithstanding, I suppose it will be looked upon as a sufficient evidence, for this prophecy relating to the Messiah's first advent, if it can be made appear, (1.) That even these passages are very applicable to this coming; and then that they stand intermixed with some others, which must needs belong to this only.

1. *First* therefore, I shall endeavour to prove,

that even those passages already mentioned, which seem most to incline to Christ's second, are very applicable to his former, coming.

By the day and coming of Christ we are to understand, not only his appearance to the world, but all the memorable changes and events, to which that appearance should minister occasion. Hence some interpreters have applied those phrases here, which speak of *purifying* and *refining*, to the doctrine and grace of Christ. Both which, it is plain, meet with mankind in a condition, but too like a mixed mass embased with great quantities of dross; or like a garment sullied with many filthy stains. To these the word and the Spirit perform the offices of *fire* and *sope*, by separating the refuse from the good; and purging out those spots, which have been contracted by natural infirmities, or evil customs. The word is serviceable to these purposes, by instructing us how, and why, this cleansing must be made: and the grace attending a right use of that word is so, by disposing the mind to follow such instruction, and conveying such strength against frailties and temptations, as may enable men to make that change effectually. But these advantages are manifestly owing, the one to the preaching and institution, the other to the merit and power of Christ, at his first appearance; and may therefore be fitly implied (as effects in their cause) by that coming, and that day of his.

Thus again our Lord may be said to *come to judgment* against the several sorts of criminals, mentioned at the 5th verse; as those sins are more expressly condemned; as the account, which men must expect to render for them, is more fully declared; and as the eternity of those punishments in a future state, to which the guilty committers render themselves obnoxious, is made more manifest by the doctrine of the gospel, than it ever had been before. For this destroys all those false confidences, which

wicked people are so apt to support themselves withal; and gives fair warning, that (any promiscuous distributions of Providence in the present state of things, any impunity or prosperity here below notwithstanding) God hath reserved to himself a future and severe reckoning; and will not fail, at his own appointed time, to *repay sinners to their face*.

But if this interpretation be agreeable to the doctrine of Christ, considered in itself; it is much more so, when we take into the argument the particular circumstances of planting and propagating that doctrine. Now these are sufficiently known to have been so calamitous, that the afflictions and persecutions; to which every believer was exposed for the sake of his profession, did prove a severe trial of his sincerity and zeal. Hence it is, that we find *taking up our cross* so often insisted upon, as a necessary qualification of becoming Christ's disciples: hence, that necessary advice to act in this matter, likewise warriors, and provident builders, by making before-hand a right judgment of our strength, and computing the cost of our undertaking: that is, to weigh seriously the conditions, upon which the advantages of this religion are offered to us; and to see, whether, upon a fair stating of the whole account, we think it worth our while to forego all other interests, for the sake of Christ, and a good conscience. Hence again, the becoming Christians is so often expressed by following Christ; and that in such terms, as plainly import our duty of imitating his example; not only in the innocency of his life, but also in the meekness and constancy of his sufferings and his death. And indeed the whole manner of our Saviour's conversation upon earth, the poverty, the contumely, the pains he chose to endure, had this, among other wise and gracious ends; to teach all those, who profess to be his dis-

Luke xiv. 27—32.

ciples, that he was their pattern, no less than their instructor: and, that they, who aspire after a part in his glories, must not think much to climb up thither, by the same rugged steps in which he hath led the way.

This we know was manifestly and universally the case for some hundreds of years. And it seems to have agreed with the expectation of the Jews; who are said to have made the pangs of the Messiah a proverbial expression for the severest afflictions; and frequently to use a traditional saying, almost the same literally with that of Malachi here, ver. 2. *Alas! who shall live with those great calamities, which shall be seen in the last* (that is, according to the common import of the word, in the Messiah's) *days.*

Now it is plain, that a doctrine, planted with such circumstances, left no room for hypocrisy, or worldly considerations. Here was no temptation to dissemble; no place for receiving it, otherwise than upon principle; and, if any had come in with an inconsiderate zeal, trials were daily and hourly at hand: such, as would not fail to prove their sincerity, in a manner abundantly justifying the comparison of *fuller's soap*, and *the refiner's fire*. And indeed the whole scheme and temper of Christianity is so contrived, that even the most quiet and peaceable profession of it requires the weaning our affections from the world, a restraint of all sensual appetites, a fixed desire and love of future and heavenly good things, and a resignation of mind disposed and resolved to do and suffer any thing, to which the providence of God shall appoint us. So that the first coming of Christ, which established this religion, may, upon all these accounts, be very properly intended by those figurative descriptions of *trying* and *purifying* the hearts of men, which the prophet was here directed to express himself by.

But there is yet another account, wherein the

Jews were more immediately concerned: I mean the destruction of their city by the Romans, and all the miseries attending it. This is, by many expositors; understood to be the finishing act of Christ's first advent. It was a punishment evidently inflicted on that people, for their obstinate unbelief, and barbarous treatment of him. It hath, in a former part of this treatise, been observed most probably to fulfil the prediction in the close of the fourth chapter. And the unparalleled calamities of that dispensation, the astonishing discrimination made by it, the utter ruin of the unbelieving part, and the safety and deliverance of the believing part of the inhabitants, recorded in the story of that dismallest of all tragedies, do so exactly come up to the scripture now at hand; that every syllable of this prediction, in the third chapter, seems to have been punctually accomplished upon that occasion.

Gosp. on 4th
Sund. in Advent.

Let thus much suffice for the former part of my argument, that the prophecy we are considering relates to Christ's first advent; because even those passages, which seem chiefly to incline to the second, are very fairly applicable to this first. I now proceed to the other branch of the argument; which undertakes to shew, that the first is the coming of Christ meant here; because there are several other passages, relating to the same matter, and intermixed with those already mentioned, which do not seem capable of being applied to any coming, but to this only.

2. The *first* of these is, that the Lord should come *suddenly*. Which refers, not to the time of uttering this prophecy, but to that of the messenger being sent before his face. And thus we know in fact it was. For the history of the New Testament (that all possible right might be done to this circumstance) so particularly careful to acquaint us, that our blessed Saviour was born six months after the

baptist: and not only so, but that both of them entered upon their public ministry, at much about the same distance of time from each other. So truly did the one prepare the way, so suddenly did the other follow; whether we regard their first appearance in the world, or their setting out in their respective characters and functions. And thus we see, of what weight the particular time of John's birth, and the year of his beginning to preach repentance is, which St. Luke gives so exact an account of; and what light it reflects back upon the prophecy before us. Which, after having learnt from Christ himself that John was pointed at by it, leaves us under no manner of difficulty, either who the Lord spoken of here is, or what coming of his the prophet had in view.

2. A *second* circumstance is that of coming *to his temple*. Which agrees with another place in Haggai, where those, who beheld how far the second temple was inferior to the first in point of magnificence, are comforted with a promise that the Lord would fill Hag. ii. 7, 8, 9. *that house with glory, that the glory of the latter house should be greater than of the former, and in that place he would give peace.* Now all the accounts given of the second temple, do represent it so very unequal to the first, not only in point of structure and ornament, but especially in respect of several methods of revelation, and marks of God's more especial presence; that it must needs have been (according to the prophet's Ver. 3. *expression*) *in all men's eyes, in comparison of that, as nothing.* These passages have obliged, not only the generality of Christians, but several very learned Jewish expositors, to interpret Haggai of the Messiah's personal presence in the temple then spoken of; as the only manifestation of divine favour, which could fill up the character given there, exalt the glory of his house so high, and justify that pompous introduction, of *shaking*

the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land; expressions usual, in the prophetic style, to denote very surprising and important revolutions.

And now, come hither, and behold the predictions I am speaking of, beginning to be fulfilled this very day. For then first did the only begotten Son of God visit his temple, in substance of our flesh; when, in compliance with the law of the first-born, he was presented there by his holy mother, as the gospel for this festival relates. And this accomplishment old Simeon seems plainly to acknowledge, who, by divine impulse, adores the divine goodness and truth upon this occasion; and tells his mother (in words of great affinity to those of Malachi already considered) *Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*

Hither, at twelve years old, he repaired to hear and confer with the doctors; and told his parents, they had found him in the place where his business properly lay.

Ver. 46—49.

John ii. 13, &c.

Here, at the first passover of his ministry, he began to exert his zeal, and assert his authority, by driving out the buyers and sellers that profaned it. Here, as oft as he resorted to Jerusalem, he held conferences, wrought miracles, and taught daily. Hither he was conducted with hosannas, as to his proper palace; to whom he declared his right by again purging it of them,

— v. vii.

— viii. x.

Luke xix. 47.

Matt. xxi. 12.

24.

who *made his Father's house a house of merchandize.* And of this he did with tears foretel the utter and irreparable ruin. Which, about forty years afterwards, was so strictly verified, as evidently to confine the prophecy now before us, to such an advent of the Messiah, as found the temple actually standing. The necessity hereof is so evident, even to the

adversaries of our faith, who believe the Messiah not yet come; that they are forced to take refuge, in a fanciful dream of a third temple, yet to be built. Which yet, were it any where but in their own imagination, would prove a vain refuge; since no other can reasonably be supposed to answer the design of these prophets, but that very temple then in being, when the prophecies were dictated to, and delivered by, them.

3. Another passage, confining us to Christ's *first* coming, is the character given in those words, *the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in*. The former part exactly suits with all the gracious methods he submitted to, both in his life and death, for the redemption of mankind, for the reconciliation of sinners to his Father, (in this sense fulfilling that clause Hag. ii. 9. *of the promise in Haggai, in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts*) and, by his mediation ratifying (as the author to the Hebrews expresses it) a new and *better covenant, established upon better promises*. Meanwhile Heb. viii. 6. that author joins the *new covenant* and the — xii. 24. *blood of sprinkling together*; and having by many undeniable arguments proved, that the whole of this fœderal transaction was finished in the blood shed upon the cross, does abundantly instruct us, how the title here is to be applied. Namely, that he, who is most strictly the messenger of a covenant, when sent from God to strike and confirm it by his own death, cannot with any propriety be so called, at a coming, designed to make a nice inquiry into the observance, and dreadfully to punish the wicked violations, of that covenant.

The same is also a natural consequence of the different resentments, which men are said to have of these two different comings. With regard to the former, he is here styled the *delight* of the Hag. ii. 7. Jews, and in Haggai, *the desire of all nations*. And accordingly, at the first completion of

this prophecy, Simeon is described, as one eminent for justice and devotion, and *that waited for the consolation of Israel*. This consolation appears, from the following words, to have been the Lord's Christ. Whom having been assured by revelation that he should see, before his death; he took the child Jesus in his arms, blessed God for his mercy and truth to him, and expressed the abundant cause of his, and the world's joy, in that short pious hymn, fitly repeated in our daily evening service. To the same purpose, the gospel for the day takes notice of a prophetess present at the same time; who *gave thanks unto the Lord, and spake of this child to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem*. These instances may serve to shew, both a general expectation and desire of the Messiah about that time, and a mighty satisfaction in them, who believed him then come. But, how very distant from these the apprehensions and passions of men will be at his second coming, let the same evangelist say; who from our Lord's own mouth represents it, by a season of general *distress of nations, and perplexity, when men's hearts shall fail them for fear, and for looking after those things, that are coming on the earth*. Wide extremes indeed! But reasonable both. For who can, without a sensible joy, reflect upon that first coming, upon which the salvation of a whole world depends? Or who can look forward to the *second* without dread, in which, if the *first* had not opened a passage, for mercy to come in and temper judgment, no flesh living could possibly have been justified.

4. Once more, *purifying the Levites, and rendering the offering in Judah and Jerusalem acceptable, as in the days of old*, are likewise descriptions very proper for Christ's *first*, but not at all applicable to his *second* coming. The Levites were literally purified, who in great numbers early embraced the Christian faith;

or, by an easy figure, they, that minister in holy things under the gospel, might be thus entitled: and the spiritual sacrifices of prayer, and praise, and men's persons devoted to the service of God, are those acceptable ones, which in the church of Christ, the spiritual Judah and Jerusalem, are now offered, and shall continue to be so, with the same and even greater simplicity and plainness, than was exercised by the old patriarchs before the introducing of that pomp of ceremonies, prescribed by the Mosaic institution. But none of these things will square with the coming of Christ to judgment; for probation ends, where retribution begins. And no place then is left for doing any more, to serve or please God; but all that remains, is to *receive* 2 Cor. v. 10. *according to the things already done in the body, whether it be good or bad.*

By this time, I hope, my reader may have attained a competent understanding of the prophecy now under consideration; of the proper design and completion of it; and of our church's wisdom, in recommending it to our meditation, on the day when it first began to be fulfilled. I only add, that, as the Collect for this festival teaches us to confess, so does this scripture give us fair intimation of, the twofold nature, and distinct personality, of Jesus Christ: for that Lord, whose temple of Jerusalem was, could be no other than very God. The messenger is plainly distinguished, from the person who sent him: and the messenger of a covenant, so made and ratified as hath been explained, must needs have been man *in the substance of our flesh*. To this Son, therefore, God-Man, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, the one true God, let us most thankfully ascribe all honour and praise, thanksgiving and adoration, henceforth and for evermore, *Amen.*

THE GOSPEL.

ST. LUKE ii. 22.

PARAPHRASE.

22. **A**ND when the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord,

22, 23, 24. The days appointed in Levit. xii. See the Comment.

23. (*As it is written in the law of the Lord, every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy unto the Lord*)

24. And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons.

25. And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

25. This Simeon was Son of Hillel, an eminent doctor among the Jews, and father to the

famous Gamaliel. His testimony is of greater weight, by reason of his knowledge in the prophetic writings and traditions of the Jews, all which were then allowed to denote the Messiah's coming about that time.

26. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

26. God gave to him a prophetic spirit upon this occasion, by which

he was assured; he should have the happiness of seeing the so much longed-for Messiah.

27. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,

27. By the direction of that Spirit it was that he came at that time

to the temple, and broke out into the following hymn of praise.

28. Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God and said,

29. Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.

29. I acknowledge myself to have now received

the comfort which thou hadst promised me before my death.

30. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation:

31. A salvation not confined to any one people, but—

31. Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people.

33, 34, 35. Then Simeon proceeded to foretel, how different the events would be, of this wonderful child coming into the world. For though the salvation brought by him

were capable of extending to all, and particularly all Jews, where it would be first offered: yet the different reception given to it would tend to the condemnation of some, and the benefit of others. And the contradiction and calumny this bringer of it should meet with, would be a test, to discover the sincerity and tempers of men.

32. *A light to enlighten the gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.*

33. *And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things, which were spoken of him.*

34. *And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against:*

35. *(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*

36. *And there was one Anna a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser; she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity:*

37. Eighty-four years old continuing a widow after a married state, and a constant attendant upon the public service at the usual hours of prayers, as

also a strict observer of the customary fasting days.

37. *And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years: which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.*

38. She also declared this child to be the person, from whom the redemption then looked for by all devout, was to be had.

38. *And she, coming in that instant, gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*

39. After this they intended to return home; but an angel warned them to flee into Egypt till after the death of Herod. And then they came back (by a fresh admonition from an angel) and settled at Nazareth. Compare Matt. ii. 13, to the end.

39. *And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.*

40. *And the child grew, and waxed strong in Spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.*

COMMENT.

THE festival celebrated by the Christian church this day, is designed to perpetuate the memory of two very remarkable actions shortly after our Saviour's birth; both which the evangelist thought necessary to be mentioned expressly; and the rather, because they were both done in obedience to the law. The punctual fulfilling thereof was a matter of such moment, that not only the behaviour of his parents is taken notice of, but the precepts themselves are particularly referred to, that so their conformity to them might be the more conspicuous: all this the three first verses of the gospel contain. In treating of this subject I will speak to each action distinctly, and in both I shall consider,

First, The law itself.

Secondly, The compliance with it in this case; and

Thirdly, The reflections and improvements fit for us to make from it.

I begin with that action which relates to the mother; not only because it commonly gives title to this day, which is from hence called *the Purification of the blessed Virgin*, but because it must needs have been first in the order of the thing; for hereby the happy mother gained her restoration to the house and worship of God, and could not be admitted to present her son, till the performance of this service had opened her a free passage into the temple.

Now the law, concerning this matter, is contained in the xiith chapter of Leviticus. Whereby it is ordained, that a woman, after bearing of children, should continue in a state, which the law termed unclean, for a certain number of days. Seven days in such a manner, that all conversation or contact polluted them that approached her; and

these are therefore called days of separation: and three and thirty days more, which amount to forty in the whole, to be debarred from the service of the tabernacle, and joining with the rest of the congregation. This was the rule for a woman that had brought a son; and the time was double for a daughter. At the expiration of this term, she was commanded to bring a burnt-offering and a sin-offering; which wiped out that stain the law had laid upon her, and restored her to all the purity and privileges of her brethren, who were a people sanctified to the Lord. This was to be given into the hands of the priest, at the door of the tabernacle; and his offering it, in her behalf, is there said to make an atonement for her, and to cleanse her. Which done, she was no longer confined to wait at the door, (where she gave her sacrifice to the priest, in token of her being excluded, till the oblation and acceptance of that had gained her admission farther) but had thenceforward free access to the house and worship of God; and enjoyed all advantages belonging to a true Israelite.

One thing more I am obliged to take notice of, with regard to this sacrifice. Which is, that the burnt-offering differed, according to the quality and circumstances of the person: but the sin-offering was in effect the same. For, whereas the 6th verse of that chapter prescribes a lamb of the first year for a burnt-offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtle dove for a sin-offering; in consideration, that this expense might be too burthensome upon those of a meaner condition; God grants a dispensation to the poor, at the 8th verse there, and orders, that, if the woman be insufficient for the charge of the lamb, then shall she bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt-offering, and the other for the sin-offering. Accordingly this part of the law is quoted by St. Luke, as best agreeing with the Virgin's fortunes. A farther evidence still of

infinite humility and condescension, in the Son of the High God, who did not only not disdain a mother, but not a mother of so low a degree.

Thus stands the law. And, if we would be satisfied of the reasons and true intent of it: we shall do well to consider it in its natural, civil, and religious capacity.

The natural reason of this separation seems to be, the allowing a time of rest and ease, for women to recover their strength; and to heal those bruises of our first parents fall, which are still, upon these occasions, felt with great grief and hazard. This, together with the prevention of mischiefs upon posterity, if no such separation was observed, might be ground sufficient in nature for this law. Which latter may also be allowed for a civil and politic reason of the institution.

But the chief and religious meaning no doubt was, to be a restraint upon carnal and wanton desires; to put men in mind of that blemish and pollution, which our nature is tainted with; and that, as David says, *Every one of us was shapen in wickedness, and in sin did our mothers conceive us.* Psal. li. 5. All which was shadowed by the Levitical uncleanness, and by the sacrifices ordained to purge it away. For although nothing can be a true and proper defilement, but sin; and it is most certain, that no diseases or weaknesses of nature are sinful; yet had these, under the Mosaic dispensation, a moral meaning couched under them, which the observers of the external ordinance were obliged principally to regard. Those uncleannesses were carnal only, and not spiritual; and, when we read of sin-offerings for them, we must not so mistake the matter, as if such offerings were necessary, to expiate any real guilt; or be able to do it, if any such had been contracted. For such pollutions in truth were no more than legal incapacities; and the atonement made for them, was only for restoring

the benefits of external communion, and declaring persons duly qualified members of the Jewish church. This was the true state of the case. But it is true withal, that, though these things did not immediately and necessarily imply sin; yet they had a constant and remote regard to it. For all those impurities, which were merely ceremonial, did signify and mystically represent something, that was morally and substantially evil. Thus much is fit to be observed, concerning the uncleanness, and the sin-offering, mentioned in the law. But for the burnt-offering, that, being a sacrifice of praise, is of a different consideration. And the acknowledgments expressed by it, will always be a debt to God, so long as mankind are brought into the world with pain and anguish, and as it is a mercy to poor travailing mothers, to be delivered from extreme sorrow, and preserved in extreme danger.

2. And now, after what hath been spoken to the law itself, the nature and reasons of it, we shall find less difficulty, in forming a right judgment of my *second* particular; which concerns the blessed Virgin's compliance with this command. The matter of fact is here related at large; that she staid till *the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished*; which reckoning from the nativity of Christ till this feast, made up the just term of forty days (appointed after the birth of a man child) that then she came up to Jerusalem, to offer a sacrifice, says the 24th verse. Which had not (as some have understood it) any respect at all to her son, or the redemption of the first-born, but (as appears plainly from the original law already insisted upon) concerned herself alone. The *pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons*, being the burnt and sin offering appointed, for the purification of such persons after child-birth, as could not afford a more costly oblation. Thus we are suffici-

ently assured, that the mother of Jesus did, in all respects, act according to the law. The only doubt upon this occasion is, whether or no, or how far, she was obliged so to do; if it were an act of duty and obedience, or rather of condescension and voluntary compliance: for some interpreters have contended for the one, and some for the other, of these opinions. And yet both may be reconciled, and (all circumstances carefully considered) each are truly said to be, in some sense, in the right.

The birth of our blessed Saviour was so perfectly different from that of common men, that it must be granted, his mother could not possibly be comprehended within the reason of the law. The conception of this son, by the operation of Almighty power, totally mysterious and divine, left no place at all, for any reflections upon the usual corruption of original sin. Nor was she in reality, in any degree, subject to so much as a legal uncleanness upon this account. And so far it is most true, that she was under no obligation to the law, nor within the intent of it. But yet, since her being a mother was sufficiently notorious, notwithstanding her being such, in a manner, so much above nature, was a secret, not yet ripe for discovery; since it was thought convenient, that her husband Joseph should for some time pass for Jesus his father in common reputation; she was within the letter of the law. And fit it was, she should submit, as the known mother of a son, to the ceremonies expected from her. Nor was this all. For, though the sin-offering were not in strictness due in any sense; yet she lay under the same legal incapacity, in the eye of the world, and must be restored to the temple by it. And, though the burnt offering was not due, as that of other parents, to commemorate a deliverance from pangs and danger; yet never sure were things so justly due for any son as this; never from any mother, as from her, who had the honour to bring

forth her own and the world's God and Saviour, the blessing and the expectation of all the earth. Add to this: that, since the first proffers of salvation were tendered to the Jews, and the old law must be abolished by Christ; it was necessary, that no circumstance should be omitted, which might mi-

Gal. iv. 4. nister occasion of chance. He was *made of a woman, and made under the law*; and

therefore obliged to satisfy the law, before he became capable of redeeming them that were under it. As therefore he was circumcised in his own person, though the mystical and moral part of circumcision had nothing to do with him: so his mother submitted to all the purifications of any other Israelitish woman, though she partook not, in any degree, of the infirmities, and pollutions, common to other births. Thus even the most rigorous Jew might seek, and not be able in any instance, to convince him of sin, or contempt of the Mosaic institution.

3. I come now, in the *third* place, to raise some proper inferences from what hath been said, and then this point shall be dismissed.

And here, *first*, give me leave to observe to you, the decency, as well as the antiquity, of those thanksgivings after child-birth, which are practised and directed by our wise and holy liturgy, in that service commonly called, *the churching of women*. What God ordained under the old law, you have already seen. But, that the order we prescribe, may not be mistaken for Jewish superstition; I shall shew you particularly, how the church hath most prudently distinguished, between the ceremonial and moral part of the law. This indeed is a thing, that deserves to be well attended to; and the want of it hath ministerted occasion to infinite sins and scruples. For, though the ritual part of Moses's law must not be retained, because that would overthrow the righteousness of faith; yet the moral

part must not be discarded, upon pretence of Judaism, because this is not particular to the race of Israel, but common to all mankind. This is not the ordinance of a temporal commandment, but of eternal duration and virtue. Now the readiest way to judge aright of such matters, is, to examine into the nature of the command. So far as the reason and substance of that holds; so much of that command does, and always will, oblige us. To make this more plain, I shall instance in the case before us. The bringing children into the world is what the commonness of it hath made men look upon without astonishment; but, did not use render it familiar, we could scarce forbear extolling it, as a most convincing proof of an almighty and wonderful good Providence. Since therefore the pain and the danger was not peculiar to the state and nation of the Jews; it is certain, the thanksgivings for being delivered from them, ought not to be so neither. And, consequently, because the peril is universal, the praise should be universal.

Thankfulness then is as much the duty of Christian women, as ever it could be of the Israelitish. And so is the returning those thanks in the public congregation too: because the blessings and benefits of communion, and the houses of God, are as sacred with us, as ever they could be under Moses. Consequently, both the advantage of our being restored to these is as valuable; and the interest our brethren and fellow-members have in our safety, is as great and tender, as that of the Levitical assemblies could possibly be. We do not indeed pretend to debar people admittance upon any pretence of pollution; for we know that marriage is honourable, and the children of Christians are a holy seed. We prescribe no number of days, but leave that to custom and conveniency; and, would health and decency permit, should not scruple to receive them the very next day into our churches. We expect

no sin offering, nor a lamb for a burnt-offering, because all bloody sacrifices ended in Christ. But, though the uncleanness, and precise number of days, though the forbidden access, till that period be expired, and the sacrifices enjoined by Moses be done away in Christ; yet thanksgiving and public praise is not, nor ever will be, done away. And, if the lamb, or the turtles, be no longer the expressions of those thanks; yet there is something, which answers, which indeed excels them. And this is the offering to them, who still live upon God's revenue; and the yet better offering of themselves, a holy and living sacrifice to God. To which purpose it is, that our church, in her rubric, does not only command the accustomed offering to be *paid to the priest*; but *advises the person then church'd to receive the communion*. All which shew how decent this custom is; how unfit the office is to be performed in private houses; how agreeable the whole institution to the general design of the thing; which is, to bless God for restoring persons to their strength, and to the opportunities of waiting upon him in his own house, where indeed their first visits are due.

And now, if I might presume to add any thing more from the law, it should be this: that, as among the Jews, those who were poor, brought a dove or a pigeon only, but they of greater substance brought a lamb for a burnt-offering; so now, though the poorer sort may well content themselves with paying those duties, from which none are (and, if men rightly understood it, none would be) excused; yet it were well, if persons of a better condition presented a lamb; that is, besides what law and custom make necessary, if they gave, of their own free-will, somewhat to piety and charity upon these occasions. For the poor are God's receivers also; and what is done to them being ac-

cepted as done to Christ, every contribution to their relief is truly offering a sacrifice.

These are institutions so well grounded, ceremonies so becoming, directions so profitable; that none but they, who are very ill disposed, or very ignorant, will quarrel at them; nor any, but the insensible and ungrateful, grudge to perform them. For sure, according to the psalm appointed for this service, *When God hath signally delivered your souls from death, your eyes from tears, and your feet from falling; you must needs think yourselves obliged to walk before the Lord in the land of the living: and, since you have no reward to give unto the Lord, for all the benefits he hath done unto you—the least you can possibly do, is to receive the cup of salvation, to call upon his name, and cheerfully to pay your vows, in the courts of his own house, and in the presence of his people.*

Psal. cxvi.

I have insisted upon this, perhaps longer than I needed; but the digression, if it be one, may have its usefulness. And I would omit no occasion to convince my readers of the wisdom of our church, the fitness and excellency of her offices, the admirable order, and beauty, and usefulness, of all our common prayer. But to return,

Secondly, Another inference, which may be raised from this action, is that of charity, or care not to give offence: for, as the blessed Virgin submitted to those ordinances, the reason and foundation whereof did not concern her; and seemed to wash away those stains, which in reality never were contracted: so it will very well become us, to practise the like humility and condescension. Not to act morosely, and shew ourselves rigorous over much, in insisting upon our privileges and exemptions; but to perform good offices cheerfully and liberally; to comply, in some cases, with the mistakes and infirmities of our brethren; and, though our consciences be never so well persuaded in the point of

Christian liberty, yet, for the sake of others, the not provoking them to scandal, the maintaining our authority with them, the securing their good opinion, and the like; to forego and deny ourselves many freedoms allowed us; and be content to perform many things, which are not in strictness required of us.

The necessity of this would soon appear, were it but once duly considered, how much opinion and example bear sway in the world; and what invincible bars prejudice puts to all the good we can do or say. Indeed, with regard to religion, the success of it depends very much upon the prudence and dextrous management of the persons that recommend it. And St. Paul himself hath
 1 Cor viii. 1. preferred *charity* before *knowledge*, for this very reason; because the one renders a man stiff and conceited of himself; whereas the other studies by all means to *promote the edification of our brethren*. And, generally speaking, the first step towards edifying any man is to conciliate his favour, and be well in his esteem. For there are few people so void of partiality, as to suffer themselves to be profited by one, of whom they have conceived a mean, or an ill opinion. The omitting of circumcision in the son, and of purification in the mother, might be allowable and harmless in the sight of God, and in the ground of the precepts themselves; but could the Jews have had that objection, and represented Jesus as profane; this would have done more mischief to his preaching, than all the malice of his enemies besides. Accordingly we find the scribes and pharisees perpetually catching at this handle; and our Saviour as industrious to vindicate himself. He was very sensible, that his adversaries could not more effectually carry their point, than by having him believed a breaker and a contemner of the law; and that, to urge his own prerogative and exemption from the law, would by

no means do his business, nor satisfy the world with his conduct, though that was most innocent in itself, and the reasons that justified it were irrefragable. The case indeed should not be so; for reason, and not affection, ought to determine us. But we must be content to deal with mankind as we find them. And thus it is but too manifest, that, to render our discourses persuasive, it does not suffice, that they be true; for, alas! the passions must be won, as well as the understanding convinced.

Thirdly, Before I leave this head quite, I would gladly offer some short observations upon the sacrifices appointed by the law upon such occasions.

And here we may take notice, *first*, That the constant manner of thanking God for his mercies used to be, by dedicating somewhat to pious and charitable uses.

Secondly, That in this the poor were not totally excused; but obliged to do something, though it were but small. So that God shewed, that he required, as well as accepted, the widow's mite; and that, where *there is a willing mind*, the offering would be always interpreted (as the apostle says) *according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not.* 2 Cor. viii. 12.

Thirdly, That, though the turtle was accepted, yet it was only there where a lamb could not be extended to. From whence we are to gather, that God expects our charity should hold proportion with our estates; and that they, who have much, ought *to be rich in good works*, to give in plenty, and to distribute with gladness.

Lastly, The sin-offering here, being the same with poor and rich, shews, that, though our condition in the world require some difference in our alms, yet it makes none in our repentance; that all, equal in the degree of guilt, are in this regard equal with God also; that he respects no man's person;

but high and low, rich and poor, are redeemed with the same price, are obliged to make the same satisfaction, and, that their souls are of the same value with the heavenly Judge, and the common Father of the spirits of all flesh. These, and some other reflections of the like nature, are proper to be gathered from the sacrifice, mentioned here to be brought by the mother of our Lord, for her purification.

I pass now to the *second* act, recorded by St. Luke, and commemorated by the church at this festival, which is presenting our Lord in the temple. And here again we will take a brief view of the law, the obedience paid to it, and the inferences it suggests to us.

As to the command itself, *first*, I shall consider the several passages, where it is to be found; that so, by the occasions and contexts compared together, we may be able to make some tolerable judgment of the foundations whereon it is built, and of the extent and importance of it.

The *first*, in which it occurs to us, is the *thirteenth* of Exodus, at the 2d verse. There, upon the Israelites departure out of Egypt, *the Lord spake unto Moses, Sanctify unto me all the first-born, Whatsoever opened the womb among the children of Israel, both of men and beast, it is mine.* And, to take away all doubt, what might be the meaning of such a ceremony, God himself hath interpreted it, ver. 14, 15, by directing their posterity to be taught thus, among the elements of their religion. *It shall be, when thy son asketh thee in time to come, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man, and the first-born of beasts; therefore, I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the matrix*

being males: but all the first-born of my children I redeem.

Now, as the sabbath is said, in one place, to have been instituted for a commemoration of God's rest from the works of the creation; and in another, to remind the Israelites of their own rest from the toils and tyranny of Egypt; so the precept now before us, though it had a great and more especial regard to the deliverance of Israel, by the destruction of the first-born; yet it seems not to have been so absolutely confined to this, as not to have had other ends and meanings too. For the next time we meet with it (at Exodus xxii. 29.) is in company with the law of first-fruits in general. *Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors; The first-born of thy sons shalt thou give unto me.* That command of first-fruits seems to have been one of those, imposed for the prevention of idolatry: for, whereas it was customary with the heathens, to sacrifice of their new product, to the sun, or Ceres, or Isis, or the like; the Jews are required to continue the thing, but to change the object: an intimation, that these services were due; though not to any of these vain imaginary deities, yet to the one true God. In the meanwhile the grounds of this worship were the same to the Jew and gentile both: for both dedicated these fruits to express their thanks, and an acknowledgment, that all they enjoyed came from the hand above them; and therefore, in gratitude, they blessed the Author of their plenty, and gave him back, by way of tribute, a part of his own again: all the pagan rites speaking in effect those words, which we find put into the mouth of every Israelite at this solemnity; *And now, behold, I have brought the first-fruits of the land, which thou, O Lord, hast given me.*

Deut. xxvi. 10.

2. The acceptance of this oblation was that which sanctified and gave them a title to all the

rest; and that person was looked upon, as guilty of the boldest impiety and sacrilege, who, without it, presumed to use, or enjoy, any of those possessions. This was injustice and usurpation, till that debt were first satisfied. Insomuch that some heathen writers, when they describe a profane person, and one that had abandoned all sense of God and goodness, do it, by calling him a *man* *Mὴ ἀπαρχήσαντα.* *that offered no first-fruits.* Among the Jews, it was also supposed to take off the pollution and curse of the wicked land they succeeded unto, and to render their possessions (as the language of that dispensation then spoke) clean unto them.

Again, *thirdly*, This offering, as it published their thanks to the Giver of every good gift, and was supposed to sanctify what they already enjoyed; so was it looked upon, as an effectual invitation of a blessing, and a sure earnest of plenty, for the time to come. Many services of this kind are urged in the law itself, with this motive, *That the Lord thy God may bless thee in all thou puttest thy hand unto.* And long experience drew this advice from the wisest of men, *Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thy increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.*

Now, since *children and the fruit of the womb are an heritage and gift, that cometh of the Lord*; since his blessing alone increases mankind; and the happiness of parents and families, and indeed of the world in general, depends so much upon the goodness, and the number, of the persons born into it; no man can doubt, but there are the same acknowledgments justly owing, and the same kind influences of providences are zealously to be sought, in this, as in any other part

of our fortunes. Therefore God might lay a tribute upon, and reserve to himself a part of this increase also. And it is reasonable to believe, he did it upon this more extensive account; and that he chose the *first-born son*, because this was reputed the best and most valuable; as Jacob says of Ruben; *He was his might, and the beginning of his strength; the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power.* Gen. xlix. 3.

The manner of God's receiving this tribute deserves likewise to be considered. The firstlings of all clean beasts were sacrificed in kind: those of unclean were redeemed by a lamb; or, if the owner would not go to that price, then the beast itself was not suffered to live. Of these likewise no vows could be made, because they were God's already; and so men had no property in, no right to dispose of, them. The children were likewise to be redeemed, not with a beast, (as some have mistaken that passage in Exdous, applying the lamb to the sons, which belongs only to the ass) but with a sum of money. Whereof the *third* and the *eighteenth* chapters of Numbers give this account. God, intending to make his claim of the first-born, ordered the sum of them to be computed, as also of the tribe of Levi, at the same time. The Levites he accepted, in lieu of an equal number of the first-born, then alive in Israel; and made them his own peculiar, by appropriating them to the service of the altar. Some will have this to be a reward to that tribe, for distinguishing themselves from the rest, and not joining in the worship of the molten calf; but the employing them in divine service is generally believed to be the putting that, which was the business of the first-born, upon them. For mankind were not always so ignorant, or so profane, as the men of this generation; who think it degrades and

Exod. xiii. 12, 13.
Levit. xxvii. 26.

Num. iii. 12: 16. 39.
— xviii. 12, &c.

lessens a man of condition, to minister about holy things. No: this was esteemed a dignity, and a privilege; the prerogative of the master and father of the family, and reserved for the heir and most honourable person in the whole house. So far then as the Levites extended, so far they were an exchange for the first-born; and the overplus were redeemed at the price of five shekels a man: which afterwards passed into a standing rate, to be paid for the first-born in all succeeding ages. And this was accounted God's revenue; a part of the stipend, which they, who are so often in Scripture honoured with the title of the Lord's portion, had to subsist upon.

Such is the law: and the obedience paid to it, in the person of our blessed Saviour, is full of mystery, as the institution itself was full of figure and significance.

How far the circumstances of this son came under the law, is not necessary to inquire, after what hath been already said under the former head. The same reasons in great measure hold for the presentation of the son, which persuaded the purification of the mother. But in him, thus presented, we may behold the full accomplishment of that law in all its parts. The deliverance of Israel, by the death of the first-born, was a most express image of the Israel of God being afterwards rescued from slavery and oppression insupportable, by the death of this first-born, and our elder brother. The devoting those children of the Israelites ascribed the glory of the deliverance to God; and owned, it was he alone, and not any strength of theirs, which made the difference between them and their enemies. And as that acknowledged the blessing, and sanctified their families, and encouraged their hopes of a future increase; so this first-born was offered for us all, as the fountain and foundation of all our mercies: the Person, from whom all the family of

God, both in heaven and earth, are blessed, and derive their whole hope and happiness. As there, the Levites were taken into the service of the tabernacle, instead of the first-born; so here, this first-born was made an high priest, the only acceptable, the only eternal one; and the discharge of that function, in its several offices, hath ransomed the lives of all the rest. With this difference only, that God did not so exchange him for a sum of money, as not to require his person in kind; for his life was paid down for the benefit of the younger children. And, to this commutation, usual in the case of the first-born, St. Peter may possibly allude, when desiring those Jews, to whom his first epistle was addressed, to consider, *that they were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ himself.* Thus he became (as the apostle styles him *the first-born among many brethren;* who are all admitted to the honour and benefits of adoption, made children of the same Father and family, and heirs of the same heavenly kingdom, with, and in, and through him.

Thus was the intent of the law fulfilled; which, by declaring the first-born holy, and prescribing a method for making the rest so, implied, that there should be one first-born, originally and essentially so: the perfection of holiness in himself, the only source of it to others. The same, who, by the sacrifice of his death, fulfilled another typical branch of the law, with regard to beasts; which required the clean in kind, and with the blood of such redeemed the unclean.

These are the effects, and this is the mysterious importance, of the only Son of God being presented in the temple, in substance of our flesh. The practical improvement whereof to ourselves may be manifold. The law, though its letter do no longer oblige, hath yet a moral sense of eternal binding

force. For, since to God was devoted the first-born, *even the chief of all their strength*; this shews, that we ought to think nothing too good for him; that the best is his due, and fittest to be offered there from whence the whole is given. This teaches us to consecrate the beginning and choice of our time, and pains, and substance; to dedicate the prime of our years, the sprightliness of our youth, the flower of our wit, the vigour of our bodies and minds to his honour: to spend our sweat, our labours, our wealth, upon such things especially, as promote religion, and are agreeable to his good pleasure; to begin every day, every work, with him; and to take care, that he be first, and uppermost, in all our thoughts and designs: quite contrary to those unworthy wretches, who throw away their time, and hearts, and estates, and every thing most valuable, upon sin and folly; who would put God off with the nauseous and useless dregs of life, and decays, and diseases, and dosings of a feeble old age; and scarce ever think of him, till other delights have forsaken them, and they can no longer with satisfaction think of any thing else.

Secondly, When we thus observe the mystical intention of the law, and present ourselves to God, after our Saviour's example; we must remember, that he was brought by a virgin mother; and, that our offering in like manner must be chaste and holy, and come from a pure and clean heart: a heart, washed from the pollutions of the world; and desirous of no pleasure in comparison of that, which results from studying to please God, and from the ravishing sense of his favour and good acceptance: a heart, recommended by that zeal, that sincerity, which may be well approved; and, if not perfectly without spot, yet having no spots, but those of children; not the false colours of hypocrisy, or the blemishes of wilful sin. A heart, which, according to the condescensions of the gospel-covenant, may

be esteemed a *white robe of righteousness*; though sullied by the necessary frailties of the flesh we wear with it: for such *as these the Father seeketh to worship him*. But,

Lastly, When we approach even thus, it must always be remembered, to whom we owe our acceptance; *that by Christ alone we have access with confidence to the Father*;

Eph. ii. 18.

— iii. 12.

that he is the first-born, the most excellent of every creature: and, that all our expectations lie couched in this argument;

Rom. xi. 16.

If the first-fruits be holy, the lump is holy: and because he lives and reigns for ever; all, that are truly his brethren and members, shall most certainly, in, and by, and with him, live also. Which God grant we may do. *Amen*.

St. Matthias's Day.

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF ST. MATTHIAS.

THE Scripture takes notice of St. Matthias, in that place, and upon that occasion only, which comes into the service of the day. He is, both by Eusebius and St. Jerom, affirmed to have been one of the seventy disciples. The province assigned him, is said by the latter, to have been one of the *Æthiopia's*. The rivers, mentioned in that account, incline Dr. Cave to think it should be Cappadocia. He was there murdered by the pagans. In what manner it is uncertain; but an hymn, cited by Dr. C. out of the Greek offices, seem as from a received opinion, to speak him crucified. The gospel, or acts of Matthias was a spurious book, said by Eusebius to have been composed by the heretics, and fathered

Eus. Hist. II. C. xii.
Hieron. in Catal.

Hist. II. C. xxv.
Strom. 7. p. 765.

upon him. And Clemens Alexandrinus observes, that Valentinus, Marcion, and Basilides, sheltered their vile tenets under the pretended authority of this apostle.

THE COLLECT.

Acts i. 24, 25,
26.

O ALMIGHTY God, who into the place of the traitor Judas didst choose thy faithful servant Matthias to be of the number of the twelve apostles; grant that thy church, being always preserved from false apostles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

ACTS i. 15.

15. Soon after our Lord's ascent into heaven, and before the miraculous descent of the

Holy Spirit on the day of pentecost, Peter proposed to them the choice of a twelfth apostle, in the room of Judas.

16, &c. To this end, he first puts them in mind of a famous prophecy, fulfilled in that wretched man; and relates both his crime and the punishment of it.

20. Particularly that he should fall from that high dignity in the church, which had been

15. ***I**n those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples and said (the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty.)*

16. *Men and brethren, this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, who was guide to them that took Jesus.*

17. *For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.*

18. *Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.*

19. *And it was known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.*

20. *For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein. And, His bishopric let another take.*

conferred upon him; and that another, more worthy of that character, should succeed him in it.

21. *Wherefore of these men which have companied with us, all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,*

22. *Beginning from the baptism of John unto the same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.*

what he had done and taught, during the whole course of his public ministry: that he may be able to concur in the same testimony with the eleven, in all material points of the Christian faith; and especially in that of Christ's rising from the dead.

23. *And they appointed two, Joseph, called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.*

lified, were accordingly in nomination.

24. *And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of those two thou hast chosen,*

25. *That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.*

26. *And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.*

the vacancy, and made the twelfth apostle.

21, 22. But this person, of necessity, should be one, who, by a constant attendance upon Jesus, hath been perfectly acquainted with

23. Hereto the assembly readily agreed, and two persons, thus qual-

24, 25, 26. Whereupon, (after devout prayer to God, that he would direct them in their choice) they proceeded in it by way of lot. And, the lot falling on Matthias, he was taken into

COMMENT.

THE main thing here intended, is to acquaint us with the reasons and manner of this day's apostle being chosen in the place of Judas. But, before we enter upon that point, let me make a remark or two on St. Peter's discourse concerning that wretched man, which contains some things, too profitable to be passed over, without any particular notice.

1. First, then, It is observable, that St. Peter mentioning the fact for which Judas perished, does it in these terms—*Judas, who was guide to them that took Jesus.* We cannot reasonably imagine this apostle, or any to whom he spoke, to be wanting in a just indignation at the treachery of this fallen brother; and yet the most villanous of all crimes could not have been expressed in softer words. Now my design is, by this remark, to give check to that liberty men are apt, and think themselves abundantly warranted, to take, in speaking of ill actions and

Gospel for 6th
Sunday after
Trinity.

ill men, with the most aggravating terms of infamy and reproach. There are, I confess, and (I have heretofore shewed) some occasions, which even require this sort of treatment from us. But, except in such circumstances, and for promoting such good ends, as were there specified, it argues more of a charitable and truly Christian spirit, to abate of our fierceness, even against those practices, of which we do well to conceive the utmost abhorrence. For the virulent language, so often poured out upon profligate and wicked people, is many times the effect, not of zeal, but ill-nature. But how barbarous and wicked a pleasure is it to upbraid, expose, and insult over, the faults of our brethren, which we ought to pity, and be sorry for, even then, when we ought to condemn and detest them?

2. To this purpose we shall do well to attend to a *second* particular, very considerable in St. Peter's management of this subject: which is, referring the audience to an ancient prophecy, foretelling that crime of Judas many hundred years before. Thus it appeared, that in the whole matter there was a secret over-ruling Providence, without whose knowledge and permission none of those things are done, which in themselves carry so great a degree of guilt, and horror, that one would stand amazed, how even the most abandoned of men, should ever

be capable of committing them. Such events, they who think too superficially, have frequently made objections against the being and providence of God. But the apostle here hath taught us to penetrate deeper into, and pronounce more justly of, them. He hath shewed the reflections properly resulting from thence, to be, that it is reasonable to endure patiently the ill effects of that astonishing wickedness, which God sees fit to permit: to contemplate his wisdom and long-suffering in them all; and not give way to impatience or irreligious suggestions, upon account of any injuries or uneasinesses to ourselves; from practices, which he, who knew, did yet not prevent or interpose against, though they were manifest affronts to his honour, and outrageous violations of his laws. In short, we should satisfy ourselves, that He, who always orders that which is best, and can at pleasure put an effectual stop to the most daring and potent offenders, forbears to do so, for no other reason, than because he knows, though we short-sighted mortals cannot tell why, it to be better, than their impieties should not be more restrained.

3. But then those offenders should by all means observe, *Thirdly*, That St. Peter, together with the crime, does also relate the punishment, of Judas; as a thing no less foreknown and foretold. And the natural consequence of this would be that wickedness, so connived at and foreseen, does involve the actors in no less degree of guilt, for the bringing about such events, and effecting such wise counsels of Providence, as are produced from thence: for God, as a wise man expresses it, hath left men in the hand of their own counsel. And, although the divine omniscience do perfectly understand all their doings, and all their thoughts, long before: yet are those thoughts and doings still their own. He does not determine their wills by any physical or forcible

Ecc. xv.

ble restraint, but he hath given them great variety of moral restraints. The light of reason, the guidance of revelation, the power of conscience: and by these he expects men should govern themselves. If they do not, he convinces them, that though the fact be theirs, the consequences are his: and therefore he frequently exerts himself in turning to his own glory, and the good of the world, the malice and mischievous designs of base and villanous wretches. Thus I have formerly made appear, he did in the very case before us. But still God punishes men, not according to events, but intentions; and considers, as a judge, the mischief they actually did, or designed; without any regard to the benefit he turned it to, which it was not any part of their meaning to promote.

I could not well overlook passages, qualified to yield so much profit, though not so immediately concerned in the solemnity of this day. I come now to the other parts of the Epistle which are so; and shall there observe *three* things:

1. *First*, The nature and dignity of the apostolic office.

2. *Secondly*, The reason given for filling up the number, when this vacancy was made.

3. *Thirdly*, The manner of the choice.

1. As to the first of these, I find myself in great measure prevented, by what hath been formerly delivered upon another occasion. The apostolic office and authority was then shewed to consist in three things. 1. In propagating and establishing the kingdom of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus, by bringing men to the belief and obedience of his blessed gospel. 2. In a power of ordering and making such laws and constitutions in matters spiritual, as shall from time to time be found necessary for the good government of all the subjects

Gospel for
Tuesday be-
fore Easter.

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Sunday after
Easter.

in this kingdom ; for admitting into, punishing in, and casting out of it, as occasion shall require. And, 3. In appointing successors with the like powers, for continuing the order, and administering the sacred offices of the church. These several rights and privileges, then more at large insisted on, seem to have been not intimated only, but confirmed and exercised, by the proceedings we are now considering, as proper to this festival.

The *first* of them, which relates to the propagation and establishment of the gospel, I take to be very plainly included in the 21st and 22d verses. There St. Peter declares the end and proper business, which this new apostle was to be ordained for ; and the qualifications requisite to render him capable of it.

The end or business to which he was ordained, is expressed, by being a witness (together with the eleven) of our Lord's resurrection.

I lately had occasion to observe, Comm. on Epist.
St. Andrew's Day.
how important an article this of

Christ's resurrection is : how particular a stress the scriptures of the New Testament lay upon it ; and how frequently it is mentioned, in a sense so comprehensive, as to conclude the whole object of the Christian faith. That thus we are to understand it here, is evident from the qualification premised. For had that single point, of Jesus rising again, been the whole subject-matter of the apostle's testimony ; to have retained to Jesus at that time, had sufficed to render these candidates capable of this office. But, in regard the *having com-* Acts ii. 21, 22.
panied with the eleven all the time that

Jesus went in and out among them, beginning from the baptism of John until the same day that he was taken up from them : in regard this, I say, is made a necessary condition of the choice here proposed ; it follows that the actions and doctrines of our blessed Saviour, during the course of his public

ministry, are all taken into this evidence, and implied by that head of our Lord's resurrection. For which comprehensive sense of that expression, my reader will content himself to receive the reasons, laid down in the discourse last referred to.

Were not this long and intimate acquaintance with our blessed Saviour of the utmost consequence, for bringing men over to the profession of Christianity; why did St. John begin his first epistle with so solemn

1 John i. 1, 2, 3. a preface: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, and our hands have handled of the word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ) that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us, &c.* For the same reason St. Luke, who was

not himself an apostle, when writing his gospel, Acts i. 1, 2. which he styles a *Treatise of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day that he was taken up*, obviates any objection,

which might be made, from his want of the apostolic character, by affirming, that *he also* Luke i. 3. *had a perfect understanding of all things from the very first.* To which we may add, that St.

Matthew, and St. John, were themselves of this highest order; and that, as St. Luke was a companion and fellow-labourer with the apostle Paul, so was St. Mark likewise of Peter; whom many of the ancients affirm, if not to have dictated, yet to have reviewed and approved, the gospel delivered down to us under his name.

So truly did the apostles make good the character given of them here, by bearing witness; so safely may all succeeding ages depend upon their evidence of our blessed Lord's resurrection; that is, the en-

Iren. l. iii. 11. 14.

Euseb. l. ii. c. 15.

— l. vi. c. 14.

Dem. Evang. l.

iii. 5.

Iren. l. iii. 1.

Niceph. l. ii. 45.

ture account of his doctrine and doings, while upon earth. I call it their evidence at present, in regard there is not one of the several accounts delivered of three things in Scripture, which in its last resort, does not rest in, and derive itself from, the information and authority of one or other of the apostles.

But these four gospels, it must be acknowledged, were indited and published at different times ; and the very earliest of the number, not till after those apostles had distributed themselves into different places, for the more speedy and successful spreading the doctrine entrusted with them. The office of witnesses therefore in the meanwhile, we have no reason to doubt, was performed by some such uniform summary of faith, as might be convenient instruction to their hearers, and suffice for such other purposes, as were then to be served by it. Of this, I say, we have no reason to doubt, because the Scripture itself hath frequently taken notice of it. For of what else can we interpret those expressions in St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. Jude ;

The form of doctrine delivered to the Rom. vi. 17.
Romans ; the form of sound words, 2 Tim. i. 13, 14.
which Timothy had heard and was commanded to
hold fast ; the good things committed to his trust,
through the Holy Ghost : the way of
righteousness, the holy commandment, 2 Pet. ii. 21.
and the faith which was once delivered Jude 3.

to the saints ? To which we may add those equivalent phrases of St. John, *That*
which you have heard from the begin- 1 John ii. 20. 27.
ning, the unction from the Holy One, 2 John 4, 5, 6.

which ye have received, and which teacheth you of all
things, and The commandment which had been re-
ceived from the beginning. These, and some other passages there, are not to be otherwise accounted for, than by referring them to some fixed rule of belief and practice, by common agreement pro-

posed to all, whom the first Christian preachers laboured to convert. A rule in substance the same testimony with, and then supplying the want of, that more ample one, which is since contained in the books of the New Testament. So that in both cases the witnesses were the same; the matter testified the same; and no other difference between the written and unwritten word, except that only, which regards the manner of delivering the evidence.

However, if bearing witness were the whole business; many, no question did, and any, who had the qualifications mentioned here, as necessarily previous to the choice of an apostle, might perform that part, and yet continue in their former station. That Matthias in particular wanted not knowledge to fit him for this work, is plain from the terms upon which he was appointed; and, that he wanted not zeal and a good disposition, is no less manifest, from the knower of all hearts ordering him to be chosen. And therefore we must take another view of the apostolic office, to find out the necessity of his being advanced to it.

Now, though it be true, that others might, and did preach the doctrine of Christ; yet was not their authority, even in this respect, equal to that of the apostles: for the Scriptures take express notice of several distinctions in point of power, between them and other ministers of the gospel. Particularly that to them Christ left the care of his church; to them gave the power of administering his sacraments; of teaching and gathering disciples; of feeding his sheep; or remitting and retaining sins; nay, and even of conferring the gift of the Holy Ghost, by laying on of hands. In short, the powers, which he exercised in his own person, while the church enjoyed his bodily presence, were delegated to them, as after his departure, his deputies and vice-

Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

— xxvi. 20, 26, 27.

John xx. 22, 23.

Acts viii. 17, 19.

gerents. Of these powers some were committed by them to inferior and subordinate ministers ; and others reserved to their own highest order. And this was done after their Lord's example, who made a like distinction between the seventy and the twelve. For of these last he says (and more could not be said to magnify the extent and dignity of their office) that to *them* he appoints *a kingdom, as his Father had appointed unto him, that they may eat and drink at his table, in his kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* Luke xxii. 29, 30.

Thus, after our Lord's ascent into heaven, and the descent of the Holy Spirit, all the jurisdiction and government of this spiritual society, the church, was lodged in the apostles. Whosoever had any part of it afterwards, received it from this source. The instances of exercising it, in matters of expedience and discipline, occur frequently in the epistles ; and one very famous example of it we have in the Book of Acts, upon the controversy concerning circumcision, and other Mo- Acts xv. saical rites ; whether the new converted gentiles were obliged to them. The determination whereof was referred to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem ; and their decree upon it was received in, and submitted to, by all the churches. xvi. 4.

The instances indeed of their authority in prescribing rules, reforming abuses, settling points of decency and order, censuring criminals, pardoning penitents, shutting out from, and restoring to, communion ; and the ready and constant effect these acts had, and undeniable proofs of their exercising, and of the universal sense of Christians that they had a right to exercise, such power ; in all things, wherein the discipline and good government of this spiritual kingdom were concerned. But that, which comes up yet closer to the words of St. Peter before us, is their being, under Christ, not only

the common source of spiritual authority in matters of discipline, but the centre of spiritual unity in matters of doctrine. Thus the new converts on the day of *pentecost* have their faith, their sincerity, their agreement, and their devotion described, by *continuing stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

ii. 42.

Thus, when the false Judaizing teachers had *troubled the minds of many, subverting their souls,*

xv. 24. 28. *and saying they must needs be circumcised ;*

it was thought a sufficient warrant for rejecting such impostors and their frauds for the future, for the apostles to declare, that *they never gave any such commandment.* Thus their decree is pronounced the act of the Holy Ghost, as well as of the assem-

bly. Thus they are said to be a part

Eph. ii. 20. of the foundation, on which the spiritual house, the church of Christ, is built. Thus, in

the passages I had occasion to produce, as proofs of a standard of faith and manners then agreed on, we find abundant intimations of the people's readily receiving those, as terms of becoming Christians.

And indeed they seem to have been by the apostles made the conditions of the covenant at baptism.

The keys of the kingdom of heaven, entrusted in their hands, were to be used according to the direction of their master ; and, though they did not originally make, yet they declared and explained, the will of their Lord in matters of this nature. To

render such declarations more authentic, and indeed above all exception, they were ordered to suspend the exercise of their powers, till the Holy Ghost should be poured out upon them. But after-

wards, when acting and speaking under the influence of this infallible guide, their authority was justly esteemed so sacred, that the only question debated among sober and well-minded Christians, seems to have been, whether the doctrine or practice at any time in dispute could be traced up to the

apostles. It being generally agreed, that whatever they have delivered as such ought, and that nothing which they did not deliver, ought to be required, as an article of belief necessary to salvation.

Hence St. Paul thanks God, that the Romans had obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, *whereunto they had been delivered*; (for so the original expresses it) Timothy is charged *to keep, and to commit to faithful men, the good thing intrusted with him*; to remember and discharge the good profession he had made before many witnesses. St. Peter also speaks

Rom. vi. 17.
1 Tim. vi. 14, 20.
2 Tim. i. 14.
——ii. 2.
1 Tim. vi. 12.
2 Pet. ii. 21.
1 John ii. 20, 27.

of the holy commandment *being known* or acknowledged, and St. John of the unction being received. By all which (as I said) seems to be intended, the public profession of belief and obedience solemnly made at baptism: such a summary of a Christian's duty, as the apostles thought proper to require, at each man's admission into the church; such again, as might serve for a model and measure, to frame and examine the teaching of all other ministers by; such a one, I say, being formed, established, and enjoined for these uses by the apostles; and, as such received, revered, and obeyed, by the whole church, as Christ's own act and command in those his vicegerents: we may see very good reason why Matthias, (supposing him equally qualified before, both as to knowledge and zeal,) should yet be taken into the number of the apostles. And thus it comes to pass, that, besides the governing part peculiar to themselves, their authority, even in the instructing part, was such, that they were, in a degree, far more eminent than any else, entitled *witnesses of our Lord's resurrection*.

Yet still another question remains, concerning the number necessary for those purposes, and why eleven might not as well suffice. Which, it is plain,

Acts i. 22. they could not ; for St. Peter is express, that one must be ordained in the room of Judas. The reason whereof I come now in the

2. *Second* place to consider. The apostle seems to ground this necessity upon another, mentioned at the 16th verse : that of fulfilling a prophecy relating to this matter ; one clause whereof says, that the office or bishopric of Judas should be *taken* Ver. 20. *by another*. Now here I might insist on the manner of such applications of prophecies being so expressed, as may seem to import a cause, when really an event only is intended ; and that the New Testament does not mean, that the thing was done for that very purpose, that such a prediction in the Old might be accomplished ; but only that, by the thing so done, as related in the New, such a prediction in the Old Testament was remarkably accomplished.

Gosp. Quinquages. Sund. Vol. II. But I have formerly observed, that this necessity of fulfilling things foretold depended upon another, antecedent to it. The truth of God must be justified by events correspondent to his predictions ; but that truth had never engaged itself by such prediction, unless God had first resolved upon those events. If therefore we can discover any reason, which might determine our Lord to chuse the precise number of twelve apostles, and oblige the continuance of that number at this time ; that may be allowed to have given occasion, as well to the prophecy repeated by St. Peter, as to the supply of this vacancy, which accomplished it.

The correspondence between the church before and after our Saviour ; or, as the Scripture phrases it, between *Israel after the flesh*, and the spiritual *Israel of God* ; hath been in several particulars illustrated heretofore. This, where it was consistent with the nature of each dispensation, did not only shew respect to

1 Cor. x. 18.

Gal. vi. 16.

the legal establishment ; (which, though less perfect, was yet of divine extract) but would naturally recommend it to the esteem of the Jews ; and was therefore fit to be continued so long as they continued a settled polity and people. As therefore Moses and Joshua, each the type of Christ, had next under them twelve, who were called the princes of the tribes ; representing those patriarchs,

Numb. i. 44.

_____ vii. 3.

_____ xiii. 2.

Josh. iii. iv.

from whom those tribes had their descent and denomination : and as these were particularly distinguished rest, by special acts of authority, and divine designation : so had this Deliverer from spiritual bondage, this Leader of his people into the land of promise, his twelve apostles ; the patriarchs and princes of this new people of God, to gather, to govern them, and to act in their behalf, as appointed by their common head. And hence it comes to pass, that the agreement in the Jewish and Christian polity is so often insinuated, to the honour of these apostles, by mention of *twelve thrones on which*

they shall sit, judging the twelve tribes of Israel : of the church represented by a

Matt. xix. 28.

Luke xxii. 30.

woman crowned with twelve stars : and of the heavenly Jerusalem, described with a wall

great and high, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names

Rev. xii. 1.

_____ xxi. 12.

written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. And the wall

had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. These, and some

Ver. 14.

other like allusions there are, which manifestly prove a resemblance designed to be (for some time at least) kept up, between the natural and the spiritual Israel with regard to the chief officers in both. But this resemblance regards the number, no less than the quality, of those chiefs, and consequently rendered a supply necessary to the apostolic order, when Judas had diminished this set number by his fall.

3. And, as the similitude holds in the number of these chiefs of the spiritual Israel, so does it likewise in the manner of their appointment. The Numb. i. 5. heads of the tribes of Israel, after the flesh, were first named by God himself; the princes of the Israel after the Spirit, were chosen by Christ. And the person, here chosen, was of divine designation. For the manner of the proceeding is such, as manifestly refers the issue to God's determination. The nominations of this kind were afterwards made by the apostles themselves, because then their act was properly God's act; and the choice of fit persons to serve in so high a station, was a matter of so great importance to the church, that no doubt can be made, but his very particular assistance was present with them in it. But at this time the Holy Ghost was not yet given; therefore in a case, which was singular, they had recourse to a method, which had often been practised, and was always believed to denote the special appointment of God.

The deciding of things contingent by lots was a practice instituted by God's own command. Thus the two goats, on the solemn day of atonement, were separated; the one Levit. xvi. 7, 8. for slaughter to be sacrificed, the Numb. xxxiii. 54. other for escape into the wilderness. Thus the land of Canaan was divided, and a portion of it assigned to each tribe. Thus the cities of the Levites were set apart, out of the Josh. xiii. 2. 6. inheritance assigned to the other tribes. Thus it was determined who should ——— xxi. 8. revenge the wickedness of Benjamin, by attacking Gibeah. Thus the services of the priests in the sanctuary were distributed. All which Judg. xx. 9. 1 Chron. xxiv. 5, &c. were so constantly believed to be of God's immediate assignation, as to give occasion for that aphorism of Solomon, *the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.*

From hence, as a matter universally acknowledged, among persons conversant in the religion and customs of the Jews, it appears, that the putting the choice of an apostle upon this issue, was a very solemn way of referring it to the decision of God himself, which is yet farther evidenced, by that solemn invocation of him upon this so very important exigence. Whereby these great patterns of piety have set us an example, which the wisdom of our excellent church hath directed us all to follow, by begging, in her Collect for this festival, that we and all Christians, *being always preserved from false apostles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

THE GOSPEL.

ST. MATT. xi. 25.

PARAPHRASE.

25. *A*T that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

25. Jesus, then reflecting upon the success and good effect, which the preaching and miracles of his apos-

tles sent forth (as is related chap. x. 5. Compare Luke x. 21.) to spread his doctrine, had met with, in persons of a disposition different from that upbraided in the verses next before, gave solemn thanks to his Father for it: and magnified the wisdom of that dispensation, which left the self-conceited in the ignorance they affected, and instructed the meek and dispassionate, the modest and the lowly, in the mysteries of the gospel.

26. *Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.*

27. *All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father: neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*

27. Mysteries which God hath revealed by his Son, and not to be known by any, but

such as submit to be taught by him.

28. *Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

28. Such therefore he invites, with a promise of

easing their minds of all those hardships, which the Levitical law, the consciousness of their own faults and frailties, or the difficulties of human life, would otherwise continue to load them withal: and, in comparison whereof, the duty and subjection he requires of them, would be found very supportable.

29, 30. For they, who bring with them a right temper of mind, and imitate the meekness and humility

of their Master, shall not fail to find him gentle in his commands, and the discharge of them softened by great comforts and inward satisfactions.

29. *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls:*

30. *For my yoke is easy, and my burthen is light.*

COMMENT.

THE use I shall make of this passage at present is, by fixing on the latter part of it, to shew, what encouragement men have to *come to Christ, to take his yoke upon them, and to learn of him*; upon account of that *rest*, promised here to the *souls* of them that do so. In plain terms, I mean to prove, that Christianity hath provided for all, who study and practise it in good earnest, the best refreshment under, and most effectual remedies against, any difficulties or sufferings; which either they, to whom these words were spoken, did, or which any other persons whatsoever can possibly, labour under.

To this purpose I shall set myself to satisfy the two following inquiries.

1. *First*, What those burthens of misery are, which exposed men to all that hardship and disquiet, thought fit to be intimated here by wearisomeness, and labour, and pain. And then,

2. *Secondly* What comforts and cures the sincere obedience of Christ and his gospel administers to each of these respectively.

1. As to the causes of this misery, they may, I think, be conveniently enough reduced to three sorts. Such as arise, either,

First, From the temper of the Jewish law, and the state of men's souls under that dispensation, or,

Secondly, From a consciousness of their own sins ; or,

Lastly, From the afflictions of the present life.

1. The first of these, which regards the Jewish law, though exceeding pertinent to our Lord's purpose, and the circumstances of the persons, with whom he was then conferring, is yet to us (blessed be God) of no farther concern ; than as the weight of the burthen, when rightly understood, may make us duly thankful for the greatness of the deliverance. Referring therefore to my *second* head so much as may be serviceable to that end, I proceed to the next burthen, which I presume our Saviour might have in view. And that is,

2. The consciousness of our own sins. It were easy to enlarge on this occasion, by representing the justness of giving to a vicious course of life the titles of weariness and labour. How exactly they square to the insupportable tyranny of ungoverned appetites and passions, and to the endless drudgery of attempting to gratify them. But this I rather take to be insinuated at the 30th verse, where the *yoke* of Christ is affirmed to be *easy*, and his *burthen light*. And therefore, since neither the measure of this discourse permits, nor the point I am upon, obliges me, to go so far, I choose to confine my thoughts to that sense of guilt in particular, which we often find David, and other holy penitents in Scripture, complaining of, as a load very sore, and *too heavy for them to bear*. Psal. xxxviii. 4.

At the instant of commission, we are warmed with passion and eager desire. The prospect of some pleasure or profit carries us out of ourselves ; and, like soldiers in battle, we are not sensible of the wound, just at the moment of its being given. But, when the heat of action is over ; then, like them

too, we grow stiff and full of anguish. The flush of our spirits cools, and the gaiety of our false expectations forsakes us. We begin to see the fact as it really is; stript of all those counterfeit beauties, in which sensuality and the subtilty of the tempter had dressed it up to deceive us. And upon a second and sober recollection, nothing remains behind, but deformed images of our folly, and the smarting scourges of a self-condemning breast.

And, who is able to live under the gnawings of this worm? Were there no other torture in wickedness, but that of being eternally dissatisfied with one's own self, and the clamorous reproaches which sound from within; no man of reason and ingenuity could long support it; none could think any advantages of sin worth his purchase, at so dear, and withal, so unbecoming, so unmanly a price.

But when the matter does not end here; when
 1 John iii. 20. *our hearts therefore condemn us, because we have offended one, who is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things; one, who sees a great deal, which we never observed, and punctually remembers many things, which we have long since forgotten; and considers distinctly each aggravation of those crimes, which our own partiality hath, by all possible artifice, laboured to soften and extenuate: when the sentence we now pass upon our guilty selves is but a pledge and anticipation of that future and final one, which shall be pronounced in thunder by our angry Judge, and the present horrors of a wounded conscience are so many foretastes of the fruitless and endless agonies of the damned; when, I say, the case stands thus with sins unpardoned; no wonder, if such remembrances be grievous, and the burthen of them intolerable; and yet, this and no better, is the condition, to which a habit of vice indulged reduces men. So bitter is the reflection, so dismal is the prospect, of an accusing mind, till thorough repentance have made up*

the breach, and God speak peace and reconciliation to it.

It must be confessed, and it is but too sad a truth, that this is not the case of every wicked man: many, even of the most profligate, are utter strangers to these terrors, and commit the vilest things, without any remorse at all. St. Paul instructs us, how to account for their doing so; when he says *their consciences are seared with a hot iron*; and, that they have so hardened themselves by custom, *as to be past feeling*. If, therefore, some work all *uncleanness with greediness*, if they glory and triumph in their shame; does this proceed from the safety? No, but from the stupidity of their souls. Yet these are the wretches, that insult religion and its ministers; that often rejoice in, and boast of, such insensibility, as a mark of their happiness and native freedom. Vain, absurd men! Why do ye not (for ye might with equal reason) extol the peculiar happiness of an apoplexy, and the profound tranquillities of a lethargy? In all these cases, ease is equally the symptom of misery and danger: for, till the patient be awakened into tenderness and smart, there is no hope, no possibility of a cure. A wounded spirit is certainly very grievous, and hard to bear; but even the painfulest of those wounds will bring more true comfort at last, and are infinitely rather to be chosen, than that sottish hardness, which says of guilt in general, as Solomon's *drunkard* said of his wine; they *have stricken me, and I was not sick*; they *have beaten me, and I felt it not*: *when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again*. 1 Tim. iv. 2.
Eph. iv. 19.

3. The *third* burthen, which I presume to be intimated here, was said to be, that suffering and disquiet of heart, which may arise from the afflictions of the present world. The greatest and most prosperous of the sons of men are in no degree exempted from the power of Providence; but feel in their for-

tunes surprising changes, and frequent interruptions : diseases and pains in their own persons, hazards, and losses in their estates, disappointments in their most promising hopes and undertakings, parting with the most useful of their friends, and the dearest of their relations ; and a thousand, and ten thousand melancholy events, which no prudence can prevent, no sagacity can foresee, and consequently, no wit of man can particularly describe. Some or other of these do more or less chequer the life of every one of us ; these, there is no remedy, but bear we must : and well it were, if all of us could bring ourselves to bear them as we ought. The great misfortune is, that when these fall in with a black heavy blood, weak minds, or very tender natures, the impression is too strong : life itself grows a burthen, and all its comforts are soured and swallowed up, by some too over-bearing resentment of grief ; and indeed even they, who are most happy, both in their circumstances, and their constitutions, do find the mixture of sweets in their cup, or (which, in regard of the point before us, comes much to one) the manner at least of their tasting and being affected with these, greatly overpowered by that of their bitter part.

If then we view mankind in this melancholy position, exposed to infinite sufferings and temptations ; pushed on to sensual pleasures by strong appetites, not to be gratified with safety ; violently averse to many difficulties, which reason and honour forbid them to decline ; liable to daily and hourly alterations ; and much more sensibly moved with every change from better to worse ; destitute, afflicted, tormented, and all without the notices of any other state, or the support of a compensation to be made hereafter ; where shall we find a creature more truly pitiable ?

I am not now considering, what reliefs might be had from those privileges, by which human nature is so gloriously distinguished ; supposing every

man to make the best, that can possibly be made, of reason and consideration: but I take men, as we find them, and as they commonly order the matter. And thus I may be bold to ask, what those privileges are, generally, in fact, and in the event; but so many fresh instruments of new, unnecessary, and more grievous troubles: brutes are indeed a great deal beneath us in dignity and capacity; but are they not manifestly beneath us, in several aggravations of suffering also? They feel the present, and they feel that only. Their evils are all of nature's and God's sending: they do not fear what they cannot foresee; and when their pains have done, they have done with them. And how supportable is this, in comparison of that, which the generality of mankind endure, whose most and sorest troubles are not the work of Providence, but their own? They chew the cud of every unpalatable morsel, renew their calamities by sad reflections upon them, when past and gone, but forget the numberless blessings that should balance these; are ever looking toward, scaring themselves with distant possibilities, and lose all sense of present good, by ghastly images of evils, that never come to pass at all. Thus are reason and memory turned upon ourselves, and made our constant executioners: as if the prerogative of mankind consisted only in a greater dexterity to rack and torment themselves, than any other creature here below is made capable of.

What redress then shall wretched mortals find so qualified by nature, so industrious, by the abuse of their faculties, to contrive their own misery and perpetual disquiet? Will the sense of a God and Providence, and those improvements of reason, commonly called natural religion, administer comfort and relief? No: not in any degree. These only add weight to the burthen, by representing our crosses and calamities, as the disposals of a power above us. For whatsoever might be said of his

wisdom ; good men in affliction could have slender confidence in his justice, or benignity : a blind chance were, to such, more eligible, than a governor that sees and knows, but does not distinguish in his distributions. Bad men indeed could not accuse him of iniquity : but would that make their punishment one whit the more tolerable ? Surely it is not, nor ever can be, a mitigation of our sufferings, to know we have deserved to suffer. Quite contrary : it is the last and highest aggravation, by adding the sense of guilt to that of pain, and pointing all our adversities, with the goads and stings of a restless upbraiding conscience.

So would the case stand with natural religion ; and the Jewish could not mend the matter : for in a law expressly covenanting (as that did) for temporal mercies and judgments, the state of each man's fortunes would be expected to hold proportion with his deserts. Consequently, the more firm persuasion of the truth of God any man entertained, the more uncomfortable must every severe dispensation be to that man ; because carrying the signature of a wise and righteous God, angry, and avenging some proportionable provocation : and how dark, how dismal these apprehensions are, how full of horror, and amazement, all who have felt them know. And we, who are God's ministers, too frequently can see it in them, whose disordered spirits and religious melancholy confound even piety, and virtue itself, with the bare borrowed form of guilt, and imaginary terrors of despair.

Such was the condition of mankind before Christ ; such it is still without Christ. Which methinks should prevail with all men most passionately to desire a remedy for so complicated a misery : and where this may be found, I now proceed to shew, by observing under my

2. *Second* head, What cures and comforts the sincere obedience of Christ and his gospels adminis-

ters to each of the griefs and burthens already specified under the *first* head.

1. And here it is fit I begin with the Jewish law : the burthen whereof is happily removed, and our thankful acknowledgments for its being so are due, upon these following accounts.

1. As its laborious ceremonies are abolished, and in their stead any easy and rational service required at our hands. A worship in Spirit and truth ; the practice of noble and beneficial virtues ; worthy the majesty of God to accept, worthy the dignity of men to pay ; and such, as sufficiently recommend themselves to the sober sense and judgment of every considering person.

2. A second instance of our happiness in this respect is the provision made against the inefficacy of the legal sacrifices, by the one, the universal, the perfect and sufficient oblation of the Lamb of God : the Lamb, who alone could take away sin : the Lamb, who once offered to take away the sins of the whole world ; the Lamb, of which those under the law were types and shadows, and derived all their worth and title to acceptance from prefiguring him.

3. The rigour of that law is also remitted, by changing the obedience of works into that of faith : by making gracious allowances, and large abatements, for unavoidable accidents and infirmities ; and by receiving men upon terms consistent with frail and corrupt nature. By proposing to all sinners truly penitent, and to all good men sincere in their endeavours, that they should be justified by the merits of another, who could not have any of their own, to expect that blessing from.

Upon the whole matter then, the gospel, though a yoke, is a gentle and easy yoke, in comparison of that shaken off and exchanged for it. The covenant now struck with mankind accommodates itself to our capacities ; it is possible to every honest and

willing mind ; it treats us with more respect ; no longer as servants, but as children, nay, as heirs : it is also established upon more glorious promises ; not the inheritance of an earthly Canaan, or abundance of corn and wine ; but of joys exalted and refined : figured to us indeed by *eating and drinking with our heavenly Father in his kingdom* ; but in reality suitable to the utmost desires of a rational and immortal soul ; even the ravishing delights of his presence, with whom there are pleasures unconceivable, inexhaustible *rivers of pleasure for evermore.*

2. The next advantage to be considered, is that, which the Christian religion brings to them, who are grieved and wearied with the burthen of their own sins. Now the fundamental point of this religion is a Saviour and Redeemer : one who is the beloved, the only begotten Son of God, and therefore he must needs be able ; one, who came into the world for that very purpose, *that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,* and therefore he cannot but be willing doubtless, *to save to the uttermost them that come to God by him :*

John iii. 16. *one who hath washed us in his own blood, nailed the hand-writing that was against us to his cross, and triumphed over sin in his death :* one, who, we are perfectly assured, hath effected all this, in that God raised him from the dead. For nothing, less than the full payment of our debt, could have rendered the detaining him in the grave impossible. And therefore the justice of God, when opening the prison, and releasing our surety, did by that very act acknowledge satisfaction. To be baptized, to believe, to repent, to engage, and to live, as become Christians ; this is still, and this is all, left upon us to do. And, though all our actions will continue imperfect, and so many of them may happen to be very impure,

Heb. vii. 25.
Rev. i. 5.
Col. ii. 14, 15.

yet still there is mercy to pardon, still there is grace to assist. And to them, who are careful not to abuse these, are those peaceful voices sounding from above, *My strength is made perfect in weakness*; and *Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.* 2 Cor. xii. 9. Matt. ix. 2.

The terrors of Satan may possibly disturb, and the mistakes of a timorous mind, wrought up by an unhappy complexion, may sometimes deject, even such good men as these. But, so long as they give diligence heartily to bewail all involuntary, and to avoid all presumptuous wickedness; they may accost their tumultuous spirits in David's soliloquy, *Why art thou so sad, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me? Still put thy trust in God.* For, as one better instructed than David argues, *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.* He hears our every sigh and groan, is conscious to every pensive thought, puts those *tears into his bottle*, with which the pious mourners *wash their beds*; interposes his own blood and sufferings, screens the trembling penitent from the justice of an angry God, and brings him before a reconciled and tender Father. A Father, whose bowels yearn over the miseries, which his ungracious children bring upon themselves; and a Father, always ready to receive with open arms, the most prodigal and lost of all his sons, when they abandon their extravagance, and come back to him and their duty. This is our rock, the refuge and confidence of frail and guilty people, that, if we be *sinner*s, we are such, as Christ came into the world to save: that no offences can be so enormous, which his propitiation is not more

Psal. xliii. 5.

Rom. viii. 33, 34.

Psal. lvi. 8.

— vi. 6.

1 Tim. i. 15.

than equivalent for; no sickness so desperate, but this spiritual physician is able to heal it. And they are the diseased, they are the polluted, that he comes to. They are the *weary*, they are the *heavy laden*, whom he calls. And he would not bid them come, if he were not willing to receive them. He, that invites in general terms, does not exclude the worst; and the worst, provided they be *weary*, sensible of their burthen, and desirous to be eased of it, shall not be thought unworthy of refreshment, and support, and deliverance.

3. *Lastly*, Those disquiets, which arise from worldly afflictions, are likewise most effectually assuaged and healed by the doctrine and service of Christ. For it is the peculiar glory of the gospel, 2 Tim. i. 10. to have brought *life and immortality to light*; and, by establishing the certainty of one to come, to have given us a right understanding of a state we are now in. Hence we learn to distinguish, between a transient condition of discipline and trial, and one of duration and final retribution. Hence, that the season of rewards and punishments, strictly so called, is not yet; nor the fate of men fixed and absolutely determined here below. Consequently, that no certain judgment can be made of ourselves, or of others, from the different fortunes now dispensed to them: nor any preremptory sentence passed, whom God loves, or whom he hates, by any thing, or by all the things, that are at present before us. The same adversity may be, to one the blow of an enemy, and to another the chastisement of a father: to one meant for a scourge of his vices, to another an exercise of his virtues: to both very serviceable, in order to present improvement, and to future happiness. And therefore it is easy to discern how it may consist very well, not only with the justice, but even with the mercy of God, to afflict the best of men: in regard no life is so unblameable, as not to deserve some correction;

nor any example of piety, yet so bright, as not to be capable of still greater lustre.

Now when these reflections have been duly made, (which to be sure they have not, till we are seriously convinced, that all events are disposed by one who is wiser than we; one, who sees and weighs our circumstances thoroughly; one who loves us infinitely, and seeks all occasions to do us good;) we then have a comfort solid, and adequate to the severest of his appointments concerning us. And this is a comfort, peculiar to Christianity: because no other institution ever did, or could, set the demerits of sinners, the love of God to mankind, and our hopes of bliss immortal, in their true light. The utmost, that philosophy can pretend to upon this occasion, is in the very worst sense of the poet's terms, *Verba et voces*; words only, and empty sounds in comparison. For ten thousand such volumes, as Seneca and Epictetus, can never lie so close at our hearts, or give that sweet repose to spirits in perplexity, as this single text from St. Paul rightly applied would do; *Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

I ought not to leave this head, without adding, that, to prevent all disappointment or mistake in our expectations from the promise of my text, we must proceed with some distinction, concerning the burthens severally spoken to. That of the Jewish law is indeed quite taken off; but from the other two we are not totally delivered. We must therefore think our Lord as good as his word, if at present we be strengthened *against* sin, and supported *under* affliction. The Son of God himself, who is our pattern, had his temptations and his agonies. And his example will direct us, how to interpret his promise, when either of these cases happens to be ours. He had the ministry of angels in both;

we in proportion have leave to depend upon a mighty, though invisible assistance; the protection of God's providence, the presence of his grace to sustain and defend, to strengthen and rescue us. A peaceful conscience; a mind contented, even, and serene; a lively faith, steadfast trust, and cheerful hope. In these is the repose of a good man while mortality detains him here below. But the time is drawing on, when such as come to Christ shall actually cease from sin, and be at perfect rest from the labours and troubles of life. For the seeds of immortality are already sown, and have taken root, though they cannot bring fruit to maturity, except we die. And nothing can go higher than this: no calamity can, in the reason of the thing, be a match for that comfort, which is qualified to reconcile us even to death, and can disarm that last grim adversary of all his sting and terror. And this is done to every good Christian, by rendering his grave a passage to light and bliss, and the separation of soul and body an expedient, necessary to consummate the happiness of both.

The Annunciation of the blessed Virgin Mary.

THE COLLECT.

Luke i. 26, &c.
Matt. i. 20, &c.
Rom. iv. 25.
— vi. 5.

WE beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts, that as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel; so by his cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

ISA. vii. 10.

10, 11. God knowing that Ahaz would not rely

10. **MOREOVER** the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying,

11. *Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God ; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.* upon the promise made, Ver. 7, &c, gave him by Isaiah, choice of any miracle he would name which should be wrought in confirmation of it.

12. *But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.* 12. This indulgence Ahaz refused to make the experiment of. Not because he believed without it ; but because he hath no confidence in, or value for it.

13. *And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David, Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also ?* 13. Hereupon the prophet concerns himself no farther with Ahaz, but addresses to the people of Judah, and descendants of David in general. First, by rebuking their infidelity under the present fear and consternation, as an injury and affront, not only to him, who was God's minister, but to God himself:

14. *Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign, Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.* 14. And then, by foretelling the Messiah's miraculous birth of a virgin ; in whom the favour and presence of God with his people should be so conspicuous, as to deserve the title of Immanuel, or God with us, in a most eminent and altogether peculiar sense and manner.

15. *Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and chuse the good.* 15. And yet this divine Person should condescend to be very man ; and should give evidence of his being such, by being nourished, and growing up to maturity of understanding, like common children. See Luke ii. 40. 51, 52.

COMMENT.

THE proper Scriptures, now offered to our meditation, exactly answer the design of this festival. The mercy it commemorates, being in the epistle with great solemnity foretold, and in the Gospel for the day, related with very particular circumstances, as punctually accomplished. The con-

sequence of the thing itself, and therefore of our belief of it, must needs be very great: by reason it lets us into a knowledge of the first act, whereby the Son of God vouchsafed to empty himself for our sakes. In that act it reveals the mystery of *God made man*: upon which the whole scheme of the Christian religion seems principally to turn. Hence all avowed adversaries of the faith have with opened malice attacked, and all the corruptors of it have, with subtlety and dissembled friendship, endeavoured to subvert the article of our blessed Saviour's miraculous incarnation.

My design, at present, is to establish this truth: not by industriously entering into an examination of the arguments brought against it; but by such an illustration of the prophecy in the Old, compared with its application in the New Testament, as may suffice to settle our own minds; as if well attended to, will also be a guard against the false reasonings of others.

To this purpose it will be requisite for me to consider,

I. *First*, The occasion of this prophecy: and

II. *Secondly*, The substance of the prophecy itself.

1. Rightly to understand the occasion of this prophecy, we must take a short view of the time, and juncture of affairs, in which it was delivered. Now the history informs us, that, about the end of 2 Kings xv. 37. Jotham's reign, the kings of Syria and Israel entered into designs against the people of Judah. Which yet God did not suffer to be put in execution, till Ahaz, whose wickedness rendered him a notorious object of divine vengeance, succeeded unto the throne. Then each of these enemies were suffered to prevail. Great multitudes were carried captive to Damascus by Rezin; and, in an engagement with Pekah, king of Israel, the king of

2 Chron. xxviii.
5, 6, 7, 8.

Judah's son, some of the principal officers, and a hundred thousand men, were slain in one day, and two hundred thousand women carried captive. After this, (for so it is very probably judged, by comparing together the accounts given in the books of Kings and Chronicles, and by placing the actions according to the order in the margin) the kings of Israel and Syria agreed to come upon Judah, with a confederate army. The apprehension of those powers in conjunction, which had, when encountered singly, been found too strong for them, created that general consternation in the king and people of Judah, which the prophet at the *second* of this chapter elegantly resembles, by *the trees of the wood bending and trembling with the wind*. Against these terrors it was, that God sent Isaiah to support them. Which he does, *first*, by a promise, that the designs of the enemy should be disappointed: and that they who, when made executioners of divine vengeance, could each of them separately overcome; no, when presuming to act without such commission, should not, with all their force united, be able to prevail. *Then* he foretels the downfall of their adversaries; and sets a period within which time destruction should happen to both the kings, then besieging Jerusalem.

2 Kings xv. 37.
 2 Chron. xxviii. 1
 —16.
 2 Kings xvi. 5—10.
 Isa. vii. 1.
 2 Chron. xxviii.
 16. 20, &c.
 2 Kings xvi. 10—
 19.
 2 Chron. xxviii.
 22.

Ver. 7.
 Ver. 1.
 2 Kings xvi. 5.

Ver. 8.
 Ver. 16.

For these events (which came accordingly to pass in a very few years after) the wicked king gave no credit to the prophet. And that incredulity occasioned the proffer, made at the 11th verse. But Ahaz, who had forsaken God, and put all his confidence in the

Rezin was slain about two, Pekah about three, and the kingdom of Israel broken, according to Grot. eleven, to Usher, twenty years after.

king of Assyria's help, refuses any miracle, for the establishment of a faith, which he had abandoned. And therefore the prophét proceeds to make a promise (not known, to him in particular, but to the family and people of David in general) of the miraculous birth of the Messiah. Which though it were not to be accomplished in, as yet, seven hundred years, did however very well become the present occasion, and minister proper comfort in these melancholy circumstances, upon the following considerations:

1. As the Messiah was the greatest and most wonderful, the sum and complement indeed, of all the mercies, designed by God, and expected by his people; he *in whom all the promises are* 2 Cor. i. 24. (as the apostle speaks) *yea and amen.* This seems a good reason, why, after the mention of any dreadful danger or calamity, the prophets do so often break out into predictions and glorious characters of him: that so the faith and prospect of such a happiness in reserve might be a support under all, whether private or public adversities, with which God might see fit, in the meanwhile, to chastise their faults, and to exercise their patience.

2. But the mention of these promises was not only a reasonable comfort under sufferings; it was also a powerful argument of hope for succour and deliverance. This must needs be the natural effect of such predictions, as gave the utmost assistance of the power and the goodness of God. How then could any danger or distress reasonably drive men to despair, whose minds were thoroughly possessed with a belief and expectation of this Redeemer; in whom so many miracles should meet, as must appear equal at least to any difficulties, possible for his servants to be oppressed with? One, in whom blessings so numerous and unspeakable should be poured out, that the love of God could no more admit of any doubt, than his power? Consequently,

when the face of affairs looked blackest, and no glimpse of comfort appeared from human and ordinary assistances ; no more effectual expedient could be thought of, to buoy up their spirits, and confirm their trust in God, than in opening a view of that deliverance, intended by the Messiah. A deliverance, so much superior to any other, that the author of it could not be supposed to want either ability or inclination, to do less in any present exigence ; who had irrevocably determined and firmly engaged, in his own due time, to do infinitely more for his people.

3. But especially this promise was adapted to the present conjuncture, and had a direct tendency to compose the consternation and terrors, at that time upon the minds of the people. The danger that now threatened, was on many accounts so formidable ; the enemy without, so flushed with conquest ; and the besieged within, so dispirited with former disasters ; that nothing less was apprehended, than the utter extermination of the race of Judah, and final overthrow of their constitution. Now a prediction of the Messiah's birth met directly with all such melancholy misgivings ; and was an argument against them, stronger and more unanswerable, in proportion as the time of that birth was at greater distance from the time of this prediction. The reason of this assertion will soon appear, to any who recollect that the Messiah, who had formerly been spoken of in terms more general, was afterwards described as a descendant of Judah :
 that the time of his coming was posi- Gen. xlix. 10.
 tively fixed, while that tribe should continue distinct, and a form of government yet kept up in it :
 that he was also to be of the lineage of
 David, whose family are here particu- Psal. lxxxix.
 larly addressed to : that these preroga- — cxxxii.
 tives that tribe and family were well apprised of, and placed their peculiar glory and happiness in

them, that Israel was under the same expectation or claim; and therefore a determinate and short period is here expressly set for the dissolution of their state: that a nobler difference could not have been put between Israel and Judah, than, after the final and speedy ruin denounced against the one, so solemnly to assure the other of a mercy so remote: and the consequence of all must come to this at last, that every attempt could not but be vain, for extinguishing that people, and rooting out that family, in this day of distress, to whom such privileges were peculiarly annexed and irreversibly decreed, that God could not be consistent with his word and most solemn engagements, if he did not rescue them out of this and all other calamities, and preserve them unbroken, for at least seven hundred years longer. For so much intervened between Isaiah's prophecy in the epistle, and the accomplishment of it in the Gospel of the festival, which we are now upon that account celebrating.

I have done with my *first* head, The occasion, and come now to consider, in the

II. *Second* place, The substance of this prophecy. Where we shall do well to observe,

1. The thing promised, *The Lord himself shall give you a sign, Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.*

2. The distinction whereby he should be known, in these words, *And shall call his name Immanuel.*

Lastly, The importance of that last clause, *Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may, or, until he, know to refuse the evil and choose the good.*

The two former of these particulars St. Matthew hath taught all Christians how to apply. Matt. i. 18, 19, 20, 21. For after an account of the birth of Jesus, of his mother's espousal to Joseph, the discovery of her being with child before they came together, the disquiet of her husband's mind upon that occasion, the composure of those

troubles by the appearance of an angel, vindicating the Virgin's innocence, and declaring that which was conceived in her to be of the Holy Ghost: he adds, as a farther confirmation of these surprising circumstances, *Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled, which was* Ver. 22, 23. *spoken of the Lord, by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which, being interpreted, is God with us.* I shall briefly treat of the particulars above specified, in such manner, as may shew, that they do not only justify, but do so oblige to this application, as to forbid, and be incompatible with, any other.

With regard then to the *first* particular, the sign promised, these two remarks are obvious.

1. That the thing spoken of in the words, must have come to pass, after the time of speaking them; for, though the verbs used in the original be of the present time, yet this is only a figure, frequent in prophetic writings to denote the undoubted certainty of the matter: and a style proper for him to intimate this power and truth, by, *Who,* Rom. iv. 17. (as the apostle takes notice) *called those things which be not, as though they were.* To this style of the prophets the reason of the thing, and, consequent to both, the universal consent of expositors of all ages and persuasions, do exactly agree. The only matter in dispute hath been, at what distance the accomplishment might be allowed to follow: whether it be not necessary to the nature and end of a sign, to be succeeded by that event, in the belief whereof it was intended to confirm men; and whether we Christians, in applying this prediction to our blessed Lord's incarnation, (an event seven hundred years off) do not enervate the prophet's argument, and utterly evacuate the use of that, which was given as a sign of events, part

whereof happened in one or two, and the whole within few years after.

This must be confessed an objection, that carries some appearance of strength. But the difficulty vanishes, when it is remembered, 1. That the word *sign* is, in both Testaments, made use of, not only concerning such events, as signify some others to come after them, but concerning all that are extraordinary and miraculous; without the least relation to, or dependance upon, any besides. Again, 2. Even in case of such relation and mutual dependence, it is in this sense sufficient to make one thing the sign of another, that the one do so necessarily imply the certainty of the other; that, if the sign do, the thing signified cannot but come to pass. And for this it is of no importance, whether of the two be antecedent, or whether of them subsequent; the strength of the motive to belief lying, not in the order of time at all; but wholly in the necessary connexion of the events themselves, and in the grounds they minister, for raising and confirming our faith, according to the consequences, evidently to be drawn from the one to the other.

And, as the reason of the thing, so is the authority of the scripture with us, in this point. I will just mention an example or two, that you may see the passage before us is not singular. God, speaking of Moses out of the flaming bush in Horeb, promises his people a deliverance from their bondage, and commands him to be the instrument of it, *Exod. iii. 10, 11, 12.* by carrying a message to Pharaoh. Moses declares the office, as too great for him to undertake; and desires some evidence of its succeeding in his hands. To remove this diffidence, he is answered by God in the following words, *Certainly I will be with thee, and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee; when thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.* Again, when,

shortly after the calamity now before us, Hezekiah was insulted by the messengers of Sennacherib, and in no condition to defend himself, God promises not to suffer so much as a siege to be laid against Jerusalem. Which was performed effectually, the very night following, by a wonderful slaughter of the Assyrians, who fell under the hand of an angel. The suddenness of which accomplishment notwithstanding, he adds, *And this shall be a sign unto thee: ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and in the second year, that which springeth of the same; and in the third year, sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof.* If then the worshipping God in Horeb was foretold as a sign of Moses his mission to rescue Israel out of Egypt; though it neither did, nor could, come to pass, till after their rescue from thence: if the plenty of three successive years is made a sign of a deliverance, which yet followed in less than so many days after the promise of it: then it is plain, that to foretel a more remote event, as a sign of one near at hand, is not against the course of prophetic scripture. Consequently the birth of Christ being made a sign of Judah's deliverance from the present attempts of Israel and Syria, as it is agreeable to the reason of the thing, so it is likewise supported by examples of the like nature in the book of God. We are not therefore chargeable with absurdity, or dishonesty, for fixing upon this interpretation. We insist, that, though the order, in which each shall come, be not necessary; yet it is absolutely so, that both the thing promised, and the sign, should be subsequent to the promise. And from hence we infer, by unavoidable consequence, that by the child, whose birth is here foretold in the reign of Ahaz, could not possibly be meant his son Hezekiah. For he succeeded his father after a reign of sixteen years, and was himself then,

2 Kings xix. 29.

Isa. xxxvii. 30.

2 Kings xvi. 2.

—— xviii. 2.

but five and twenty years old. Therefore the absurdity and perversion lies all on their side, who seek to elude this prophecy by applying it to Hezekiah. That is, indeed, to make it foretel a child yet to be born, who had been born, at least nine or ten years before the words were spoken.

2. The *second* remark, which I take to be also a very obvious one, is, that the birth here foretold is of an extraordinary and miraculous kind. And such we believe our blessed Lord's to have been; who alone answered the character here given of him, by having a virgin mother. This strictest interpretation of the place, as it best agrees with the etymology and general use of the original word, which we render *virgin*; so it is especially enforced by the circumstances of the context. For, after the refusal of *Ahaz* to ask a sign of God either in the height or depth, in confirmation of a promise, thought too great to be credible; the prophet here gives the house of David this sign, of a virgin conceiving and bearing a son. Hence it is evident, that the use of signs is to awaken men's observation, and to add life and vigour to their faith in difficult cases. And how shall this be done, but by consisting of events, out of the common way of expectation? Such as transcend the power of natural causes and effects, and plainly demonstrate an interposition of the Almighty's own hand? But, if no more be meant here, than what the Jews would make us believe, that a young woman, then a virgin, should be joined to a man, and be with child: what is there in all this, fit to compose the house of David's fears, in that day of consternation and distress? How could an ordinary and natural event assure an unexpected and extraordinary deliverance? But especially, how ridiculous, (upon this supposal) how extremely trifling, is all that pomp and solemnity, with which this prophecy is introduced? Surely that preface, *Hear ye now, O house of David, &c. The Lord him-*

self shall give you a sign; and that awakening of their attention, *Behold a virgin*, &c. do import, not only some strange and supernatural effect, but one, that should be more full of astonishment, than any that Ahaz could have asked. And hence I take it to be very manifest, that this prophecy cannot be confined to the son of the prophetess, or to any other, born after the manner of men; and, that it never was fulfilled truly, and in the sense of him that gave it, except in the event, which we are now thanking God for—the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus Christ alone.

II. I pass now, *secondly*, to the distinction peculiar to this wonderful child, in those words, and *shall call his name Immanuel*. Could any stress fairly be laid upon the words, *shall call*, I should think it another intimation of a truly virgin-mother, by lodging in her that power of naming the child, which, by the laws and customs of the Jews, was always the father's prerogative. But I think it cannot be denied that *thou shalt* or *she shall call* in the prophet; and, *thou shalt*, or *they shall call*, in the evangelists, are terms exactly equivalent:

Isa. vii. 14.

Matt. i. 21. 24.

Luke i. 31.

and in general, that such forms are frequently of no other importance, than that, which at last resolves itself into a passive signification. Of this many instances might easily be produced, which must abundantly satisfy us, that the meaning of this passage is properly thus much—*his name shall be called Immanuel*.

It is of more weight to shew, how this part of the prediction can belong to him, whose name we acknowledge to have been, by express command from heaven, called Jesus. Now nothing is more common in Scripture, than, by the calling or naming of a person or thing, to mean that the person or thing shall really be what that name imports: and so again,

Luke i. 31.

—ii. 21.

Matt. i. 21.

being called stands generally for *being*. In the former sense we find it foretold of Jerusalem by this prophet, that she should be called *the city of righteousness*. Why? because, as was promised in the words foregoing, *God would restore her judges, as at the first, and her counsellors as at the beginning*.

In the latter sense it is twice used by the angel, in the Gospel for this day: who says of Jesus, that *he shall be great, and shall be called* (that is shall be) *the son of the Highest*; and again, *that holy thing, which shall be born of thee, shall be called* (that is again shall be) the Son of God.

Without proving this, therefore, by a multitude of instances, which might make it endless; or recurring to the critical distinctions of natural and instituted names, which a learned writer of our own hath shewed to be in this case frivolous and prevaricating; it shall suffice to say, that, according to the usage of the Jewish, more especially the prophetic language, the name of a person or thing so called, imported only such qualities or effects, in or from it, as that name signified. And by consequence, that Christ's name was truly, and strictly called Immanuel, in full and punctual completion of this prophecy, if he were *God with us*, (which is the adequate meaning of the Hebrew word) in so distinguishing a manner, as none besides ever was, or can be.

Now, (not to mention that presence of God, whereby he is in every place, and with every person, and which cannot be the meaning of the name we are considering) there is a presence of favour and distinction, whereby God is said to be, in a peculiar manner, with those, whom he loves and blesses above others. In this regard the child here spoken of is justly called Immanuel; because, as St. Paul

Bishop Kidder
on the Messias.
P. I. Ch. I.
P. II. Ch. V.

of our own hath shewed to be in this case frivolous and prevaricating; it shall suffice to say, that, according to the usage of the Jewish, more espe-

speaks, *God was in Him reconciling the world to himself; for his sake and sufferings not imputing their trespasses unto them; and again, by him, they who were sometimes afar off are made nigh, have access to the Father, are accepted in the Beloved, and become, of enemies and strangers, friends and children; insomuch, that God vouchsafes to dwell in us, and be one with us. And, as he unites us to himself by grace, so did he in this child condescend, by an ineffable generation, to unite our substance and nature to himself: to be perfect God, and perfect man, that so he might be the first born among many brethren, and redeem the children from death, who are partakers of flesh and blood, by himself taking part of the same.* Let it not then be any more objected, that the child of this prophecy could not be called *Immanuel*, whom we confess to have been called Jesus; for he is therefore our *Immanuel*, because our Jesus; therefore most eminently, most literally, *God with us*, because, by so miraculous an union, a *saver of his people from their sins.*

2 Cor. v. 19.

Eph. ii. 13. 18,
19.

— i. 6.

Athen. Creed.

Rom. viii. 29.

Heb. ii. 14.

But, *lastly*, as the name *Immanuel* leads us to contemplate the reality of our Saviour's divine nature, so does the description, which follows, help us yet more to a thankful sense of his inimitable condescension. For, by adding, *butter and honey shall he eat, that, or until, he knew to refuse the evil and choose the good*; the prophet is reasonably supposed to signify to us, not only the reality of our Saviour's human nature; but all the frailties and infirmities of it, which might render him, as the apostle speaks, in every point *like unto us*, sin alone accepted. The first Adam was created in the utmost maturity and perfection both of body and mind, that any of the species ever attained to; but the second

Heb. ii. 17.

— iv. 15.

1 Cor. xv. 47. Adam, though *the Lord from heaven*, vouchsafed to enter the world a tender babe, stooped to the weaknesses of infancy, and the gradual progressions of youth. His body was nourished with the food, usually administered in those countries to common children; and his understanding brightened like theirs, and received enlargements proportionable to his years. So that Isaiah here foretels in other terms, what St. Luke relates to have been exactly fulfilled; when acquainting us, that the *child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom*; and again, that, *Jesus increased in wisdom, and stature, and in favour with God and man.*

There are many useful inferences arising from this subject, which, having touched upon formerly, I forbear now to repeat. Let it therefore suffice at present, briefly to observe, the reverence which becomes the devotions appointed for, and the glorious pre-eminence due to, this happy day. For this is the day, that began first to scatter the thick night of ignorance and error, and the veil of types and shadows, in which till then mankind were all involved. The day, which of right begins our ecclesiastical year; because on it, the redemption and true life of mankind was first put into motion, by the author and giver of it taking our substance in the womb of his holy mother. The day, which, by this wonderful operation, began to reconcile, not only God and man, but the word of God with itself; and is the common centre of agreement and union, between the Old and the New Testament. The day, in short, whose honour it is, that, to the glorious event set forward in it, the mysterious proceedings of four thousand years had been made subservient. And therefore, on this day especially, let us be glad, and rejoice, and give glory, and praise, and

Gosp. for Christ-
mas-day, and
Sun. after Christ.

humble adoration, to God the Father, *creating this new thing*; to God the Son *incarnate*; and to God the Holy Ghost *overshadowing*; three persons and one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Jer. xxxi. 22.

THE GOSPEL.

ST. LUKE i. 26.

PARAPHRASE.

26. *AND in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God, unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,*

26. In the sixth month after the message to Zacharias, and his wife

Elizabeth's conceiving, as had been foretold (see ver. 23, 24,) the same angel (ver. 19,) was sent, &c.

27. *To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.*

27. To a virgin of the family of David, after her espousal to, but

before any cohabitation with, Joseph, a man of the same stock. Compare St. Matt. i. 18, &c. also Matt. i. 6—16. and Luke ii. 3, 4, 5.

28. *And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.*

28. Thou, to whom God hath shewed the peculiar favour of making thee a subject

of blessing to all generations, above the rest of thy sex.

29. *And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.*

29. These words of the angel she was in great concern and deep

thought with herself, to understand the true importance of.

30. *And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.*

31. As was prophesied of thee long since by Isaiah, ch. vii. 14.

31. *And behold, thou shall conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.*

32, 33. This person, that Son of God, that great and eternal King, of whom so many glorious predictions and characters are left us by the prophets; see

2 Sam. vii. 13. 1 Chron xxii. 10. Psal. lxxxix. 36, 37. cxxxii. 11, 12. Isa. ix. 6, 7. Dan. ii. 44. vii. 13, 14. Mic. iv. 7.

N. B. 34. This question is not to be understood as

proceeding from disbelief, but only from wonder, and a desire to be satisfied how events so strange should be brought to pass.

* 35. This shall not be an ordinary birth. For, as the person to be born is divine and essentially God; so the operation, by which thou shalt conceive him, is altogether divine, and owing to the Holy Spirit.

36, 37. God hath already begun to work wonders on this occasion, by removing a natural objection from Elizabeth,

and giving her strength to conceive, beyond all natural capacity and expectation: and this (as will more eminently appear in thy case) is a work of omnipotence, to which nothing is hard.

N. B. 38. Here she expresses her consent, her humility, her faith, and her rejoicing, in this gracious purpose of God,

32. *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.*

33. *And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.*

34. *Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?*

35. *And the angel answered and said unto her, *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy Thing which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God.*

36. *And behold, thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.*

37. *For with God nothing shall be impossible.*

38. *And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.*

COMMENT.

WE have here an account of the glorious mystery of our Lord's incarnation, intermixed with such a description of his blessed mother's virtues, as seemed to have inclined Almighty God to make choice of her, for the happy instrument of conveying this inestimable mercy to mankind. Having, therefore, upon the portion of Scripture appointed for the Epistle, treated of the former of these points; we will endeavour to do due honour to the saint of this day, by taking such a view of her excellent graces, as the Gospel, now read, does plainly set before us.

I. The *first* of these is that, contained in the character of her state, the purity and chastity of a virgin. A heart free from vain imaginations, or loose desires; and so unsullied with all those filthy pollutions, that defile and deform the wanton and unclean soul. Of all vices, to which mankind are subject, there are none of greater danger and worse consequence to us, than those which the lusts of our flesh tempt us to. None, to which nature is more prone; none by which it is more vilely debased, more shamefully exposed, more mortally wounded. They blind the eyes of the mind, destroy consideration and thought, drag down the affections to short and sordid pleasures, leave no relish, no inclination, to joys that are either religious or manly: but, on the contrary, they fix us in a hatred and neglect of God, and enslave us to the appetites of brutes. No sins are more reproachful and ignominious; no life more perplexed with troubles, and cares, and vexations; no enjoyments so mean and bestial, nor so full of folly and shame, and dreadful allays, as those of the lascivious and impure man. But when these temptations happen to get the dominion over women; besides all other

inconveniences that attend them, there is something so very odious, something that seems such a violence and affront to the modesty of their sex, that nothing can render them more despicable and abhorred, in the eyes both of God and man.

Most justly therefore does the virtue opposite to this procure a good esteem and great favour : since by it men are conquerors of the strongest and subtlest enemy, and have learned to be deaf to the busiest and most importunate solicitations of a syren, that labours perpetually to ruin them by her treacherous enchantments. By it they secure their native freedom and greatness of spirit ; preserve their faculties from those thick unwholesome mists, by which sense and appetite ungoverned darken their sight ; secure order and peace within, by subduing all rebellious passions, and keeping reason and religion constantly supreme ; fixing the affections upon things most worthy of them ; and exercising the mind in the sweet raptures of meditations and prayers, the thirst of spiritual and eternal comforts, and all the unspeakable delights, which result from holy conversation, contempt of the world, and the fervent love of God. These are the praises, these the qualities, of a truly virgin life. Not that which is so with regard to outward circumstances only ; but that which is so in the inward disposition, in the choice and the purity of the soul ; in a wilful and happy ignorance of evil.

And with respect to these good qualities, these noble and resigning hearts it is, that such glorious things are spoken of virgins in Scripture. For, as St. Paul says of the Jew, so must it be said in this case, *He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision, which is outward, in the flesh ; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly ; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.* It is not the singleness of life,

but all that modesty, and purity, which are figured by it, and ornaments of it, that must recommend men to God. The divine *Spirit flies from* Wisd. i. 3,4. *deceit, and removes far from folly; and will not abide when unrighteousness cometh in.* The unspotted mind makes the body a temple fit for the Holy Ghost. And, because that part of Mary was clean and unblemished, because she was entirely devoted to piety, and abominated the very thoughts of filthiness, therefore was she *highly favoured*. It was her chaste and virgin heart, that prevailed with the Son of God, when he *took upon him to deliver man, not to abhor or disdain her virgin womb*. And of such virgins as these it is, St. John Rev. xiv.5: speaks, when he says, they are clothed with white robes, and have the honour, in the New Jerusalem, to attend upon the person of Christ, and *follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth*: a bright and shining innocence, which with good care may be preserved in any condition of life; and such whereof even celibacy itself, and all the affected vows of it, are but too often destitute.

Secondly, Another grace very conspicuous in this blessed Virgin, is humility. In the whole account of this affair, we find no circumstance, that speaks her exalted with the thoughts of this revelation to intemperate joy, or lofty conceits of herself: no pleasing reflections upon her own virtue; nor any of those things, that are usually looked upon as symptoms of pride and arrogance. How natural, indeed how almost unavoidable, may we think it in such a case, for a woman to be transported with being thus preferred above the rest of her sex, and enjoying such tokens of the divine favour, as none ever did, none ever should, beside herself; to be tempted to look down with some sort of pity and contempt upon mankind, in the retrieving of whom she was thus made instrumental, and to think something extraordinary due to that person, whom the King

of heaven thus delighted to honour, by joining her substance and human nature, to his own divine nature? But, instead of all this, she receives the astonishing message with modesty, and meekness, and awful wonder; she seems to make no other use of the strangeness of the thing, than from thence to entertain the mystery with a becoming reverence, and to be more amazed at the greatness of the condescension: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord, and he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaid, and God hath done to me great things, and he hath exalted them of low degree, and he hath filled the hungry with good things.* These are the meditations that rise in her heart; these the meek and modest expressions, by which she gives vent to that joy, which the embassy of an angel, the salutation of her cousin Elizabeth, and the exulting of a babe, yet unborn, produced in her. A joy, than which never was any more justly indulged, and yet so indulged, as to be profuse only in the praises of God, and the depressions of herself.

Now this deportment could not but be the effect of excellent spirit, a long confirmed habit of that quality, of which God hath declared himself particularly fond. *For though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect to the lowly,* says the psalmist: *With the lowly is wisdom, and before honour is humility,* says the wise man. *I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit;* says God himself by Isaiah: and, *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble,* says the apostle. And our blessed Saviour, upon several occasions, inculcates that sentence, *He that exalteth himself shall be abased, but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* This is accordingly recommended, as a jewel of great price in

Psal. cxxxviii. 6.

Prov. xi. 2.

——xv. 33.

Ias. lviii. 15.

James iv. 6.

Luke xiv. 11.

women; an ornament, much more beautiful in the sight of God, than any of those, by which they are so studious to set their bodies off to the eyes of the world. 1 Pet. iii. 4.

And therefore the height of that favour mentioned here, may very reasonably be ascribed to the perfection of this most charming, I had almost said this divine, virtue: indeed, why should I not call it divine, since as none is better beloved, so none was ever more eminently, more visibly, practised by God himself? For, who can sufficiently admire that meekness, and unspeakable condescension, by which the King of heaven emptied himself of all his glories, left his throne on high, and took his abode in the body of a mean virgin; vouchsafed to be born in poverty, to live in contempt, to become the minister and the servant of many; and submitted to the death of slaves, and malefactors? Who shall compare any other accomplishment with this, after such an example? Who shall wonder, that, since it thus behoved Christ to live and suffer, it behoved him thus to be born too? That a parent should be chosen, so resembling the virtues of her son: and who shall hereafter fear the disparaging or degrading of himself by humility, who sees the human nature of Christ exalted to the right hand of God; and a meek virgin, lifted above the fate of common women, and made the mother of the holy and eternal Jesus, for excelling in it?

Thirdly, St. Luke takes notice of one grace more, very remarkable in the Virgin upon this occasion, which is her faith: and this, in a matter so foreign, so wholly new, so mysterious and above the power of all created nature, is very extraordinary. 'Tis true she questioned the angel (ver. 34) *How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?* But that was in a sense very different from Zachary's at the 18th verse, *whereby shall I know this?* He questioned the messenger, because he looked upon himself as de-

luded. She doubted not the truth, nor the authority of the message; but desired satisfaction, only as to the manner of bringing about an event, altogether unusual, and for which she saw no competent means. Less than this could not be done to save her credulity; and more than this she insisted not upon, to indulge her curiosity: for when it was declared, that the operation should be God's; that, however strange it might appear, yet his power knew no bounds; and, as an evidence that it did not, how he had already exerted it in a very wonderful instance; by giving a child to persons of her own kindred, whom both age and nature had made barren, and cut off from all expectations of such a blessing; when once, I say, this had been declared, she raises no fresh scruples, nor urges any of those difficulties, which to human reason are insuperable; but returns this submissive answer, at once declaring her expectation that it would, and her desires that it might, be so; *Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according unto thy word.* She left God to finish his own work in his own way; not doubting, but his omnipotence would take care of his truth: she offered herself, the contented, the ready, nay the glad object of this miracle, for heaven to fulfil all its good pleasure upon. This, without dispute, is the importance of the Virgin's reply; and accordingly we find her carriage thus interpreted by Elizabeth, to her mighty commendation; (ver. 45.) *Blessed is she that believed, for there shall be a performance of those things, which were told her from the Lord.* This was a noble resignation; fit for her, whose son was to plant a religion built upon faith: and where such virtues as these conspire, where each is so eminent, each so acceptable, we may allow the person to be *full of grace*; and discern reason sufficient, why this bright constellation should render her lovely in God's eyes and *highly favoured by him.*

I conclude with exhorting my readers to consider that, as Christ was born for us, so he must likewise be born in us, if we expect the benefit of his most stupendous incarnation: that is, his likeness and image must be formed in our souls: we must express his virtues and disposition, and be one with him in affection, if ever we be united to him in glory. And here his holy mother is our emblem and our pattern: for the same qualities, which recommended her to that high honour, are necessary to invite him to dwell in our hearts. We must be sure to provide him a clean habitation, a house swept and garnished; purged from the filth and dregs of fleshly and impure desires, and adorned with graces and good works. Especially we must be clothed with humility; so eminent in this Virgin, so delightful to God, so conformable to all the practice, to all the precepts, of the meek and lowly Jesus; without which it is utterly impossible, for any man to be like unto him, or to be loved by him. And we must fix and confirm our minds with a stedfast and unblameable faith; a modest and resigned belief of all the deep and glorious mysteries of the Christian religion; a lively and active principle, such as may invigorate and quicken us, render us indefatigable and constant in well-doing, fruitful and exemplary, to the glory of God, and the good of others; such as may fire us with a commendable emulation of the blessed above, and teach us so to commemorate their crowns, as to aspire after them too, by copying their virtues. This is to honour the Virgin indeed when we conform ourselves to her in pure and virgin hearts; this, to celebrate the conception of Jesus, when we conceive him afresh by a spiritual and mystical regeneration; this, *lastly*, is the only method, so to receive the glad tidings of his incarnation, and to improve by that message of the angel, as, by qualifying ourself for the happy influences of his most meritorious *death and passion, to partake in the glo-*

ries of his resurrection: which if we heartily endeavour, as we are taught now to pray, God will hear the devotions of this festival, and grant them for the sake of the same his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

ST. MARK'S DAY.

A short Account of St. Mark.

SAINT Mark is, in the preface of St. Jerome's comment on his Gospel, said to be by descent a Levite. They, who make him one of the seventy disciples forget what Eusebius affirms out Lib. iii. c. 19. of Papias, that he never heard or followed Jesus at all. It is much disputed, whether he be the same with that John surnamed Mark, mentioned Acts xii. and xv. as the attendant, first of Paul and Barnabas; afterwards, when Col. iv. 10. these two apostles parted, of the latter, whose sister's son he was. This is the reason by which most have been induced to conclude our evangelist not to be the same; as thinking those travels, with Paul and Barnabas, inconsistent with that constant retainure to St. Peter, which is generally reported of our St. Mark.

But, what weight soever this argument may have, several learned persons are by no means convinced by it. A late learned historian declares himself so far from seeing any necessary consequence in it, as to say that Mark, the kinsman of Barnabas, is without doubt the same with him who wrote the Gospel, which goes under St. Mark's name; and which is generally supposed to be written, while he was under the direction of St. Peter. And our learned Pearson manifestly inclines to this opinion: he presumes

LeSueurad Ann.
Chr. 60.

Annal. Paul. ad
Ann. 44.

the reason of Mark returning with Barnabas and Saul to Antioch (when they had delivered the charitable collections, Acts xi. xii.) was that St. Peter's absence from Jerusalem at that time gave him leisure so to do. He adds, that the kindred and acquaintance between Peter and Barnabas, the uncle of Mark, was the most intimate that could be; he imputes to this the compliance shewed by Barnabas to St. Peter's behaviour among the Judaizers at Antioch; and the disagreement, which afterwards separated St. Paul and him in their travels. The question is not of any great consequence; but far from being given up on the one side; though perhaps more generally asserted on the other, which holds, that these are two different Marks.

Ad Ann.50.

Be that as it will, the Gospel we now enjoy under that name, is agreed to be written by the author, when accompanying St. Peter; and the occasion of writing it to be this. After the defeat of Simon Magus, the reputation of our faith grew so great, and the converts to it so many, at Rome; that they were desirous to have in writing those doctrines, which had hitherto been imparted to them by word of mouth only. St. Mark, to whom this request was made, did accordingly set himself to recollect, what he by long conversation had learnt from St. Peter: this writing from his own memory is rendered as a reason, both for the brevity of the narration, and the order of facts, being less exact. To the setting about this work, it is said, that, although Peter neither gave countenance or discountenance; yet, when finished, he perused, approved, and recommended it to the use of the churches: this account Eusebius gives from a book of institutions, written by St. Clement of Alexandria, but now

Euseb. Hist. lib.
ii. c. 15.
— v. 8.
— vi. 14.

Euseb. lib. iii. c. 39.

Comp. Eus. Hist.
lib. vi. c. 14. &
lib. ii. c. 15.
Iren. lib. iii. c. 1.

lost. There is indeed a passage in Irenæus, importing, that this Gospel was not written till after St. Peter's death. (If by the word ἐξοδῶ or discessus, Irenæus meant decease; and not rather the departure of St. Peter and St. Paul from Rome, as some interpreters understand him.) But the general current of antiquity favours the account of Clement: to which we may add, that, though the most ancient writers give us now no authentic particulars of St. Mark's death, yet those who do, seem to place it before that of St. Peter.

Le Sueur Ann. 62.
Ib. Ann. 65.
Pears. 68.

Nazian. in Arrian.
Euseb. ubi. sup.
Chrys. in 12 Ap.
Hieron. in Catal.

Having written his Gospel, he is said to have left Italy, which had enjoyed the benefit of his labours for some time, and to have carried it with him to Alexandria in Egypt; where he first preached Christ, constituted a bishoprick, and was succeeded in it by Anianus. The Ascetic Christians,* said to be an order founded there by him, seem to be mistaken for Jews: for such were the Therapeutæ; whose rules and discipline Philo so highly extols, that those very commendations render their Christianity suspected. After some time spent in

* Compare Val. in Euseb. lib. ii. c. 17. with Dr. Brown's Dissertat. de Therapeutis, at the end of Clem. Roman. Epistle published by Colomesius at London. 1687.

Alexandria, St. Mark is said to have gone through Lybia, Marmorica, and Pentapolis: and, after his return to Alexandria, to have been murdered there, about Easter, at which time of the year extraordinary honours used to be paid to Serapis. The Egyptians, in zeal for this idol, seized St. Mark as he was officiating in his Christian church; tied his feet with cords, and dragged him about the streets and rocks, till the skin and flesh being torn off, he at last expired under the torture.

THE COLLECT.

O ALMIGHTY God, who hast instructed thy holy church with the heavenly doctrine of thy Evangelist St. Mark; give us grace that, being not like children carried away with every blast of vain doctrine, we may be established in the truth of thy holy gospel, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* Eph. iv. 14, 15.

THE EPISTLE.

EPH. iv. 7.

PARAPHRASE.

7. **U**NTO every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

7. To each Christian (so many ways united to all his fellow-christians),

as before ver. 4, 5, 6. are imparted such assistances, as the wisdom of Christ, our common Head, thinks proper.

8. *Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.*

8. And this distribution was long since foretold by David, who (Psal.

lxviii.) describes the Messiah mounting his throne in heaven, and, (as an evidence of the majesty and power, to which his human nature was now advanced) after an entire conquest of the enemies of his kingdom, scattering his gifts, as is usual among men, on days of inauguration and triumph.

9. *(Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?)*

9. Now that expression, of ascending up on high, hath refer-

ence to some former coming down. And so did this King and Conqueror descend from the utmost height, when incarnate, and vouchsafing to live on this earth; and yet more so, when not disdaining to die, and to be buried in it.

10. *He that descended, is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things)*

10. He therefore is now returned back to his heavenly throne,

the highest and most glorious that can be, to exercise an universal dominion, and to diffuse his influences over every part of his mystical body, the church.

11. To which purpose it is, that he qualified persons for, and sent them in the several capacities here mentioned, some to reveal, some to foretel and explain his will; some to propagate and record it; others to govern according to it, and instruct in it, where it was already received.

11. And he gave some, apostles: and some, prophets: and some, evangelists: and some, pastors and teachers;

12. Now these several offices, and the powers for performing them, were all designed for the benefit of the body in common: every party concerned was hereby obliged to contribute his best endeavours for the improvement and mutual support of believers, for the faithful discharge of his own proper post, and for the peace and unity of this body;

12. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13. Again, the end of such improvement is, that by the unanimous confession of, and

13. Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

strict adherence to, the same principles of our religion; and by a competent knowledge of Christ and his gospel; we all should rise to, and meet together in, such degrees of piety and perfection; as are esteemed the maturity and full growth of Christians, according to those measures of each, whereof our nature and state are capable.

14. By these means we shall attain to such steadiness and sound judgment, as may set us above that

14. That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive:

childish ignorance and levity, which floats between different opinions, and is carried into this or that, which every sophistical turn of an argument, managed by crafty seducers, who use their utmost industry to corrupt the Christian doctrine.

15. Such unity in opinion and affection among the members, will unite and endear us

15. But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ:

more and more to Christ, our mystical Head;

16. From whose influences, derived

16. From whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every

joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love.

through the whole spiritual, each member of this (like the natural) body, according

to the powers it receives, and the position in which it stands, contributes to the strength and beauty of the whole; by discharging its own function faithfully, and promoting that, which is the proper health and growth of this body, unity and faith, and active charity diffused through all the parts of it.

COMMENT.

THE verses next before, had given a description of that mystical union in the Christian church, which St. Paul here makes use of, as an argument for enforcing that *unity of Spirit in the bond of peace*, which he, at the *third* Ver. 4, 5, 6.

verse, exhorts his Ephesians by all possible means to keep. The particular bands or ligaments, by which Christians are thus knit together, as there instanced in; and urged as so many indispensable obligations to a godly agreement in opinion and affection. The nature of this union, represented in Scripture under several similitudes, hath been illustrated, with regard to each that came before us, in some preceding discourses. The passage, we are now concerned in, proceeds to shew, what means and assistances our blessed Lord hath left us, for the establishment and preservation of this union; what ends he had in ordaining: and what we should constantly propose to ourselves in using those means and assistances. These two points therefore shall make the heads of what I intend to lay down on the present occasion. For indeed they are the whole substance of the Epistle for the day. The former being insisted on, from the *seventh* to the *twelfth*; the latter, from the *twelfth* verse to the end of this portion of scripture,

See Ep. 1. Sund. after Epiph. and Ep. for St. Thomas's Day.

The apostle's argument here is much the same with that, more largely expatiated upon, in the *twelfth* of the *first* Epistle to the Corinthians. The gifts, in both places, are chiefly those supernatural ones, which the extraordinary occasions of ~~an~~ religion, to be proved and planted by miracles, did require at his first setting out into the world.

These gifts have been thought by some, to have accompanied the sanctifying graces of baptism, in the first beginnings of Christianity; and, for some time, to be imparted to the generality of private believers; as

See Chrys. on
1 Cor. xii.

a mark of God's favour, a visible pledge of his acceptance of their own conversion, and a powerful motive to that of other people. But they who do not allow these distributions to have been so extensive, seem not at all to doubt, but that every one called, in those early days to the public ministry, did, in some kind of measure or other, partake of them. Now, according to the different quality of such gifts, and the different stations and offices, in which they were exercised; the persons so endued were distinguished under different titles and characters. An example hereof we may have in the *eleventh* verse of this chapter, and at the latter end of that *twelfth* chapter to the Corinthians; where, as I have already observed, St. Paul enlarges upon the same subject.

At this so great a distance of time, and in circumstances of the present, so very unlike to those of the primitive church; it is perhaps not possible, to be sure not necessary, nicely to determine the bounds of those several offices, and the precise importance of the names by which they, who then bore them, are styled. But withal, it is easy to discern, that some among them are of such a nature, as renders them of perpetual use and necessity. Those, I mean, whose business chiefly consists, in authority to govern, and commission to in-

struct. Accordingly, when all miraculous operations, and all occasion for the workers of them ceased, care was taken to preserve and continue a constant succession of the rest. For, though there be no longer, nor have been for many ages, healers, nor speakers with tongues, nor interpreters, nor discerners of spirits, nor prophets, as heretofore there were; yet there are still, (and it is fit there should be to the world's end) men, who, with the spiritual power and rule they succeed into, may not improperly be termed apostles; and others who for their labours in the work of exhortation and doctrine, and watching over, and feeding the flock under their respective charge, are, in the very strictest sense of the words, *pastors* and *teachers*, in the church of Christ.

From this account of the means and assistances, afforded to the primitive Christians, and of those continued to all ages of Christianity, it seems a thing very natural and fitting to make these following remarks.

1. Though the end, to be promoted by such means, be, as we shall shortly see it is, one and immutable; yet the methods made use of to serve and compass that end have been many. Not the same in succeeding, as in the more early ages of our religion: but varied according to different times and circumstances; and dispensed in such kinds and measures, as the wisdom of God saw proper to each of them.

2. Such diversity of means and dispensations notwithstanding, we have no manner of reason to question a constant supply of them that are sufficient. And consequently, if the distributions in our time be more sparing than those we read and hear of formerly; this comes to pass, not because God is less intent upon the great purposes to be furthered by them, or partially fond of one generation above another; but because the necessities of his church

required a more liberal hand at one time, and the more settled condition of it, at another time, might be very well provided for by a less expensive supply.

3. Be the means and assistances afforded more or less, our duty, with regard to them, continues still the same: which is at all times to make the best of the helps and opportunities we have; and to take due care, that what is sufficient in its own nature, (and would be so, with just improvement, as to our own particular) do not prove ineffectual to the great ends here mentioned, through any neglect or fault of ours. Now this care is then duly taken, by persons in public character, when they exercise their respective functions and trusts diligently and conscientiously: and, like faithful stewards, render their high stations and larger talents, as serviceable to the cause of God and religion, as possibly they can. And it is taken by those in a private capacity, then, and only then, when they submit to their spiritual governors, in all lawful ordinances; when they adhere stedfastly to the *pastors* and *teachers*, regularly called, and set over them; when they employ their utmost endeavours, to profit by their holy labours, count them *worthy of all honour*, and (abstracting from other considerations) *esteem them very highly*, (as this apostle elsewhere enjoins) even for their character, and *for their work's sake*.
 1 Thess. v. 13.

4. Since it hath pleased God, that the extraordinary means and assistances, once vouchsafed to his church, should be long ago withdrawn; and, that some others here specified should still remain: this seems very evidently to warrant our inferring, that it is our Lord's will, these letters should always continue; and that their continuance is necessary to the very being and constitution of the Christian church. For, what account can any reasonable man render to himself, of such a difference put between these

two sorts of gifts; but, that the necessity of the former was temporary and occasional only; whereas that of the latter is perpetual and indispensable?

It may be, and indeed it hath been very often, and very maliciously objected, (though never I think so often, or so maliciously objected, as in the profligate age, wherein we live) that such orders and offices are now superfluous, when the secular powers are Christian, and the book of life in every hand: so that the civil magistrate suffices to *govern* us, and all of common industry and understanding are abundantly qualified to *teach* themselves.

But to this the answer is plain and easy, and, to men of probity and fair argument, would not fail to be satisfactory too, *viz.* *That* the societies, in which these governments are exercised, are different. The civil is a particular state or country; the spiritual, a church diffused, wheresoever Christians happen to be, throughout the whole world. *That* the powers they claim and exercise are also different in their original: for the civil was given by God to men, and is regulated by the municipal laws and customs of each nation; whereas the spiritual was given by God to Christ; (whom he thus made *head* Eph. i. 22. *over all things to the church*) conferred by Christ on his apostles; derived down by them to their successors, and in all its essential parts, the same, all the Christian world over. They are also different in their objects; the one extending to the lives, liberties, and secular interests; the other, to the minds and consciences, of its subjects. They are *lastly* different in their ends too; the one aiming at the safety and welfare of their bodies and estates; in this present world; the other, at the salvation of their souls, in that which is to come.

The plain consequences of all which remarks I take to be, *that* neither of these powers can be qualified to discharge the business of the other: *that*

they are so perfectly distinct, as to have nothing of danger to apprehend from each other: *that* they are so contrived, as never, in their own nature, mutually to interfere in their exercise, except when one of these powers is abused and stretched beyond its due and proper limits: and, *lastly*, that this spiritual government, being instituted by Christ himself, cannot be abrogated, ought not to be changed, by any authority less sacred, any declaration less positive and express, than that, by which it was first established. This (we have reason to believe) would not be wanting, were such authority, in his judgment, mischievous or unnecessary: but for any man to pronounce it so, without any such signification from its author, is certainly most impudent sacrilege, and even raging impiety.

This for the *governing*; then for the *teaching* part: do not the many millions of ignorant souls, notwithstanding the most free access to the Holy Scriptures, furnish us with too melancholy a proof of the necessity of it? If common understanding and industry would give men a competent knowledge of their duty; yet is it true, that all have that degree of understanding? Or, that all who have, cultivate it with that industry they may and ought to do? Admit they did. Yet, is there no occasion for, no advantage to be had by even them that know their duty best, from an order of men, who are bound to deal impartially with them, in awakening their attention, searching their consciences, representing their dangers, quickening their endeavours, and frequently refreshing their memories in many things; which they are so far from carefully recollecting, that the temptations, and pleasures, and cares of the world often prevail with them to use many arts, and take great pains, to forget, and even drive these things out of their thoughts?

But, waving all these arguments, are we to suppose, that the whole of a pastor and teacher's office

consists in that single point of instruction? No such matter. These are the persons authorized by God to transact the affairs of the second covenant, between him and his people, called for that reason in Scripture his delegates, or *ambassadors*: to seal that covenant by visible signs and sacraments, and therefore said to *baptize men* 2 Cor. v. 20. for their *washing away of their sins*; to Acts xxii. 16. offer the commemorative sacrifice of 1 Cor. x. 16. their Lord's death, and therefore said to bless the holy elements at his table: these are appointed to declare the guilty conscience absolved or condemned; and, in the name and by the declared power of their great original, the great High Priest of our profession, to grant pardon upon certain conditions: and therefore they are said to *rebuke with all authority*, to *retain* and *remit the sins* of others. Tit. ii. 15. These are set be- John xx. 23. tween God and men, to bless in his name, to intercede for their charge, with an express promise of being heard in those solemn meditations. Jam. v. 14, 15. In a word, these are declared to be *ordained for men in things pertaining unto God*; Heb. v. 1. and, in that respect, to have an *honour* conferred upon them *which no man taketh to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron*. Ver. 4. By which is meant, that whoever usurps this office is an intruder; and that none who are not so called, can perform any parts of it, with the same efficacy and jurisdiction.

So far is this distinction from being an empty title; so impossible to be at any time superfluous; and, by consequence, so justly to be concluded of perpetual duration, and even essential to the constitution of the Christian church. What less indeed can we conclude, from the apostle's own words now before us, than that, so long as there is a *body of Christ to be edified*, and *saints to be perfected*, there will always be occasion for the *work of the ministry*,

and for these orders of men separated by God to the discharge of it? For thus the substance of my *first* head is here connected with my *second*: the means for, with the end of, establishing the mystical union of Christians. *He gave some* Eph. iv. 11, 12. *apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, &c.*

I have been the longer upon this head, with a design to shew, how little ground there is, for the cavils, either of libertines who deny, or of enthusiasts who despise, the institution of these orders in the Christian church. And I hope what hath been said may suffice, as well to vindicate the persons exercising the authority proper to these characters, from the tyranny and usurpation charged upon them by the former sort; as to invalidate the pretences of the latter, who vainly fancy themselves above any established dispensations. The indisputable dominion of the fountain of these powers ought to silence all invidious reflections upon them, to whom they have been regularly conveyed; and his infinite wisdom must convince all reasonable men, that the ends, which he appointed these as means to bring about, they are certainly sufficient for. What those ends are, it is the design of my *second* general head, and I now proceed, to examine.

II. Now those, which are more succinctly contained in the *twelfth*, are explained more at large in the *four* following verses. And they may be reduced to *two*; unity and faith, and universal charity. Both which I shall treat of in such a manner, as may be most agreeable to the scripture now under consideration. That of faith is thus expressed: *Till* Ver. 13, 14, 15. *we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. That we henceforth*

be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive: but speaking the truth in love, may grow up unto him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ.

1. In order to understand the apostle's meaning aright, with regard to the former of these, which is unity of faith; we shall do well to take our first step, by examining, what may most probably be intended in those words, which seem more immediately to express the end to be attained from it, *viz. Coming to a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*

Now perfection may be capable of several senses, according to the different subjects to which it is applied. In its highest and most absolute sense, it signifies a state so elevated and complete, that, as all defect, so all addition, is excluded from it: and the being thus perfect, not only actually is not, but cannot possibly be at any time, more or less, better or worse, than it is. Thus we affirm most truly of God, that he is perfect in holiness, in justice, in wisdom, in power, and the like. That is, there is no degree of these, or any other excellences, attributed to the divine nature, of which he is not in full possession. And what he stands thus possessed of can no more admit of diminution, than of increase. But then it is very plain, that this absolute perfection can truly be affirmed of God alone; because the very notion of it includes infinity and immutability: for whatsoever is not infinite, may be greater and better; and whatsoever is not unchangeable, may be less and worse. Since therefore none but God is infinite and unchangeable; it follows, that none but God is, or can be, absolutely, and in the highest sense of the word, perfect.

When therefore perfection is attributed to any creature, we must understand it in a qualified sense;

and such, as is limited by the capacities of that creature in particular, at the time, and in the circumstances, the person or thing is, when thus spoken of. Thus the perfection of a man consists in all those attainments, of which a creature compounded of soul and body (considered as such) is capable: but this is a perfection belonging to none, except to the first Adam before his fall; and to that second Adam, the *Lord from heaven*, who for our sakes vouchsafed to take the human nature upon him. If then the word be used of any other; it can denote that perfection only; which fallen men, under all the disadvantages of original corruption, but assisted by divine grace, can, as matters now stand with the race of a lapsed ancestor, come up to. And this does not only fall infinitely below the complete perfection peculiar to God, but it stops vastly short even of that qualified perfection, which the human nature in our first parents was (before their transgression, and the fatal consequences thereupon) formed in and fitted for.

But our gracious God, by the second covenant, hath given us expectations of a future and better state, in which the infirmities of our present one shall be removed. And hence arises another distinction, termed in the schools, The perfection of the *way*, and the perfection of our country, or journey's end. The former is such, as is allowed to a condition of discipline and trial; the latter is reserved for that of our happiness and reward. And this is evidently St. Paul's meaning; where speaking of knowledge particularly, he says, *We*
 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10. *know in part, and we prophecy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.* As it seems to be also in that other place, where, after mention of attaining to the resurrection of the dead, he adds immediately; *Not as though I had*

already attained, or were already perfect, but I follow after, &c. and press toward the mark, &c.

Phil. iii. 11, 12,
13, 14.

This last distinction deserves the greater notice, because it opens the way to another, exceeding useful (indeed absolutely needful) for understanding several passages in the New Testament. It is, *that* such degrees of many virtues are styled perfect, as, although they are not the utmost possible to be attained in our present state; are yet, according to the terms of the gospel-covenant, sufficient to qualify us for the perfection of our future and better state. It is thus, that we read of perfection in *knowledge, in faith, in patience, in love,* and the like. All which do not, (as is plain from those last words of the apostle to the Philippians, joined with what follows in the 15th verse there,

1 Cor. ii. 6.
Jam. ii. 22:
1 John iv. 18.
Phil. iii. 11, &c.

Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded, &c.) All which, I say, do not shut out all possibility of farther improvements; but only imply such to have been already made, as the duty of Christians does, in each of those respects, require. An instance or two will suffice to set this matter in a clearer light.

When the rich young man had expressed his desire of knowing what he must *do to inherit eternal life*; and had recited

Matt. xix. 16—21.

the commandments of the second table, as things observed by him *from his youth up*; he asks, *What lack I yet?* To this our Lord replies, *If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, &c.* That is, if thou wouldest be fully instructed in the knowledge, and conform to the practice, of the Christian law in its just extent; thou must be ready to forsake all the advantages of this world, when obedience to any command of Christ shall render it necessary. An obligation, of which he was

not before sensible, that the love of God and his neighbour had laid upon him.

In the beginning of his *first* Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul had taken notice of the common prejudices against the gospel, and particularly against his manner of preaching it. This, he tells 1 Cor. ii. 1—6. them, was recommended to the world by miracles; not *by excellency of speech*, or the *enticing words of man's wisdom*. But, how much soever the want of these might be despised, among persons ignorant of the reasons for so unusual a method; yet, *We*, says he, *speak wisdom among them that are perfect*. That is, they, who have a true knowledge of the nature of this doctrine, are fully satisfied in, and have the highest value for, both the matter delivered, as most excellent in itself; and the manner of delivering it, as most suitable to the subject, and most wisely contrived for the effectual conviction of unbelievers.

Again, the Gnostics, among other corruptions, had taught men to tamper with their consciences; affirming it lawful to serve one's self, by denying Christ in times of persecution. Now St. John, to shew the baseness of this principle, says, *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear; he that feareth, is not made perfect in love*. 1 John iv. 17, 18. That is, the love of God and Christ, required of every Christian, implies such ardency and constancy, as shall make and keep men in a continual disposition, resolutely, and even cheerfully, to undergo any hardships and sufferings that can possibly befall them, for the sake and on account of the profession of the faith. And no temper of mind, short of this courage, can answer the duty and character of those, who call themselves disciples to a persecuted and crucified Master.

But what need we seek any farther, than to the scripture now in hand, for an illustration of this point? The very nature of the metaphors used here,

does in truth seem to me to import, above any other scripture whatsoever, that evangelical perfection must not always be rigorously understood, for the largest measures that any Christian may, but for so much as every Christian must, arrive at, to justify his hopes, and to answer his character.

This I apprehend is sufficiently intimated by St. Paul, when comparing the growth and proportions of the spiritual, to those of the natural, man. For, it is no way necessary to the perfection of the latter, to have attained the largest measures of stature or strength, that can be, or that ever have been, or that shall be actually attained. But he is esteemed a perfect man, who hath all the parts of body and mind in their just maturity. So neither is it required, to denominate the spiritual man perfect, that he have a clear and full comprehension of the mysteries of the Christian religion; or, that he understand as much of them as ever any did, or shall; but it suffices, that he be rightly instructed in, and thoroughly persuaded of, those truths revealed in the gospel, which are the essential and distinguishing doctrines of this religion. And, as the natural man, when come to maturity, may yet, by exercise, and study, and other proper methods, confirm and add to the strength and vigour both of his mind and body: so may he, who in this sense is spiritually *perfect*, make daily increase of his faith and knowledge, by conversing much with the Scriptures, by holy contemplations, acts of piety and virtue, and all those excellent arts, whereby they, who make it their aim and business to excel in goodness, do improve and brighten the graces of God in their souls. In short, this is a perfection which supposes a measure, short of which we cannot be men in Christ; but not a measure, at which they who are once arrived, either ought not to aspire, or cannot rise above it.

That this is a manner of expression familiar to

St. Paul, my reader will be abundantly satisfied ; if, to the marginal texts already referred to, he adds the consideration of Coloss. i. 28. 1 Cor. xiv. 20. but especially the latter end of the *fifth*, and beginning of the *sixth* chapter to the Hebrews, compared with the three first verses of 1 Cor. iii. The last of which plainly implies, that this distinction is not peculiar to such virtues, as are intellectual only ; but belongs to those moral and practical ones also, which are opposite to envyings, and strifes, and divisions, on account whereof the Corinthians are there upbraided as *carnal* and *babes in Christ*.

From this account of perfection in private Christians, it will be no difficult matter to form a judgment of that unity of faith and knowledge, required by the apostle. And I think we may safely conclude from hence,

1. That it is not meant of an agreement in, or unanimous profession of, all truths, no, not all religious truths whatsoever. Considering the nature and the corruption, the ignorance and frailty, the avocations, the inadvertences, the mistakes, and different capacities and interests of men ; we have reason to think this so far from necessary, that it is not (ordinarily speaking) to be conceived possible. Since therefore of points, relating to religion, all are not of equal importance and concern ; it suffices, that those, which are fundamental and essential, such as Christians are said by St Paul to be *delivered to*, such as he calls *the form of sound words*, must be *held fast*, and wherein the substance of the covenant made in baptism does properly consist, be competently understood, firmly believed, and stedfastly continued in, by every Christian.

Rom. vi. 17.

2 Tim. i. 13.

2. To shew how practical this is, I observe again, that even of these fundamental doctrines so perfect and masterly a knowledge is not expected, that every man should be able to answer, or so much as

to know, every cavil that may be started against them. The apostle expresses himself in terms that imply much less. He is content with such a faith, as may set them above the levity of children, and secure them against the fraudulent arts of deceivers. And these arts are successful, only when they meet with weak and unsettled minds. Now such steadiness and agreement will need good instruction in the articles, and in the grounds, of our belief. All which lies in a little compass, and may be reduced to a few plain scriptures. These will render men proof against subtleties, which they are not dextrous enough to unravel. For, as the knowledge of a straight line discovers all that differ from it to be crooked, even to them, by whom the numberless forms of those that do so differ, cannot be accounted for particularly; so, to detect an imposture in this case, it will suffice to know the plain and fundamental truths of Christianity; and, without entangling one's self in nice disputes, resolutely to reject all that differs from, and is consistent with, these.

3. I observe once more, that this unity of faith is not only capable, but necessary, to be attained, even in those points of doctrine, of which we cannot have a full and adequate comprehension. Accordingly St. Ambrose on the place interprets *the knowledge of the Son of God*, and *the fulness of Christ*, of confessing the divinity of our blessed Saviour. And this may be very rationally, and ought to be unanimously, confessed. Because, though we cannot understand how the divine and human nature were united in his person; yet we may, (and, if we will consider things impartially, we cannot but) see such forcible reasons for assenting to it, as must needs render our unbelief highly blameable. Such are, that we ought to believe whatsoever eternal and essential truth hath declared; that the Spirit of God, who is truth, dictated

the Holy Scriptures ; that he appears to have done this, by all the arguments and evidences, proper to prove a subject of that nature ; that it is most reasonable to take the doctrinal parts of Scripture in their most obvious and literal meaning ; that thus to expound the passages, containing the mysteries of our religion, is most agreeable to the propriety of those languages, in which they were written. And they, who are competent judges of these matters, may soon be satisfied, that the difficulties charged upon those Scriptures, are not owing to any obscurity in the texts themselves, or to the different acceptations of the ancients, who acknowledged these doctrines ; but to the more modern perversions, and wretched criticisms, of those, who have taken pains to darken and confound them.

So much for the first branch of unity, that of faith. Let us now proceed to the other, that of charity, which we find described in the sixteenth verse.

That part of it which relates to Christ, and the constant communications of grace from him our common Head, to every member of his mystical body, hath been largely explained heretofore. At present I shall treat of the other part only, which concerns our own duty. And, to the observations formerly made upon this also, I will add but just so much,

as may be serviceable to the illustration of the metaphor chosen to express it, by the *edifying of the body of Christ, and making increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself.*

And here is the proper place for making a former promise, of stating the true and scriptural notion of edification. Which shall be done with all the plainness and brevity that I can.

But before I come to that, it may not be amiss to

Ep. i. Sun. after
Epiph.

Ep. ii. and iii. S.
after Epiph.

Ep. for St. Thomas's Day.

take some notice of another great end ; wherein not the ministry only, but they also who live under it, may and ought to be instrumental ; expressed in the 12th verse, by the *perfecting of the saints* : The word itself translated by *perfecting*, is no where else to be found in the New Testament. But, according to the force of its root, which often occurs there, and must direct us in this inquiry, we have reason to think, that it is very capable of the following senses.

1. It may signify finishing, by a supply of that which was lacking to render it complete : thus the apostle prays for the Corinthians *perfection*, exhorts them to *be perfected*, and desires to see the Thessalonians, that he might *perfect that which was lacking in their faith* ; all which he expresses by the word, whence this is derived.

Καταρτισμός.
Καταρτίζω

2 Cor. xiii. 9. 11.
1 Thess. iii. 10.

2. It may also signify mending any breach, or reducing any thing out of place. And thus the verb is used by two evangelists, where the fishermen are said to be *mending* their nets ; and again by St. Paul, with allusion to a bone broken or out of joint : where he exhorts the Galatians, if any *be overtaken in a fault that they which are spiritual should restore such a one in the Spirit of meekness*.

Matt. iv. 21.
Mark i. 19.
Gal. vi. 1.

3. Again, It is frequently taken for compacting the several parts of any whole, so as there shall from thence result one entire and regular frame. Thus we find it used of God's *making* the world ; of the body *prepared* for Christ, and fitted for a sacrifice ; of the man of God *framed*, or as we read, *thoroughly furnished* to all good works ; and of the *vessels of wrath*, fitted (or as our margin, *made up*) for destruction.

Heb. xi. 3.
— x. 5.
2 Tim. iii. 17.
Rom. ix. 22.

The design of St. Paul here is well answered by any, or all, of these significations. For the saints

are then *perfected* in the *first* of them, when the several orders (said at the 11th verse to be given for that purpose) do, by the regular and diligent administration of the word and sacraments, supply what is lacking, and finish every member of this society, in the knowledge and practice of religion. They are *perfected* in the *second* sense, when these ministers reclaim the exorbitances of the disorderly and wicked, and, by judicious rebukes, affectionate warnings and due application of the censures and comforts entrusted in their hands, restore penitents; and so retrieve the beauty and strength of this body, by healing the breaches made in it. They are *perfected* in the *last* sense, when those rulers and teachers keep every member to its proper station; and by example, instruction, discipline, and every possible method, propagate and preserve unity and order: so rendering the several members, like one body, animated by the same soul. In which sense also this apostle himself uses the word, when *beseeking* the Corinthians *by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, 1 Cor. i. 10. that they would all *speak the same thing*, that there might be no *divisions among them*, but that they would be *perfectly joined together*, (the very original word we are speaking of) *in the same mind, and in the same judgment*.

Next, as to *edifying*. The proper signification of it is building. And thus we find it very frequently in the New Testament: sometimes applied to houses, which indeed is its strictest and most literal sense; and sometimes to structures of other kinds. Examples the reader may find, if he please to consult the texts noted in the margin. In all which the same Greek word, elsewhere rendered *edifying*, is read in its most natural construction, *building*.

From hence it comes to be applied metapho-

rically to the church of Christ, and to those Christians who compose it. The significance of which application deserves our particular regard; as well for the frequency of its use, as for the great authorities, that have warranted it to us.

When our Lord himself promised to constitute and perpetuate a body of men, that should always be distinguished by the confession of a true faith in him, he calls it *building his church upon a rock*. Of the same body collective St. Paul says, that they are *rooted and built up in Christ*; that they are *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone*; that *they are a building fitly framed together, growing unto an holy temple in the Lord*; and, that *in him they are builded together, for an habitation of God through the Spirit*. And St. Peter, yet more particularly (after having termed Christ, with allusion to the prophecies of David and Isaiah, a *living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious*) says, they who *come to him*, (that is, his proselytes and disciples) *are as so many lively stones, built up a spiritual house*.

Matt. xvi. 18.

Coloss. ii. 7.

Eph. ii. 20.

21, 22.

1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

Now, if every Christian, considered singly, be compared to a *stone*; and if all Christians, collectively taken, be a *house*; the first thing to be observed, is that mutual joining, which thus frames them together. And here the analogy holds between material buildings and this spiritual one. For a heap of stones are the same, in substance, though not in form, before and after they are modelled by the workman's skill. That which denominates them afterwards a house, is *first*, the being raised upon, and regulated by, one common foundation; and *secondly*, the being orderly placed, and compacted to each other, by some common cement, or band of union. The foundation of this

1 Tim. i. 4. spiritual house is *faith*. Accordingly
Coloss. ii. 7. St. Paul speaks of *godly edifying in*
faith; and to being rooted *and built up*

in Christ, adds being *established in the faith*, as they
had been taught. And St. Jude exhorts the brethren
to build up themselves on their most holy faith.
Upon this, as the ground-work of all the rest, the
firmness and uniformity of the whole structure does

chiefly and essentially depend. Concerning which, and the importance of
Ep. for St. Thomas's Day. it, my reader will be better satisfied,
with a reference to what was said on another occasion,
than with an unnecessary enlargement or repetition here.

That other part, now to be treated of, which answers to the common cement of a building, is *love*, or *charity*. A term sometimes of latitude so great as extends to the whole practical duty of a Christian; but more particularly meant of amity and order, mutual good understanding, and kind inclinations and offices from one to another. This therefore, at the *fourth* verse, is called *the bond of peace*; as the agreement in principles is called the *unity of Spirit*. And each is then kept, when, as stones in a structure produce beauty and strength, while the lower support those above, the upper couch close upon those below, and those in the same course, are laid firm and true; every one fitting his own place, and knitting with those about it: so each private Christian, whether superior, equal, or inferior, performs the duties of his own station, and so assist others in their part of the burthen, as to add to the symmetry and firmness of the building. In short, when each seeks his own, in the general good; and all separate interests apart, considers himself as a piece of the common frame; whose entire union and order it is no less advantage, than his duty, by all proper methods to preserve and promote. And, that such is the true notion of *edifying* in Scripture, will appear from

a short view of some of the principal passages where the word is used.

Those texts which apply this metaphor to the church or body of Christ in common, are too plain to admit of any dispute: such as style it *God's building, a building fitly framed together*; such as mention the *edifying of the body*, and that *body edifying of itself in love*, and the like. The only

1 Cor. iii. 9.

Eph. ii. 21.

— iv. 12. 16.

difficulty lies in other places, where the word is made choice of, for directing particular Christians, in the discharge of their respective offices; and where regard is had to their improvement in some special graces and virtues, wherein we should all labour to excel. Now, in the proof of the point I am upon, it shall be my endeavour to shew, that even in all these places, there is a constant regard had to the unity and common good of the church, to the benefit of our brethren, and to the preventing any breaches and divisions of Christians from one another.

Nothing can be plainer, than that this is St. Paul's intent in the *fourteenth* and *fifteenth* chapters to the Romans. Among whom some had been converted to Christianity from Judaism, and others from Gentilism. The former sort still kept to some distinctions of days and meats prescribed by the Levitical law; and these were censured by the latter, as weak and superstitious. The latter understood and asserted their Christian liberty; and these were despised by the former, as licentious and profane. This matter was carried so high, that they scrupled communicating together in the public offices of religion. Now to bring both upon better terms, the apostle exposes the sin of judging others, urges the reasonableness of suffering every one to abound in his own sense, and fitness of making allowances to our brethren, in matters perfectly indifferent. And such are those (but

those only) which neither in the nature of the thing, nor by any law of God, or of our superiors, as to the use of them, are determined this or that way. And then, after having proved the subjects in de-

bate to be of this kind, he adds, *let us follow the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify ano-*

Rom. xiv. 19.

— xv. 1.

ther: And again, We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves:

(by rigorously insisting upon having each his own sentiments complied with in such cases) but

Ver. 2. *let every one of us please his neighbour, for his good unto edification.* And what the peace and

edification spoken of was intended to bring men to, by such mutual condescensions, the apostle's prayer just after sufficiently declares in these words:

Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to

Ver. 5, 6. *be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus: that we may all with*

one mind and one mouth glorify God, &c. That is, that there may be no breach of charity, or of communion among you; but that your love and order may be testified, by mutual condescensions, and continuing to join together in the acts of religious worship.

The church of Corinth fell under a like inconvenience, by the positiveness of some, who, bearing themselves out by a maxim, that things which have no being can have no effect or influence, took the freedom to eat of meats sacrificed to idols, to the great scandal of their less nice and distinguishing brethren. St. Paul, who allows their reasoning, as to their own particular, yet utterly disapproves the practice grounded upon it. Because, in matters of such temper, the peace of the church, the satisfaction of our fellow-Christians, and the common good, ought to restrain our practice in the use, whatever our judgment be concerning the true state of our Christian liberty. And therefore he

1 Cor. viii.

tells them, *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.* Expedience therefore is the just abridgment of our liberty in things lawful, and edification is the just measure of expedience. Which he afterwards explains by *no man seeking his own, but every man another's wealth, by doing all to the glory of God, by giving none offence, by pleasing all men in all things, and not seeking his own profit, but the profit of many, that they be saved.*

1 Cor. x. 23.

Ver. 24. 31,
32, 33.

To the same church many false teachers had crept in, who divided their hearers into sects, named after those by whose ministry they had been converted and taught: and these endeavoured to bring the apostle's person and doctrine into contempt. Finding some reproofs in his *first* epistle ineffectual, he threatens these separatists in his *second*, with the censures of the church; which he very significantly styles an *Authority given him by the Lord*, for the Corinthians edification, and not for their destruction. Those punishments (that is) are designed to preserve the peace and unity of Christ's church; by casting them out who corrupt, and divide, and instead of building, pull down, and (as much as in them lies) tear to pieces this spiritual house, by setting up new sects and parties among Christians.

2. Cor. i. 12.
— iii. &c.2 Cor. x.
Ver. 8.

To the same purposes of order, and peace, and adherence to their regular pastors, the context proves the same word to be directed in the *first* to the Thessalonians, (especially if that passage be compared with two others, almost parrallel to it, in that to the Hebrews) *comfort (or exhort) yourselves together, and edify one another; and we beseech you brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in*

1 Thess. v. 11, 12,
13, 14.

Heb. x. 25.

— iii. 13.

love for their work's sake: and be at peace among yourselves. And we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

Once more, that this word imports all those things, by which Christians can contribute to the quickening and heartening their fellow Christians in their duty. All, that may render their minds easy and satisfied, courageous and resolute under it, I think we may argue, by parity of reason, from that expression, 1 Cor. viii. 10, where, speaking of the mischiefs that might come to the less knowing, by the ill example of eating idol-sacrifices, the apostle argues thus: *If any man see thee, which hast knowledge, sit at meat in the idols temple, shall not the conscience of him that is weak be emboldened* (so we read, but the Greek literally rendered, is, *be edified*) *to eat those things which are offered to idols?*

These are, if not all, yet at least the principal texts, where the word is designed to regulate the behaviour of Christians towards their fellow-members. Some few besides there be, which more immediately respect personal improvements in particular graces and virtues. But a very short view will prove, that even in these also, the thing chiefly aimed at, is the peace and general good of this mystical body in common.

The virtues this expression is applied to, (besides those of love and condescension, union and order, already spoken to) are but two or three.

The first of these is faith. Which we have in Ver. 20. St Jude, when exhorting men to build *themselves up on their most holy faith.* Of which

passage it is observable, that the advice given to the whole community of the disciples, to whom that epistle was written; that the So 1 Thess. v. 11. phrase is not necessarily confined to each man's care of his own faith, but to the mutual assistances, extended to the increase of one

another's: but especially, if we consider the immediate occasion of this council, and the ill practices to which it stands opposed; the consequence is evident that unity and agreement is no less recommended than soundness and full assurance in believing. For thus the context runs, *these* (the filthy heretics, disorderly murmurers, and profane mockers mentioned just before) *these be they, who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit: but ye, beloved, building up* (or edifying) *yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost; keep yourselves in the love of God, &c.* or (as that phrase may import) in godly charity and concord; which alone can secure to us the continuance of the divine favour, and is a necessary evidence of our loving God.

Jude 19, 20, 21.

1 John iii. 17.
—— iv. 20.

Another excellence is that of knowledge. And this seems chiefly to be concerned in St. Paul's discourse at the *fourteenth* of his *first* epistle to the Corinthians. There, treating of the spiritual gifts then frequently bestowed, he prefers that of prophecy, before speaking in unknown tongues. For which he gives this reason: because *he that speaketh in an unknown tongue, speaketh not unto men, but unto God; for no man understandeth him:* and again, *he that prophesieth* in a language intelligible, *speaking unto men to edification;* but by *speaking with tongues,* except they be interpreted, the church cannot possibly *receive edifying.* That is, their understandings could not be informed, nor any pious affections excited, by words of which they did not know the meaning. I add the raising of pious affections here, by reason of that passage at the 4th verse, *he that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself:* which will very well fit this construction, but not that of informing others. But still the raising those affections seems plainly to suppose

1 Cor. xiv. 1, 2.

Var. 3. 5.

the tongue then spoken in, *not unknown* to the person speaking, though it were unknown to them that heard. For sure it is altogether unaccountable, how either speaker or hearer should, in any sense or manner whatsoever, be *edified*, by words not understood, either by speaker or hearer. The apostle's command therefore upon this matter, is, that all spiritual gifts should be used in such manner, as might render them of most general profit; which Ver. 12. is expressed by exhorting *them who were zealous of spiritual gifts, to seek that they might excel to the edifying of the church.* The same is manifestly the sense of ver. 17. *Thou verily givest thanks, well, but the other is not edified.* And at the 26th verse he advises, that, in their public assemblies, all the parts of divine worship might be so ordered, that nothing should be done there for ostentation to any man's particular gifts; but all contrived for uniformity and decency, and the profit of the whole congregation. *How is it then, brethren?* says he, *when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done to edifying.*

I observe farther, that knowledge itself, though one sort of edification, is yet allowed by St. Paul to be so, only upon condition that it disposes men to peace and love; and the common good. Take it apart from these, and you see it represented as a qualification, not only not desirable, but very mischievous. This evidently follows from that antithesis in the viiith of this Epistle; *knowledge* (when they who have it abound in their own sense, and scandalize their weaker brethren) *puffeth up,* Ver. 1. *but charity edifieth.*

Once more, this notion is confirmed by that rule for common conversation laid down, Eph. iv. 29. that our discourse should be *good to the use of edifying.* The Greek, in terms more expressive, reads

it, *for the edification of use*. And the apostle's meaning seems to be, that we should always so comfort ourselves in company, as not only to entertain, and render ourselves agreeable to our friends, but even to render them practically wiser and better by what they shall hear from us.

I hope the reader will not think me too tedious, at least not useless, in adjusting the notion of edification, as it is set forth to us in Scripture; since from thence the following inferences appear very naturally to be drawn.

1. That, although every thing, which hath a tendency to good, may in a larger sense be said to *edify*; yet a man is not properly and truly *edified*, either by any new light or knowledge acquired, or by any pious affections and desires kindled or cherished in him, unless these prove and exert themselves in the acts of practical and profitable virtues.

2. That, in order to render even the practice of such virtues strictly *edifying*, it is requisite, that the benefit resulting from thence, be not confined to the doer's private advantage, but that it aim at the good of others, especially the general good of religion; and of Christians, considered as one house built up together in the faith and love of Christ. Whereof each, as a *living stone*, is a part; and each is bound to demean himself in all points, as may become a person, possessed with, and mindful of, that persuasion.

3. That advancing the peace, order, and unity of this common body is, in Scripture language, the true Christian edification. Consequently, whatsoever tends to make any breach or division in that body, is contrary to, and destructive of, edification: consequently again, separating from a regular established church, or leaving one's proper pastor, on pretence of *edifying* more elsewhere, is not only wicked, but absurd. As absurd, as it would

be to say, we intend to strengthen a wall by drawing out the stones ; or that we design the improvement of health, vigour, and beauty, in the body natural, by unnecessarily taking away the useful limbs, and loosing the ligaments, which should compact and keep them in their functions.

4. By the apostle's urging this edification of the body in *faith* and *love*, as the great end of that ministry established by Christ and continued to the church, both ministers and people are moved to make such reflections as these. The ministers, and all who undertake to execute that office, that they are highly accountable, if by their means any heresies or schisms get ground ; if they do not faithfully warn the people against these things ; detect the artifices of them, who lie in wait to deceive ; expose the error, the sinfulness, the infinite both private and public danger of those vile latitudinarian principles, which would not only break down the walls, but undermine and root up the very foundation, of this spiritual building. In short, if they do not set forth the wickedness of all needless and wilful, and the misery of all judicial and deserved, separations from the church of Christ, with all the aggravating circumstances, so warmly, so frequently, inculcated in Scripture. For where in truth do we find any one sin, more expressly forbidden, more severely threatened, or represented as more fatal and damnable, than those of division and heresy ? Where any duty more plainly taught, more authoritatively commanded, more earnestly recommended, or more zealously prayed for, than those of unity, and peace, and love, in all the fellow-members of this spiritual body ?

But if the teachers shall either touch this matter too tenderly, or explain it too superficially ; the hearers, in the next place, may, from the passage now before us, learn both the importance and the nature, of their duty in this particular. The importance indeed is so evident, that few go about to

deny it : but the nature of it should be more attended to, than it generally seems to have been. At present I will suggest a short remark or two, for the better understanding of it.

1. From the connexion of this great house, the church universal, in the several apartments of it, (if I may so speak) which are the church's national, and so in every subdivision downwards, it appears plainly to me, that, where the foundation is held, and no sinful terms of communion imposed, every single person promotes or obstructs, the edification of the body of Christ, as he holds or breaks communion with that particular church and pastor, to which he regularly belongs. It being thus only, and by the like gradual progressions, (beginning from the union of single persons under their respective guides, and rising from particular congregations to districts of larger extent and denomination,) that we come at last to the union of each part, with the whole body of Christians diffused all the world over; and that we are able to shew, how he, who is regularly joined to the one, is, in virtue thereof, joined to the other also.

2. From St. Paul's resembling the church to a human body, the manner, as well as the consequence of maintaining its union, is likewise easy to be discerned. As, *that* this must be done by every little vessel (to which every private Christian bears proportion) doing its proper office, in that part, where nature hath placed it. And, whatever disorder or mischief ~~would~~ follow in the one case, from any dislocation or defect of such vessel: the like deformity and confusion will as certainly ensue in the other case, as oft as any member of the body shall either perversely depart from his station, where Providence hath placed him, or slothfully neglect the duties peculiar to it.

3. This I take to be yet farther confirmed, by that *love*, mentioned here as the main instrument of

edification. For, though there be such passages as confine this word to the relief of our brethren in want and distress; I take it oftentimes to concern, more immediately, the fellowship and friendly communion of Christians, expressed by joining together in and receiving one another to, the ordinances and

See 1 Cor. viii. 1.	public offices of religion. Some in-
_____ xiv. 1.	stances of this kind I set down in
2 Cor. ii. 8.	the margin, and a diligent observer,
Phil. ii. 2.	I believe, will find many more.
Coloss. ii. 2.	These, when their particular occa-
Heb. x. 24.	sions and contexts are duly weighed,

will shew this to be the first and most obvious intent of the word; and, that the other kind offices and dispositions, in the affairs of human life, are sometimes its more remote meaning, and such as result from the former, as their natural cause and foundation. At least when Christians are considered as one body, or religious society, all other love is imperfect, and indeed hardly to be, in any good degree, kept up, without this.

I only add, that there is one remarkable difference, to the advantage of the spiritual body, above the natural and artificial bodies, whereto we find it compared. The natural have their fixed proportions and maturity; the artificial their set dimensions, which they cannot, nor are ever designed, to exceed: but the spiritual is not at any time so bounded, that it should be capable of no farther improvements. And this is a nobler spur to our diligence and zeal, that our faith and love will always edify, and always increase this body; will make it more strong, more beautiful and more glorious, and enlarge as well as adorn it. Let us therefore labour, indefatigably labour, for ourselves; and let us incessantly pray for *all estates*

Collect for Good
Friday.

of men in God's holy church, that every member of the same in his vocation and ministry may truly and godly serve

him. That they may not be, like children, carried away with every blast of vain doctrine, but so established by his grace in the truth of Christ's holy gospel, as to hold the faith in unity of Spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. Amen.

Coll. for St. Mark.
General Interces-
sion.

THE GOSPEL.

ST. JOHN XV. 1.

PARAPHRASE.

1. *I AM the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.*

1. The union between me and you, (my church)

may be represented by a vine: the place and uses whereof I answer more fully, than any natural vine can ever do: and my Father is the owner, who takes care of the plant, and receives the fruits.

2. *Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.*

2. His care is seen, in cutting away the unprofitable, and cultivating the fruitful

branches, to render them still more so.

3. *Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.*

3. This care you have partook of by the instructions

I have given you.

4. *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*

5. *I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

4, 5. Let it now be your own care to preserve and improve this union, by living up to your faith and knowledge: which is the only course to be fruitful; be-

cause the communication of my Spirit and grace will depend upon it, with which you may do great things, but without it nothing. No more than in a branch severed from, and having no sap imparted by, the vine, can bring forth grapes.

6. Besides, such separation will prove not only unfruitful, but fatal. For a wicked believer, like a vine-branch that bears not, is unprofitable, and destined to the fire, (*i. e.* utter destruction.)

6. *If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*

7,8,9,10. Whereas, on the other hand, the being fruitful in this respect shall engage a gracious return to all your prayers; promote my Father's honour, by raising the credit of religion; and

7. *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.*

8. *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples.*

9. *As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.*

10. *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.*

prove you my disciples indeed, by the imitation of my zeal and obedience: which shall also be followed by the like beneficial returns for me, as mine are from my Father.

11. These considerations I leave with you, for the support of your spirits under any difficulties in your duty; and to soften the grief for my absence, by inward comforts, resulting from this spiritual union between us.

11. *These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*

COMMENT.

THE tender Jesus, designing probably to comfort his apostles under the terrible apprehensions of his departure from them, begins this chapter with an account of such an union between him and his disciples, as should abundantly compensate the want of his personal presence and conversation. The intimacy, the beneficial effects of this union, the duty, the manner, the necessity of preserving it, and the irreparable miseries of a separation, are all most elegantly and significantly set forth, by the parabolical representation of a vine and its branches; the illustrating whereof, in some useful measure, shall be the business of this discourse.

1. The intimacy of this union is abundantly plain, from the choice of a tree and its branches, as a fit emblem to represent it. For the clearer understanding whereof, and of the peculiar elegance and propriety in this similitude, two things should be attended to. The one from the rest of the trees a vine is singled out. Any of them would well enough have signified the closeness of the union; but some other effects and considerations relating to this, are much more emphatically shewn in a vine, than in any common tree. Those interpreters no doubt have judged very rightly, who applaud the wisdom of this choice, upon the account of the many vineyards in that country: from whence our Saviour frequently raises parables, because every part of such comparisons could not but be very intelligible to his hearers; and they, who constantly dealt in the allusion, might more easily apply, and discern the intent of matter and expressions so familiar to them.

But there seems to have been yet greater inducement to this choice, from the very nature of the thing itself: in regard of the vine bearing a fruit more generous, and bearing in greater abundance. This renders it (as our Lord in the passage here takes notice) more worthy the tiller's care. And yet (which is greatly to the purpose of this parable too) that noble and delicious plant, so highly valued when prosperous, is yet, when barren, more vile and refuse than any other tree.

But then it must be observed in the next place, that when our Lord speaks of himself as this vine, (as in the *first* verse) we are to understand Christ taken in the complex sense; for him and his church, root and branches, (as elsewhere in scripture head and body) together: but 1 Cor. xii. 12. when (in the following verses) the tree is distinguished into its parts, when Christ is the root and trunk, and Christians are the branches, of a piece with,

shooting out of, nourished by, and living with, in and through him.

The other heads relating to this matter, will appear in the best light, by considering and explaining our Lord's allegorical representation of it, in the order St. John hath recorded it. By which method several beauties of the parable will shew themselves, which are not so easy to be preserved, if the whole be taken asunder, and cast into distinct topics of discourse.

The *first* proof of the importance and benefit of this union is the great care, which the husbandman, or owner of this vine, esteems the preservation and improvement of it worth. A care, extended to every single branch, in such manner as each is capable of, and as the common good of the whole may best be served and promoted by.

To this purpose he is said to *take away* the barren, and to *purge the bearing branches*, ver. 2. By entering into covenant with God at baptism we are grafted into the body of Christ's church, and become branches of that spiritual vine. And, in proportion as we afterwards continue in, or swerve and fall off from, the holy purposes of faith and obedience then contracted for, we are esteemed to bear, or not to bear fruit. So that by the work of the cultivator here mentioned, are represented the different dispensations of the Divine wisdom and goodness, suited to the several circumstances of particular believers, and to the honour and advantage of the Christian religion in general.

Thus it is often seen, that Almighty God does, by some signal judgments, bring down, or quite cut off wicked and powerful oppressors; who *hold the truth in unrighteousness*, crush the religious, corrupt the principles, and discourage the practice, of piety and virtue. The prosperity and insolence of such renders their condition like, and therefore requires that their fate too should be like, to that of wild

and luxuriant suckers : necessary to be taken away ; because they impoverish the tree, and keep the fatness of the root from others, while they continue an useless burden to it themselves.

On the other hand, the hopeful vigorous shoots are cherished and encouraged. These the master of the vineyard digs about and dungs, or prunes, or trims, to advance their fertility yet more. That is, God instructs, strengthens, favours, comforts, remarkably prospers ; or, if that be needful, he afflicts, corrects, tries, and distinguishes well-disposed people ; that they may grow and shine in knowledge, and goodness, and all spiritual graces. In short, he spares no proper pains, denies no fitting opportunities, for the promotion of that holiness, which is the main end aimed at, by the ministry of his word, by the assistances of his grace, and by the various methods of a providence, which never fails to make *all things work together for the good of them that love and fear God.* Rom. viii. 28.

Next follows an earnest exhortation to perseverance, grounded upon sundry arguments illustrating this union. *As first,* The necessity of a steadfast adherence to Christ, in order to the preservation of our spiritual life. Because the whole substance and efficient cause of this is as necessarily derived from him, as the fruitfulness of the branches depends upon the root. They, if the communications from hence be intercepted, are insignificant and useless ; we, upon losing the like kindly influences from the mystical Vine, fall under an universal impotence, and have no longer the least ability to do good. John xv. 4.

The advantages of this union, when faithfully preserved, are next represented. And that is preserved by *abiding in Christ.* An expression, intended no doubt to denote the continuance of our serious resolutions and sincere en- Ver. 5.

deavours of that obedience, which was stipulated for, when we were first incorporated with him. The profit of this is set forth by a vast increase capable of being produced, in virtue of those plentiful and perpetual communications, to which our conjunction with the root gives a title, and which the root never fails to supply, in their proper seasons and measures. These are the assistances of Divine grace, in which the very spirit and life of Christians, as such, consists. It is this that excites, that improves, that maintains our holiness. Nature is insufficient; for that is diseased and decayed. Reason is too weak to conquer our prejudices and passions. The best disposition cannot bear up against corrupt habits and violent temptations. A principle above all these is requisite, to repair our breaches, to enlighten and purify our minds, to persuade as well as to convince, to incline, to guide, and to determine our wills. Natural actions are performed by a natural concurrence, and by such co-operations of God as are common to his creatures. But *that which is spirit must be born of the Spirit*, and gospel virtues cannot spring from any other original, than gospel grace. The most exalted goodness is a more liberal gift, but the lowest degree of it is also a gift. They who pass for persons of larger abilities and attainments, are indeed distinguished from the vulgar. But what distinguished them? Not an inherent power, or natural excellences of their own; but the free distributions of that Lord, who entrusted them with more of his talents. Let therefore the increase be never so great, this ought to mortify our vanity, that the fund we traffic upon is another's. For, whatever may be allowed us in other capacities, yet, when considered as branches, we bear not the root, but the root us. And, whence our very vital principle, the source of all our vigour and activity is drawn, no words can more peremptorily declare,

than these of our Lord ; who urges the necessity of the mutual abiding, by good purposes on our part, and by the distributions of his grace on his ; from this unanswerable argument, that *without* him we *can do nothing*.

Meanwhile these frequent commands of *abiding* in Christ, after the manner I have explained, and the promises of reward to them that do so, suggest to us one remarkable difference, between the natural and the mystical vine. It is, that the former is merely passive in all its productions, the other not so. And therefore though the barrenness of the natural branches be a misfortune only, yet that of the spiritual is strictly a crime. Hence we are called upon to *cleansè ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit*; exhorted not to *receive the grace of God in vain*; forbidden to *resist*, to *quench*, to *grieve his Holy Spirit*; commanded to *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*; upon this encouragement, that such labour shall not be vain, because it is *God which worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure*. In short, the ability to act is from God, but the act is from ourselves, when so enabled. When God had set David's *heart at liberty*, he then resolved and ran the *way of his commandments*. When Christ had strengthened St. Paul, he could then *do all things*. Without that enlargement from the slavery of lusts and vicious habits, David could not have taken one step in God's way. Without that strength, St. Paul could not have performed any one of all the things he spoke of. David could not enlarge his own heart, neither could the apostle strengthen himself: but it was the act, and therefore the virtue, of the one to *run* when *thus set free*; and of the other, to *do* all he was so enabled for. And indeed, were it otherwise, all the commands and promises,

2 Cor. vii. 1.

—— vi. 1.

Eph. iv. 30.

Phil. ii. 12.

Ver. 13.

Psal. cxix. 32.

Phil. vi. 13.

all prohibitions and threatenings, (of which there are very many) relating to this matter, are mockery and vanity. For why are they persuaded, who cannot comply? or commanded, who cannot obey? or threatened, who cannot rebel? or called upon to work together with God, if they can do nothing when he assists? Though what they do, it is confessed, they could not do, without his gracious prevention and assistance.

In another respect indeed these two vines do but too well agree. So far I mean, as the barren parts of each are concerned. The branches cut off from most other trees, are of substance and service; but those of the vine men set no value upon. They are trodden under foot with contempt, and the fire is the end of them. Thus Christians, in the parallel, who profit not under the influences of grace, are the worst and most deplorable part of mankind. The lewd and scandalous professors of this best religion, fall from the most glorious advantages into the most abandoned state of any; and leave themselves no more possibility of any middle condition, than nature hath allowed the tree, whereto they are here resembled. It is either the most noble, or the most despicable plant of all the vegetable world: Christians are likewise of the moral world, the most generous, or the most unprofitable part. Objects, that best deserve esteem and admiration; or else that most justly provoked indignation, and scorn, and reproach.

But this is not all; for, if some be (as alas too many are) so lost to modesty and shame, as to have quite out-grown all regard to the opinion of men; yet let those hardened wretches understand, that there is still behind an affliction which will be felt, awaiting their unfruitfulness. The vine, as it contributes not to its own barrenness, so neither does it feel the disgrace and the curse of it: but the spiritual branches choose and affect their own

barrenness ; and therefore the effect of this to them is a punishment strictly so called ; in which they can be no more unconcerned, than they were in the obstinate disobedience that deserved it. A dreadful and irreversible sentence of final extermination from heaven and happiness ; everlasting flames kindled by the breath of an angry God ; and the insupportable agonies of a never-dying worm, gnawing their guilty breasts perpetually with the bitterest remorse and self-condemnation. Upon this account our blessed Lord resumes his former argument ; shewing, that the misery of separation from him, and of unfruitfulness under his communications, doth not determine in merely being unprofitable, but that they expose men to the utmost extremities of suffering. For such he tells us, are *cast forth and withered* ; they are rejected by God, and, by withdrawing of the grace they had abused, they lose the vital principle of their souls ; and, not only so, but they are *gathered and burned*, fitted up for destruction, snatched away in fury, and thrown into hell.

On the contrary, the advantages of improvement under the grace of the gospel of Christ are also to ourselves. And many encouraging motives are urged to quicken us in it. This Spirit is said to be the *pledge of our adoption*, the instrument of our *sanctification*, the *seal of our inheritance and redemption* : the *Spirit which in our hearts cries Abba, Father*, by which we have access to God, which helps our infirmities when we approach him, and is an assurance, that let us *ask what we will*, it *shall be done unto us*. These last our Saviour's own words here. Confined indeed by some interpreters to the apostles : as a promise of full power to work all such miracles, as they should find necessary, and to apply to their Lord for his assistance in, whereby un-

Rom. viii. 13—15.

Eph. i. 13, 14.

— iv. 30.

Gal. iv. 6.

Eph. ii. 18.

Rom. viii. 26.

believers might be convinced, and his truth get credit in the world. But, as the union, and the grace consequent upon it, do evidently extend to every Christian, every branch of this mystical Vine; so does the promise of the reward here extend no doubt to all, who abide in that union by a diligent and humble use of that grace. And therefore I will very briefly shew, how valuable a privilege this is, and how it is really made good to every sincere disciple of Jesus Christ.

To those, who at all reflect upon the present state of human nature, to what unspeakable variety of weaknesses and wants we stand exposed; and how perfectly unable the best and greatest among us are, to succour the one, or to supply the other; what can be more desirable, than access with ease and confidence to him, whose help we always stand in need of, and who is always mighty to help? To him, from whose single hand all the relief we are capable of, does and must come? And what can be a more powerful incitement to please and serve him faithfully than to be satisfied, that this will effectually recommend us to his favour, open his ear to our requests, and so far prevent our at any time addressing in vain, that, in all things seasonable and convenient for us, even our own hearts cannot be more liberal in wishing, than God will approve himself in giving.

Now this is every good man's happiness. Such have in effect whatsoever they ask; because such always ask in an humble and dutiful submission to the will of their heavenly Father: for in all prayer there is a general reserve to be implied and understood, how express and particular soever the form and words of the petition may be. This is what not only should be, in point of difference and duty, to a being of infinite wisdom, but it is and must be so in the very reason of the thing. For when our prayers specify any object by name, this pro-

ceeds from a present apprehension of that object being proper for, and good to us. In which notion, the moment we are made sensible of a mistake, that object would cease to excite our desires, and we should deprecate, instead of asking it. Hence then it follows, that there must be, in the very nature of prayer rationally put up, a tacit referring of ourselves to him, whom we cannot but acknowledge to understand the condition of our affairs, and the consequences of granting what we ask much better than ourselves do. It is the virtue then, it is the wisdom, nay, it is the necessity and constant meaning, of every one who prays according to knowledge, to insert, mentally and intentionally at least, this clause into all his supplications, that *God would so fulfil the desires of his servant, as may be most expedient for him.* And thus our Saviour's promise here is most true, *Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.* John xv. 7. For such disciplines as he speaks of here, have no peremptory and determinate will of their own; but such only as, though disposed to some objects rather than others, agreeably to the present measure of their understandings, is yet always subordinate and resigned to the wiser and better will of him from whom they ask.

The other advantages and fruitfulness, which follow, are, the honour of God and religion, the justifying their own character and sincerity to the world, and the return of Christ's love, continued and exemplified in all the instances of kindness, which resemble that of God to his only begotten Son. Some, confining this passage as was intimated before, by the great quantity of fruit expected here, understand the prodigious number of converts, and the glorious successes of the Christian faith, which those apostles so zealously laboured after; and, that our Lord's intention was at that time to excite and inflame their zeal, from a consideration how great-

ly the propagation and establishment of the gospel would redound to his and his Father's honour; and how well it would become them who professed to retain to him as their master. For, *by being his disciples*, at the *eighth* verse, cannot be meant their now becoming such: such they already were, and had been, for a long time. But the true intent of that expression is, that this was the way to appear, and manifest to the world, that they are such. A phrase of much like importance with that in the *thirteenth* of this gospel, where it is said of mutual
 Ver. 35. love, *By this shall all men know, that ye are my disciples*. As charity there, so fruitfulness here, is recommended for a distinguishing mark, and sure indication, to whom they belong.

But, as I said, since not they only, but we, and all Christians, are branches of this Vine; and since bearing will be required from every branch; it will behove us to examine, what fruit it is, which this relation to Christ is fitted to produce, and upon the product whereof all the hopes and happiness of them, who have the honour to be so related, do depend.

When our blessed Saviour directs us to judge of the tree by its fruit; his meaning is, that the consequences visible, whether in the opinions or actions of men, will naturally be of the same piece and kind, with the principles from whence they are drawn. Now the Spirit and grace of God, (the ordinary influences whereof are imparted to Christians as such, for the general conduct of their lives) being that very vital principle, which renders the branches of this mystical Vine capable of bearing: the ready way of learning what is expected we should bear, is to inquire, what those dispositions and actions are, which the Scripture hath taken notice of, as effects most genuine and peculiar to the operations of this Divine Spirit in the hearts of men.

Now in this matter it is very easy to inform ourselves; for St. Paul acquaints us, that *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*: and again, *the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness and truth*. To the same purpose St.

Galat. v. 22, 23.

Ephes. v. 9.

2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7.

Peter exhorts men, that *giving all diligence*, they would *add to their faith virtue*, and to *virtue knowledge*, and to *knowledge temperance*, and to *temperance patience*, and to *patience godliness*, and to *godliness brotherly kindness*, and to *brotherly kindness charity*: all which he enforces with this argument, most exactly apposite to the subject I am upon; for *if these things be in you, and abound, they make you, that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*. In like manner we read of *having our fruit unto holiness*, of *bringing forth fruit unto God*, of *being fruitful in every good work*, of *being filled with the fruits of righteousness*, of *the wisdom from above* (which is but another name for the grace now in treating of), *full of mercy and good fruits*; and a multitude of other passages there are, much to the same importance.

Ver. 8.

Rom. vi. 22.

— vii. 4.

Col. i. 10.

Phil. i. 11.

James iii. 17.

These are the virtues, which shone so bright in the mind and conversation of our blessed Lord; the root, in whom the fulness of this Spirit dwelt: these therefore are the product, which must prove every profession of his doctrine to be a genuine, and living branch of this mystical vine: and therefore, men need not go far for satisfaction in this point, nor puzzle themselves with dark and intricate questions, about the signs of their union with Christ; since these are so easily discernible, and the only true marks of it. All which indeed is sufficiently intimated to us, by those words at the tenth verse, *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love*:

even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

But in regard the commandments of God extend to all the circumstances and conditions of men; and those moral virtues, mentioned by St. Paul just now as the genuine fruits of the Spirit, are of such different sorts, as not possibly to be put in practice at one and the same time; therefore, in order to our bearing much fruit, it suffices, that we be habitually disposed to all; but that we be actually exercised in such of them only, as the present occasion requires. And in the choice of these our different relations and capacities, our different fortunes and events in the world, must determine us: for as that branch is fruitful, which bears in proportion to the advantages of its place and situation, though not the richest fruit of the whole tree; so is that disciple esteemed to bear much fruit, who makes it his constant care to do all that good, which the abilities and opportunities afforded him by God render him capable of. Indeed it is here, as in the parable of the sower; which, although some brought forth a hundred, and other sixty, yet allows that, which brought forth but thirty, to be good ground: in one word, here is no room for discouragement or complaint, no tolerable pretence for sloth or despondency. The vine communicates its sap and fatness to every branch; and, though all do not partake of this in equal measure, yet each is accountable for such increase, as may answer to the quantity received. Be then our station high or low; be our attainments slender or large: whoever he be, that discharges the several duties in that post, in which Providence has placed him; whoever improves the degrees of grace, afforded him, to the best of his skill and power; this man *abides in the vine*, and does not only *bear*, but *bear much fruit*.

I shall make a brief reflection or two, and so conclude.

1. My reader will readily observe the agreement between the Epistle and Gospel for this day; which, though representing it under different images, do both agree, in describing the union between Christ and Christians: both tend to illustrate the advantages of it; both earnestly excite our utmost diligence to preserve it: with this only difference, that St. Paul insists upon the benefits accruing from thence to the body in general; but our Lord regards those chiefly, which belong to each member in particular. From both together, we may form an unanswerable argument, for keeping that unity, and promoting that edification, which, if neglected and broken, is certain, not only to disturb the peace of the church, but by cutting off, to destroy, at last, those very persons, who are guilty of making the breach. For it is by grace only, that men can be saved: that grace is no where promised to be given in an extraordinary way: it is first bestowed in, and ordinarily annexed to, the use of the sacraments, the ministry of the word, and other Christian ordinances; called, for that reason, *means of grace*. What therefore can become of those branches, who are severed from all communication with the trunk? And how careful ought every one to be, neither to break himself off wilfully; nor, by any unworthy and scandalous behaviour, to incur a forfeiture of those kindly influences; nor by a profane abuse or supine neglect of those religious offices, which are appointed to convey them, to draw down the fate of those sapless boughs, whose present curse (we are told here) is withering and decay, and whose end is to be burned!

2. I would call upon my reader to take notice, how pious, and prudent, and exactly agreeable to our Lord's declaration, that *without him we can do nothing*, our excellent established liturgy is. In this we daily acknowledge, that *all* Second Collect *holy desires, and all good counsels, and* Evening Service,

all just works proceed from God. In this, after the most exalted act of worship, we pray to be prevented with his most gracious favour, and furthered with his continual help, that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in him, we may glorify his holy name, and finally by his mercy obtain everlasting life. The acknowledgments of this kind are so frequent and full. No church ever took more care to declare her sense of the vanity and danger of relying upon our own sufficiency. None magnifies the freedom, none urges the necessity, of divine grace more industriously: none begs it with more humility and pathetic zeal. And they, who pray in dependance of our Saviour's promise to hear those that abide in him, cannot im-

Prayer in the end
of the Communion
Service.

* Adv. Sund. 1, 4.
Epiph. 1, 4.
Lent 1, 2.
Easter-Day.
Sund. 2, 3, 4, 5:
Trinity Sunday 1,
7, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18.
19. 25.

plore his assistance more suitably, than in some of the collects noted in the margin:* that particularly for the *Ninth* Sunday after *Trinity*; with which (it comes so close up to the scripture now in hand) I will finish this discourse.

Grant to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful; that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

St. Philip and St. James's Day.

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF ST. PHILIP.

John i. 43,
44, 45, 46.

THE first of St. John's gospel informs us, that Philip was of Bethsaida; that he was called by our Saviour, the day after Andrew and Peter; and was the instrument of bringing Nathanael first to Jesus. It does

not appear, by what authority Clemens of Alexandria makes him the person, who, when called by our Lord, desired leave to *go home first and bury his father*. Which occasioned that reply,

Strom. III. p.
436.

Matt. viii. 21,
22.

Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead. Our Lord, to try his faith, proposed to him the difficulty of feeding the multitudes in the wilderness. To him, the Greeks, who desired to see Jesus at the feast, made their first address. And with him our Lord had the discourse of shewing his disciples the Father, explained in the paraphrase of the Gospel for this day.

John vi. 5, 6, 7
——xii. 20, 21.

He is said to have preached in the Upper Asia, to have wrought many miracles in Hierapolis, a city of Phrygia, now called by the Turks, Pambuck Kulosi, from the rocks about it, which are white, like cotton. There is another Hierapolis in Syria, which some have thought the modern Aleppo; others, more probably, the old Beroe, or Berrhæa. In the former of these places (that of Phrygia) it is, that this apostle is said to have suffered martyrdom, by being fastened to a cross, and stoned to death. He was a married man, and had three daughters. Two whereof died virgins at Hierapolis. The third died at Ephesus, and appears from a passage in Clemens Alexander to have been married. These were persons inspired by the Holy Ghost, and are reckoned among the lights of the Asiatic churches. We know not of any writings he left behind him, though the Gnosticks are said to have alleged some such, in defence of their heresy.

Chrys. in 12.

Apost.

Euseb. Hist. Lib.

V. C. 24.

Clem. Alex.

Strom. III. p.

448.

Dr. Cave from

Epiphan. Heres.

26.

A short Account of St. James the Less.

HE was the Son of Alpheus or Cleophas, brother to Jude, and the brother, (according to the use of that word among the Jews, which extends it to all our near relations) or cousin-german, of our Lord. Distinguished from the other James, Zebedee's son, by the title of James *the Less*; and known also by the title of James *the Just*. This last denomination seems to have been given him, on account of his extraordinary sanctity. Which was such, that he is said to have the privilege of entering at pleasure into the holy place; and, for an evidence of his piety and perseverance in prayer, his knees are said, by constant kneeling, to have been hardened like to camels hoofs. The year after our Lord's passion, he was by the apostles made bishop of Jerusalem; as such he presided in the debates concerning circumcision, Acts xv. and is styled by St. Paul Galat. ii. 9. one of the pillars, and named before Peter and John.

He wrote the epistle, which goes under his name, as a check, most probably, to the errors of some converted Jews: who laid the whole stress of Christianity upon faith, and an outward profession of the truth: and lessened the regard due to good works, and a truly Christian conversation.

The occasion and manner of his death is related with the following circumstances. The governing part of the Jews enraged at the disappointment of their malice against St. Paul by his appeal Acts xxvi. to Cæsar, revenged it upon St. James. The death of Festus gave them an opportunity of

acting in this matter more arbitrarily, than otherwise they durst have done. Hieron. Catal.

In the interval therefore between that, and the arrival of his successor Albinus, Ananus the high priest summoned St. James, Euseb. Hist. Lib. II. C. 23. and required him to renounce the Christian faith. For the compelling him to do this in the most public manner, he was carried up to the battlements of the temple, and threatened to be cast down, in case of refusal. He, on the contrary, with greater vehemence confessed and exhorted to the faith of Christ, in the presence of those, who met to hear his renunciation of him. Provoked by such inflexible constancy, they threw him headlong down. The fall broke his legs, yet he prayed: the rabble below received him with showers of stones; and at last one with a club, such as is used by fullers in dressing their cloths, gave him a blow on the head, after which he presently expired. A fact, condemned even by their own historian, Joseph. Antiq. Lib. XX. C. 5. and said by him to be so, by all persons who bore any regard to justice or the laws. Insomuch, that for this offence against both, the high-priest, by whose authority it was committed, was in few months degraded, and another put in his stead.

THE COLLECT.

John xvii. 3.
— xvi. 6.

O ALMIGHTY God, whom truly to know is everlasting life; grant us perfectly to know thy Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life; that following the steps of thy holy apostles, St. Philip and St. James, we may stedfastly walk in the way that leadeth to eternal life, through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

JAMES i. 1.

1. James, Bishop of Jerusalem, the metropolis of the Jews, to all of that nation wheresoever dispersed, who are converted to the Christian faith, wishes health and prosperity.

1. *JAMES, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.*

2. Be not discouraged, but rejoice at afflictions, those especially, which God sends for the sake of your religion, and to prove your virtue and constancy.

2. *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;*

3. And that for this very good reason, because such trials exercise your patience.

3. *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*

4. A virtue, which, if improved to its just height, will contribute greatly to your Christian perfection.

4. *But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

5. If any therefore want wisdom to manage these trials aright, let him pray for it to God, who is always ready to grant it.

5. *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

6, 7. But these prayers must be made with a full persuasion of God's power and goodness, and firm resolutions of doing our own duty: otherwise they will not be successful.

6. *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind, and tossed.*

7. *For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.*

8. And a man divided in his own thoughts will never stick close to any thing.

8. *A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

9. Let the Christian in mean circumstances, think his poverty abundantly compensated by the opportunities this furnishes for the advancement of his faith and virtue.

9. *Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted :*

10, 11. Let him also who is fallen from a wealthy and prosperous condition, be well pleased with that change, which gives him a title to solid and substantial blessings, instead of that worldly prosperity, than which nothing can be more fading and inconstant.

10. *But the rich, in that he is made low : because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.*

11. *For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth : so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.*

12. Happy therefore is that man, who perseveres in his integrity ; because he shall not fail of that exceeding glorious and eternal reward, by which God, who cannot break his word, hath engaged to distinguish them, who, by continuing faithfully in his service, prove that they love and value nothing in comparison of him and his favour.

12. *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation : for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*

COMMENT.

THE condition of the Jews had, for several ages before our blessed Saviour's coming into the world, been very distressed. Indeed ever since the carrying away of the ten tribes by Salmaneser, and the captivity of Babylon, which followed shortly after under Nebuchadnezzar, 2 Kings xvii. xxv. great numbers of them had been scattered abroad in foreign countries ; and were not only deprived of the opportunities to settle and embody themselves, as formerly, in their own land ; but found very unkind treatment from the nations, among which they sojourned. The case in this res-

pect was not at all amended, but indeed made worse, to those of them, whom the irresistible evidences of truth had brought in to the acknowledgment and obedience of the Christian faith. Such had now, not only the malice of the heathens among whom they lived, to encounter; but the yet more implacable envy and rage of the far greater part of their own countrymen, who still continued in obstinacy and unbelief. The contempt and prejudices of the former, and the blind and bitter zeal of the latter, had extinguished all humanity; and instigated them to persecutions, in which cruelty was even reputed a virtue.

Under such circumstances, these persons were most proper to be addressed to by the apostle of this day. For he was himself, not only descended of the same stock, but made choice of by the other apostles to preside over the first Christian church, collected in their ancient capital city, Jerusalem. And when nature and character, and the tenderness of a charity resulting from both, had determined him to the persons; their present sufferings pointed out the subject proper, above all others, to begin his good counsel with. He therefore immediately falls upon those sufferings, which the feeling of them to whom he wrote would naturally make uppermost in their thoughts. He endeavours, first of all, to instruct them in the ends, the advantages, and the proper management of afflictions: those, more especially, which God thinks fit to bring men under, upon the account of truth and religion.

Now, because these are spoken to at large, and all comprehended under the title of temptations; it may, I conceive, be both seasonable and useful to take an occasion from hence of saying somewhat concerning the nature of temptations in general.

To *tempt*, in the full extent of the word, is to *try*: and, by analogy, whatever is a trial of our virtue may be called a temptation. In this most compre-

hensive signification we may say, that every circumstance, every event of human life, is a temptation. Because there is not any one of these, but according as it falls under the principle of free choice natural to mankind, is capable of being used to right, or abused to wrong, purposes ; and so, of becoming the occasion of our doing well or ill, in the management of it.

But, in regard some of these require less skill and resolution to manage them, than others ; and, since the use proper to be made of them is so little disagreeable to our reason and inclination, that they can hardly deserve to be called trials ; therefore that name is generally confined to such, as carry apparent danger and difficulty in them. Such, as offer violence to flesh and blood ; and create great struggles, between the affections of nature, and the principles of religion. Hence it comes to pass, that great afflictions, of any kind whatsoever, and especially the sufferings undergone for the sake of God and a good conscience, are peculiarly distinguished by the title of temptations.

In all these cases the Scripture acknowledges temptations to come from God. Thus he is said to tempt Abraham, when commanding him to sacrifice Isaac : the conflict, which must naturally rise between the natural affection to a son, the son of his old age, his only son, the son of promise, and the consideration of his obedience due to that command ; being the most difficult experiment of faith in, and love to, God, that perhaps was ever made : and consequently, the virtue of complying with it, in despite of so much suggested for declining it, is the noblest instance to be met with in story. Thus again, the temptations of affliction and suffering in a good cause, are frequently attributed to God in Scripture ; even when most violent, and such as the weakness of human nature is aptest to startle at, and to shrink back from. This is plainly the mean-

ing of several passages, which do not only mention God's trying men in their hearts; but intimate the severe manner of doing it, by comparing the afflictions themselves to fire, and the persons enduring them to metals passing through, and separated from their dross in that fire. Hence they are said to be

Psal. lxvi. 10.

Zech. xiii. 9.

Ezek. xxii. 20. 22.

1 Pet. i. 7.

tried, to be refined, to be melted as silver and gold; and with regard to persecutions, upon the account of religion in particular, the trial of

Christians is said to be *much more precious than that of silver and gold which perisheth, though it be tried by fire; and such sufferings are*

iv. 12. *called a fiery trial, or according to the more literal rendering, a fire kindled for their temptation.*

Now as God is said expressly to be the author of these temptations, so he ordains them for very wise and kind reasons, of which I shall have occasion to take notice in the sequel of this discourse.

There is another sort of temptation, in the same sense of trying; by which men are said to tempt God, when they adventure upon dangerous experiments of his power and goodness. Such as import either a wicked distrust of, or unwarrantable presumings upon, his protection and care, or some of his divine perfections. So the Israel-

Psal. lxxvii. 18.

Numb. xi. 4.

Exod. xvii. 4.

Matth. iv. 5, 6.

ites tempted God in the wilderness, when questioning his ability to supply their wants: and so our Saviour was urged to cast himself *down from a*

pinnacle of the temple, in reliance upon a promise of the angels bearing him up. The fallacy of which reasoning he refuted by that plain command in the

Ver. 7.

Matth. xvi. 1.

— xix. 3.

— xxii. 35.

John viii. 6.

law, *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.* Thus the Pharisees and lawyers frequently *tempted* Christ, by demanding signs which they thought above his power; and by asking ensnaring

questions, which they supposed would gravel him. And thus Ananias and Sapphira are said to have *tempted the Spirit of the Lord* by lying to St. Peter, in confidence, that their fraud would pass upon the apostles; and that the Holy Ghost, wherewith they were inspired, could not be conscious of or discover their secret collusion. But this is an application of the word, no way belonging to the place in hand: another more restrained sense of it there is, which imports seducing men into sin. Thus the devil is most emphatically styled the *tempter*: as always lying in wait, and industriously suggesting evil thoughts: either drawing us from good purposes, or egging us on, and emboldening us in wicked ones.

Acts v. 9.

1 Thess. iii. 5.

1 Cor. vii. 5.

This sort of temptation is also ascribed to the corrupt inclinations of our own hearts. Particularly in this chapter: for here the apostle declares, that it cannot without the utmost injustice and impiety be ascribed to God, in that remarkable text, ver. 13, 14. *Let no man, when he is tempted say, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*

The truth is, in all seducement the tempter plays our own artillery upon us. For man, in his primitive purity, was made capable of standing or falling by a limited understanding possible to be imposed upon, and by a liberty of will to choose, according to the true or false appearances of good. But by the corruption which, since the fall, mankind lie under, these faculties are miserably weakened: the understanding is clouded, the will warped, and that concupiscence, which signifies a strong propension to sensuality and wickedness, is become a fit matter for the subtle enemy of souls to work upon. By these all the evil motions excited in us, find the mind disposed to receive and indulge them; and all

the deluding representations put upon the things of the world, and the appetites of nature, are now much more apt to deceive us into a wrong choice, and to draw us off from the true principles of right reason and duty. When therefore a man is tempted by his own *lust*, he is also tempted of the devil; and when tempted of the devil, he is tempted of his own *lust*. Because the corruption of our nature, meant by that word *lust*, is the instrument the devil makes use of; and it is our present unhappiness to have a false party within, which holds correspondence with the enemy, and furnishes those very arms that he labours to slay us by. For, were it not for the depravity of our sensual appetites and passions, we should find it much more easy to form right judgments, and make wise choices of things. And were it not for the malice and cunning of our spiritual adversary without, who takes advantage of these disorders and frailties of lapsed human nature; the affections of our own breasts, and the appointments of Providence concerning us, which in the design of them are temptations of experiment only, would not, as now they so often do, prove temptations of seducement in the issue and unhappy event of them.

Thus much, one would hope, might suffice to shew how men are said in Scripture to be tempted of God; and how, of the devil, and their own treacherous naughty hearts. What those temptations are, which deserve our joy and thanks; and what those, which it is our duty with our utmost might to strive and pray against. But, as we daily imitate our first parents in their transgression, so do we in their contrivances to cloak and excuse it too.

Gen. iii. 12. Adam endeavoured to mitigate his guilt, by alleging, that a woman given by God enticed him to it. His sinful and no less blasphemous posterity argue after the same manner; and can by no means think the command of this apostle

reasonable, but endeavour to hide their iniquity, as Adam, by making God a party in it too : a flaming, but it is much to be suspected a common impiety ; frequent in the private imaginations of many, who yet have the modesty not to espouse and openly avow it. But some have done even this, and produced what they esteem their strong reasons. Which I cannot but think it may be useful, *first*, to propose ; and *then* to offer such considerations in return to them as may detect the vanity of this shift, and prevent the wickedness of running to a shelter, which, instead of a covering, will prove our utter confusion.

Now upon this occasion, some have had the confidence to argue as follows : that, as to our weakness and corruption, God knows it perfectly ; and how far we are from being an equal match for the enemy that attacks us. God declares in Scripture, that he hates sin, that he tempts no man to sin, that he willeth not the death of a sinner. But does he not suffer man to be tempted ? Nay, does he not ordain the very temptations ; that is to say, those very things and events, which become occasions of sin to them ? And is not this to will their death, and to destroy his sheep, when he does not only not destroy the wolf, but permits the sheep to come daily and hourly in the wolf's way ? In a word, if God do indeed hate sin, why (say they) does he not prevent it effectually, by cutting off at once all those occasions from whence sin comes ?

These are pretences sometimes laid hold on, to silence the reproaches of a guilty conscience, and assuage the terrible expectations of the wrath to come : at other times insultingly advanced, as objections against the Divine Providence in general ; or at least as difficulties, which bear very hard upon the justice and holiness, and goodness of that Being, who is said to govern the world in methods of a

wisdom tempered with, and inseparable from, all these perfections.

Now in answer hereunto, it is to be observed, that the objectors agree with us in one general principle; which is, that it cannot by any means consist with the notions we ought to entertain of God, to suppose that a Being perfectly good should lead men into inevitable ruin; or, that a Being perfectly holy should be author of, or partaker in, the sins of men; or, that a Being perfectly just should punish men for facts by himself ordained, and without any seeking or concurrence of their own, necessarily brought upon them. Thus much being premised, as out of the question, let us see how much the following particulars will avail toward satisfying all reasonable scruples about this matter.

1. First then, let it be considered, whether, when the several beings in the universe are created in excellent order, and a gradual ascent of perfections, it can misbecome their Creator to continue them in that order. Now the wisdom of the Creator seems chiefly to be manifested, by the peculiar excellencies of the several sorts of creatures: and the standing beauty of the creation is illustrated, by each sort acting in consent and proportion to their respective powers and qualifications. Among all the stations, in those regular distances, none seems more wonderful, than that assigned to man. He stands upon the confines, and is the common centre of union as it were between the material and spiritual world. Here is an incorruptible soul inhabiting a body corruptible; consequently fit to be acted upon by passions and appetites, and since tainted with original sin, whereby it is greatly depressed, toward flesh and sense. But, that primitive constitution and his supervening corruption notwithstanding, a rational soul it is; and, as such, endued with a power of thinking, comparing, judging, and determining its own choice ac-

cordingly. We cannot say indeed, that, in these operations, the human soul is so clear, or so equally poised, as formerly. But, that even the present remains of this freedom are an excellence, cannot be denied. For liberty is a privilege, which all the world are fond of, and perpetually contending for. And those men know very little of the dignity of human nature, who do not allow that of the will to be the most valuable liberty of any. Consequently, it can be no reflection upon God to preserve men in this liberty; or to suffer the laying such objects before them, as in their present station they may make an unwise choice of: for this is the condition of a creature, frail and fallible, as well as free. But free his will is, so as to be the proper internal principle of all his actions. And if that freedom be (as alas it is) too often employed amiss; he who gave the privilege, ought not to be reproached for the abuse of it. Least of all, when not only every actual abuse of it, but every habit or disposition in us, tending that way, and all the unhappy consequences of both, are owing to man himself. On the other hand; if these bents and warpings of the will had destroyed all freedom in us, what trifling, what mockery are those scriptures, which expostulate with men, and ask, *Why they will die?* Which call upon them, *to turn themselves from their iniquities;* which declare wicked people to be *destroyed by the perverseness of their own folly;* and lastly, which bespeak men in such solemn manner, *I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.*

Ezek. xviii. 30, 31.

Prov. xi. 3. i. 31,

32.

Deut. xxx. 19.

2. The last particular vindicated the *faculty* of the will; let us in this look to the *objects* of it. Which indeed are such, that they, who are desirous

to have an effectual end put to all vice, by God not suffering men to be tempted, seem not to be sufficiently aware, that the same method would be every whit as effectual for putting an end to all virtue too. For, to denominate any thing virtuous, it is necessary, not only that there be a contrary evil, but also, that the evil have something in it, which may invite us under the appearance of some good. Now that appearance is the mover of our affections, and the very thing which makes the temptation. For it is our unhappiness and our fault, to be drawn by the bias of appetite and sense; and it is thought rashness, or prejudice, or weakness in balancing of motives, that we suffer the delusion of false appearances to prevail, and prefer real evil disguised, before real good. Now the stronger those motives to sin are, which we resist, and the more resolutely we persevere in that resistance, the greater is our virtue and our reward. And if there were no motives to be resisted, then doing well would not entitle us to virtue or reward either. If this be so, then our present temptations, by furnishing opportunities for the exercise of our virtue, do plainly add both to our present commendation, and to our future happiness. Nay, and in proportion as the temptation is sharper and more difficult to be endured, the more valuable is the victory, and the more joyful the triumph. And because the exposing ourselves, and all that is dear to us, is a trial which flesh and blood is of all others most apt to boggle and recoil at, the apostle does here represent the case of suffering for Christ and his religion, as such a one. And not content with patiently enduring, he commands his afflicted countrymen even to rejoice in such trying circumstances; upon account of that glorious and beneficial distinction, which unshaken courage and constancy would make for them here; and of the

Ver. 2, 3; 4. 12.

abundant recompense, which would be thus secured to them hereafter.

3. But *thirdly*, As oft as the subject now under debate comes into our minds, let us be sure to take this along with us, that the objects without the solicitations from within, and the suggestions of our great enemy working upon both, when considered all together, are yet *but* temptations ; that is, they try us only, but they cannot so force us, as that any man should perish without his own consent. In a word, temptations are not properly the causes, but merely the occasion and instruments of sin. And even then, they are not such by any natural tendency of their own, but altogether made such by our neglect or mismanagement. Can any thing be plainer than this is made, by the different effects and consequences of the dispensations of Providence, as they happen to be the portion of different men ? the afflictions sent by God, do not they aggravate the guilt of some, by provoking impatience and rage, murmuring and despair ? and yet the very same afflictions brighten the virtue of others, and, by the exercise of patience and meekness, faith and heavenly-mindedness, draw their souls closer, and render them dearer to God. The riches God bestows, are they not to one man, like the camel to the needle's eye, an obstruction to his entrance into the kingdom of heaven ? and yet even these promote the salvation of others, *who make to themselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness*, and open a more abundant passage into *everlasting habitations*. These are cases obvious to every man's senses and experience. And reason will prove as evidently in all the kinds and degrees of them, that temptations do nothing of themselves : that the result and issue depends constantly upon the person tried by them : and that such issue will be prejudicial or profitable, not according to the quality or the degree of the trial, but according to the hand it

Luke xvi. 9.

shall fall into, and the uses which shall be made of it.

4. I would not be supposed all this while to forget the deplorable impotence of human nature, and that unhappy bent of passion and inclination, which, like a bias put the wrong way, draws us much more strongly to evil than good. But, blessed be God, we can add in the *last* place, that there is a provision made for this also, by the assistances of that grace which is promised to all our weaknesses and wants; upon condition it be earnestly sought, and diligently improved. So that when He, who says,

John xv. 5.

Matt. vii. 7.

John vi. 37.

Matt. xxv. 29.

2 Cor. xii. 9.

Heb. xiii. 5.

Without me ye can do nothing; hath like wise said, Ask and ye shall receive; And him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out; And, To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; And

My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness; and, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee: When the same apostle, who acknowledges that he was not sufficient

2 Cor. iii. 5.

Phil. iv. 13.

of himself to think any thing as of himself, does yet at another time declare himself able to do even all things through Christ who strengthens him; and lays down this as a rule, that obtains in all God's proceedings, and as an evidence of the faithfulness, from which he can never depart,

1 Cor. x. 13.

that he will not suffer his servants to be tempted above that they are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it. When such scriptures as these, I say, come to be fairly weighed, they are great and gracious supports, enough to buoy up the sinking spirits of any true Christian under the severest trials: enough to convince any impartial considerer, that God, who gave men a power of choice, is wise and good in leaving them to the use of it: that He, who makes temptation capable of contributing to their virtue and happiness, no less than to their guilt,

and misery, is by no means chargeable with their sins: and that He, who forsakes not the faithful, nor ever fails to sustain the weak, does all that can become him to do with creatures, so created at first, and so corrupted at present, as mankind are: creatures, not supposed to have sufficient powers of their own; and therefore directed here by St. James, upon a certain presumption of their wants, from whence, and upon what terms, to expect supplies. For that is manifestly his meaning, from the *fourth* to the *ninth* verse: which I shall explain as briefly as I can, by inquiring into the nature of the thing he commands his afflicted brethren to pray for; and then, into the qualification he requires, for rendering those prayers successful.

The blessing to be prayed for is *wisdom*; under which we may reasonably suppose all that ability of doing well to be comprehended, which is more commonly styled the Grace, or Spirit, of God. For, in regard the will and understanding are only distinct operations of one and the same mind; and whatsoever the understanding conceives and represents as best, the will never fails to choose; it follows, that a true information of the judgment is not only an effectual security, but even a necessary cause, of a right determination of the will. Provided always, that by such information be meant not only a cold and speculative notion of the truth and nature of things, but a lively sense and just calculation, of their importance and respective consequences to us. For, as no man in his wits ever chose evil, except under the notion of good; so neither did any ever choose it, except under the notion of a good, greater, as was at that instant presumed, than some other good, then laid in the balance against it.

The motives, or several sorts of good, concerned in moral actions, are reducible to three heads; the virtue or honesty, the profit, and the pleasure of them. The more of these concur, the stronger

is the inducement. But the first is of so great consideration, that both the other are not an equivalent, nor ought to prevail without it, much less against it: that is, no prospect of pleasure or advantage will justify an action vicious and infamous. Now, in regard those advantages and pleasures are also of different kinds, it requires great skill and integrity to make a just computation and choice between them: to give a due preference, as the profit happens to be greater or less, present or future; and as the pleasure proposed is durable or fugitive, intellectual or sensual. In the present depraved state of human nature, the last of these motives seems most powerfully to affect us. And of them again such pleasures, as most gratify sense, and cannot be of any long continuance. The only method therefore of securing ourselves from the danger of being deluded by these, is to weigh against them the virtue, the advantage, and the delights of another kind, which attend things unacceptable to flesh and blood. But, this being all a violence to our corrupt inclinations, we must be obliged to a principle superior to nature for our success in attempting it: especially in afflictions, which the apostle truly confesses, *do seem for the present not only not* Heb. xii. 11. *joyous, but grievous.* And more particularly yet in those, which are voluntary afflictions, and chosen for the sake of God and religion, (the case of the converts here applied to by St. James) no *wisdom* less than that from above, can produce and establish resolution and perseverance in sufferings, to which mankind have the strongest and most irreconcilable aversions. This therefore is the mercy, which they, and all afflicted Christians are encouraged to ask of God. And the mighty influence and benefit of it, under such trying circumstances, may be expected to answer our purposes and wants, the several ways that follow.

1. In enlightening the minds of men to see and

attend to the many excellent reasons, which move God to ordain or permit such afflictions upon his servants. Such are, the trial of their virtue; as the best tempered arms are proved by a higher charge than ordinary: the increase of their spiritual strength; exercise contributing to that of the mind, no less than that of the body; the prevention of spiritual pride, and security; by such experiment of their own weakness left to themselves; and of their still remaining liable to temptation, notwithstanding any attainments in grace and virtue made by them, though never so happily heretofore; the correcting some past misdemeanour, or subduing some rebellious lusts, which oftentimes make insurrection, and interrupt the piety even of very good men; magnifying the power of divine grace, in carrying them through difficulties, which human nature, destitute of such assistances, had not been able to bear up against; shewing to the world examples of surprising patience, resolution, and firmness of mind, to provoke their imitation, and encourage the honest but feeble intentions of others; weaning the affections from things here below; raising the mind by heavenly dispositions, and, in proportion to their present sufferings, persuading them of a sure and more abundant recompense, for the crown of their labours at the last great day.

These are some of the many excellent ends served by the sufferings of good men. Which yet are all overlooked or forgotten, unless represented faithfully to the mind by a wisdom inspired from above. To this we owe the very remembrance, to this the just valuation of them. This teaches us the reasonableness of glorifying God, in any way of his own choosing; the preference due to profit above pleasure; and how much better it is for us, that our minds should be improved, than that our senses should be gratified. This takes off from the present smart by feeling of God's favour; and more than

makes amends for bodily pain and grief, by the ravishing satisfactions of a good conscience. But especially this sets the excellency of our reward always in view, and the unspeakable kindness of that Father, by whose infinitely wise providence the *light affliction for a moment* is so ordered as to *work out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

2. The wisdom mentioned here is yet farther useful, by discovering to us the ends aimed at in our own particular afflictions, and the means best fitted for attaining those ends. The former observation propounded only the ends of affliction in general: which are served, not all at once, but some in one time and person, some in another, as circumstances differ, and occasions require. In this variety therefore of good uses, it is of the utmost importance rightly to understand, which should be chiefly applied, and what sort of account God expects from each dispensation of his providence toward our own selves. In this disquisition, the state of our souls, and the nature and kind of our affliction, are principal articles. These, when the grace of God hath helped us to descry, (as, whether our sufferings be designed for correction or some vice, or whether for the exercise and exemplification of some virtue, and the like) the next proof of our spiritual skill must be seen in such a temper and behaviour, as may answer that purpose of God concerning us. If this be to chastise us, repentance must be our care; if to try us, patience and perseverance; if to promote the honour of religion, meekness and charity to our persecutors; and a deportment so discreet and void of offence, as may oblige those of a contrary judgment to glorify God, by the good works they shall behold in us. In short, this will be a light to our eyes, and a guide to our feet. A wisdom to salvation, by which we shall at once be enabled to know, and to practise our duty; to bring forth the fruits

of righteousness, and to bear each fruit in its proper kind and season. Particularly, in suffering for the sake of religion, (which is the case before us, and seems the most difficult of any) this heavenly wisdom is absolutely necessary to distinguish the causes and proper times of suffering. What those are, which require our enduring and resisting even unto blood; and, when the serpent ought to be mixt with the dove, by prudently declining a needless trial: what means are fit to be used for our own preservation; which, if neglected, our pretended martyrdom would be the sacrifice of fools: and, when it is, that we are to cast ourselves entirely upon Providence, and esteem the very sorest temptations matter of joy to us.

Such is the grace which St. James here would have his persecuted brethren, and indeed the afflicted in general, to ask of God. And so properly it is styled wisdom: as a principle, both convincing their judgments of the wise and kind ends, and conducting them in the use of means most suitable to the ends of their respective trials. It remains now, only that I say something to the other point, which concerns the qualification requisite to render the prayers of this wisdom successful: and that shall be done very briefly.

Among the promises of grace produced at the entrance upon this head, the *first* enjoins *asking*, as a necessary preliminary to *receiving*. Now this *asking* the apostle tells us here must be in *faith*, *without doubting* and *wavering*, and a *double mind*. Whereby, there is no question, but the two following particulars are intended:

1. *First*, A stedfast reliance upon God for obtaining such succour and relief (that is, such measures of his grace and favour) as he sees expedient for us. It is plain from infinite passages of Holy Writ, that God expects we should apply to him in our wants, and that we should do it with repeated and continued

earnestness. But then it is equally plain to any who consider those passages, that our importunity is acceptable and prevalent with God, as it is a testimony of our unshaken faith in, and humble dependence upon, him: in a word, that it does not extort the mercy he is loth to grant, but makes us fit to receive the blessings he delights liberally to bestow. Accordingly, where the deliverance of his servants, and the granting of their prayers are mentioned, Psal. xxxiii. 10. we find them generally attributed to — xxxii. 20, their *hope* and *trust*, their *waiting for*, 21. and *casting their burden upon, God*. For — lv. 22. this indeed is giving him the glory due Isa. xxvi. 3, 4 to his divine perfections. We must not imagine any difficulties too great for him to vanquish, for that detracts from his omnipotence; we must not suppose our own faults and frailties (when unaffected and repented of) will shut his ears against our cries, for that were a disparagement to his mercy and his truth. Least of all must we come to him with any confidence in ourselves; for that were to make our prayers a mockery, and presume to divide the honour of our success with him. And, whatever our own endeavours may be, (and they ought to be what they can) yet the events, nay the very power of endeavouring, must be acknowledged entirely his. To be short, he is to be our sole stay and trust; and upon him we are to rest with a firmness, which may compose our fears, prevent all anxiety of thought, set us above all despondencies, possess us with an impregnable persuasion of his affection for us: such lastly, as may represent the aids, which we implore with a due resignation of our spirits to his heavenly will and wisdom, (all that we really stand in need of) to be as certain to us, as if we already had them in actual possession.

2. The other thing intended here, is steadiness in our duty. A well-weighed and fixed resolution, that no extremities shall drive us to despair, nor

abate our love and zeal: a prudent use of the means put into our hands, without which we do not so properly trust God, as tempt him: and an utter abhorrence of all unlawful means for our ease and rescue. For, by recourse to such, we plainly break off with God, take the matter out of his hands, give up his protection, and formally discharge his providence from any further care of us. To this purpose a very ancient writer of the church interprets the *double mind* here, of a man divided in his affections between this and the next world: floating like a vessel without ballast, with wind and tide contrary. Such is the instability spoken of at the *eighth* verse, where conscience of duty, fear of punishment, and hope of heaven draw one way; and a violent gust of trouble, and worldly considerations, drive another. And, according as either of these opposite motives make a stronger or weaker impression, the man's piety and virtue are proportionably more intense or remiss. Now such a man cannot, as St. James observes, *think* (or reasonably expect) to *receive any thing* (any of this wisdom) *from God*; because he is defective in the very condition, upon which it is promised. Sincerity and constancy are our part; but these belong to none, *whose hearts are not whole with God, and who continue not stedfast in his covenant*. His honour and his truth stand unalterably engaged in favour of those brave soldiers of Christ, who in this fight of afflictions strive lawfully and manfully: but they have no right to either deliverance or support, who, though content to march under his banner while the service is easy, do yet, when combat comes on, and the action grows hot, throw down their arms and desert to the enemy. The Christian warfare is such as allows of no capitulation. For, as the cause is God's, so is the strength that defends it. And, is it to be imagined, that a formal petition should prevail for additional recruits, to them who have betrayed the

supplies they received before? If therefore we desire God should strengthen our weakness, we must determine to employ the courage and powers he inspires. We must, in full assurance of his might, resolve to stand it out to the last ; which is indeed

2 Tim. ii. 13. resolving to conquer and triumph. For

He is faithful, he cannot deny himself; and they who call in his succours against any sort of tribulations or trials, with the two dispositions I have been treating of, never yet did, never shall, seek them in vain.

I own, there are many cases, from whence unwary people might be apt to conclude, that even such prayers are not effectually heard. But I must add, that many prayers are then most effectually heard, when such men fondly suspect the quite contrary. For the minds so prepared, as we have just now seen, always esteem their addresses most successful, when answered in that way, which the divine wisdom knows to be best for them. Not always by deliverance out of afflictions, because the continuance of these may be more for the glory of God, and their own good. Supposing then that these be even lengthened, they are heard, if their own patience be lengthened out with them. Suppose the degree of them to be yet more exquisite, they are heard if the measure of their spiritual consolation and support do at the same time increase. Nay, supposing the extremity to be such, as even foils these combatants for a season ; yet, notwithstanding such disgrace, they are heard, if God renew their strength, pour in more plentiful reliefs of grace, and so bring good out of evil, that they grow wise and wary by past dangers, and not only recover their standing, but even profit themselves of their fall. For it is an indispensable part of our duty cheerfully to submit to the divine wisdom, both for the duration and the degree of our trials ; and firmly to depend upon it for such a final issue, as shall not

fail at last to be most for our advantage. And therefore, if these petitioners shall be oppressed, tormented, and barbarously slain in a good cause, yet even then they are heard too. Then, in the most beneficial sense of all; for *blessed* above all others *is the man*, that thus *endureth* temptation, because sure to *receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him*. And a crown of more than common weight and lustre, no doubt, is laid up for those, who give this last proof of their fidelity and love to him.

Ver. 12.

THE GOSPEL.

JOHN xiv. 1.

PARAPHRASE.

1. **A**ND Jesus said unto his disciples, *Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*

quent upon it: but support your hearts with faith in the Father, and in me, who am one with the Father, and consequently able to defend you in the execution of my commands.

2. *In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you.*

1. Be not discouraged at my departure, or the troubles consequent upon it: but support your hearts with faith in the Father, and in me, who am one with the Father, and consequently able to defend you in the execution of my commands.

2. Able also to reward you with durable and abundant happiness in heaven.

3. *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.*

and accordingly I will in due time come back from thence again, and receive you up thither, to dwell with me for ever.

4. *And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.*

have been often told; and so you have likewise of the way that leads thither, so that you need not any enlargement on these points.

3. Whither one purpose of my returning is to gain access for you:

4. That this is the place to which I am going, you

5. *Thomas saith unto him, Lord we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way.*

6. I am the guide and director, and so the way; I am the teacher of the truth, revealed for this purpose, and so the truth; I am the author and only source of happiness eternal, and so the life; to the enjoyment whereof with my Father no man can attain, except by obeying and relying upon me, in these several capacities.

6. *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

7. Do not therefore complain that you know not my Father to whom I am going: for they who know me and my doctrine, know him; and they who see my miracles and me, see him.

7. *If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.*

8. Philip conceiving grossly of this sight, and al-
luding possibly to some manifestations, which God was pleased to make of himself to Moses, Elias, and the like, desires some sensible representation of the Father.

8. *Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.*

9. This request of our Lord reproves, by answering, that the bodily sight of him had not fully acquainted Philip with him. For to discern nothing more than human in the Son, was not to know the Son; and to descry the divine perfections under that veil of humanity, was to see the Father in the Son.

9. *Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me Philip? he that hath seen me, hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father.*

10, 11. These two being one in substance, and mutually in each other, as original and image: and in this respect, neither of them an object of bodily

10. *Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.*

11. *Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works sake.*

sight, they are seen by the mind contemplating their divine perfections. Such were the wisdom, goodness, truth of the Father, in the Son's doctrine, and the power of the Father in the Son's miracles. The union in this latter respect being a sensible demonstration of their union in the rest.

12. *Verily verily I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do ; because I go unto my Father.*

Christ promises to impart his power to these disciples so effectually, that the operations of it in their hands should be more amazing, than even those of it in his own had been.

13. *And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*

ministry, with the invocation of his name, and interposition of his power, should be insuperable to them. By which means the Christian religion should be promoted, and so bring honour to the Father, in the manner he chooses to be served and glorified by.

14. *If ye shall ask any thing in my name I will do it.*

Christ) I once more promise, that I will do this for you.

12. As a further evidence whereof, and that he was to be exalted, not destroyed by dying ;

13. Nothing, which they should attempt in the execution of their

14. And to remove all doubt of my power (says

COMMENT.

IN the Epistle, one of our Lord's apostles directs and comforts his suffering fellow-Christians under the present feeling and smart of temptations ; in the Gospel for this festival, our Lord himself comforts that, and the rest of his brethren the apostles, under the melancholy prospect of them. The arguments for their support are the same in substance, as the troubles they were to be sustained under are the same in kind ; such difficulties principally, as the preaching or profession of the gospel should expose them to. But as the afflictions of good men in general are an object of the divine mercy and

entitle the patient sufferers to the assistance of grace at present, and a glorious recompense hereafter: so are we allowed, under due limitations, to apply these promises proportionably to the pains and patience of all Christ's faithful servants, how different soever in other respects their capacities and sufferings may happen to be.

Our Lord hath said in the chapter Chap. xiii. 36. before, that, to the place whither he was then going, St. Peter could not *follow him* immediately, but he should *follow him afterwards*. The same comfort is here extended to the rest of the apostles; who indeed were appointed to follow him, in the same way of torments and death for the truth's sake: and the terms of this consolation justify the hopes of all others, who follow him in meekness and constancy, integrity and piety, though not in the like painful steps of dying for the testimony of the same truth.

The excellence of the reward provided for all such, is illustrated in three particulars. (1.) The durableness of it, intimated by the word *mansions*: places of abode; opposed to that uncertain condition of things below, represented elsewhere Heb. xiii. 14. where by our *having here no continuing city*. (2.) The abundance of that provision; for those mansions are *many*, and furnish room for all, who make it their care to seek and to be qualified for them, be the number of such never so great. (3.) The exquisiteness of the felicity which shall be then attained; in regard these mansions are in *Christ's Father's house*, where all happiness and perfection dwells. For in God's presence is *fulness of joy, and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore*. Psal. xvi. 11.

From hence our blessed Saviour proceeds to shew, that the glorious object of this hope is entirely owing to him. This discourse is occasioned by the

gross apprehensions of two apostles, whose slowness of understanding turned to our profit, by opening the way to a full declaration of our Lord's essential unity with God the Father; and to most express assertions of his power and readiness effectually to answer the requests put up in his name, by plentiful supplies of all necessary assistances and graces of the Holy Spirit.

That this promise was literally and primarily intended and made good to the apostles, by the extraordinary gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost, imparted to them at the day of Pentecost, and at other times afterwards, as their circumstances required, is not to be denied. But there are other gifts of that Spirit, and several blessings no less requisite, for the ordinary conduct of our actions, for the honour of God and religion, and for the leading men in all ages to the same blissful mansions. These also are such as must be sought after the same manner, and expected on prayers alike conditioned. And therefore, to render this scripture of as general use and consolation, as the words of it will in their utmost latitude import, I shall consider the two last verses of the gospel, with relation to the prayers of good men at large. And having treated formerly of sundry points wherein this subject is concerned, I will employ my reader's thoughts on one, purposely reserved for the present occasion. That, I mean, which is here enjoined, as a condition necessary to qualify all our prayers for success, which is *asking in the name of Christ*.

Now a thing is said in scripture to be done in the name of another four several ways. Either, (1.) When it is done at the command of and by commission from another. Or, (2.) When men act or do it for the service and honour of another. Or, (3.) When they proceed in conformity to the rules and directions set by that other. Or, (4.) When they interpose the authority and mediation, the sake

John v. 43.

— x. 25.

Exod. v. 23.

Deut. xviii. 19, 20.

Acts iv. 17, 18.

— v. 40.

Acts xv. 26.

— v. 41.

1 Pet. iv. 14.

Acts v. 30.

Col. iii. 17.

1 Cor. vi. 11.

Acts x. 43.

John xx. 31.

Eph. v. 20.

and merits, of another. In these several senses Christ is said to *come*, and to *act* in his *Father's name*; the *prophets*, to *speak* in *God's*, and the *apostles* in *Christ's name*; and *men* to *hazard their lives*, and to *suffer reproach for his name*; and to *do wonders*, nay, to *do all things in his name*. And, in the last of these significations, we read of *being justified*, *receiving remission of sins*, *having life*, and *giving thanks to God, in his name*.

1. In the first of these senses men may be said to ask in *Christ's name*, when they come to God, in obedience to Christ's command, and from a sense that it is their duty so to do. So did the apostles, when in a just diffidence of any power or holiness of their own, they implored supernatural abilities, proper for the efficacious discharge of a trust by him committed to them. So David describes his own practice, and the foundation of it, Psal. xxvii. 8. *When thou saidst unto me, Seek my face; my heart said, Thy face, Lord, will I seek*. And this ought indeed to be the sense of us all, at every approach toward the throne of grace. For a very little reflection upon the infinite majesty of God, and the wretched vileness of such creatures as we are, would suffice to condemn the offering of any sort of correspondence with a Deity so pure, so high, of arrogance and presumption. Some warrant therefore was necessary to countenance and justify those addresses, the boldness whereof, without such encouragement, would be unseemly and inexcusable. But when our gracious Lord hath condescended not only to allow, but with all imaginable kindness to invite, nay, with the most peremptory injunctions to require, our frequent and constant applications: when he hath called us, and directed us to come

with all the modest assurance and dutiful importunity, usual in the requests of children to a father, or of one dear and intimate friend to another; what can be alleged in extenuation of their fault, who shew themselves insensible of such a mercy, such a privilege? And how shall they escape, who neglect to use the one, and thrust the other away from them? How can men look upon prayer as a matter of no consequence, such as may be performed or let alone at pleasure; such as God neither needs, nor will be moved by? In short, as a homage, if it be a fit one, by which no honour, no advantage accrues to the part paying, but all to the person receiving it? When irreligion and profaneness shall obtrude such notions as these; and when the too general disuse of prayer seems to say, they are too greedily imbibed: it is highly requisite men should be told, that duty as well as interest hath a part in this matter; that men should pray, in an apprehension of their being bound to do so. And therefore they that *ask in Christ's name*, must first of all acknowledge Christ's authority. They must proceed, I mean, upon a principle of conscience, as performing a service, and an instance of homage. A service owing from a dependent creature to an infinite and Almighty Creator; and encouraged by positive commands and affectionate exhortations. These ought always to weigh very much with a disciple, when so often and so earnestly inculcated, by so great, so gracious a Master. And that, in so kind a manner, as well as with so just authority, that none would, none in reason can, think himself at liberty to dispute or dispense with the command. Let this then be our first care, this our first mark of *asking in Christ's name*; that we pray in due deference to his order, in confidence of the encouragement given by him; and *ask*, because, as his servants and followers, we find ourselves under indispensable obligations;

such as render us guilty of a very great sin, should we neglect *asking*.

2. This direction of *asking in Christ's name* may be also interpreted so, as to concern the ends proposed to ourselves ; and to regulate our desires, and our use, of the things we pray for. An interpretation, judged by some the most genuine of any : who have therefore chosen to read the words, at ver. 13. in the following order : *Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that the Father may be glorified in the Son, that will I do*. This was manifestly the case more immediately concerned here. Those apostles did not ask a power of working miracles, out of any vain ostentation, or for private advantage to themselves ; but purely for the promotion of the gospel which required such testimonies, and by which, above any other instance, the Father was glorified in the success of his Son's doctrine and kingdom. And St. Chrysostom, in like manner, understands the promise of our blessed Lord's presence, *where two or three are gathered together in his name*, to mean such assemblies for promoting mutual peace and love, as make Christ the motive and true foundation of charity to their neighbour. However that be, as to the proper sense of that passage in particular, yet certain it is in general, that every good and faithful servant makes his master's advantage the principal end of his actions. Our blessed Saviour himself, upon all occasions, vindicates his own fidelity from hence, that he was far from pursuing any separate interests of his own, but in all things sought the honour of his Father that sent him. And thus it becomes every man, who professes himself a servant and follower of Christ, to do ; to fix his hopes and wishes chiefly upon those things, which conduce most to the promoting his Master's honour, and the advantage of that spiritual kingdom of grace and glory, which he seems to set up ; to set it up, in the hearts of men at present, by faith

and virtue; and then, in the happiness and salvation of souls hereafter. We must therefore prefer this before any private or temporal respects, and fix our last and great aim in the increase of our Lord's honour: so that no Christian, in this sense, *asks in Christ's name*, who does not allow to the spiritual and eternal benefits to be obtained from him, that place in his heart, which is really due to them: that is, who does not esteem the future infinitely more desirable, than any advantages which can be enjoyed in the present world; and desire those proper to the soul, above any pleasures or advantages that can possibly accrue to his outward and mortal part. Nay, who with regard to these sensible and bodily advantages, does not bring a spirit so perfectly resigned, as to be well content, that his prayers relating to these, should be heard and answered in such a manner, as God in his wisdom shall see most fit; though at the same time that may so happen, as not to be most agreeable to the inclinations of flesh and sense, and a merely natural man.

3. They who *ask in Christ's name*, are supposed to contribute their own endeavours, so far as these can be serviceable to the obtaining what they ask. For (as I said before) to do any thing in the name of another, implies the doing it by his order and direction. We are therefore commanded to *ask in faith*; because faith supposes a promise and a declaration, as the proper basis on which it stands: consequently, it does not, cannot exclude, but must indeed of necessity infer, the performances of all those conditions, upon which the promise is suspended. For example: we are commanded to ask our *daily bread*, but we are commanded to seek it by honest labour too. And therefore the praying for it implies no more, than begging success upon our labours, and the blessing of God to prosper and reward our industry. We are encouraged to ask forgiveness of our sins, and emboldened to depend

upon the mercy of God, and the sufferings of Christ for it; but we are ordered likewise to repent of our sins, and to forsake them. And therefore, he who prays, and expects to be pardoned, and still continues obdurate and unreformed, hath no just foundation for his requests or his hopes: nor can he be said to *ask in Christ's name*, because he does not ask in such a manner, and upon such terms, as Christ hath appointed. *If I incline to wickedness with my heart, the Lord will not hear me*, says David. And therefore obstinately wicked men do not ask in Christ's name when they pray; because such a course of life is neither consistent with true faith in him, as a mediator, nor with the conditions of being so heard and accepted by virtue of that mediation. In all such cases, men do but tempt God, and mock themselves; by forming new conditions, exceeding their commission, and abusing their privilege of access to him. They turn that, which was intended as an encouragement and assistance to their care, into a pretence of hypocrisy and sloth. We cannot command events, nor render our own endeavours successful; and therefore God hath permitted, nay, he hath enjoined, the recommending ourselves and our endeavours to him. But that, which is a supply to our defect and weakness, when we can go no farther, is by no means a reason for superseding all attempts, or any excuse for not going as far as we can. We cannot effect the whole; but we must not, upon that pretence, sit down with our arms folded, and gape up for extraordinary supplies at the hand of Providence, while ourselves do nothing. We are directed to *cast our care upon God*, but we are no where encouraged to cast our idleness or our extravagances upon him. And yet even this is done, when we expect, that he will furnish our vanity and profuseness, or grant relief and success, without any degree of care or concern to help ourselves. This is the case both of our tem-

poral and spiritual affairs, that neither of them will be done without us. And indeed, in the business of this world, most men of any common prudence seem well enough aware of it. The generality of people perhaps are rather too solicitous, too eagerly employed, on that account. But, in the weightier matters of the next, where our endeavour and concern are full as necessary, and ought at least to be equal in our thoughts and regard, they are miserably negligent and supine; and think, that now and then a lazy prayer, though never seconded by their own pains, is all that needs. Hence it so often comes to pass, that men complain of praying to no purpose, and charge God foolishly with not hearkening to their petitions: whereas the failing, if duly examined, is all the while at home. And their hopes miscarry, not from any want or backwardness in him to hear or help, but from want of their own diligence, and of taking proper methods for the compassing their purposes. It is not easy to be conceived, how great and happy a change this consideration, duly applied, would make; how it would quicken and invigorate our actions; and what a world of injurious and unbecoming reflections it would prevent, which persons, loth to seem in fault themselves, are used to cast upon grace and Providence. They bewail their infirmities, or their temptations; their inability to conquer some darling passion, or to free themselves from the bondage of some reigning lust; and, least their slips and falls should lie at their own doors, take great pains to make the world and themselves believe, that they have prayed fervently and frequently, but are never the better. But such men, in truth, ought to lament and condemn themselves. And, as in most cases, the blame is but too manifestly ours; so, where it is not evident, it will become us to suspect, and be very jealous of ourselves; rather indeed to suspect any thing, than once imagine, that God is wanting in his

helps, or can be false to his gracious promises. For he *who asks thus in Christ's name*, that is, who prays as he ought to pray, in this *third* respect, 'tis certain never asks in vain.

4. But the principal and most proper intent of this expression is that, which I reserved for the *fourth* and last place; approaching the throne of grace, I mean, with an humble confidence in the merits and mediation of Christ, and resting our souls upon him alone for the mercy and good acceptance of God. Thus did the apostles in the matter more immediately concerned in this passage. In the miracles wrought by them for confirmation of the truth, they constantly invoked the name of Jesus Christ. When strength and limbs were restored to the lame,

Acts iii. 6. they are commanded in *the name of*
 — ix. 34. *Jesus to stand up and walk*; when the
 — xvi. 18. sick recovered their health, they de-
 — xxviii. 8. clare, that *Jesus Christ made them*
 James v. 14, 15. *whole*; when evil spirits were to be

dispossessed, they are *commanded in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of the patient*. The usual method of performing such cures was by laying on of hands, and prayer. The requests put up to God for the confirmation and increase of this power, in-

Acts iv. 30. treat that *He would stretch forth his hand to heal, and that signs and wonders might be done by the name of his holy child Jesus*.

And when these petitions at any time had their effect to the amazement of all beholders, particular care was taken to prevent those effects being attributed to the apostles themselves; by solemn and public declarations, that they were not owing to any *power*

or *holiness* of their own, but must be ascribed entirely to *Jesus, whom God had glorified, and to faith in his*

name. So constant a dependance upon Christ did the very manner of working those miracles express, which he promises the power of, and prescribes the

qualification for, here. And so just were the doers of them to their great Master's honour, in disclaiming all right to any glory from thence, any part in the operation, except that only of suppliants for, and instruments in, the use of these supernatural and truly divine gifts.

And herein they are our patterns. For we, like them, must bring the name of Christ along with us; and, whether we desire to be *for-*
given those things, whereof our con-
sciences are afraid, or to receive

Collect. xii. Sund.
after Trinity.

supplies suitable to our weakness and our wants, must come to God, in a due sense, that both the one and the other sort are such things, *as we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.* Accordingly such forms as these have obtained in all ages and parts of the church. And most deservedly, since this is a manner of worship peculiar to Christians. It is an essential and distinguishing property of our religion: of absolute necessity to be observed, and consequently of very great importance to be rightly understood. To which purpose I shall now endeavour to set in a true light, by representing, as plainly and briefly as I can, the necessity, and the efficacy, of prayers thus qualified.

1. It was observed before that the vast distance between an Almighty Creator, and creatures so poor and low as we are, required an express encouragement to justify our addresses to him. And such encouragement might reasonably enough be hoped for, considering that our natural notions of God represent him infinitely good, as well as infinitely great. The wise man's argument is certainly very just, that *God loveth all things that are,* because he *would never have made any thing, if he had hated it.* And this affection in such a Be-
 ing, it is agreeable to suppose, would move the common Maker, not only to preserve the things

Wis. xi. 24.

made by him, but to allow to each of them such degrees of happiness, as their respective order and condition should render them capable of. Thus, so far as our knowledge of nature will carry us, other creatures seem to have been dealt with. And thus, revelation assures us, man was dealt with too: only with this difference, that he, being qualified for a voluntary obedience, was admitted into covenant with God, and had his happiness suspended upon terms. When the terms were broken, all title to the privileges depending on the keeping them was forfeited and gone. For the creature, not continuing the same it was made, had thenceforth discharged God of all obligations which he had vouched to bring himself under, considered in the quality of its cause and maker.

If then the single consideration of our natural vileness rendered it a mighty condescension to permit our access to so great and glorious a Majesty, how shall we presume to draw near, and what reception can we hope to find, when we remember that we are sinners too? Is it not plainly one thing, to be distant, and beyond all comparison inferior; and another, to have changed our nature, and so become polluted and odious to a perfectly pure and holy Being? If, by creating us, God be a father, and we his children; that relation cannot stand those any longer in stead, who have been undutiful and rebellious children. If the original right of creation conveyed to God that dominion, which implies the care and protection of his vassals, this claim is lost to traitors, who have shaken off his yoke; and as much as in them lies, alienated his property, by enslaving and selling themselves to his irreconcilable enemy. So plain it is, that mankind, thus degenerated, could have no right to cry any more unto the King of heaven; could have nothing to look for at his hand but wrath and vengeance; and, the more they understood of themselves, the more cause

they saw to be overwhelmed with guilt and shame, confusion and despair.

From hence it follows, that if after this there remained any covenant-right to the favour of God, this must belong to men, by virtue of some subsequent and better covenant : a covenant of mercy, suited to the circumstances of sinful men, and such as inspires hope, by looking up to him, not now merely as a creating, but much more as a gracious and forgiving God : a covenant, which provides a Saviour and Redeemer from the guilt and misery, into which all had been otherwise irrecoverably sunk. And this is the covenant with God in Christ, typified and foretold from the time of man's transgression, but actually accomplished and declared in the gospel. A covenant all along so ordered, as to possess men with a mortifying sense of their own unworthiness, and abundantly to shew that it is *by the blood of the Son* only, that any of us Eph. iii. 12. *have now access to the Father.*

For to this end it was, that sacrifices of living creatures were always a rite of religious worship. By the shedding whose blood men were given to understand, not only that their own forfeit lives were a debt to offended Justice ; but that all, who from thenceforward were saved, must be saved by the blood of another shed for them. This was intimated yet more fully under the *Levitical* law ; when God appointed all sacrifices to be offered by the priest ; when one only place was allowed to offer such sacrifices in ; when one part of that temple was made inaccessible to all except the high-priest ; and even to him at all other times, except on the great day of atonement once a year : (nor was he then to enter without the blood of the sacrifice) and, when the prayers of the people were emblematically sent up to God, in the incense carried by the priests into the holy place, and ascending in smoke before the mercy-seat.

Epistle for
Wedn. before
Easter, and
Good-Friday.

The substance and meaning of these figurative ordinances have been in some measure explained heretofore. But, as to the subject of prayer in particular, by God's keeping his covenanted people at such an awful distance, and accepting their oblations at the hands of the priest only, was signified, that he must now be addressed to by the mediation of another : and who that is, we cannot be to seek,

after St. Paul hath told us, that *there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*. Again, that as God so this Mediator is but one, was farther signified, by confining all religious worship to that single place, which was a type of Christ's body, the tabernacle in

John i. 14. *which the word made flesh dwelt and manifested forth his glory*. These remarks concerning the holy of holies I cannot think capable of a clearer exposition, than that left us in the follow-

ing texts to Hebrews ; *The priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God : but into the second went the high-priest once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people : the Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while the first tabernacle was yet standing : which was a figure for the time then present :—But Christ being come an high-priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building : neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us*. And again,

Chap. x. 12. 20, 21, 22: *Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh : and having an high-priest over the*

house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. Lastly, St. Paul hath also compared Christ to the mercy-seat, by saying, *God hath set him forth as a propitiatory*, for so the word strictly rendered imports. It being now with us, as formerly with the *Jews*, that they, who hope to find God propitious to their prayers, must send them up here; that is, must supplicate for mercy in and by him, and must obtain it (as the apostle goes on) *through faith in his blood.*

Rom. iii. 25.

From these and such other allusions to the religious worship of the *Jews* heretofore, and the correspondence our blessed Saviour holds to them all, in the Christian worship now, it is evident, that all prayer, without the mediation and merits of Jesus, is destitute of promise, or any foundation whatsoever of just hope to encourage it. It is also evident, that his being our priest, our sacrifice, our mercy-seat, doth depend upon, and follow from, his dying for us; dying in such a sense and to such purposes as the piacular victims heretofore were understood to die for the person that brought them.

And from hence it is, *that faith in his blood, being justified in his name, and justified by his blood, baptizing into his name, and baptizing into his death*, are phrases equivalent with the apostle's writings.

Acts x. 43.

Rom. iii. 25.

1 Cor. vi. 11.

Rom. v. 9.

Acts ii. 38.

Rom. vi. 3.

This is also farther evident from Jesus being so often, and so expressly, declared to be the author and cause of those blessings, which make the subject of our prayers. For, whether we ask pardon for our faults; it is *through this man only*, that forgiveness of sins is preached unto us, *and by Jesus Christ that reconciles us to himself.* Or, whether grace to live better for the time to come; *we are renewed by the Holy Ghost, which God sheds on us through Jesus Christ our Saviour.* He is the Vine, without

Acts xiii.

38, 39.

2 Cor. v. 18.

Tit. iii. 5, 6.

the communication of whose sap the
 John xv. branches *can do nothing but wither and*
 Col. ii. 19. *die*: he the Head, *from whom the whole*
mystical body having nourishment ministered, in-
creaseth with the increase of God. If we implore
 any blessings or comforts of this life, this is the
 best confidence we have of success, that *He who*
 Rom. viii. 32. *spared not his own Son, but delivered*
him up for us all, will certainly be rea-
dy with him freely to give us all things. If deliver-
 ance from, or support under, dangers and tempta-
 tions; we are called to come boldly to the throne
 Heb. iv. 15, 16. *of grace, as sure to find mercy and*
grace to help in time of need; be-
cause we have an High-Priest capable of being touch-
ed with the feeling of our infirmities, and who was in
all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. If
 our desires look chiefly beyond this world; it is for
 his sake only that we can obtain them. On him alone
 depends our resurrection; for *Christ*
 1 Cor. xv. 20. *is risen from the dead, and become the*
 2 Cor. iv. 14. *first-fruits of them that slept:* which
 assures us that *he, which raised up the Lord Jesus,*
shall raise us up also by Jesus; on him alone the hap-
 piness we hope for in that state; for
 Rom. vi. 23. *this is the gift of God through Jesus*
Christ our Lord; who, at his departure out of the
 world, left this day's consolation behind him, that he
 John xiv. 2, 3. *is gone to prepare for his disciples a*
place in his Father's house, and that he
will come again and receive them unto himself; that
where he is, there they may be also.

2. After so much said upon the necessity, very little needs be added to prove the efficacy of thus asking in the name of Christ. For, besides many promises made upon this account in the New Testament, and all the commands of seeking necessary supplies, enforced with the encouragement of receiving what we want; the correspondence between

the Jewish and Christian religion, which is already spoken to, give us an equal right to those of the Old Testament. There is not therefore one assurance given to the sacrifices under the law, which does not still more strongly affect our prayers under the gospel. For even those derived their force and merit from the typical relation they bore to the Christian priest and sacrifice ; and as *we now are*, so they likewise were *accepted in the Beloved* ;

Eph. i. 6, 7.

even him, *in whom we have redemption through his blood*. Accordingly upon this capacity it is, that the author to the Hebrews lays so very great a stress through the whole course of his argument in that epistle: declaring him *our merciful and faithful High-Priest, able to succour them that are tempted ; and to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him ; seeing he ever liveth to make*

Heb. ii. 17, 18.

—iv. 15.

—vii. 25.

intercession for us. In short, there is so close a connexion between the merit of our Lord's sacrifice, and the power of his intercession, that it is now as great an indignity to distrust of mercy and acceptance, as it would have been to flatter ourselves with expectations, of such success without it. Had not Christ died, it had been impudence to *hope* ; but after that, it is infidelity to *doubt* : because such doubt, would by necessary implication, infer a questioning either the value of his sufferings, or the sufficiency of his power, or the truth of his promises ; and so, in fact, reflects on the whole scheme of revealed religion.

I close this argument with a remark or two, of which one would think there should not be any, and yet experience proves there is but too great need. The one is, that this benefit of being heard when we ask in Christ's name, is confined, as the other gospel-privileges are, to those who firmly believe in and sincerely obey him. Men may call themselves Christians to no purpose at all, for they do not belong

to Christ, unless he be depended on as their priest and sacrifice, and observed with the duty owing to their Lord and King. They that desire to have their persons reconciled, and their prayers recommended, must pray in faith. But faith without works suitable to it, is accounted dead, and can have no effect, but such as is worse than none, the reproach and self-condemnation of the believer.

2. By the correspondence between the legal and this gospel High-Priest, we may perceive not only the efficacy, but the duty of prayer. God of old manifested his favourable presence at the mercy-seat; he does the same now to Christians, in him, of whom that propitiatory was a type and shadow. But this is done in both cases, to the priest offering up the prayers of the people: and he cannot in this respect do the office of a mediator for them, who bring him no prayers to offer. For his business is not to pray for those who neglect to pray for themselves, but to render the prayers of those who ask effectual. Let us, therefore, in a due sense of our obligation and interest, be fervent and frequent at the throne of grace; and esteem it a most valuable privilege, that we may come thither boldly, when *asking in Christ's name*. That is, as you have seen under this last head, when we humbly and heartily acknowledge ourselves less than the least of all God's mercies: when we disclaim all desert of our own, and approach as becomes miserable, but believing and penitent offenders: when (after the example of our established church in her admirable Liturgy) we interpose the most prevailing name of Jesus the beloved in all our devotions: and when with the lowest opinion of our own vileness, which makes us unworthy to beg *any thing*, we do join so high and honourable a trust in his merits, that we make no doubt of obtaining, for his sake, *every thing* that is expedient for us. For the more meanly we conceive of ourselves (and 'tis but too evident we can-

not exceed on that hand) the nobler and juster is our faith in our Saviour's inestimable sacrifice, and all powerful mediation for us. To whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, now and for ever. *Amen.*

St. Barnabas the Apostle.

SHORT ACCOUNT OF ST. BARNABAS THE APOSTLE.

THE Scripture acquaints us, that his name was originally Joses, that he was descended of the tribe of Levi, but born at Cyprus. This last was a circumstance necessary to be added, for clearing the next thing related of him, *viz.* that he sold an estate, and brought the purchase-money to the apostles, to be put into a common fund, then applied to the sustenance of poor Christians. For, though within the promised land the Levites had no proper estates, yet if any of that tribe settled in other countries, this law could not be there any bar to their enjoying like properties with the natives of that place. Hereupon, as one of the first or most liberal contributors to so charitable a design, seems to have received the name of Barnabas, interpreted by St. Luke the son of consolation. Though St. Chrysostom (attending I suppose to the word nabi, a prophet) ascribes this name to those large endowments and virtues, which qualified him so excellently for the great work he was designed for. Such as the Collect for this day refers to, and the Epistle describes, when saying, *He was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.*

Acts iv. 36,

In Loc.

Acts, xi. 24.

Euseb. Hist.
I.

C. 12. L. II.

C. 1.

Whether he were, as some affirm, brought up with St. Paul under Gamaliel is not certain. It seems to be much more so, that he was one of our Lord's

Clem. Alex.
Strom. II. p.
12.

seventy disciples. Upon the news of the good success, which the publishing Christ's doctrine by some Cyprians and Cyrenians had found at Antioch, he was sent thither by the apostles to confirm the new Christians there. The number of converts grew so fast upon his hands, that he called in the assistance of St. Paul. These two continued mutual coadjutors for a considerable time ; the effects and methods whereof have been already related, in the larger account given of St. Paul. The occasion of their parting was there also taken notice of : upon which at present it shall suffice to remark, that even these great lights were men of like passions with us ; and, that God, upon this occasion, did most eminently illustrate the wisdom of his providence, by rendering the frailties of two such servants instrumental to the benefit of his church. For each of them thenceforth employed their extraordinary industry and zeal singly and apart, which, till then, had been united, and confined to the same place.

After this St. Barnabas is said by some, to have travelled to Alexandria, and from thence to have returned to Judea. By others to have preached about Liguria, to have settled Christianity at Milan, and to have been the first bishop of that church. All seem to agree, that his last labours were employed in his own native country ; and that by the malice of the Jews, he was tumultuously assaulted, and stoned to death at Salamis, the principal city of Cyprus.

Hieron. in Catal.
Euseb. Hist. Lib.
III. Cap. 25.
Pearson Lect. II. 10.
Strom. II. p. 373.
375. 389. 396. 410.
V. 575. 577.
Apostolick Epistles,
by Dr. Wake, 1693.

He hath left us one epistle, reckoned among the Apocryphal writings of the first Christians. By which word is not meant always, that such writings were not genuine ; but oftentimes only that they were not received as canonical. It is full of piety and zeal, frequently quoted by Clemens of Alexandria : written in a style

very allegorical, but such as the English reader may be both entertained and profited by. The opportunity of which, is owing to the pious labours of the right reverend and learned Lord Bishop of Lincoln.

The Epistle to the Hebrews hath been by some attributed to St. Barnabas, but that opinion hath met with very little credit.

THE COLLECT.

O LORD God Almighty, who didst endue thy Acts xi. 24.
holy apostle Barnabas with singular gifts of the Holy Ghost; leave us not, we beseech thee, destitute of thy manifold gifts, nor yet of grace to use them always to thy honour and glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE.

ACTS xi. 22.

22. **T**IDINGS of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

ver. 19, 20.) the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas, to strengthen and perfect the new converts in the doctrine they had received.

23. *Who when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.*

at last to Antioch; exhorting them to perseverance and patience, and immoveable constancy in the faith.

24. *For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.*

man, as well as the eminent endowments of the Holy Spirit; qualified him admirably for a work of this nature.

PARAPHRASE.

22. Upon hearing what success the preaching of those brethren had, (mentioned

23. In pursuance of which commission, he travelled through Phœnice and Cypress, and

24. In which he was very successful; for the piety and virtue of the

25. Which that he might the more effectually accomplish, he called in the powerful assistance of Saul.

25. *Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul.*

26. By whose joint labours for a year together the gospel gained so much advantage at Antioch, that there first, the believers

26. *And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people; and the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*

of it were solemnly styled by the name of Christians, or, persons believing in, and belonging to, Jesus Christ.

27. * Persons endowed with that gift of the Holy Ghost, which enabled them to foresee and declare events to come.

27. *And in these days came prophets* from Jerusalem unto Antioch.*

28. † Throughout the Roman Empire, as indeed it happened about two years afterward, and the fourth of Claudius Cæsar.

28. *And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit, that there should be great dearth† throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar.*

29. ‡ This came very seasonably; for the famine, there particularly, was sharp and long.

29. *Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief‡ unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea.*

30. || To be deposited in their hands, and distributed at their discretion, according to the necessities of those under their care.

30. *Which also they did, and sent it to the elders|| by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.*

COMMENT.

THE subject of those good tidings, referred to, ver. 22. is a great number of believers *turned to the Lord*. And the occasion of this numerous conversion is very remarkable. The *eighth* Ver. 1. chapter had taken notice of a terrible persecution, immediately after the death of St. Stephen.

The rage hereof dispersed the new believers, and rendered Jerusalem incapable of affording safety or protection, for those that made public profession of Christ. This dispersed the disciples indeed: but, at the same time, it dispersed the gospel too; and opened a passage for the word of truth, wider and readier, than could have been found, supposing its proselytes quietly to have continued and assembled together in any one place. These holy fugitives, who (in compliance with the great law of self-preservation, and with our blessed

Matt. x. 23.

Lord's direction in the case) did, when persecuted in one city, take refuge in another, carried the zeal for truth to every city: and so powerfully recommended the cause for which they suffered, that the force of this doctrine, wheresoever they arrived, made its own way, even through prejudice and persecution. Thus were the enemies of our religion, intentionally and by design, the greatest friends and promoters of it, by occasion and in the event. And, by the same over-ruling Providence, which

Gospel, Tuesday
before Easter.

was formerly observed to disappoint the malice of the devil, and to bring good out of the evil of his instruments, wicked men, the success of Christianity was such, that it does not appear to any considering person, how the propagation could possibly have been so swift, or the establishment of it so strong, had less industry or cruelty been used at the very first, utterly to suppress and obstruct its taking root at all.

This providence of God, in the disappointment of malicious purposes, and converting the sufferings and sorrows of his servants to their own, and the common advantage, seems indeed never to have appeared so conspicuous and amazing upon any other occasion, as on that of founding and establishing the Christian religion. To this dispensation all that had preceded were subservient. The importance

and the extent of this blessing, the difficulties it had to encounter, and the necessity of demonstrating it to be from God, required the most illustrious evidence of a divine power. But God is in all ages the same in wisdom, and goodness, and tender regard for all that love and please him. Any community therefore of Christians, nay, any single member of such community, may and should, from such events as this before us, draw inferences full of hope and comfort.

Heresies, and schisms, and factions, do frequently deform the face, and break the peace, of the Christian world: but even those have their beneficial effects; and, by awakening the zeal, by increasing the caution, by exercising the meekness and patience, by uniting the hearts and hands, and by exciting the devotion and trust, of the truly faithful, they do not only glorify God, in the brighter shine of his servants light; but they raise the credit, and strengthen the assertors, and confound the adversaries, of truth, and piety, and regular constitutions.

Afflictions and injuries, poverty and disgrace, are some of the instruments, made use of by the common enemy of souls, to work our destruction. But instances innumerable have been of God's interposing so powerfully with his grace, that the sorrows designed to bear down, have exalted and brightened, the sufferer's virtue. Nay, and his wisdom hath interposed so seasonably too, in the over-ruling of events, with regard to the affairs of this world, that those very calamities, which portended nothing less than utter ruin, have at length proved the visible and immediate occasions of surprising, of much greater prosperity, than without them, as working together under a Divine direction, could ever have been looked or reasonably accounted for.

So often therefore as we cast our eyes on this, or other such like narratives of glorious and desirable

effects, produced from means, humanly speaking, improper and unlikely, let us not fail to make such profit of them, as may do us service in the day of adversity. In all our distresses, whether public or private; under the most melancholy apprehensions for the church or for the state; when the *foundations* are in danger of *being cast down*, and the *overflowings of ungodliness make us afraid*; let us remember that *God is in heaven, and ruleth over all*; that *his ways are not as our ways*: and therefore, however he may suffer the malice of enemies, the treachery of dissemblers, the insolence of the profane, or the delusion of enthusiasts, to try or to correct us; yet if we persevere in our duty, hold fast our profession, and attend upon him, with patience, and holy trust, and Christian prudence; the blackening clouds will scatter, and the Lord will cause his face to shine on his sanctuary, and prevent its desolation, for his truth and mercy's sake.

Thus again, in our personal capacities: if our worldly cares be multiplied, or expectations disappointed, our affairs embarrassed, our sorrows enlarged, our bodily sufferings grievous; nay, even our souls dejected for want of spiritual light and comfort; still let the contemplation of God, and the wonder of his providence, sustain us; that providence, which never fails them who, in all their ways, and under all their temptations, acknowledge and patiently abide upon it; which orders all events for the true advantage of good men; and gets itself more honour, by such unexpected changes of heaviness into joy, and the darkness made clear as the noon-day.

II. For the confirmation and improvement of converts made by the zeal and assiduity of their persecuted brethren, the apostle of this day was sent, with authority to supply what might be defective by any want of the like mission to their first instructors; and to carry on the good work, by them so

piously and so successfully begun. Of whose virtues and abilities when we read so high commendations, care must be taken, that we do not so misinterpret these, as to suppose the glory of the large increase due to any but God alone. The seed of the word proves fruitful or otherwise, according as it is received and cherished, or despised and neglected. Much depends upon the quality of the soil upon which it is cast; and the preparations of this are from the grace of God, exciting and working with the wills of men. This purges out the corruptions which obstruct its efficacy, purifies the affections, enlightens the understanding, invigorates the endeavours, and infuses that general disposition to goodness, without which the best seed is an unprofitable expense, and the care of the skilfullest sowers is but labour in vain: but though the scatterer's hand be instrumental only; yet in regard the power of the gospel is a power of persuasion, it is a particular blessing to any people, that God uses such instruments among them, as are most likely, and best fitted, to persuade. Even in the season of miracles, the extraordinary gifts did not supersede the ordinary; they only supplied their weakness, and wrought effects, of which those were incapable. When, therefore, to the endowments of the Holy Ghost this history adds the goodness and faith of

Ver. 24. Barnabas as means of *great numbers believing and turning to the Lord*; the effect is, in the nature of the thing, very suitable to the cause; for the fruit of the ministry may most reasonably be expected to abound, where actions teach as well as words, and when the diligence of exhortation is seconded and set home upon the hearers by the influence of example. Great thanks are due to God for the benefit of such teachers: great respect, and honour, and praise, are due to the teachers themselves; but especially, great care and jealousy are required of the souls under their charge; because,

if the product of such lives and labours be not great, the condemnation of them, whose unfruitfulness disappoints their labours, cannot but be very great.

III. Another thing worthy of remark, upon this occasion, is the imposing upon the believers that name, which hath ever since been made their distinction, and justly esteemed their glory, all the world over. The enemies of the gospel did in scorn call them Nazareans, the *men of the sect*, and the like. Among themselves they were styled *disciples, believers, brethren*; and had such other titles, as imported faith and charity. But now the success of Paul and Barnabas had given them so much confidence, that, at Antioch first, they adventured publicly and solemnly to take the name of *Christians*: or persons belonging to, and believing in, Jesus of Nazareth; as the Christ of God, the Lord and promised Saviour of the world. That this distinguishing character was taken in solemn manner, we have reason to conclude from the propriety of the original word. For *Χρηματίζουσι* is used with regard to edicts and proclamations; such particularly, as contained the people's professions of allegiance to emperors, and the privileges granted by them to the people; after which mutual declaration, the emperor in that place was publicly acknowledged, and the account of state transactions were reckoned from that era. As a further proof of this, we have the manner of imposing this name described; that it was done in an open assembly, by Euodius, then bishop of Antioch, and successor to the apostle St. Peter in that see at the beginning of Claudius's reign, and ten years after our Lord's ascent into heaven. These are circumstances too considerable to be overlooked, because all virtually contained in the Greek expression; which gives a quite different notion of the thing, from that too feeble rendering of being *called Christians*. And as St. Luke, the author of

See Gregory's
Notes, Part I.
Chap. 36.

this book, could not find a more forcible or proper phrase for the solemnity of this denomination; so he could not do greater honour to his own city Antioch, than by acquainting posterity, that the proselytes of that place had, first of all others, the courage thus to take upon them a name, which every part of the believing world gladly derive from them, and desire to be known by.

But it is of much less concern, that my reader should understand the manner of this name being first given, than that he should be duly sensible of the weighty obligations which follow upon its being constantly borne by us. Now these cannot possibly be less, than a firm belief of the doctrines, a conscientious obedience to the precepts, and as exact a conformity as we are capable to the example of that Christ, after whom we are called. When these are not observed, the name, which is meant for our crown and joy, becomes our condemnation and reproach. To preserve an incessant remembrance of these engagements, each person, at the time of being incorporated into Christ's body, receives that, which is termed his Christian name. A name, deservedly placed before the other, by reason it inclines us to advantages more valuable, than any possible to descend from our ancestors. A name, more strictly ours, than that of our respective families; because taken by us, not derived down to us. A name, which we are infinitely more concerned to do credit to, than that other; because it is a mark and badge of that covenant with God, upon the sincere discharge whereof all our hopes and happiness depend. And therefore, *lastly*, a name very properly inquired of at the beginning of our church catechism; because it is the signature of our profession, and an indelible monument of having contracted for those duties, in which the child is there about to be instructed. In a word, if it be deservedly accounted baseness and degeneracy, to stain our blood, and

reflect shame back upon those forefathers, who were men of like frailties and passions with ourselves; think, how heinous a provocation it must needs be, when those who *name the name of Christ* 2 Tim. ii. 19. *do not depart from iniquity*; when such minister occasion to libertines and infidels, to blaspheme the Son of God and his gospel, through their impure and vicious, that is, indeed, their infamous, absurd, and contradictory conversation.

IV. The *last* clause of this Scripture confirms my remark upon the *first*. For, what could more conduce to the honour of the name so lately taken, than those fruits of charity so agreeable to the import of it, sent as a relief against the approaching famine? The extremity and extent hereof Josephus describes at large: Antiq. L. XX. C. 2. but the supplies here mentioned, were principally applied to Judea. Probably, because there the calamity fell heaviest; because believers there were like to find least pity, and because this was a fitting testimony of gratitude to the country, from whence the means of their conversion first came. So early had these Christians at Antioch learnt the equity of that argument, used afterwards by St. Paul; and indeed so far from Christians are they, who learnt it not: *if we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it* (ought it to be accounted) 1 Cor. ix. 11. *a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?*

THE GOSPEL.

JOHN XV. 12.

PARAPHRASE.

12. **T**HIS is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.

12. See the commandment.

13. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

13. The highest instance of kindness capable of

being expressed, is for one friend to save the life of another, by a voluntary laying down his own in the stead, and as the purchase of it.

14. Now this proof I am about to give of my love to you; whom I esteem my friends, while ye continue obedient to my commands.

14. *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*

15. And accordingly, though your Master, I do not treat you in the quality, nor keep you at the distance

15. *Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you.*

of servants; but, conversing with the freedom and affection of a friend, have imparted to you all such purposes and secrets of my Father, as are for your advantage to know.

16. All which is the effect of my free love, which made choice of you (without the engagement of any

16. *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*

antecedent affection of yours to me) to be attendants on my person, hearers of my doctrine, witnesses of my miracles, and glorious instruments of planting and establishing a Christian church, to last till the world's end. For the success of which great work, whatever shall be needful, God will give it to the prayers put up in my name. (See the Gospel St. Philip and James's Day.)

COMMENT.

AFTER all that hath been written in the foregoing parts of this work, upon that love, which the Gospel for the day begins with commanding, I should hope the Christian readers might now be addressed by me, as the *Thessalonians* were once by

1 Thes. iv. 9. St. Paul, *As touching brotherly love, ye*

need not that I write unto you, for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. But, in regard it is not only a very possible, but a very frequent case, for men to acknowledge themselves obliged to duties in general, without either duly considering the full and proper force of all the motives which induce such obligation, or discerning the just measures and degrees, to which they ought in rea-

son to aspire ; upon these accounts I could not but think it reasonable once again to press this matter, from the particular enforcement of our Lord's example : and to urge the necessity of this qualification, *viz. the loving one another as Christ hath loved us.*

Now this qualification may import two things. Either (1.) A motive, *why* we should obey. Or (2.) A pattern or direction *how* we should obey, the command laid down before it. In the *first* signification it represents the inquiry ; in the *second*, the measure and extent of our duty.

Some difference there is among interpreters, Whether of these two senses ought to take place here : a disagreement of no great importance ; since both, it is evident, are warranted by Scripture. For when St. John says, *Behold, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another :* he 1 John iv. 11. justifies their interpretation, who understand the text, as a command of love, grounded upon, or at least very powerfully strengthened by, the consideration of Christ's love to us ; and, that we ought therefore to love others, because he hath loved us so very exceedingly. Again, when the same St. John says, *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren :* he comes up to their meaning, who assert, that by *loving one another as Christ loved us*, is intended that our love to the brethren should be conformed to *his*, as its proper model or standard, and bear a just proportion and resemblance to it in all its possible perfections. iii. 16.

I say in all its *possible* perfections. For we must either have very mean and unworthy apprehensions of Christ, or very lofty and extravagant notions of ourselves, to suppose the best good-natured man in the world capable of equalling the kindness of this Saviour in its utmost excellence. And therefore these are to be understood, like those other expres-

Matt. v. 48.
 Luke vi. 36.
 1 Pet. i. 16.

sions, which command us to be *perfect*, and *merciful*, and *holy*, as, and because, our Lord and *Father in heaven is merciful, and holy, and perfect*: that is, that we keep this great Original always in view, and copy after it in little; observing such proportions as the vast distance between God and man render our nature and condition able to attain: that we make our obligations to be like God, a strong incentive to our endeavours of being so. Thus here, we are engaged to imitate the love of Christ, to as great a degree as we can: and we are likewise to stir up ourselves to charity, by that very strong obligation to it, which this love of his lays upon every considering Christian.

My design accordingly at present is,

1. *First*, To instance in some particular qualifications, wherein the love of Christ to mankind both may and ought to be imitated by us.

2. *Secondly*, To shew the obligation we have to follow his example in these respects, arising from the contemplation of his goodness to us.

1. *First*, I will instance in some particular qualifications, observable in the love of Christ to mankind, such as both may and ought to be imitated by us, in our love of one another. And here we shall do well to consider the blessed Jesus as our pattern, with regard,

First, To the nature of the affection itself:

Secondly, To the object, or persons upon whom it ought to be exercised: and,

Thirdly, The proofs to be given of it, or those actions of kindness which are required from us.

I shall speak to these as briefly as the matter will well bear; and, under each of them, represent the obligation which this example lays upon us.

1. And, *first*, With regard to the nature of the affection itself. Our blessed Saviour's love towards mankind we know was voluntary and generous, and

free. It was not the effect of any former engagement, nor begun upon any prospect of advantage to be obtained from the persons thus beloved. For *who*, as St. Paul urges, *hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again?* And *herein is love*, saith St.

Rom. xi. 35.
1 John iv. 10.

John, *not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

The meaning whereof is, that all the marvellous methods of grace, and the great things done and suffered for us by Christ, were not by way of return to any former kindness, or desert, on our part, but the motions of mere mercy, and his own will. He sought not ours, but us. His happiness could have suffered no diminution by our misery: but, when we had deserved to perish, he rather chose to have his mercy glorified in our rescue from destruction, than to signalize his justice in our eternal punishment and ruin. And of this choice no other reason can be assigned, than his own exceeding goodness and the incomprehensible greatness of his love. *He would have mercy because he would have mercy:* and mercy triumphed over judgment; not because it was better for him, but because it was more profitable for us that it should do so.

Here then our Lord hath left us an example that we should follow his steps, in a kindness that is noble, and free, and undesigning; that our love should not be mean and mercenary; such as only does good to others, with a secret or distant intention of serving ourselves; but that it should terminate entirely in the party to whom it is pretended to be borne, without any hope or prospect of returning to our profit again. And I may well call this a *pretended* love only, since in truth, when thoroughly examined, it is but an empty form and fair disguise. For, what colours soever of kindness it may be varnished over with, nothing but self is at the bottom. This is not doing good offices, but driving a trade by them, and

putting them out to interest under-hand : which, after all, is not only the most hypocritical, but the most sordid way of imposing upon mankind. For it abases the best and bravest of virtue ; it profanes the sacred names of liberality and friendship, by usurping the praises due to these, while it continues not to be discovered ; and, when it is, by tempting us to suspect that this narrow principle is the constant spring and rule of every man's actions, and that there is no such thing as true generosity, and disinterested good-nature, and Christian friendship left in the world.

It is one thing, to consider this duty of love as mere men, and another to consider it as Christians. Philosophy and human prudence, when they urge it upon us, proceed upon principles of profit and convenience. They tell us of the benefit accruing from the practice of it, to private persons, or public societies : and these are topics very proper for reason and policy to make use of for recommending it. But the Christian religion goes a great deal higher. And though it refuse not these motives, yet hath it a reserve of others peculiar to itself. It requires us to do good, because it is good ; it draws us off from the consideration of present, to the prospect of future and greater advantages ; it expects, that we should think the command and will of our Master a sufficient inducement, though there were no other to back it ; that we in some degree resemble God himself, who is bountiful and kind from the essential goodness of his own nature, and because it becomes his character to be so. And, as he is beyond all imagination liberal and tender, though it be impossible for him to receive or propose any additional happiness from the creatures he sustains and favours most highly : so we, moved by an inherent principle of Christian perfection, should not sit down first, and compute what account our good intentions or good works will turn to ; but care-

fully observe those rules of generosity left us by the apostle, which fully express our duty with regard to the point before us. Such are, *not seeking our own profit, but the profit of many. Pleasing every one his neighbour for his good to edification. Looking every man not on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. No man seeking his own, but every man another's wealth.* And, as Christ, *having loved his own, loved them unto the end*, because of that inexhaustible spring of goodness, which was ever flowing, ever spreading itself to all who seek and receive its communications: so should our affection too imitate his, in the constancy and perseverance, in the sincerity and diffusiveness, of our love. It must be *void of dissimulation, not weary of well-doing, not growing hot and cold in our hearts, according to the ebblings and flowings of uncertain passion, but proceeding upon the steady principles of reason and religion: such as are always fixed and consistent with themselves: and, if pursued as they ought, will not fail to make us increase more and more, and to abound in love towards one another, and towards all men.* Which leads me to the *second* particular, wherein our Lord's example ought to influence us, and that is,

II. In *the object of this affection, or the persons upon whom it ought to be exercised.* Now any person at all acquainted with the gospel, needs not to be told, *that* Christ was a lover of mankind in general; and that his goodness was extensive above (infinitely above) any that ever was in the world. Himself tells us, *that he came to give his life a ransom for many: that he was lifted up with an intention of drawing all men to him: that he came not to condemn, but to save the world: that the way was open, and, as no man could*

1 Cor. x. 33.

Rom. xv. 2.

Phil. ii. 4.

1 Cor. x. 24.

John xiii. 1.

Rom. xii. 9.

Gal. vi. 9.

1 Thess. iii. 12.

Matt. xx. 28.

John xii. 32.

— iii. 17.

— xiv. 6.

— vi. 37.

come to the Father but by him; so whosoever shall come to him, he will in no wise cast out. And lastly, *that* the malice and obstinacy of wicked men was so far from provoking him to leave off all kind attempts of doing them good, that he still retained his merciful inclinations; laboured long and often to gather those, who would not be persuaded to come in; and persisted in teaching, exhorting, arguing, reproving, lamenting, and weeping over, even the most intractable, even the most incorrigible. *That* he did all this, not only when he foresaw of how little effect his holy labours would prove; but also, when the continuance of them exasperated his enemies the more, and brought his own person and life into manifest hardship and hazard.

The apostles in like manner testify, that the design and influence of Christ's death and sufferings was of extent as universal, as the blemish and punish-

Rom. v. 12.

———— 18.

Heb. ii. 9.

1 Tim. i. 15.

Eph. ii. 12, 13.

ment of Adam's sin. And as by the guilt of the *first* Adam condemnation came upon all; *so by the obedience of the second the free gift came upon all, unto justification of life: that* he came

into the world with a purpose *to taste death for every man: to save even the chief of sinners: to make the aliens and strangers nigh unto God*, by reconciling them to him, and uniting them to the same common body with one another: and, in a word, *that* in this

chiefly *the love of God commendeth itself towards us, in that while we were yet sinners*, that is, enemies and rebels, Christ *died for us*.

What now can any man conclude from hence, but that they, who are commanded to love one another as Christ *hath loved us*, must open their hearts wide, and stretch their affections, as far as he did his? that no part of mankind ought to be excluded; and that a narrowness of spirit can by no means be excused in a Christian, which confines all

kindness within those very straight lines, which either nature, or fortune, or private profit, or personal obligations, have drawn about us. My meaning is this: that we must not love our next neighbours only, for this is a point of convenience; nor our acquaintance only, for this is the effect of inclination, and we do it for our pleasure; nor our friends only, for this is required in gratitude, and common justice; nor those from whom we hope to receive benefit only, for this is no more than interest would advise; nor our relations only, for this is the dictate of mere nature; nor them, who are of the same church or opinion with us only, for that is but a serving and valuing ourselves. All this is no more than the sordid, the covetous, the proud, the voluptuous, the publican and heathen, the Jew or the Samaritan, would do: but the Christian must do a great deal more. He is to distinguish himself by higher degrees of goodness; even by *Gal. vi. 10.*
doing good to all men, as he hath opportunity; by putting on bowels of charity for the most miserable, the most despicable, the most neglected, the most mistaken, the most obstinate; the worst of men, the bitterest of enemies, the most revengeful and implacable, that even thirst after his blood: for in all this Christ is our pattern. He died, and, in the inexpressible agonies of that most painful death, prayed for the very wretches that so maliciously persecuted, so barbarously tormented and murdered him. And therefore well might the apostle urge, as he does, *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice, Eph. iv. 31, 32. Coloss. iii. 13.*
and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. If the most grievous provocations could have hardened our Saviour against us; if any worthlessness could have wrought in him contempt

of our condition, we must have continued miserable and lost to all eternity. And therefore they, who love as he did, will not abhor the lowest estate of the most forlorn wretches, will not suffer the most disoblighing, the most spiteful behaviour, utterly to extinguish all tenderness and compassion, no, not to the most unworthy man alive.

These are such truths, as people in cold blood are generally well enough content to allow: those people, I mean, who consider religion at all, and are desirous to be thought Christians. They will, for the most part, freely declare against hatred and revenge; and, that they would not for all the world bear malice, no not in thought, against any man breathing. But however clear they may profess their hearts to be in this matter, how universal soever their charity and good-will to the whole world; yet it is but too common and too visible, that very little of this general and unreserved charity appears in the outward carriage of many, who pretend to it in the highest degree. Lest therefore they, whose reason convinces them, that the love of Christ ought to be imitated in the universality of it, should delude their own souls, by supposing that they love all men, while they barely profess to do so, I thought it necessary to consider Christ as our pattern.

III. *Thirdly*, With regard to the proofs of our love, or the instances wherein it ought to be expressed. For they, who *love one another as he loved us*, must, according to their power, and as occasions offer, be ready to give the same evidence of their affection, which he was pleased to do of his. And what that was, the history of his life and death takes very particular care to acquaint us.

To enter into the detail of these proofs were endless; since every action, every word of his was a fresh one. Or rather, all he did, and taught, and suffered, in the whole course of his appearing in our

nature, was but one continued act of love ; diversified in its circumstances, as the wisdom of the agent, and the occasions of the persons, for whose immediate benefit it was intended, made such variety requisite. In this he was so constant, so perfect, so lively and heroic a pattern, that we need only contemplate his behaviour, and frame our own by that model, to practise this virtue in its utmost excellence. For, though such sinful sordid souls as ours can never aspire to all the perfections of this Son of God, who is love itself ; though the effect of the kind inclinations we may have, can never be so great and so diffusive as his, by whose kindness unspeakable benefits devolve upon all mankind, yet we shall do well to copy after this great original so far as we can. And that we are more especially concerned to do in these three particulars.

1. *First*, By suiting our expressions of love to the circumstances of other people, in such a manner as may be most proper and profitable for them. When I urged the extending our charity to all mankind, (under the *second* head) my meaning was not, either that we should love all men equally, or that we are to give the same proofs of our affection to all alike : neither of these is reasonable, neither so much as possible. But, in regard (by the *first* qualification I laid down) our love ought to be generous and free, and to terminate in the benefit of persons to whom we profess it : it follows necessarily from hence, that, in doing acts of kindness we are not to consider our own convenience, so much as theirs, to whom we do them. And here again, we are not always to be governed by opinion, but truth ; aiming at what will profit most, rather than what would please best. It is therefore highly necessary, that we study the wants of others, in order to become as useful as we can. And as our blessed Lord sometimes instructed and exhorted, sometimes cherished and fed his hearers by miracles, sometimes reproved

and upbraided their faults with great severity ; so we, in like manner, if we will follow his example, must dispense to each, as we ourselves are able, and as their condition requires. To the needy we must bring relief ; to the oppressed and injured, protection and assistance ; to the honest, well-meaning, and ignorant, instruction ; to the weak, encouragement ; to the sorrowful, comfort ; to the wicked, reproof ; and to the scandalous and incorrigible, shame and punishment ; forgiveness to our enemies ; prayers and good wishes to all the world. In a word, Christ's behaviour is a rule to us, for doing all the good we can ; and for doing it to as many as we can ; and for doing it in the best and most prudent manner that we can. And rather to hazard the doing somewhat, that may appear harsh, and give displeasure ; than, by too great a tenderness not to offend, and under the disguise of value and friendship, to do what in truth is the part of any enemy : which leads me to the *second* particular in our Saviour's behaviour, necessary to be observed and imitated by us. And that is,

2. That we make it our principal endeavour, to express our love in acts of kindness to the souls of men. Our Saviour, 'tis true, was very merciful to the bodies of men. He sustained their hunger, he healed their diseases, he released them from the torment and bondage of evil spirits ; and he died at last to purchase eternal redemption for this viler, in conjunction with the other more valuable part of us. But still in all these, and in all his other acts of mercy, he had regard chiefly to the souls of men. Those very miracles, which bestowed bodily health and soundness, had yet a farther end in view, and were designed for the gaining them over to holiness and truth. And in this spiritual life and health it was, that their true, their great happiness consisted. Thus also we must shew all the kindness we can to men, in every kind and capa-

city: but chiefly should we labour for their spiritual advantages. For no charity is truly Christian, which does not always keep God and heaven in its eye, and direct the good works it does, to the salvation and amendment of the parties to whom they are done. All other obligations, by which the body alone is provided, are of so little value, in comparison, that St. Paul, who yet was never behind-hand in gratitude, speaks of those people with an air of disdain, (if any such there were) who thought them equal. *If we (says he) have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your carnal things?* But, if the kindness to the souls of men be so much greater, so much more to be chosen and practised, than any that can be done to their bodies or fortunes: how far from the love in my text is that which men pretend, to draw their friend and companions into sin by, and, under pretence of honouring the outward, destroy the inward man? Sure these of all mankind must not pretend to obey the command here. This is not courtesy, but treachery and cruelty; not civility and entertainment, but brutality, nay even more than brutish excess; a scandal to human nature, a contradiction to Christian charity. For surely they, whose profession of friendship tend to the damning those, whom he took so much pains to save, do, least of all men living, *love one another, as Christ hath loved them.*

3. Upon this principle of Christian charity, designing the good of mens souls chiefly, is grounded the reasonableness of my *third* particular, in which Christ hath likewise set us an example. And that is, the thinking no instance, no act, whereby we may testify this love, and profit others, too great; but being ready and willing to promote the eternal good of our fellow Christians, at the expense of any temporal inconvenience or hazard. St. John, you must needs allow, hath carried this point very

1 John iii. 16. high; when arguing expressly, that, *as Christ laid down his life for us, we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* But Christ would not have thought the bodies of men, or any temporal happiness a cause, or consideration sufficient for his death and sufferings. The reason this great work cost so much was, because it was to redeem their souls: and each of these he, who bought them, hath taught us to prize above the whole world. Since therefore the body is not the man, but only the least and meanest part of him; when the parting with this may prove an instrument of great and manifest advantage to our own, or another's soul, the laying down life, in such a case, is agreeable to that general rule in traffic and human prudence, of exchanging a less for a greater value. But we, who are commanded upon occasion to expose or sacrifice our lives, are no where commanded, or so much as permitted, to commit a wilful sin, for the sake of any man. And the reason is, because this brings the soul into a manifest hazard and ruin. God can make a man good amends for the loss of this life, but there can no amends be made for the loss of the next. He that dies to advance the salvation of others, takes the right course for making both them and himself happy; but he that sins against God, in pretended love to another, does him no good, and himself a certain harm. And even Christ, who is our standard in this case, would not, could not, sin, or be damned, to save the world. And though we are not under the same impossibilities, yet we must be under the like firm resolutions, never to run the risk of being eternally miserable, for the sake of any the dearest friend alive. Any thing short of this, is agreeable to the duty of *loving as Christ loved*: but this were to hate and to destroy ourselves; a thing neither reasonable in its own nature, nor agreeable to that love of ourselves, which Christian charity hath made the measure of

our love to others : do, and suffer, and die for them we may, but sin for their sake we must not. It is absurd, as well as unlawful, to desire so dangerous an experiment of love and friendship : and they, who give it, neither understand Christ's precepts, nor follow his example : who, though he grudged no suffering or hardship upon our account, yet never left us pattern or permission, of being content to part with our innocence at any rate.

After insisting thus long on the words, as they represent Christ's love to be the measure and rule for ours, I shall need to say but very little of them, in that other sense, which makes his love the motive or argument of ours ; and implies that we ought to *love one another*, because *he loved us*. For, who are we, in comparison of him, that we should grudge that to our equals, which he condescended to, for the benefit of poor wretches, so many degrees his inferiors ? But why do I talk of degrees, where there is no manner of proportion ? For none indeed there is, none can be, between God and man, Creator and creature, infinite and nothing. Can any love be thought too great, when provoked by such an example ? I said we were in comparison of God as nothing. Give me leave to call that word back again, for in very truth we were worse than nothing. As therefore the vast distance between the Son of God and us, as creatures, is an argument for the freedom and generosity of our love, that it should proceed without prospect of return, and serve those who are least able or likely to recompense us : so, when we consider ourselves as lost and wicked sinners, this enforces the *second* qualification, and shews that we ought to make it universal. For how shall we dare to exclude, whom God hath not excluded ? What unworthiness can be a bar to our affection, when we consider, that all our dependance, all our hope, is in the worth and merits of another ? What provocation can be so grievous,

what enemy so fierce, as should, with any colour of reason, hinder them from forgiveness and reconciliation, who, if they be not forgiven ten thousand times more, must be undone to all eternity; nay, who are allowed to expect forgiveness of their own faults, upon this condition only, that they from their hearts forgive the offences committed against themselves? Once more: how can we think any proof of our love too much, when Christ hath done and suffered so much more for us, than we do, or can, for one another? For never can the condescension, the meekness, the patience, the sorrow and anguish, of his mysterious incarnation, his afflicted life, his ignominious and painful death, never can these meet with, I will not say a parallel, but any instance of charity fit to be named with them. What then can we do, in any tolerable measure like his love to us? What wretches are we, how ungrateful, how insensible, if, after having received more than can be expressed, we refuse to pay back a very little? I say, to pay back; for this is the only method we have left, of expressing our love and thanks to Christ himself; since, inasmuch as we do it to the least of these his brethren, we do it unto him.

I conclude with desiring my reader to observe, how prudent a choice our church makes in propounding to our consideration this lecture of charity, on a day, which gives us the advantage of receiving, together with the precept, an example enforcing the practice of it. For such, in most eminent manner, you have seen the saint of this festival
 Acts iv. 36, 37. to be. He cheerfully devoted first his fortunes, then his labours, and last of all his life, to the service of God and his fellow-Christians. This was indeed to love his brethren, as Christ had loved him. This we
 Collect. have reason to esteem one of those *singular gifts of the Holy Ghost, with which* this holy apostle *was endued*; and which we beg not to *be destitute*

of, nor yet of grace to use them always to God's honour and glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

St. John Baptist's Day.

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST.

IT is worth observing, that, whereas other festivals are celebrated on the supposed day of the saint's death then commemorated, this is calculated for the nativity of St. John: the only nativity, except that of our blessed Saviour, for which the church assembles with thanksgiving. The rest did by their deaths bear testimony to Christ already come: he died a martyr too, though not properly a martyr for the faith of Jesus. But the circumstances and design of his birth were so full of significance and wonder, that this in a particular manner claims our praise to God. Because his nativity was a warning and pledge of our Saviour's; and rendered him, as St. Chrysostom expresses himself, a preacher, and worker of miracles, from the very womb. Hence, says St. Augustin, it is, that the church this day goes out of her usual method, and pays a particular respect to the first setting out of this wonderful fore-runner.

Hom. de Concep.
S. Joan. T. 5. p.
832. Ed. Eton.
Serm. de Sanct.
xx.

All that concerns this part of St. John's story, is so fully related in St. Luke's first chapter, and so much of it will occur in the following discourse, that no more need be said of it. The evangelist acquaints us, that the fame and expectation of this child had spread itself through all the country. This, we are told, provoked the jealousy of Herod to endeavour his destruction also, at the time of slaying the children in and about Bethlehem. Zacharias is reported to have been

Luke i. 65.

killed in the temple, for refusing to deliver up his son; and Elizabeth, to have fled with him into the wilderness, and so early to have entered him upon that solitary life, which he persevered in, till the exercise of his ministry called him forth, and manifested this more than a prophet to Israel. St. Matthew describes to us his habit and diet; *a garment of camel's hair, a leathern girdle, locusts and wild honey*; all resembling the rigour of that Elias, in whose spirit and power he came. And, that the correspondence might hold as well in the miraculous provision, as in the plainness of his food, there was a tradition, that his mother Elizabeth died about forty days after their arrival in the desert; and that God commanded an angel to feed this important infant, till he was able to look out for his own sustenance.

His ministry will be considered in its place. His imprisonment is by Josephus imputed to Herod's jealousy, lest a person of such influence upon the people should dispose them to any insurrection.

Macherus was the place of his confinement: a town and castle of great strength, a little beyond Jordan, and near the Dead Sea. Here he was beheaded, and buried (say some) between Elisha and Obadiah the prophets. The gospels tell us the

provocation: that it was rebuking Herod for taking his brother's wife; and that Herod, who had a reverence for John, was trepanned into this execution by the subtlety and malice of Herodias, which took the advantage of a rash promise made to her daughter, and instructed her to ask the Baptist's head in a charger.

Josephus relates at large the wickedness, both of that marriage, and of this murder: the severe revenge taken by Aretas, king of Arabia Petræa, brother to Herod's

Adricom. Reuben, 44.

Luke iii. 19, 20.
Matt. xiv. 3. 12.
Mark vi. 17. 23.

Antiq. LXVII.
Cap. 7. 9.

repudiated wife: the miseries, which the restless ambition of Herodias brought afterwards upon both Herod and herself, no less than deprivation of his government and perpetual exile. And the daughter is also said, by a fall through ice which broke under her, to have had her head severed from her body: so resembling that death, which at her request the Baptist had suffered before.

See Dr. Whitby
on Matt. xiv.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY God, by whose providence thy servant John Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of thy Son our Saviour, by preaching of repentance; make us to follow his doctrine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching, and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Luke i. 11—
20. 36. 57, &c.
Matt. iii. 2—8.
xiv. 3—12.

THE EPISTLE.

ISA. xl. 1.

PARAPHRASE.

God is here introduced, sending his prophets upon a glad message; which some refer immediately to the return of the Jews from the captivity, threatened, chap. xxxix: but ultimately, to the days of the Messias. The third and following verses, as applied in the New Testament, put the latter of these interpretations past all dispute. And

therefore I shall attend to that sense only, as most suitable to the purpose of this day.

1, 2. Carry my people these glad tidings, to sustain them under their sufferings and fears, that the time of the Jewish servitude and hardship is drawing to an end; that their sin shall be effectually forgiven; and that God is satisfied with the punishments always inflicted upon that account.

3, 4. The immediate introducer of this gracious dispensation shall be John the Baptist; who, by preaching repentance in the wilderness of Judea, shall so dispose matters for the Messiah's appearance, as to do the part of those officers, who, upon the approach of princes, are wont to go before, and see the roads levelled and mended, and all made commodious for safe and easy travelling.

5. And then God shall manifest himself
Comp. and

Luke iii. 5,
6. and Luke
ii. 26. 30.

his glory, by the incarnation of his blessed Son, whom he hath appointed to be the Saviour of the world. This is God's own word, and he will make it good.

6, 7, 8. Man indeed is frail and feeble, his power is not able to obstruct or to bring about effects like this; but God and

1. **C**OMFORT ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

2. *Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.*

3. *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

4. *Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.*

5. *And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*

6. *The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field.*

7. *The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass.*

8. *The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever.* his promises can never fail.

Or, (as others)

God gave this farther message; that the Levitical law (called sometimes, in the New Testament, flesh, and a carnal ordinance) shall then be abolished, and expire like a mortal man; but the gospel (not resembling it in weakness or unprofitableness) shall be the last dispensation for bringing men to God, and continue in force to the world's end.

Gal. iv. 29.

—— 13.

Heb. ix. 10.

—— vii. 18.

9. *O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain: O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength: lift it up, be not afraid: say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God.*

10. *Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: Behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.*

11. *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

9,10,11. Let this therefore be published all abroad, beginning from Jerusalem, and let it be carried all the world over, that God will exert his power and his mercy; the former, like a mighty conqueror, subduing all that oppose him; the latter, like a tender and compassionate shepherd, cherishing

and condescending to the infirmities of all that obey him, and are desirous to be gathered into his fold.

THE GOSPEL.

LUKE i. 57.

PARAPHRASE.

57. **E**LIZABETH's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.

58. *And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.*

59. *And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and*

59. It being a son, born above

expectation, and like to be the only one, the relations were unanimous for his father's name. *they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.*

60. His mother (whether by an impulse of the Holy Spirit, as ver. 41. or whether having known from her husband, what name had been imposed on him by the angel, ver. 13.) opposed it. *60. And his mother answered and said, Not so ; but he shall be called John.*

61. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.

62. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.

63. He by signs in return intimated his desire of a writing-table : this determination surprised them very much for the reasons, ver. 60, 61. *63. And he asked for a writing-table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.*

64. But yet much more so did the accomplishment of what the angel foretold, ver. 20. by Zacharias recovering his speech. *64. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.*

65, 66. All which became a general subject of discourse in Hebron, and all the parts adjacent, (Comp. ver. 39. of this ch. with Josh. xi. 21. and xiv. 14. and xxi. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.) *65. And fear came on all that dwelt round about them : and all these sayings were noised abroad through all the hill-country of Judea.*

66. And all they that heard them, laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be ? And the hand of the Lord was with him. *66. And all they that heard them, laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be ? And the hand of the Lord was with him.*

And the wonderful circumstances, with which this birth was attended, made people presage great things from such a child. And accordingly the blessing of God appeared to go remarkably along with him.

67. And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

68. Praised be God, who hath in mercy looked upon the misery of his people, and, by visiting them in human flesh, hath brought them effectual redress. *68. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people.*

69. *And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us, in the house of his servant David;*

in David's throne, as a descendant from him, as a Saviour.

69. By setting up the kingdom of his Christ, to reign and a mighty Sa-

70. *As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began ;*

the prophets of every age successively ;

70. In exact agreement with the revelations to this purpose, left by

71. *That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us.*

should at length be subdued, and we rescued out of their hands, by a superior power ;

71. That they who hate us and design our ruin,

72. *To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant ;*

73. *The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,*

respect was unchangeable, he confirmed it to Abraham with the solemnity of an oath. See Gen. xviii. 18. Comp. Heb. vi. 13—18.

72, 73. All which he was so gracious, as long ago to engage his truth for, and, to shew that his council in this

74. *That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear,*

75. *In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.*

cheerful spirit, by persevering constantly in all his Son comes to teach us.

74, 75. The effect of which deliverance from our spiritual enemies, must be that of serving God with a thankful and the virtues, which

76. *And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways;*

run this Saviour, to fit men for a due reception of him ;

76. And thou, my child John, shalt foretel and immediately fore-

77. *To give knowledge of salvation unto his people, by the remission of their sins,*

him out to the people; that they, repenting, may be pardoned.

77. To give warning of him, and personally to point upon thy doctrine,

78, 79. By that unspeakable compassion of God, who hath sent his Son from heaven; that, like the sun, or morning-star, he should disperse

the darkness of ignorance and misery, and enlighten the minds of a blind world, to find the paths of knowledge and safety.

80. This child advanced, in natural and spiritual accomplishments

proportionably; and spent his time in solitary places, till the entrance on his public ministry.

78. *Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us,*

79. *To give light to them that sit in darkness, in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace.*

80. *And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.*

COMMENT.

THE portion of Scripture for the Epistle, and that of the Gospel, now before us, will be most properly treated of together; because both agree in the same design, of explaining to us the office and business of that holy person, whose wonderful birth the Christian church this day commemorates. It was, say Isaiah and Zacharias unanimously, that he might *go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his way*. Of the nature of that preparation, so far as it was intimated by the metaphorical expressions in the Old Testament, somewhat hath been spoken already. The farther consideration of it was referred to this place, and shall now be briefly taken under three heads: 1. The preaching of John; 2. His baptism; and, 3. Some significant circumstances, relating to his person and manner of life.

1. With regard to the *first* of these, more especially, we may understand those words of his father; who styles this *child, the prophet of the Highest*, because he should *go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways*, by giving *knowledge of salvation to*

Gosp. iv. Sun.
in Advent.

his people for the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited them, &c. Which the evangelists inform us, was done, by *preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*

Matt. iii. 1.

Mark i. 4.

Luke iii. 3.

The prophets of former ages might, in a qualified sense, be said thus far to prepare Christ's way, that they also preached repentance. But none of them did or could preach it in the manner John did. They did not so boldly, or so plainly, warn the people; how vain those confidences were, by which they flattered themselves in being the holy seed, descended of the stock of Abraham. They did not so clearly discover to them, that the venom of the viper still lurked even in those, who were highly exalted with a false opinion of their own sanctity, built upon a nice observance of the Mosaical ordinances. They did not draw the scene, like him; and set before their eyes that unquenchable fire, prepared for ungodly men and vain-glorious hypocrites. But, above all, they did not, could not, press the necessity of repentance, and the danger of delaying it, by that most quickening of all motives, *the kingdom of heaven* being then *at hand*. Consequently they could least of all be said, like him, to *go before the face* (or, as the Hebrew signifies, in the presence) *of the Lord*. The difference between them and John being in this respect the same, as that of messengers sent long before, to give notice of the intended, but yet distant, coming, and that of officers accompanying the motions, and immediately ushering in the person, of the prince.

Matt. iii. 2.

This doctrine of repentance he likewise inculcated in its utmost extent and perfection. He awakened men to it by the terrors of the wrath to come; he contented not himself with bringing them to an humble sense of,

iii. 7. 12.

Matt. iii. 8.
 Luke iii. 10.
 14.

and deep sorrow for, their past wickedness; but required a thorough change, and *fruits meet for repentance*. A change, not sufficiently evident by forsaking old vices, unless the mind be also possessed with the dispositions, and the life distinguished by the habitual practice, of their opposite virtues. He puts their hopes of forgiveness upon the right foot, and suffers them not to be laid upon any of those actions, which, though the indispensable condition, are not yet the proper and meritorious cause, of pardon. He gave *knowledge of the remission of sins, through the tender mercy of God*. Not that mercy inherent in him, as a Being absolutely perfect; not those bowels belonging to the character of a Father or Creator; but that *whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness*. Once more, not to that mercy, which sent his Son, merely to discharge the office of an instructor and guide: for when he represents that Son to the people, as the *Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world*, this is a manifest allusion to the lambs offered under the law, and to persons educated in that dispensation, an allusion easy and familiar. The inference from whence was obvious, if not necessary, that he was to take away sin by the death and sacrifice of himself.

One cannot reflect at all upon these particulars, and not see the fitness of that preparation made by them, for him who came to reform the world, to establish righteousness, to complete and to reveal the whole mystery of our redemption. Had these principles been entertained with the same zeal they were taught, how smooth and easy had his way been made: but they, who lay grovelling in their mire of sin, affected still to retain the situation of valleys, and refused to be *exalted*. The *mountains* and *hills* of *pharisaical* superstition and self-sufficiency would not endure to be *made low*. The *crooked* disposi-

tions of covetousness, ambition, sensual pleasures, and worldly lusts, were not *straightened*; nor the *roughness* of angry, revengeful, haughty and uncharitable passions *made plain*, by this doctrine of repentance. And, from that inefficacy of a preparation, so competent in itself, the history of our Saviour's and his apostles ministry assures us, it was, that so great a part even of their labours was in vain. Meanwhile, what hath been said abundantly proves, how well this part of John's office was discharged, and how eminently he, above any other prophet whatsoever, deserved the title of our blessed Lord's *fore-runner*, upon the account of his *preaching*.

II. Let us in the next place consider his *baptism*. Baptism was no new or strange thing with the Jews; it was acknowledged and practised, as an emblem of purification from past guilt, and a rite of entering solemnly into covenant with God. The expositors of their law agree, that this ceremony passed upon the whole congregation of Israel, just before the law was given at Mount Sinai; and they understand that command of God to *sanctify them*, which we render *washing of their clothes*, of a baptismal immersion of their bodies. Their custom in all succeeding ages hath been, to receive their heathen proselytes by baptism, as well as by sacrifice, and (if they be males) circumcision. A practice, grounded on that clause, which says, *One ordinance shall be both for you of the congregation, and also for the stranger that sojourneth with you, an ordinance for ever in your generations. As ye are, so shall the stranger be before the Lord.* Exod. xix. 10.
Numb. xv. 15.

And as it was in point of the rites of admission, so was it likewise in point of privileges, accruing by that admission into covenant. The Jews receive their own children by circumcision and sacrifice; because the obligation of their law, as to these, is personal and express. But in regard, baptism im-

plies a state formerly unclean, they do not baptize their natives; as thinking, by that general baptism at entering into covenant with God at Mount Sinai, not the then body of the people only, but all succeeding generations descending from them, to be sanctified. In like manner, though the persons of proselytes are baptized constantly, yet are their posterity, born after proselytism, never baptized; because accounted clean by the baptism of their pa-

Dr. Lightfoot. rents, and so (as an eminent writer expresses it) they *are already Israelites*.

I have insisted the longer upon these things, (which are set in a very clear light by the late excellent labours of a worthy and learned divine) because they help

Mr. Wall of Infant Baptism.

up to a plain solution of a passage; which, by being misunderstood, hath ministered occasion to a considerable error, concerning the matter now in hand. The messengers sent from Jerusalem to John, after he had declared, who he was not, and what he

John i. 25. was, proceed with this question, *Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not the Christ, neither Elias, neither that Prophet?* The Jews admit, that one, commissioned by divine authority, is not strictly bound up to the law; but may act and appoint things, not mentioned there, or practised before his own time. From hence many have supposed baptism to have been instituted by St. John, either in the whole, or at least in the signification of it, as a rite intimating sanctification of the soul. Now the truth is, it was both used, and used as a means and emblem of purifying from sin, before. But it was used thus to proselytes only, to natural-born Jews never, except when the whole body were baptized (as a body) at Mount Sinai. That therefore, which gave surprise and offence upon this occasion, was, that John administered baptism to those natives, who were presumed to have no need of it; an indignity done to the supposed

of holy seed, such as implied a reproach of uncleanness, and brought them down to the level of the despised Gentiles. And the requiring this, as a necessary means for remission of sins, or testimony of that repentance he so earnestly urged upon them, was (in their judgment) a disparaging innovation, which nothing less than a divine authority could justify.

Meanwhile it is easy enough from hence to discern, how signally John, above all others, was the fore-runner of our Lord, in respect of his baptism also. He first administered and exhorted to this ordinance, (which our Saviour afterwards enjoined) as an evidence, requisite for every one to give in his own person, of penitence for sins past; as a profession of a better obedience; as a title to the privileges of a covenant therein renewed with God, and (in ordinary cases) a necessary protection against the wrath to come.

But faith is a qualification for baptism, of equal necessity with repentance. And thus also *John prepared the way of our Lord*, as he propounded him for the object of faith to all who received this ordinance at his hands. Herein St. Paul is express, *John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.* Acts xix. 4. 'Tis true, the object of baptismal faith was afterwards enlarged, when our Lord himself instituted that sacrament. Christians are bound to profess their belief in, and dedicate themselves to the service of, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The trinity of persons in the Godhead was a mystery reserved for the Son himself to reveal: John taught it not, much less required the profession of it. This was one imperfection in his baptism. For his, though it prepared men to be Christians, did not make them such; and, consequently, could not supersede the use and necessity

Christ's baptism, even to them who had been already baptized by John. The case of the disciples at Ephesus puts all this out of dispute. They had been baptized unto John's baptism, Acts xix. 2, 3. *and yet had not so much as heard whether there were any Holy Ghost.* Whereupon, after St. Paul's representing the deficiency of that in their present state, *when they had heard the argument* Ver. 5, 6. *quoted just now, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus; and when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Ghost came on them.*

If it be asked, whether they were not baptized *in the name of the Lord Jesus*, who, when baptized, were taught to believe on him that should come after St. John, *that is, on Christ Jesus*: I can answer, they were not. Baptizing in the name of Jesus imports the baptism commanded by Jesus; and I see no ground for that distinction, which some have inferred from the variety of phrases used in this manner; as if baptizing *in the name of Jesus*, and baptizing *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, were ever designed to mean two different sorts or forms of baptism. We are baptized in the name of Jesus, when we are baptized into the belief of the doctrine taught by Jesus; when after the manner, and in the form, instituted and prescribed by Jesus; when taking his name upon us as disciples, and professing obedience to all his precepts. The proper notion of doing any thing in the name of another, is doing it by the authority, in compliance with the direction, or with a dependence on the being upheld in it, by the person so named.

But waving this; the persons, who, when baptized of John, were taught to believe on him that should come after him, were *not baptized in the name of Jesus*, because, strictly speaking, they were not

taught to *believe in Jesus*. They were indeed taught so, by consequence and necessary implication; because taught to *believe on him that should come after John*, who was, as St. Paul truly affirms, Christ Jesus. But they were not taught so explicitly, and in terms; nor did John, at that time, either teach the multitudes determinately, or as yet himself understand, that Jesus in particular was the person that should come after him. He knew there was some excellent and transcendentally great person, to whom the title of *coming after* belonged, with peculiar reference to his own office of *going before*. And therefore the baptism of John did contribute greatly to *prepare the way of the Lord*, as our Lord's condescending to receive it was the method ordained by God, for the personal manifestation of him to the people. All these things are evident consequences of those declarations, made by the Baptist himself.

This is he, of whom I said, After me cometh a man, who is preferred before me, for he was before me. And I knew him not; but that he might be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And again, I knew him not; but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw and bare record, that this is the Son of God.

John i. 30, 31.

Ver. 33, 34.

Our Saviour could not stand in need of John's baptism; as it was a baptism of repentance, by reason he had no sin to be purged away. He suffered it because it *became him to fulfil all righteousness*. This being then appointed an instrument of purification to the Jews, it was not fit, that he, who came to be a pattern of perfection, should neglect any ordinance appointed by his Father, any mark or profession of sanctity: not that especially,

Matt. iii. 15.
Chrys. T. VII.
Orat. 95, 96.

which they laid so great stress upon, and held in so high esteem, who joyfully heard the praises and *justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.* But above all it was expedient, for the introducing that visible and glorious testimony of Jesus being *the beloved Son of God, in whom he is well pleased,* and whom it is therefore the duty of all men to hear.

Thus John was most eminently our Lord's forerunner, not only as a preacher, but as a baptist too; in that his baptism was a solemn rite of renouncing sin; in that it was a profession of obedience for the future; in that it opened the way for a more perfect institution of the like nature; in that it exhibited Christ, as the object of faith, the master and guide men ought to follow: for being thus baptized, they were thereby led and consigned over to him; and qualified for the Christian baptism, which exceeds that other in dignity and efficacy: for here the Spirit accompanieth the water. This confers by its own virtue, actually and immediately, the privileges imparted by that, accidentally and remotely. This confirms and completes that pardon of sins, and those assistances of grace, which belonged to no antecedent washings, farther than as they were figures of, and approaches toward, the Christian; and is therefore by way of distinction and eminence styled, *the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*

III. Let us now, in the *last place*, observe the Baptist preparing the way for Christ, in some remarkable circumstances relating to his person and behaviour.

1. The first of these is his being foretold by the ancient prophets; both as to the character he should sustain, and as to the successful discharge of it. This

we find done particularly, by Isaiah, in his *fortieth*, and by Malachi, in his *third* and *fourth* chapters: passages all applied to John, by the evangelists, and by our blessed Saviour himself. An honour so uncommon, that some have understood him to be entitled *more than a prophet*, not only upon the account of his immediate fore-running our Lord; but because his doing so, and the spirit and manner in which it was done, were thought a subject worthy of former and long distant prophecies. And to this the prediction of his conception, birth, name, manner of living, and ministry, by an angel sent from heaven for that purpose: the same angel which so quickly after brought the like, but more joyful message, concerning our Lord himself. The particulars of both indeed as nearly resemble each other, as it is possible for the accounts of persons so distant to do. So circumstantial in this respect was the preparation made for the Son of the great God's approach, by the predictions of him, than whom *there had not been a greater among them that are born of women*.

Matt. iii. 3.

Mark i. 2, 3.

Luke iii. 4, 5, 6.

Matt. xi. 10. 14.

xvii. 11, 12, 13.

Luke i. 13, 14, 15,
16, 17. 19. 26.

A *second* particular in his birth. His stock was of that set of men, whom God had chosen of his own, and sanctified for the nearest approaches to himself in the priestly office. Both his parents were of an age that rendered issue unexpected; and his mother besides under a natural incapacity from her youth. So that this child was altogether miraculous; and, as such, a proper fore-runner for him, who was born of a pure virgin, without the knowledge of man: because the sight and certain assurance of the former astonishing event would, when rightly considered, dispose to the belief of the latter. That this was one intent and use of it, we have the authority of an angel to instruct us; who, to establish the Virgin's faith, in a

Luke i. 5, 6.

message unaccountable to reason, and impracticable to nature, urges this argument: *And Luke i. 36, 37. behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible.*

3. St. John did also *prepare the way of Christ*, by his manner of life. This was retired and abstemious, austere and mortified to the last degree; and such a life became a preacher of repentance, who thundered out terrors to the vicious and hypocritical. But, when reproofs and threatenings had awakened the fears and remorse of guilty sinners, and rendered comfort and encouragement seasonable to be administered, Jesus came to declare pardon and reconciliation: and it was no less agreeable to the character he sustained, to be gentle, and affable, and courteous. It was foretold of him, that he should *Matt. xii. 20. not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax:* and therefore, that he might bind up the wounds of penitents cut to the heart, and blow up the least sparks of virtuous inclination, he shewed himself easy of access to the most profligate, and disdained not to eat and drink even with publicans and harlots for their reformation.

John did *no miracle*, and therefore found no way so fit as extraordinary reservedness and sanctity, to gain such veneration among the people as might dispose them to believe, that *all things John x. 41. he said* of Jesus were true. Jesus was to prove his divine original and authority, by *signs and wonders, and mighty works*; such as could not attain their intended effect, without frequenting places of public concourse, and mixt multitudes of spectators. His business therefore was to win upon their affections by his charity; to *go Acts x. 38. about doing good*; and to convince men from their own experience, that he came to live

as well as die, for the common benefit of a miserable world. The complexions, and interest, and engagements of mankind are infinitely various, and these require as different sorts of treatment. The life of John taught men, how to escape the pollutions of the world, by solitude and going out of the way of temptations and allurements: the life of Jesus taught them, that they may be safe in the midst of enjoyments and business, and promiscuous conversation; that liberties may be so taken, as to continue innocent; and society so indulged, as to be even more beneficial than solitude. In the former the contemplative and reserved, the severe and melancholy; in the latter the sociable and active, and generous, the sanguine and open, may find their pattern and instruction. Thus there was a difference indeed in the conduct of that less, and this greater example; but it was a difference of decency, and order, and use, and great propriety. It was not only profitable, but necessary, for bringing all to Christ, that they who admired the austerity of John, might come to Jesus for the sake of his testimony; and that they, who preferred the social virtues of Jesus, might come for the love of his own engaging easiness. But they, who would suffer neither of these attractives to prevail, betrayed their own perverseness; and left no excuse, no remedy, for an incorrigible temper. From hence it is, that our Lord mentions the very matter I am upon, and upbraids the Jews with the inefficacy of it, under that parabolical expostulation, *Whereunto shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the market-place, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread, nor drinking wine, and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man is come, eating and drinking,*

Luke vii. 31. 35.

and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of all her children.

4. How *John prepared the Lord's way* in the whole course of his public ministry, hath been already shewed. I add, therefore, in the *last* place, that he did it also by his imprisonment and death. Although, in the series of our Saviour's actions, we are to place all that we find related by St. John, from the *first* to the *fifth* of his gospel, between St. Matthew's ac-

John ii. & v. count of his temptation, and that

of his preaching in Galilee; though our Lord had began to manifest his glory by some miracles, and received some disciples, and baptized

John iii. 22, 23. in Judea, while John continued to baptize in Enon, near Salim; yet he

did not so solemnly enter upon his preaching, till the confinement of John made it seasonable for him to come into the same parts, and set out with the same subject. For the evangelists are express, that, *after*

Mark i. 14. *John was cast into prison, Jesus came*

Matt. iv. 13. 17. *into Galilee, and from that time he began to preach, and to say, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

Out of this confinement it was, that John, by Matt. xi. sending two of his disciples for the con-
Luke vii. firmation of their faith, made them at once witnesses of the divine power, and divulgers of the fame of Jesus and his miracles. Thus he contributed greatly to the fixing them in, and inviting others to, the discipleship of that heavenly

Master after his death. Upon the news Matt. xiv. 12.

whereof we find those that adhered to him, and had done the last offices of respect to his body, immediately repairing to Jesus. And it is probably believed, not only that they were from thenceforth Christ's constant followers, but that the more considerable part, both of the twelve apostles, and the seventy disciples of our Lord,

were first initiated under the preparatory discipline of John.

But his death was farther instrumental to this end, as it raised the esteem of John yet higher with the Jews, who held him *for a prophet before*. Matt. xxi. 26. The scribes and pharisees durst not return a direct answer to Christ's question, concerning the authority of John's baptism, for fear of either condemning themselves, by allowing it; or of *being stoned by the people, if they should have denied it*. Luke xx. 6. The opinion they had of his virtues was such, that some thought our Saviour to be John restored to life; and that God had endued him with a power of miracles to testify his innocence and the wrongfulness of his death. The perplexity this surmise cast Herod into, Matt. xiv. proceeded from a guilty conscience, and a dread that the people should revenge upon him the cruelty committed on so deservedly celebrated a person. And the subsequent calamities on him and his family, were generally Joseph Antiq. LXVIII. c. 7. interpreted a particular vengeance, for the barbarity of that murder.

All these circumstances are meant to shew, that the death of John, as it is added to his own honour, so must it in proportion add to our Saviour's; and dispose them, who held John in such veneration, to think so much more honourably of the person, to whom he bore such ample testimony; and to whom he was upon all occasions so solicitous to declare the preference, infinitely above himself, to be strictly due. Accordingly the gospels seem to say, that the prodigious increase of our Lord's fame broke forth and diffused itself, immediately after the death of John. A death, in this yet farther respect, fore-running his; as it was provoked by the discharge of his duty, borne with exemplary courage and patience, and a martyrdom in the cause of truth and virtue.

Thus, after a long dark night of ignorance and virtue, God was pleased gradually to restore light to a wretched world. The law and the prophets, like the glimmerings of the twilight, dawned first. The Baptist, like the morning-star, gave notice of its approach : and, in proportion as this disappeared, clear day came on, and the Sun of Righteousness arose. God give all them, who live under his shine, the grace to *walk as children of light*, and in that *way of peace*, for the *guiding their feet, in which he visited us from on high*. To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, three persons and one God, be all honour and glory for evermore. *Amen.*

Eph. v. 8.

Luke i. 78, 79.

St. Peter's Day.

AN ACCOUNT OF ST. PETER.

THE Scriptures take little more notice of St. Peter's relations, than that he was the son of Jonah, and the brother of Andrew. John xxi. 15. Whether he was the elder, is controverted ; but St. Jerom, and far the greater part of the ancient writers, give it to St. Peter. *Epiphanius* indeed thinks otherwise. But St. Jerom Adv. Jovin. Tom. 2. p. 35. expressly imputes his priority to his years or gravity, as the most probable reason that can be alleged for his precedency before St. John the beloved disciple in particular. That he was considerably older than our Lord, we may with good reason conclude ; although the number of years, and time of his birth, be not known to us. The place of his abode, as well as birth, was *Bethsaida*, where he had been educated in the laborious trade of fishing. We have reason enough to conjecture that he was for some time a disciple of John

the Baptist; being well assured that his brother Andrew, who first brought him to Christ, was so. St. Peter, being surprised with the news, comes full of expectation to see the person, who, his brother had assured him, was the same that the prophets had foretold, the very Messiah. He at first sight meets with a familiar salutation, and the promise of an honourable name, with which he should shortly be dignified. How long St. Peter continued now with Jesus the Scripture does not inform us. But it hath been already proved, that this was not the call to his constant attendance upon Christ; the circumstances whereof have also been sufficiently spoken to.

John i. 41, 42.

Gosp. for 5th
Sun. after Trin.

Our Saviour being now about to choose his apostles, did first commend himself and them to God the Father, and begged his assistance in earnest prayer. *It came to pass in those days, that he went into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God; and when it was day his disciples came unto him. Of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles, Simon, called Peter, &c.* When the apostles were baptized, we have no good account; but that they were we have no reason to doubt. Some have been so fond as to think our Saviour baptized Peter only; that he baptized James and John, and they the rest of their brethren. But this is advanced without any ground, and it is easy to discover the meaning of it. Thus much we are well satisfied of, that these three were admitted into our Lord's more secret retirements, and honoured with greater manifestations of his power and glory, than the rest. But that Peter was ever alone so favoured, we do not any where find sufficient proof.

Jesus, having exerted his divine power, in the feeding five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, from thence took occasion to discourse of himself, as

the heavenly bread typified by the manna in the wilderness. At this many were offended, insomuch that great part of his disciples deserted him; which he perceiving, asks the twelve, *Will ye also go away?* to which St. Peter with a becoming zeal replies, John vi. 67, 68. *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.*

Our Lord, willing to be private, and at the same time to make trial of his disciples faith, commands them into a ship, whilst himself in a desert place continued praying. In the mean time a boisterous storm had made the voyage not only slow but dangerous. In the midst of their vain toils and fears, they beheld Jesus walking on the merciless element. This put them into a yet greater affright, caused by mistaking him for a spirit; he, to satisfy their anxious doubts, makes himself known to them. But Peter's warmth, willing to distinguish itself, desires leave to make an experiment of his faith, by coming to our Lord upon the water. Immediately, the waves rising, and his body and faith both sinking together, he implores help; which being given, with a gentle reproof, both came in the ship. The storm having now performed the business for which it was designed, forthwith ceased; and the winds and water, with all speed, convey them to their haven where they would be.

Being come into the coasts of Cesarea, Christ inquires of his disciples what opinion the people had of him; and afterwards, what the apostles themselves thought. Peter, their common spokesman, answers, *Thou art Christ the Son of God.* Matt. xvi. To which our Saviour replies, *Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona, &c.* as in the Gospel for the day. For the true importance whereof I refer my reader to the Comment there.

The next remarkable passage we find this saint concerned in, was the glorious transfiguration of our

Lord ; when Moses and Elias were seen with him, and Peter's advice was, to build three tabernacles for an abode there. His words in some sense were prophetic ; and afterwards so far accomplished, that history informs us, three Christian churches were erected in this mountain.

Matt. xvii.

Adricom,
Zabulon.

Our Saviour, upon the approach of his passion, began to forewarn his disciples of it ; but Peter's affection for his Master, and his misapprehension of the nature of his kingdom, could not bear any thoughts of that nature. He supposed it incredible that such affronts and indignities should be offered to the Son of God. Whereupon he receives a sharp rebuke, *Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men,*

Matt. xvi.

Matt. xvi. 23.

After this he is made instrumental in a miracle, by taking up a fish with money in his mouth, for satisfying the demands of those who collected the tribute-money at Capernaum. This was the yearly sum, payable by every Jew, to supply the service and expenses of the temple. To which, though our Lord's argument plainly intimates that he was not obliged, yet he rather chose to submit to the payment than give offence, and incur the censure of contemning the legal ordinances, by insisting upon an exemption, the reasons whereof were not as yet convenient to be divulged.

Matt. xvii.

Our blessed Lord, having discoursed, a young man, very eager to become his convert, but who had not followed that wise counsel, to sit down first and count the charges, (that is, to represent to himself all the difficulties before he entered upon the work) was hence teaching his disciples what great impediments to godliness riches are, and how unlikely the possessors of them would be to forsake all, take up their

Matt. xix.

Luke xiv. 31. 33,

cross and follow him. St. Peter desires to know, what reward their so perfect resignation of themselves and their fortunes should obtain. He is answered, that they should meet with ample recompense; if not in this world, yet however, when the Son of Man shall come in his glory.

The time was now at hand for our blessed Saviour's celebrating his last great passover: he therefore

fore sends Peter and John, as har-
Luke xxii. 8. bingers, to prepare for his reception.

They had executed his commands, and he comes to the house with the rest of his apostles. (Whether it was St. John's, Simon the leper's, Nicodemus's, Joseph of Arimathea, or whether any of those, there is no necessity of inquiring.) Supper being now almost ended, our Lord, about to shew them an exemplary proof of that humility, which he had so constantly recommended to them in his discourses, rises from table, lays by his upper garments, (which, according to the custom of those eastern countries, were long and unfit for action) girds himself

John xiii. with a towel, and having poured water into a basin, comes to wash the feet of his apostles. Peter, thinking it too great a degrading of himself, esteemed himself obliged to refuse the proffer. Which modest obstinacy he persists in, till informed that, unless he were so washed, he forfeited all right in his Master. Whereupon he immediately and eagerly replies, *Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.*

This ceremony being ended, our Lord foretels the consternation and fear his being apprehended should strike into them. Peter's forward temper and most affectionate zeal, makes large promises of going into prison or death, rather than he would be guilty of deserting his Master. Hereupon he is reproved by Christ, for his inconsiderate, though honest, professions of kindness; and forewarned, how great his own particular failing should shortly

be, notwithstanding the indignation of the former prediction concerning the apostles in general had raised in him; that he should forsake, deny, nay abjure his Lord; and that three times before the cock-crowing. He, still pre-
 Matt. xxvi. 31. 35.
 suming upon his own sincerity and strength, proceeds to engage farther, that he would not only adhere to Christ inseparably, (*I will lay down my life for thy sake; and though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee in any wise:*) but that he would do it in a more eminent manner, and even stand single if the rest should be shaken; *although all men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.* Matt. xxvi. 33.

Our Saviour after supper goes to Gethsemane, near which place was a garden: here the first conflicts began: it seeming good to Almighty God, that our happiness should there begin, by means of the second Adam, where it had been so miserably forfeited by the first. His three companions, Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, were left at some distance from that place, where he addressed himself to his heavenly Father. After two returns he finds them fast asleep; which this kind Master imputes to their frailty, and not to careless, or unconcernedness for the danger then imminent. His third ejaculation was scarce ended, when the traitor had conducted his soldiers to interrupt his privacies, and rudely seize him. The apostles, being now awakened from their secure slumber, by so dismal an object, put the question, Lord, *shall we smite with the sword?* Peter,
 Luke xxii. 49.
 whose vigorous courage always spurred him on to bold and generous actions, not enduring the tedious expectation of an answer, strikes a kinsman of the high priest, which happily
 John xviii.
 had no worse effect, than cutting off his right ear. Our Saviour, willing even then to convince the

Jews, if possible, of his divine power and mission, immediately heals the wound; and, with a sharp rebuke, commands Peter to forbear such unlawful and unseasonable proofs of his love.

Hereupon the disciples all fled. But Peter and John, presently recovering themselves, followed to the high priest's palace, where, at the request of St. John, they were admitted. Now it was, that those mighty protestations were come to the test; when that resolution, which had so lately opposed a band of armed men, trembled at the words of a silly maid; and that Master was denied for fear, in whose cause, not many minutes before, he had hazarded his life. St. Peter, retiring into the porch, probably to avoid more reproaches, was warned by the first crowing of the cock, which had not the least effect upon him. About an

Matt. xxvi. 69—
74.

hour after, he is charged again; and the suspicion arose from his dialect, or manner of speech, (the Galileans using a broader and more clownish pronunciation than the rest of the Jews.) To this denial he adds an oath for confirmation: and to his third, a solemn execration. So feeble are we, when left to ourselves; and so ordinary is it to heap one sin upon another, when men are conscious of guilt and a bad cause. It was now time to compassionate his infirmity, and to restore his understanding; which our Saviour, at the second crowing of the cock, did so effectually awaken, by a gracious chiding look, that the penitent was sensible of his heinous offence, and so deeply sorry for it, as immediately to flee out of the house, that he might give his grief the vent it desired; that of deep sighs, and bitter tears of repentance.

Whether he followed our Saviour through the other stages of his passion, we have not any account from Holy Writ. That he was, first of all the apostles, honoured with a sight of our Lord after

his resurrection, we are told by St. Paul; and St. Luke relating the appearance to the disciples at Emmaus, seems to intimate as much.

1 Cor. xv. 5.

Luke xxiv. 33, 44.

An infinite demonstration of mercy and goodness this was, to afford his afflicted disciple such early comforts for that sorrow, which the remembrance of his sin had produced. After having appeared to the twelve at Jerusalem, they begin their journey to Galilee: whither he had lately commanded them to betake themselves, in order to converse with him. This, it is highly probable, they might defer upon the account of their fears: those being now banished by frequent interviews, they set forward; and Peter, James and John, Thomas and Nathanael, being by the sea of Tiberias, betook themselves to their old trade of fishing.

John xxi. 2, 3.

After many fruitless endeavours, they beheld upon the shore a person, probably

Ver. 4, 5.

Ver. 6.

in the habit of a traveller, who advised them to cast the net on the right side of the ship. Which, when they had done, and inclosed a great number of fishes, St. John, remembering the former

Ver. 7.

miracle in the like nature at their first calling, cried out, *It is the Lord*. These words inspired new vigour into Peter, who, impatient to approach his dear Master, casts himself into the sea and swims to shore. There he finds a fire and fish, thereon: which notwithstanding Jesus rejected,

Ver. 9.

and required some of the draught. After dinner he applies himself more particularly to Peter, and three times asks the question, *Lovest thou me?* Adding each time this command,

Ver. 15, &c.

Feed my sheep. This question, so often repeated, must needs be very afflicting to Peter since his fall. Which having created in him a more meek temper, and increased his humility, he does not now prefer himself to his brethren, no, not even when Jesus asked, *Lovest thou me more than these?* (possibly in

allusion to his professing, *Though all be offended, yet will not I*) but modestly declines the comparison, and appeals to his omniscience, *Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.* Thus was it thought fit, that he, who had so shamefully denied his Lord, should as oft be obliged to make solemn and public professions of his love and reverence for him; each answer being a kind of reparation for his former offence.

Luke xxiv. 50, 51. Our Saviour, after forty days, brings his disciples to Bethany.

There, having given them all his solemn blessing, and promised them the assistance of his Spirit, and the testimony of miracles, he was taken into heaven;

whilst they, full of joy and wonder, returned to Jerusalem, praising God.
Ver. 52, 53.
Acts i. 12—14.

Thus far of St. Peter, during our blessed Lord's abode upon earth.

The next occasion that presents him to us, is the election of a new apostle instead of Judas.

Acts i. 15. Peter, being the mouth of this assembly, introduces the choice, by shewing the necessity of another witness of the resurrection, and the horrible crime the traitor had been guilty of. After which they proceed, as hath been observed heretofore. Shortly after, we read of the Holy Ghost poured

Acts ii. 14, &c. out upon the disciples; and St. Peter, upon that occasion, not only vindicates his brethren from the scandalous imputation cast upon that miracle, by the astonished auditors, but effectually proves the mystery of our salvation; which first discourse was so powerful, as to gain no less than three thousand souls over to the faith.

Acts iii. The next step, made in this progress, was a miracle upon a cripple from his birth: which, becoming publicly known, created a jealousy in the sanhedrim of the Jews, that the people's hearts would be won to the belief of this new religion, unless prevented by timely care. Having

therefore called Peter and John before the council, and examined them, they met with replies so full of constancy and courage, with reproofs so just, and doctrines so powerful, that proceed to punishment they durst not, fearing the people. Therefore, after some short debate, they were dismissed with a severe prohibition to preach any more in this name. Such was now the apostles undaunted presence of mind, that, not fearing the very assembly, who had dyed their hands in their Lord's blood, and therefore were not likely to be very tender of his servants, they replied, that such menaces could not prove of any force at all to keep them from their duty; appealing to their very judges and accusers, whose injunctions ought to take place, God's, or their's. The many signal miracles done by their hands, daily advanced their character among the people. And it is not difficult to imagine, with how great regret and vexation of spirit the high priest and Sadducees daily beheld the sick in couches, expecting only the shadow of Peter as he passed by. They send therefore the captain of the temple, (so called, because his garrison was in the Turris* Antonina, near at hand, to prevent any tumults or seditions) to take them again; they complain of their strict orders, so soon, with so much confidence, violated; the apostles returned the same answer as before: hereupon they are committed to

Acts iv. 1--3.
13--18.
8--12.

Acts iv. 19, 20.

Acts v. 11, 12, 13.

Ver. 15.

* This commanded the temple, as that did the city; it had for that reason been the dwelling of the chief priests, from Hyrcanus the Maccabee (the builder of it) to Herod's time. But he, sensible what check a good strength here might give to any commotions, repaired, fortified, and carried it so high, that the guard placed here had a perfect view and command of every thing done about the temple, and were always at hand to suppress any disorders. See Adricom, in Jerusal. § 29.

prison. But in vain do bars and keepers oppose the operations of an almighty Power. The apostles were found in the temple preaching to the people, and yet the prison-doors all this while strongly guarded. Enraged with a miracle, which should

rather have convinced them, the Jews
 Acts v. 34. were now preparing the sentence of death; when Gamaliel, whose wisdom made him more moderate than the rest, diverted them from their design by a seasonable and most rational discourse.

The martyrdom of Stephen not long
 Acts vii. after, and the persecution immediately consequent upon it, caused the disciples to disperse, and consequently the speedier dissemination of the

gospel. Philip, the deacon, among the
 Acts viii. rest, had been very happy in Samaria. For the confirming of which city, Peter and John were sent from the college of apostles at Jerusalem. Here they imparted the gift of the Holy Ghost, by the laying on of hands and prayer. Here they confounded Simon Magus, and disabused the people who had been seduced by his sorceries and blasphemies. In their return to Jerusalem, they enlightened many places about Samaria. During this interval, most probably, Peter visited Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, and made those converts, to whom his first epistle is directed. About the same time he is supposed to have planted the Christian religion in Antioch, and to have gone through the places mentioned, Acts ix. In almost all of which he left some signal proof of a supernatural power co-operating with him. At Lydda, Æneas, after eight years' palsy, was from bed-ridden made immediately whole; and at Joppa, Tabitha was restored to life and sound health, after she had been washed and prepared for burial. After presiding some time over that church in Antioch, of which he had laid the first foundations, he is said

to have been succeeded in that see by Enodius : under whose government how gloriously the Christian faith grew and flourished, notice hath been taken before.

Epist. St. Barnabas's Day.

But the most glorious prize he bore was the conversion of the Gentiles, begun at Cornelius his house, and assisted by the donation of the Holy Ghost. This the brethren at Jerusalem were offended at, still retaining their scorn of other nations ; till Peter's relation of the dispensation of Providence in it assured them, that he had done nothing, except what he was warranted in, and by a vision from heaven commanded expressly to do. This turned their murmurings into thanksgivings, and their reproaches into praises. We have reason to think that Peter continued now at Jerusalem till his imprisonment by Herod ; from which, a little before his intended execution, he was miraculously delivered by an angel. How he disposed of himself betwixt this time, and the general synod in the *fifteenth* chapter, we have various conjectures. After the determination of that council, Peter went down to Antioch, and there, by his practice and free conversation with the Gentiles, did confirm his approbation of the decree which he had past ; till fear of displeasing some Jewish proselytes caused him to withdraw himself, and use his former severity. For this St. Paul, as himself tells us, re-proved him sharply ; as having by his behaviour encouraged that party, which not long before, were by the general assembly pronounced to lay too heavy a yoke on the necks of the new converts. All which mightily discountenanced the Gentiles, and was an ignominious practice of hypocrisy, which St. Paul thought he had deserved to be branded withal.

Acts x.

Acts xi.

Acts xii.

Gal. ii. 11.

That he was married we know, being expressly

Matt. viii. 14.

Mark i. 30.

Luke iv. 38.

1 Cor. ix. 5.

Aug. T. IV. p.

878. Ed. Bas.

Clem. Alex.

Strom. III.

Bar. Ann. 60.

Strom. VII.

p. 736.

told by the evangelists, of a cure publicly performed by our Saviour upon his wife's mother ; whom, though some affirm that he left with his occupation when he was called to the apostleship, yet we are told by better authority, that she accompanied him through all his travels : and this may perhaps be proved from that passage of St. Paul to the Corinthians, *Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles; and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?* St. Augustine seems to say, that he had several children, and so does Clemens of Alexandria. We are told, even by Baronius, of a daughter named Petronilla. His wife is said to have obtained a glorious crown of martyrdom before him. And Clemens Alexandrinus gives an account, how piously her husband did both encourage and congratulate her upon that occasion.

Of his writings we have none, except his two epistles. The first is confessedly his : the second we have no reason to question his being the author

Euseb. Hist. L. III.

C. III. IV.

of, if we consider, that several passages in it are by no means applicable to Simeon, the second bishop of Jerusalem, to whom some impute it. Such are the *seventeenth* and *eighteenth* verses of the *first* chapter ; where he relates the transfiguration of Christ, and tells us, himself was present at it. So likewise the *fourteenth* verse, speaking how our Lord foretold his death ; with many other particulars, which sufficiently shew the writer. Five other treatises are mentioned by St. Jerom, as ascribed, but falsely, to St. Peter. His acts, his gospel, his preaching, his revelation, and a fifth of judgment. In which account Eusebius also (as to the

four former) exactly agrees, but makes no mention of the last.

Pearson de Success. C. VI. VIII.

That he was at Rome, and bishop of that city, is affirmed by so general a consent of the most ancient writers, that it seems too great hardiness to deny it. But the time of his coming thither is matter of just dispute. They who place it in the second of Claudius, and from thence infer his presiding over that see twenty-five years, are not supported by sufficient authorities. Much less are they, who relate his martyrdom in the tenth of Claudius. The occasion of putting him to death is generally reported to be, that he, assisted by St. Paul, had here also confounded the diabolical illusions of Simon Magus. Whereupon Nero, who was a great favourer of magicians, being provoked, (or, as others think, to ingratiate himself with the people of Rome after firing the city) gave orders for his execution; which the præfects, in the emperor's absence, took care to see obeyed upon him and St. Paul at the same time. The latter, as a denizen, was beheaded with a sword; but St. Peter, who had no claim to the like privilege, was sentenced to crucifixion. This, and the torments preparatory to it, he underwent with marvellous patience.

Pearson Annal. Paul.

And, as a mark of his humility, requested and obtained to have the body fastened to the cross with his head downward: as judging it too great an honour to suffer in the same manner and posture as his Lord had. His body lay buried, (says St. Jerom) in the Vatican, near the triumphal way. And there is no need of adding, with him, that he is held in mighty veneration by the whole city of Rome.

Euseb. Hist. L. III. C. IV. Hieron. Catal.

THE COLLECT.

* Matt. xvi.

18, &c.

Acts iv. 8.

— v. 15, &c.

† John xxvi. 15,

16, 17.

O ALMIGHTY God, who by thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to thy apostle St. Peter many* excellent gifts, and commandedst him earnestly† to feed thy flock; make, we beseech thee, all bishops and pastors diligently to preach thy holy word, and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

ACTS xii. 1.

1. About the time of foretelling the famine, mentioned chap. xi.

1. *ABOUT that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church,*

2. James the Great, whose relation to John is here added, to distinguish him from the other James, called the Less, and son of Alphaeus.

2. *And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.*

3. The ruling part of the Jews hated them, though the generality of the people are often

3. *And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread).*

4. Sixteen soldiers had the care of him, who were to relieve the guard, by watching four at a time.

4. *And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him, intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.*

It was customary in the feast of the passover, for the people to beg a prisoner, and not be denied. (See Matt. xxvii. 15. Luke xxiii. 17. Mark xv. 6, 8. John xviii. 39.) To prevent therefore Peter's escape this way, he reserved his public trial till that festival was over,

5. *Peter therefore was kept in prison ; but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.*

6. *And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains ; and the keepers before the door kept the prison.*

curing men was, to fasten the prisoner to two, and have the door kept by the other two, of the four then on the guard,

7. *And behold the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison : and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off his hands.*

8. *And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals : and so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.*

9. *And he went out and followed him, and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel : but thought he saw a vision.*

for a strong impression upon his fancy.

10. *When they were past the first and the second ward they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city, which opened to them of its own accord : and they went out, and passed on through one street, and forthwith the angel departed from him.*

11. *And when Peter was come to himself he said, now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.*

5. The very night before the day intended for his arraignment and execution. The manner of this se-

9. He obeyed the orders, but all the while mistook the whole thing

10, 11. At last Peter recollected himself, and finding the whole transaction real, took care to perfect that deliverance, which God had put in his power by the ministry of his angel, whose assistance was now no longer necessary.

COMMENT.

THE other matters concerned in this day's solemnity, requiring more than ordinary enlargement, I shall contract myself here. It shall there-

fore suffice, only to suggest some observations arising from hence, upon which, if my reader desire to employ his thoughts, he may do it to good purpose, by turning to the places referred to in the foregoing parts of this work.

Now, *first*, We have in this, as in a former Herod, a tragical instance of the abuse of power; and of the merciless cruelty, into which rulers and great men are betrayed; and when once they let go the reins of justice, and become unsteady in the measures of government, for the sake of envy, ambition, jealousy, partiality, or any other corrupt passion whatsoever.

2. Of all those passions, this scripture points us out one of the most dangerous, affectation of popularity and applause. With this the deadly poison is generally gilded, by those who would insinuate mischief, and persuade to wicked, because acceptable, methods. It was because the death of *James* Ver. 3. *pleased the people*, that *Herod proceeded farther to take Peter also*. Nor is this any great matter of wonder: for the humours of the people are so extravagant, and their expectations so unreasonable, that whosoever takes his directions from thence is the greatest of slaves. A prince may see this, and repent too late, and wish to retrieve his liberty; but, except resolution, assisted by the grace of God and trust in his protection and assistance, break this chain, he will certainly minister occasion for that, which is my

3. *Third* observation: the danger and misery of going past retreat, losing all remorse, and falling from one wickedness to another. Herod first vexed some private Christians, then murdered one apostle; and, after that, imprisoned another, with intent to give him no better quarter. But against these Ver. 5—11. melancholy observations, the following verses help us to set another most comfortable one.

4. The wisdom, I mean, and goodness of that ever-watchful Providence, by which the evil designs of such wicked men are disappointed, and his faithful servants wonderfully preserved from them. Concerning all which particulars, see the Comment on the Gospel for *Innocents Day*, vol. I.

5. The *fifth* verse instructs us, how instrumental the intercessions of good people are towards procuring such deliverances. Mighty indeed is the efficacy of prayer, when unanimous and public; especially if the subject-matter of it be somewhat eminently serviceable to the glory of God, and the benefit of religion. This may be seen at large in the comments on the Gospel for St. Peter and James: and the Epistle for the XXI. Sunday after Trinity, vol. III.

6. But if those prayers be not presently successful, the case of St. Peter forbids us to despair. *Prayer was made without ceasing of the church to God for him;* but the angel was Ver. 5, 6. not sent for his release, till the very night before his intended execution. Thus it is usual with God, for the clearer illustration of his mercy and power, for the exercise of his servants in faith and patience, and for other excellent ends, to forbear the interposition of extraordinary means till human helps and hopes are given over. This topic is largely discoursed on in the Comment on the Gospel for II. Sunday in Lent, and XVI. after Trinity.

7. As the season proper for miraculous operations is, when ordinary methods prove vain; so when such otherwise inextricable difficulty is over, that season is at an end; and we are left to the use of common means, and the protection of a common Providence again. Thus our Lord commands Jairus to preserve the life of his daughter, by the usual refreshments of nature, which Luke viii. 55. nothing less than an almighty Power had, or could

Acts xii. 7, 8, 9, 10.

have restored. And thus the angel here, after knocking off St. Peter's chains, unlocking the prison-doors, and causing the city-gate to open of its own accord, leaves him, when thus set at large, to provide for himself. A plain instance of our duty, to be diligent in the use of means, when put into our hands; and not to expect those things should be done without us, which, by the due use of prudence and industry, we are sufficiently qualified to do for ourselves. See Comment on the Gospel for St. Philip and James.

THE GOSPEL.

PARAPHRASE.

MATT. xvi. 13.

13. Jesus being alone with his disciples, took occasion to examine into their proficiency by asking the people's opinion concerning his own quality and original.

13. *WHEN Jesus came into the coasts of Cesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say, that I, the Son of Man, am?*

14. To this each returned such an account as he had heard from men, divided in their judgments about him.

14. *And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets.*

15. This question was chiefly meant to introduce the following one, which was, what notion they themselves had of him.

15. *He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?*

16. To which Peter (whose single answer was sufficient, when the whole company were agreed, and had but one thing to say) replied, Thou art the promised Messiah, the natural and very Son of God.

16. *And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art Christ the Son of the living God.*

17. Hereupon our Lord pronounces a blessing upon him, (and in him upon them,

17. *And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*

whose sense, and in whose name, he spoke) declaring this to be a truth, not discoverable by human reason, or established upon human testimony, but taught and confirmed by the attestation of God himself.

18. *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

18. See the Comment.

19. *And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.*

19. This church thou shalt have power to let into, and to shut out from, by declaring the proper con-

ditions of membership, by due administration of sacraments, and by the exercise of discipline and censures appointed for that purpose.

COMMENT.

THAT I may not be justly accused of derogating from the honours of right belonging to the apostle of this day, it may not be amiss to explain and vindicate some Passages in the paraphrase which relate to him.

1. I suppose St. Peter, at the sixteenth verse, to have spoken the sense, and in the name of his brethren. I do so, because the question was put to them all in common, as is evident from ver. 15. Because they were all agreed in the same judgment, and so the answer of one only was needful; and because there are some reasons for Peter being that one, rather than any of the rest.

1. That the apostles all knew and believed the great truth confessed here by St. Peter, no man, I think, can reasonably deny, who calls to mind the declaration made of it before by John the baptist; or the acknowledgments of Andrew and Nathanael to the same effect; or the belief of all the disciples in that divine glory, which by his miracle

John i. 34.

—— 40, 41.

49,

—— ii. 11.

of the water made wine he is said to have manifested ; or the solemn thanks returned to his Father, for revealing to these babes the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, (of which this is the first and principal ;) or the confessions extorted from evil spirits dispossessed before their eyes, and over whom they also had received power ; or those voluntarily made by the sailors and passengers in the ship with him, upon rebuking the wind and the sea ; or, lastly, that allowed on all hands to have been long ago made in the name of the whole fraternity, *we believe and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.* These instances abundantly expose the vanity of them, who would persuade us, that this was a truth now imparted to St. Peter alone, by peculiar and immediate revelation ; and that the rest stood silent, because this was a mystery above their reach : these again justify the interpretation current with the fathers, who upon this occasion speak of St. Peter as the *common mouth, the tongue, the foreman, the sustainer* of the persons of all the apostles, and the like.

2. Not content with barely delivering this opinion, the fathers sometimes proceed to assign reasons for it. As, *that* decency required but one to speak for all, that confusion and disorder might be avoided : *that* this denoted the unity, which then was, and always ought to be, among the apostles ; and indeed among all, whom this confession makes members of the Christian church. And,

3. That the probable reasons of St. Peter being the person, are, either the natural fervour of his temper and behaviour ; or his age ; or his being the first called to a constant attendance upon Christ ; or that priority of place and order, in which we find

Matt. xi. 25.

Mark. iii. 15.

Matt. xiv. 33.

John vi. 69.

Ambr. L. VI. in

Luc. C. 9.

Chrysost.

Matt. xvi. 15.

Acts i. 15.

him in the catalogue of the twelve apostles. Any, or all of which will account for his delivering the judgment of the company ; and may dispose reasonable men to think his confession the common voice of all, to a question which had evidently been propounded to them all.

If this be so, then sure no blame can be laid on extending the blessedness pronounced at the *seventeenth* verse, so as to allow some share in it to them, in whose behalf St. Peter spoke. For this were an *encomium* of that confession, and the matter of attaining to it ; they, who had a part in the one, ought not to be denied their proportion in the other. The less, because that authority promised to St. Peter, as a reward of this faith here, is in the very same words promised to all the apostles in the *eighteenth* of this Gospel : and it was also actually conferred on him and them together, immediately after our Lord's rising again, in John xx. 22, 23. a manner, that carries not the least appearance of distinction or pre-eminence in authority, to any of the whole number.

And yet it was very proper, that the answer returned by our Lord should be directed to St. Peter in particular, as it concerned words spoken by him alone : as his name (given, probably, to intimate that firmness our Lord foresaw in his faith) was a fit allusion to the firmness of that church, which was to be begun by him : and, as he made use of the *keys of the kingdom of heaven*, in a more eminent manner than any of the rest, when made choice of by God to be the first opener of this door to the (till then seemingly lost and rejected) heathen world.

There now remains only the *eighteenth* verse, not yet spoken to, which I reserve for the subject of this discourse. And, because I would decline, as much as fairly I may, the fruitless and unreasonable controversies raised from thence, my business shall be to explain the promised perpetuity of Christ's church

there contained ; *first*, by some observations directing us to the parties concerned in it ; and then, *secondly*, by others, that may state the privilege itself.

Now here, first of all, it is evident enough, that, whereas the church is capable of two senses, and taken in common speech, sometimes for a society of persons worshipping God, sometimes for the place set apart for the public performance of such worship ; the word in the text signifies a society of men compacted together into one body. Consequently, to that collective body it is, or to each person respectively, as a member of that body, that the promise of my text belongs.

Secondly, the *building* this church is a metaphor, frequently made use of in the New Testament, and signifies the doing all those things, either in private Christians, or public communities of them, which may contribute to their growth in grace and goodness, their mutual strength and support, their perfection and continuance. Thus men are comanded *to build themselves up in their most holy faith* ; and every one who hears Christ's words, and believes and practises accordingly, is compared to a house built upon a rock. And thus also Christians united together are called a **spiritual house* ; a *†heavenly building fitly framed together, a holy temple, and an habitation of God through the Spirit*. Thus far then we are advanced : that our Lord, by building a church, means the establishing a certain society of persons, joined together, like stones in a material building, by some common principles, which should cement and knit them to each other, and so constitute and denominate them one frame. But, were it not for this agreement, they would be like so many stones scattered abroad, or laid in a heap, without

See Comment on
Epistle for St.
Mark.

Jude 20.

Matt. vii. 24.

* 1 Pet. ii. 5.

† Ephes. iii. 21, 22.

form or beauty, or mutual dependance and relation.

Thirdly, The thing, in which they are to be thus united, is the rock. And what is that rock? the person of Peter abstractedly considered? No, certainly. For this construction equals Peter to Christ himself; and, other *foundation can no man lay, than that already laid, which is Jesus Christ.* Now, wheresoever mention is made of the church being built upon the apostles and prophets, the same honour is attributed to the rest, as is to St. Peter; and *Jesus Christ himself* is called *the chief corner-stone*, in which the whole centres. Thus Christ is expressly called the *Rock*, and *salvation declared to be had in no other.* Therefore some other constructions shall be mentioned, as much more probable. Such is that, which supposes Christ to mean himself; and pointing to his own person, in the utterance of these words, as he seems to have done on another like occasion, when saying to the Jews, *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.* Or, that, which makes the faith and confession of Peter, the rock on which this church was to be built. Or, that, which says, the church might be said to be built upon Peter, *as the twelve apostles are called the twelve foundations*; because it was begun and carried up by their holy labours and zeal. And thus some apply it to their successors also in the Christian church. Not but that St. Peter hath some privilege superior to the rest, as he was made choice of by God, to lay as it were the first stone both of the Jews and Gentiles. The former, in his most efficacious sermon, at the day of Pentecost: the latter, in the conversion of Cornelius and his company. But still, in these senses, the faith and confession of St. Peter is of the most important consideration. For if there were

1 Cor. iii. 11.

Eph. ii. 20, 21.

1 Cor. x. 4.

Acts iv. 12.

John ii. 19.

Acts xi.

— x.

not the rock itself, yet even they who contend for Peter's being the rock, must allow, that this confession, and his part in the propagation of it, was the occasion of so extraordinary an honour. And therefore the inference I am about to draw from hence, is what none who calls himself a Christian, will, (I think) deny me ; which is, *that the church is a society of men agreeing with St. Peter ; a body linked together by one common band ; and distinguished by that character, of confessing as he did, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

Having thus seen to whom the promise in my text belongs, I now come to consider the words themselves, that the *gates of hell shall not prevail against this church* ; that is, against the believers in Christ. This we shall find no great difficulty to understand, when once it is agreed, what the *gates of hell* here import. Of which two senses especially have been insisted on by learned men. And, because they are both of them agreeable to the truth, I shall propound them to my reader's consideration, and endeavour to leave each upon him, with such useful reflections, as the promise, thus taken, naturally leads us to.

First, then, some interpreters by the word *hades* here, which we translate *hell*, would have Grot.in loc. no more to be meant, than the state or place of souls departed. And thus the gates of hell mean only what the ancient poets and other heathen writers intended by that *periphrasis* of this common receptacle of the dead, compared to a house or strong prison, which is styled Isa. xxxviii. 10. likewise in Scripture *the gates of the grave*. Or if by *gates* we will have strength to be meant, then it denotes the power of death ; and the importance of the words comes to thus much. That although Christ have not so vanquished death, as to set his servants and followers out of a condition of dying, yet hath not death gained a final and

absolute conquest over them that die in the Lord. For they shall certainly one day be rescued; this universal devourer of mankind shall be forced to give up his prey: and even the dead, who believed and obeyed *this Christ the Son of God*, shall rise again, and live, and reign with him, in *fulness of joy for evermore*. And thus *the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church*; in regard the members, of which that body is composed, shall not continue dead to all eternity, but shall revive a second time to a better life, and triumph over this last great enemy of mankind.

The promise thus expounded is full of grace and comfort, valuable to Christians of all ages, but more especially seasonable and necessary to the first preachers and professors of our faith. For they, besides the same fate of mortality and natural decay, common to them with other men, exposed themselves upon the account of this confession made by St. Peter here; and asserted *Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God*, at the utmost peril of their lives. Now, what could more conduce to the establishing of their minds in this undertaking, than the assurance of a future state? How indeed was it possible for them to have gone through with it, had they not been supported by a strong persuasion, that death could not make an utter end of them; and that, when their persecutors had carried their malice to the very last point, in killing their bodies, there was one mightier than they above: one, who had engaged his truth to see them well considered, and who would not fail to make them large amends for all they did and suffered in the flesh?

The same assurance is no more than needful, even in the most peaceable times of religion. For though wicked men and gainsayers do not declare open war against the truth, yet there can never be a truce between our carnal appetites, and the severities of a Christian conversation. The calami-

ties we are subject to, exercise our patience, and make life sometimes a burthen, even to those, who in the eye of the world pass for prosperous and easy men. But, when we consider the afflicted and oppressed, the mortified and the resigned, the conflicts which the saints undergo, the voluntary hardships they impose upon themselves, the many advantages and pleasing enjoyments they are content to be debarred of for their exceeding love of God and virtue, it must be confessed, that men could very hardly be persuaded to a conduct so reserved, so full of austerity; were there not a reversion hereafter, so very much to be preferred before any present fruition here, that the mere expectation of this makes all we can do, for securing it to ourselves, highly reasonable. And therefore, we have reason to esteem this promise very highly; as that, which, if well and wisely applied, would soften and assuage our troubles and misfortunes; would sweeten those self-denying duties, which human nature thinks harsh and hard of digestion; and reconcile us to the thought and necessity of dying, when we are satisfied, that the *gates of hell shall not prevail against us*; that is, that we die, not for ever, but only like plants in the winter cease our verdure for a while and disappear: yet so that the principle of life remains, though the signs and outward effects of it be withdrawn. For we shall bud and flourish again, more vigorous, more beautiful than before, in never-fading glories, and an eternal spring.

Calvin. *Secondly*, Others contend for the more vulgar and usual sense of the word, and, by *hell*, understanding the place of infernal torments, apply it by an easy figure to the devil and his angels inhabiting those regions of darkness. Now in regard that in cities the gates were barred and fortified against enemies and invaders, and so places of strength; in regard also that these, among the

Jews especially, were the places, where the judges and magistrates assembled for distributing of justice, and consulting what measures were fit to be taken for the security of the public; hence they understand, by this phrase, policy and force. And then this promise made the church amount to thus much; that notwithstanding the devil and his instruments, wicked men, and damned spirits, are irreconcilable enemies to the progress of the Christian faith, and do all they can to obstruct the salvation of souls, yet all in vain: Christianity shall stand and flourish in despite of them; and all their subtilty and strength shall not be able to bring about their wicked purposes of defeating and overthrowing it.

Here again the constructions put upon this promise are twofold: as we choose to apply it, either to private Christians, or to the body of them, united into a church.

First, There are some, who apply it to the church in a distributive sense, so that every private Christian may take it to himself. And thus, by the gates of hell not prevailing against believers, is intended that sin and temptations shall not be the final ruin of those, who stedfastly in practice and profession adhere to this truth, that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God*. Now, for the right understanding of this promise thus interpreted, we are to observe these three things.

Gerhard.
Calvin.
Theophylact.

1. *First*, That our Saviour does not intend by it an absolute freedom from temptations. For the proper perfection of a Christian does not consist in never being tempted at all, but in not being led away and overcome when he is tempted. The house built upon a rock is described, with the winds blowing and the waves beating upon it; and the safety of that house is said to lie not in the not feeling, or not being shaken by storms, but in not

falling when it blows hardest. Our life is called a warfare, and the enemy of souls, one *who goeth about continually seeking whom he may devour*. Conflicts, and difficulties, and dangers await us every where; and this is the consideration, which makes our constant care and watchfulness necessary. The whole armour of God is therefore prescribed us, because enter the lists and fight we must. But if we can stand in the evil day, we shall do well; and the promise does not pretend to soothe us with security, as if the *gates of hell* would not attempt any thing to our prejudice, but to support us with hopes of escaping, and coming off victorious at last; by this assurance, that though they do attempt, yet they shall not *prevail against us*.

2. *Secondly*, Neither is this promise of not *prevailing* to be so far extended, as that true believers should never fall into sin. We have a mighty and a very cunning adversary to deal with: one, who will let no advantage slip; but endeavours by wonderful address, to turn every action, every accident of our lives, into an occasion of eternal ruin. And this design is extremely favoured by the infirmities and inclinations of corrupt nature; by which we are, when left to ourselves, much more disposed to comply with temptations, than to resist them. Even they who keep the strictest guard, are sometimes overcome with slumber; and either yield to the importunity of the enemy, or unwarily take part with him against themselves. Were not the case thus with us, repentance would not be made one necessary condition of salvation. But, because *all have*

sinned and come short of the glory of God,
 Rom. iii. 23. and *in many things we offend every one of*
 James iii. 2. *us*; for this reason even the just man is so reputed, only by faith in the merits of another, and such, as may be accounted to him for righteousness. For this reason the law of works is insuf-

ficient for our purpose ; and the covenant of grace hath found a remedy for them, with whom, if God *should enter into judgment*, and be *extreme to mark what is done amiss*, no *flesh living could be justified*, none could abide the rigorous scrutiny. Therefore,

Psal. cxxx. 3.
— cxliii. 2.

3. *Thirdly*, The true intention of this encouragement, given to each private Christian, is, that, provided such do sincerely abide in the belief and obedience of their Lord and Master, they shall not perish nor fall away finally. Although the way they go be strait and rugged, full of snares and precipices, yet they shall be led through it safely: although their infirmities be great and many, yet they shall be *kept by the power of God unto salvation, and enabled to do all things by Christ that strengthens them*: although

1 Pet. i. 5.
Phil. iv. 13.

they cannot pay a pure unsinning obedience, yet their failings shall be pitied, and their iniquities pardoned: if they fall, they shall recover their standing, rally their forces again, combat successfully; and, being endued with the grace of perseverance, by enduring faithfully to the end, shall at last be saved, and come off with glory and triumph.

This consideration, if duly laid to heart, will animate us in all our spiritual encounters. And therefore, when the remembrance of our past offences afflicts us, and the sense of our own weakness and corruption puts a damp upon our spirits; when the dread of so potent an enemy, and the returns of temptation coming thick upon us, create some doubts and disquieting fears, what may be the event of all these things at last: let us remember, that *they that are for us, are more, and mightier than they that are against us*; that Christ hath promised *he will never leave us nor forsake us*; that his grace is *sufficient for us*; for the divine strength is illustrated and made perfect in human weakness. The sum of

Rom. viii. 31.
Heb. xiii. 5.
2 Cor. xii. 9.

all which and many such comfortable texts of Scripture, in short is this ; that if we do our parts, God will not fail to do his ; that he, who hath baffled this enemy himself, can and will render us victorious over him too ; and, provided we do not by any wilful neglect fall from our own stedfastness, the *gates of hell shall not prevail against us.*

Lift up then the hands that hang down, and comfort yourselves, ye feeble-minded ; for your endeavours, if honest though imperfect, shall yet be kindly accepted ; your unaffected failings shall find compassion ; and, as sure as God is true, you shall at last, though it may be thought much tribulation and hardship, enter into the kingdom of heaven.

I come now, in the *last* place, to consider that sense of the passage which is most usually insisted on, as it concerns the church collectively ; that is, Christians, not in their single and private capacities, but as they are united into one body. And then the promise implies thus much ; that notwithstanding all the wicked contrivances of Satan and his instruments to the contrary, Christ will always preserve to himself a true church ; that is, he will take care, that there shall never to the world's end want a society of men, confessing, with St. Peter, that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

Now upon this occasion we must observe,

1. *First*, That by confessing Jesus to be Christ, *the Son of the living God*, is to be understood, acknowledging all those doctrines concerning him, which the scheme of the Christian religion, contained in the New Testament, hath propounded as essential and necessary points of faith. Such are, the divinity of his nature, his miraculous birth, his dying to satisfy the sins of the world, rising again for the justification of sinners, being exalted to God's right hand in heaven, and constituted judge of the whole world at the last great day of ac-

count ; together with those other particulars, contained in that form of sound words, to *which we were delivered* in our baptism. For all these refer to the nature or offices of Jesus, and all are virtually contained in acknowledging him to be *the Christ, the Son of God*. And because all faith is to influence our lives, and to prove itself by practice ; therefore, by confessing Jesus to be such, is likewise meant the submitting ourselves to him, as that divinity, and those offices require ; living, I mean, in agreement to what we profess and believe.

2. *Secondly*, This faith and confession, as I have described it, is the mark of the true church, and such a character, as may distinguish those who are, from others who are not, of the church. For the promises of our Lord being the only foundation of certainty we have to depend upon, for the continuance of his church to the end of the world ; he no doubt fulfils them so, as that men may be convinced he keeps his word. It is reasonable indeed to presume, that, after so many wise and mysterious methods made use of for establishing the truth, God will not suffer it to be absolutely suppressed and lost. This renders the preservation of the church probable, and highly so, but it does not give any positive assurance of the thing. For, since every man is liable to be perverted from the truth, a society made up of such men cannot, in the nature of the thing, have any security, that they shall not all be seduced and fall away. So that our Lord's promise is the security given us in this case. And we therefore believe, that Jesus shall always be publicly acknowledged to be *the Christ, the Son of the living God*, because he hath solemnly engaged, that thus it shall be.

In this the being of the church is preserved : this confession is its property, it makes its essential difference ; it is that, wherein its safety, nay, its very nature consists. Wheresoever this confession is

made, and the unity of the body confessing it is preserved, there is the church. And consequently, the pretences to being the true church are not to be tried by such fallible notes, as numbers, or splendour, or visible succession in the same place, or any other outward distinctions of that kind; but by the sincerity of the professors, and their stedfast adherence to the saving truths of the gospel. Again, since every mark, whereby a thing may be distinguished, infers its being discernible itself; (otherwise it can never shew us the difference of other things to be tried by it) hence we may conclude, that this confession of *Jesus to be the Christ and Son of God*, will always be made in such a manner, that there ever was, and will be a church, which may be known to be true; that is, a visible church of Christ, without interruption, so long as the world endures.

3. *Thirdly, The gates of hell*, when the words are thus applied, will most naturally signify those oppositions to the truth, by which the free and constant profession of it is hindered and discouraged. And since this may be done two ways, either by drawing men off, and debauching their judgments with erroneous opinions destructive of the truth; or by deterring them from sticking to the truth, and owning what is their real opinion: therefore, persecution and heresy are very fitly understood by these *gates of hell*. Thus is the malice and the subtilty of the devil principally employed: by the one, he labours to batter down the walls of this building upon a rock; by the other, to sap and undermine the foundation of it.

4. *Fourthly*, With regard to these, the tenure of the promise is, that *they shall not prevail against it*. That is, no persecutions, how severe and barbarous soever, shall so far deter men from adhering to this religion, even in its most oppressed and afflicted state, that there should be no good men left, who dare to own their principles, in despite of threaten-

ings, and tortures, and death. Many may fall away, many may be taken off from their constancy, but still a remnant shall escape : and however the seed upon the stony ground may wither and be scorched, when the burning heat of tribulation arises ; yet there will be some on the good ground, to bring forth fruit with patience, and yield thirty, sixty, nay a hundred-fold.

So again, new and dangerous doctrines may spring up, and spread ; and, like the tares in the field, shed their venom upon the wheat : but still the wheat shall stand till the harvest, and true believers shall always be found ; such as, if not free from all error and corruption whatsoever, are yet untainted with any, that should make them cease to be a church. In a word, however men may differ in matters of less consequence, and how many soever may fall off from them, still things shall never come to that extremity, that there should be an utter and total defection from the important truths of the gospel. So that the substance of my text thus interpreted, in short is this : *That*, notwithstanding all the vain attempts of heretics and persecutors, there shall always be some so constant and courageous, as will dare to profess and teach ; so orthodox, as to hold and continue fully persuaded of the great and necessary doctrines of the Christian religion. And these Christians, thus persuaded, thus professing, be they more or fewer, prosperous or afflicted, are the church in this promise, against which those *gates of hell* never did, nor ever *shall prevail*.

It remains now, that I draw some few inferences from this explanation of the words, and so conclude.

And, *first*, From hence we learn, what that church is, to which the promise in my text belongs. The term *church* is of an ambiguous signification. It must therefore be of great consequence to fix a

right notion of it, that we may not suspect the truth of our blessed Master, nor bring the punctual performance of this engagement into question, by a wrong application of his words.

Sometimes the church signifies the elect, who are heirs of salvation, by virtue of an inward effectual calling of the Holy Spirit: and, because this inward operation of the Spirit is what we cannot discern, this is called the *invisible church*. Against this church the gates of hell do not prevail indeed: but the promise does not seem to be peculiar to them only, because it supposes some marks, whereby we may discover who are, and who are not, the persons, to whom it is made good.

Sometimes again, the church signifies that company of men who live in the outward profession of the truth, and own the name of Christ any where in the world. Now their doctrine and worship being open and observable, such as they may be taken notice of and distinguished by; this is, in that regard, called the *visible*, and, in regard of its not being confined to any limited place, it is also called the *universal church*.

Sometimes also the particular branches of this great body are called *churches*; as St. Paul mentions *the care of all the churches*, the church of Jerusalem, the church of Rome, of Corinth, of Ephesus, and the like. In this last sense, it is manifest, the promise is not meant. For those churches mentioned in Scripture, having some of them revolted from the doctrine and worship of Christ, and being over-run with errors and heresies, destructive of the first and fundamental articles of our faith, it is evident that the gates of hell have actually prevailed against them. So that the universal and visible church is plainly that society of persons concerned here. And so long as there Christian religion does not absolutely disappear; so long as there are, any where, men, who continue to hold all the necessary

and essential points implied in that confession of St. Peter, that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God*, so long the promise is made good still. The candle is not put out, though the candlestick may be removed from some *particular visible* churches, and so translated out of one country or province into another.

2. *Secondly*, This promise does not infer, that the church shall always continue in outward peace and splendour. We know, at the beginning, after our Lord's resurrection, almost the whole of it, the church representative at least was contained in that single upper room, where the disciples assembled privately for fear of the Jews. And, Acts i. afterwards, during the primitive persecutions, it was only to be found in desarts, and mountains, and caves of the earth: among such persons, who, to avoid the rage of their enemies, served God, not in temples and synagogues, but in such manner and places as the wisdom of the serpent joined with the harmlessness of the dove, put them upon taking shelter in. Therefore the character of the church is not its being countenanced by human laws, and protected by the secular arm; it lies not in the multitude of its professors, nor in the freedom of its worship; but in the truth of its doctrine, and the sincerity of its members.

3. *Thirdly*, it does not follow from hence, that the church of God cannot err. For as men may be saved, though they be not absolutely void of all sin; so the church may continue a true church, though it be not totally exempted from all error. All men, as such, are subject to mistakes; but all mistakes do not overthrow the being of a church. Though therefore it should be granted, that no society of men ever served God in perfect purity; yet, so long as their corruptions did not overturn the main points of faith, so long as they held fast *the form of sound words*, and kept to the foundation; such errors and

corruptions, in matters of less moment, are by no means inconsistent with his promise. For the *gates of hell* have not *prevailed*, till error rides triumphant, and draws them off from the belief and confession, that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God*. From hence I argue,

4. *Fourthly*, That the holding communion with this or that particular see, or set of men, is no necessary qualification of the true church. For the truth of any church lies in the making St. Peter's confession, and holding communion with pastors duly qualified, according to Christ's ordinance, to administer the word and sacraments to the people. And they, who continue to hold his doctrine, and this communion, as before explained, though they may see good cause to separate from some practices, which they think by necessary consequence destructive of the faith, are yet truly members of Christ's church, let them hold outward communion with any particular Christian bishop, or regularly constituted church whatsoever.

5. *Fifthly*, This promise may be of great comfort to us in these wicked and dangerous days, when heresy, and profaneness, and all manner of impiety and shameless wickedness, do so wretchedly abound: for, though the cause be bad, yet it is not desperate. God may try us, and suffer many to fall off, but he will vindicate himself and his honour. Error may spread, but it shall not prevail: some trouble his church may have; great distress, but no interruption. And if our sins, which, God forbid, should provoke

Matt. xxi. 41. him to let out this *vineyard to other husbandmen, who will give him the fruits in due season*, yet religion shall never be totally destroyed, nor can he suffer his truth to fail. But,

6. *Lastly*, This should be a warning to us, to prepare for difficulties and trials, and to resolve against falling from our own steadfastness. The kingdom of Christ and that of the devil are described as two

societies ever at war with one another. And therefore every one, who hath listed himself under Christ's banner, should provide for engaging ever hour, and fight manfully against sin, the world, and the devil. We should all pray most earnestly to God for the assistance of his grace; we should seek and love the truth; we should all pursue the things that make for peace, and wherewith one may edify another; we should hold fast to the church, of which we are members, and not content ourselves with believing, but be sure to live up to what we are taught: always remembering, that, so long as we continue honest inquirers, zealous professors, and holy livers, though God may suffer us in some points to be mistaken, yet his goodness will not suffer us to perish, nor to err fatally; and that the only means to triumph and obtain the crown of righteousness, is to *live soberly, justly, and godly in this present world*, and to *continue Christ's faithful soldiers and servants unto our lives end*.

St. James's Day.

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF ST. JAMES THE APOSTLE.

THERE needs but very little be added upon this occasion, after the many circumstances relating to it, already delivered on the Gospel for St. John the Evangelist's Day. He was (as hath been most probably believed) first instituted, with his brother, under the Baptist; and surnamed Major, either on account of his age, or to distinguish him from another apostle of the same name. It does not certainly appear, how he disposed of himself after our Lord's ascension. Catal. Script. St. Jerom, (or his interpolator) makes him to have preached to the Jews of the dispersion; but that his labours carried him at all out of Judea, or even from Jerusalem itself, no authentic history informs us. That his zeal

was very industrious and ardent there, no other proof is necessary, than Herod Agrippa's choice of him, for the first sacrifice to the fury of the people; which happening just upon his receiving the addition of Judea to the dominions and regal titles conferred on him by Claudius, the emperor, the true way of rendering himself popular and agreeable to the governing part of that nation, was to single out one, whom his doctrine and the successes of it had distinguished, and rendered the principal mark of their malice and envy.

Eusebius, from *Clemens of Alexandria's* Hist. L. II. c. 9.

institutions, (a piece now lost) relates this remarkable passage, that the behaviour of St. James, when brought before the tribunal, was such as converted his accuser. And that he also, in the presence of the whole assembly, declared himself a Christian. Incensed at this, the court condemned him to death. In their way to the place of execution, he desired St. James to pardon him: who, after some pause, and fixing his eyes upon the man, kissed him with these words, *Peace be unto thee*: and then they were both beheaded together. Thus did our blessed Lord, not only verify to this apostle

Matt. xx. 23. his promise, that he should *drink of his cup, and be baptized with his baptism*, but in some sense grant his request of precedence in his kingdom too, in regard he had the honour to die, first of all the twelve, a martyr for the Christian cause.

COLLECT.

Matt. iv. 21,
22.

Mark i. 20.

GRANT, O most merciful God, that as thine holy apostle St. James, leaving his father and all that he had, without delay, was obedient unto the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him; so we, forsaking all worldly and carnal affections, may be evermore ready to follow thy holy commandments, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE.

ACTS xi. 27. unto CHAP. xii. VER. 3.

27. **I**N these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

28. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit, that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar.

29. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea.

30. Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

xii. 1. Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.

2. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

3. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also.

This scripture having been paraphrased, and the matter contained in it been considered already, I proceed to the Gospel.

Epistles for St. Barnabas and St. Peter.

THE GOSPEL.

MATT. xx. 20.

20. **T**HEN came to him the mother of Zebedee's children, with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him.

selves: either because they bore their mother company, or because she asked it at their desire, Mark v. 35.

21. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She said unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom.

PARAPHRASE.

20. St. Mark makes this request to have been preferred by the two apostles, them-

21, 22, 23. See the Comment.

22. *But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.*

23. *And he said unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with : but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.*

24. This gave offence to the other ten apostles, who knew no reason, why these two

24. *And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.*

25, 26, 27. That resentment our Lord sets himself to compose by two arguments. The one taken from the different nature of his, from that of the kingdom of this world :

25. *But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know, that the princes of the gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.*

26. *But it shall not be so among you : but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister.*

27. *And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.*

28. The other, from his own example ; who sought no other

28. *Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

pre-eminence, than that of doing and suffering more for the good of mankind, than any other person whatsoever.

COMMENT.

THE Gospel for this day consists of two parts ; a very inconsiderate request preferred to our blessed Saviour, and his answer to it ; of both which I shall at present discourse, so far as the apostle now commemorated seems more especially concerned ; reserving the resentment of the other apostles, and what followed thereupon, (from the *twenty-fourth verse* to the end of this portion of scripture) to be considered hereafter.

Now here we are informed, that the mother of Zebedee's children, together with her two sons James and John, entertaining a very mistaken notion of Christ's kingdom, besought our Lord, that when he should enter upon it, (which they seem to think would immediately follow his resurrection, foretold at the *nineteenth verse*) these two apostles might have the privilege of being next in honour to this king himself.

Such is the plain importance of that phrase, *sitting the one on his right hand, and the other on his left*; it being usual in the courts of this world, to distinguish persons of authority, by sitting in judgment, and having access to the presence of the king. And among them again, to give place and precedence to those of the first rank and dignity, by seating them nearest to the person of the prince. To this our blessed Lord replies, that *they* Ver. 22. *knew not what they asked*. Their apprehensions (that is) of the kingdom of the *Messias*, so often spoken of by the prophecies of old, were gross, and low, and carnal. For as his kingdom was not of this world, so neither should the manners and advantages of it hold any such proportion or resemblance to those upon earth, as they fondly imagined. Himself was not to acquire and possess this crown, by wars and triumphs, and common conquests; but by sufferings, and shame, exceeding great hardships, and universal malice and contempt. And since his servants must follow his example, as well in the methods of obtaining honour, as in the nature of the honours appointed for their recompense; he inquires whether they were content, and qualified to accept the advantage they ignorantly desired, upon such hard conditions.

They with a hasty zeal, natural to men eager in their wishes, and liberal in promising what great things they would do, answer, that they were ready to do and suffer anything, and had not the least

distrust of their own performance. Whereupon our Lord tells these bold undertakers, they should be taken at their word; and in proportion to their making it good, they should not fail to be considered for their pains and fidelity. *Jesuan-Ver. 22, 23. answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give: but it shall be given to them, for whom it is prepared of my Father.*

That such is the true purport of our Lord's reply, as I have already represented, will be yet more manifest, if we proceed now to consider the terms in which it is expressed. Where it will be necessary to explain, what is meant by *drinking our Saviour's cup*, and what by *being baptized with the baptism that he is baptized with*.

For the former of these we must observe, that it was anciently the custom of great entertainments, for the governor of the feast to appoint to each of his guests the kind and proportion of wine they should drink. In which he was so arbitrary and absolute, that all the company thought themselves obliged, neither to call for any which was not thus distributed, nor to refuse or leave any behind, which was brought thus by order. Hence a man's *cup* came to signify in general, his lot and portion; and some philosophers have persuaded to this virtue of contentedness, by representing God as the great Master of this common family, whose right it is to carve every man's proportion; and arguing from thence, what rudeness it would be in the receiver, to quarrel at his measure. This cup is used in Scripture, sometimes for good, sometimes for evil and unpalatable accidents. In the former sense by

David, when he describes the bounty of God, by *his cup running over*; and the delight and happiness he found in his favour, by calling the *Lord the portion of his inheritance and of his cup*: in the latter, by the same psalmist, when he says of the wicked, that *the Lord shall rain upon them snares, fire and brimstone, storm and tempest, this shall be the portion of their cup*; and threatens such with *a cup in the hand of the Lord, full of mixture, and that they shall be forced to wring out the very dregs of it, and drink them*. And what our Saviour means by it in this place, we cannot be to seek; since he hath been his own interpreter, in two very remarkable passages upon the approach of his death. The one is that in the garden where he prays the Father, that if it were possible, that cup might pass from him; *but if he must drink it, that his will might be done*. The other, that rebuke to Peter for attempting his rescue from the officers who had taken him into custody; *Put up thy sword within thy sheath. The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*

Psal. xxiii. 5.

xvi. 5.

xi. 6.

lxxv. 8.

Luke xxii. 42.

John xviii. 11.

Luke xii. 50.

Psal. lxix. 1, 2.

The same is likewise the importance of the other figurative expression, *the baptism that I am baptized with*; agreeable exactly to that text in St. Luke, *I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!* Whether he chose to call his sufferings so, with an allusion to that resignation of a man's self to the will of God, which every baptized person does in that act profess to make; or whether from that effect of purifying, which his meritorious death was to have upon mankind; or whether in conformity to that usual metaphor of comparing troubles to *deep waters*; so that the ceremony of total immersion, practised in

those hot countries at baptism, might shadow out the extremity of what he was about to endure; which of these reasons, I say, gave occasion for this metaphor, is, I think, no very material inquiry. For so long as the signification of the place is clear and uncontestable, the particular reason of this scheme of speech need give us no great trouble. And little doubt can be made, but the true importance of the words is neither more nor less than this, that the sincerity and ability of these two apostles should be brought to trial, by Providence ordering matters so, that they should be conformed to the example of their Master, and suffer bitter things for the honour and confirmation, and great advantage of the Christian religion, as Jesus had done before them.

This prediction, or promise, call it which you will, was literally and punctually fulfilled in St. James, to the honour of whose memory this festival is designed; the Epistle for the day informing us, Acts xii. 1, 2. that when the malice of Herod had instigated him to vex certain of the church, the storm fell upon this eminent person particularly; and when that tyrant killed him with the sword, then did he, in the highest sense of the words, *drink of his Lord's cup*, and was *baptized with the same baptism that he had been baptized with*.

Concerning St. John, the other son of Zebedee concerned here, Scripture indeed is silent, as to the manner of his death. But, since the cup and baptism imply persecutions and afflictions, even short of death, the same honour cannot be denied to St.

John, who, as St. Luke informs us, — v. 18. 40. was both *scourged* and *imprisoned* by the council at Jerusalem; and afterwards (as himself says) banished into the *isle of Patmos*, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus

Rev. i. 9.

Christ. Besides that ecclesiastical history mentions his being put into a cauldron of hot oil, by the barbarity of the proconsul at Ephesus, under Domitian. And certainly, that man may with great justice be esteemed a martyr, who had undergone such tortures, as nothing less than a miracle could have supported his life under, or delivered him from. Euseb. L. III. C. XVIII.

Thus much shall suffice for explaining the *cup* and the *baptism* meant here. But it is of no less importance, to be truly informed concerning another passage now before us, which is, how our Saviour meant, that *sitting on his right hand and left hand was not his to give, but it should be given to them for whom it is prepared of the Father.*

In the close of the *nineteenth* chapter, to the question of St. Peter, *Behold we have forsaken all and followed thee, what shall we have therefore?* Jesus had returned this answer, *Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* This promise of pre-eminence, made to the apostles in common, did by no means satisfy the two sons of Zebedee. But their ambition led them to desire a preference above the rest of their brethren. Of this, it is probable, they conceived some hopes, from the particular regard our Lord seems to have expressed for them, in giving them the privilege of attending him in his privacies. Thus he made them witnesses of his reviving the daughter of Jairus; of his glory at his transfiguration in the Mount; and, shortly after, of his agonies, when he retired into the garden to pray, upon the approach of his passion. St. John is also styled, by way of eminence, the disciple whom Jesus loved; for which some have assigned this

Matt. xix. 27, 28.

Mark v. 37.

Matt. xvii. 1.

— xxvi. 37.

John xiii. 23.

reason, among others, that he was very nearly allied to him in blood. To all these grounds of confidence, which might encourage them to ask such precedence themselves, they add the intercession of their mother, hoping thus to strengthen their pretensions yet more. But still the answer is, *It is not mine to give, &c.*

The meaning whereof, is by no means what some adversaries to the divinity of our blessed Saviour would infer from it; *that* to distribute rewards in the kingdom of glory is a prerogative peculiar to the Father alone, and such as no way belongs to the Son. For this Son is that very Lord, whom St.

2 Tim. iv. 8.

Matt. xx. v. 31, &c.

— xvi. 27.

Paul calls the *righteous Judge*, that *shall give a crown of righteousness to all that love his appearing*. He is that *King, who shall separate the sheep from the goats, and reward every man according to his works*. But the design of this passage is to shew, that those rewards shall not be distributed, upon such considerations, and in such manner, as these petitioners vainly supposed. To which purpose we may take notice, that those words, *It shall be given to them*, are in a different character; which is a mark of their not being in the original, but only a supplement made by the translators. So that the *sitting on the right hand and on the left*, the honours and degrees of happiness, are not the Son's to give, in the sense these apostles fancied; that is, he does not give them absolutely and arbitrarily; he is not led by partiality and fondness, or respect of persons; he is not carried by humour, or vanquished by the importunity of friends and suitors, as earthly princes are; but he is limited by the considerations of equity and strict justice, from which it can never be consistent with the perfections of his nature to depart. This then is the purport of the words, *To sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give, but, or except, to them alone, for*

whom it is prepared of my Father. And, since we are so perfectly assured, both from the nature of God, and from express revelation, that *every man shall at the last day receive according to the things done in his body*; it follows, that these are *prepared* for those who do most obtain them. That is, every Christian shall then be exalted to a higher degree of bliss and glory, in proportion as he hath drunk deeper of Christ's cup. As his humility, his obedience, his sufferings, his patience, and his meek disposition, have brought him to a nearer conformity with his Master: so shall he be considered, and be placed nearer him in happiness.

And thus this answer explains and confirms the parable in the beginning of the chapter. There the labourers in the vineyard, whose work one hour had expressed an equal diligence to theirs who were hired sooner, were in their pay likewise made equal to them, who *had borne the burthen and heat of the day*. The apostles, and primitive Christians, in like manner, they, who had the advantage of conversing personally with Christ, or who actually laid down their lives for him, shall in no degree have the advantage of any other Christians, whose zeal and disposition, obedience and sufferings, have set them upon the same foot of fidelity, and fervency, and undaunted love of him and his truth.

Thus much shall suffice to be spoken upon the words, so far as they relate to the case of these apostles themselves. But since the answer given to them in such general terms, is what every servant of Jesus hath manifestly a concern in; the remainder of my discourse shall be spent in offering such reflections from it, as may be of some service to us, in the performance of our duty. And these are so many, and so important, that I shall not need to be particular in all, which the whole passage together might suggest to our profit; but will confine

myself to a few only, which the words of our blessed Master minister occasion for.

1. And here, *first* of all, we may learn to form a right judgment concerning afflictions ; and may convince ourselves, how very wide from truth those opinions are, which conclude the calamities of this world to be certain marks of God's displeasure. How usual is it, when any uncommon disaster befalls a man, to imagine, that such a one hath been guilty of some very heinous crime, which provoked God to take that opportunity of punishing and exposing him, after a manner as extraordinary, as we fancy his offence ? And even, in the several dealings of Providence towards our ownselves, nothing is more frequent, than from thence to frame very false and fanciful ideas of our being objects of the divine favour or displeasure. Now, when I dissuade and condemn this manner of arguing, my meaning is not, that we are never to look upon afflictions, as punishments sent from God to chastise sinners, and to give seasonable warning to others. For this, it is very certain, it well becomes us to do. The strokes of this rod are designed to reclaim us ; which cannot be otherwise done, than by making us sensible wherein we have exceeded. The surprising events and dismal revolutions in the fortunes of other men, are so many loud awakening calls to avoid their vices ; (where those vices are crying and scandalous) and, in general, it is very certain, that all adversity comes originally from sin. Nor could the Son of God have suffered as he did, had he not been *numbered amongst the transgressors*, and taken upon himself all the temporal inconveniences, to which that guilt had rendered those persons obnoxious, whose character he bore. Now, since all men have sinned, all may in justice be afflicted. Therefore the utmost my present argument extends to, is against concluding, not who are, and who are not sinners, for all are such : but against deter-

mining rashly concerning the degrees of any man's guilt, or the condition of his soul with regard to the judgment of God and another world, from the measures of his misfortunes and sufferings here. And in this, I say, we are extremely to blame, and very liable to be mistaken. That it were easy to shew upon other accounts, but there is one at hand, with which I shall content myself: and that is, our blessed Lord himself styling afflictions, and injuries, and all manner of sufferings in good men, *drinking of his cup, and being baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with.*

It may perhaps be objected, that these expressions, which denote our Saviour's bitter death, may indeed be applied to such, as lay down their lives for the service of God and the truth, but that they ought not to be extended to every sort of affliction and distress. And therefore, though this argument, and the comforts of it, may of right belong to martyrs, yet have not all good men under hard circumstances a title to them: nor may they say, upon the account of bodily sorrows, or distresses in the affairs of the world, that they either drink of Christ's cup, or do any thing to qualify them for the brighter crown, by submitting to them.

Now in answer hereunto, we are to observe, what it is that God chiefly respects and rewards in martyrdom itself. It must be something, wherein the virtue of that action consists. Now that cannot possibly be, either the particular occasion upon which the man suffers; or the particular kind of his suffering; or the honour and advantage which accrues to religion by such sufferer. The reason is, because these are things disposed of by Providence, and not in the man's own power.* And that, which is not in the person's power, cannot denominate his action virtuous. It must therefore be the disposition of his mind, by which he prefers the glory of God and a good conscience, before his own tem-

poral safety and advantage. It is the meekness, the patience, the constancy, with which he suffers. Consequently, whatever it be, that ministers occasion for the exercise of the virtues, it makes no difference, provided the submission and self-denial be the same. It is sufficient, that the cup be bitter, and that it be drunk with cheerfulness and content ; though the particular ingredients, which make that bitterness, be not exactly the same. Sickness, and pain, and poverty, are grievous to human nature ; and these are equally the appointment of God towards us, as tortures and persecutions for the faith. And therefore these are capable of being equally considered, in that righteous judgment, which distributes rewards, not according to the quality of the hardships undergone, but in proportion to the temper and resignation of spirit, which men undergo them. Indeed, were it otherwise, the blessing of peace, and a free profession of the truth, had been the unkindest dispensation which could possibly have happened to the church. Because, upon these terms, Christians had been quite cut out from all opportunities of drinking of their Lord's cup ; and, by rendering it impracticable to partake in his sufferings, Providence at the same time would have rendered it impossible to arrive at a participation of his recompense, and of his glories.

The objection being thus removed, our argument is just : that, as upon other accounts, no inference can be drawn, which shall generally conclude a man in disfavour with God, because he is afflicted ; so particularly not upon this account, because the most innocent, the most holy, and the best beloved person that ever lived, was injured, oppressed, and barbarously treated in the days of his flesh ; to a degree, as much exceeding the sufferings of common men, as his worth and dearness to Almighty God excels theirs. And therefore we may observe,

that the sufferings which these two apostles were hereafter to undergo, are not threatened in the quality of a punishment, but seem rather to be promised in the nature of a privilege. God is the master and judge of the race; he is the sole disposer of the prize; and since his original justice determines him to crown those who run best, all the favour he shews in this regard, is properly that of furnishing men with proper occasions of exerting themselves, and putting them upon such trials, as are most acceptable to him. Had misfortunes and hardships been evil in themselves, and necessary distinctions between good and bad men, they could not in the nature of the thing have fallen upon the best of men. Because the greatness of them would then have proved him a proportionably great sinner. And therefore, since his cup did not destroy his innocence, we ought not to think our own, or other people's circumstances, a sufficient mark to judge the state of their souls by. Rather, when the hand of God falls heavy upon us, let us look up with comfort to this great example. Not doubting, but that as according to the constitution of his all-wise providence, it *behoved Christ to suffer*, and thus *to enter into his glory*; so we are then in the right and ready way to bliss and honour everlasting: and that the only danger lies, not in enduring, but in not induring as he did. For, if by our humbling and submitting ourselves, we be brought to the likeness of his meek and patient dying; these severest exercises of our virtue are the effects of love and favour, our honour, our advantage, and the most effectual methods of transforming us into the likeness of his resurrection and triumphs in heaven.

2. *Secondly*, We have here a fair occasion given us, of considering the reasonableness of suffering and self-denial being made the condition of a Christ-

ian's happiness : and of seeing, that our Lord, in commanding all his disciples to *take up their cross and follow him*, hath imposed no' more upon us, than every considering man may find very sufficient arguments for submitting to. It must not be expected, that I can at present enlarge upon all these motives as they deserve. And therefore, I shall content myself with mentioning two only : which, if they be not set off in their full light and strength, will yet, I hope, by this short representation, answer the purpose I produce them for.

1. The *first*, Is the condition of human nature, and the unavoidable fate we lie under of suffering, in one kind or other, whilst we carry these bodies about us. *Man is born to trouble*, says Job v. 7. the Scripture, *as the sparks fly upward* : that is, consider us, as we now are, corrupt and sinful ; and there is something as natural in our afflictions, as it is in fire to ascend. For, being thus compounded of warring principles, such as flesh and spirit, the one cannot prevail, without some depression and violence to the other. And, our happiness consisting in the predominance of the spiritual part, whatever promotes this, must be uneasy to the sensual. As therefore our sins have provoked God to chastise us, and the constitution we are of renders all chastisement for the present not joyous but grievous ; so does the same constitution render it impossible for us, either to pursue or to indulge, to deny or to subdue, our lusts and worldly inclinations, without pain and trouble. If poverty and infamy, if humility and temperance have their torment ; so have riches and honours, pride, and ambition, and luxury, their troubles too. Could we, in any state of life, attain to perfect happiness and quiet, more might be said to justify mens declining to close with religion, upon the terms of present uneasiness. But since this awaits all men in all

conditions, the question is not, whether we will suffer at all, (for suffering is our portion, and escape it we cannot) but in what manner we will chuse to suffer: whether we will chuse to be martyrs in the cause of our lusts, and the service of the devil; or whether for truth and virtue, and in obedience to God. Whether we will make ourselves wretched, while cares and vices rack us to death, and our better sense reproaches our folly; or whether we will chuse some hardships, for acting like reasonable men and enlightened Christians; while our own consciences, and the commendations of all wise and good people, support and applaud our choice. Whether we will dote upon these perishing bodies, and glory in our shame: or whether we will rather love that part, which is more truly ourselves; and, by mortifying this outward shell of us, and exposing, if need be, our lives for the advantage of holiness and the preservation of our souls, take the most effectual method of saving body and soul both. This is the true state of the case, in the present condition of mortality; a condition, which admits no sincere and uninterrupted peace and pleasure; and leaves us no other choice, but that of rendering our burthen ignominious and unprofitable, or else reasonable, and glorious, and such as, well and wisely borne, will turn to infinite account. For, which is yet more,

2. *Secondly*, We have a future and eternal reward to encourage us in these sufferings. Had men no prospect at all beyond the grave, yet even so, thus much might besaid to shew the advantages of patience and self-denial; that religion, with all its hardships and incumbrances, is better suited to the dignity of a reasonable creature, and ought to be preferred far before the brutish and unthinking life of sensual and worldly men. But when the present state comes to be considered as it

really is, in the quality of a state of discipline and trial ; that in which our proper happiness cannot be attained, and ought not to be expected : and when that happiness shall be proportioned hereafter, to those proofs which men give of their virtue, and fidelity, and perseverance, and Christian bravery here : this puts quite another face upon the matter, and casts the scale clearly on the side of religion. Immoveable stedfastness is then our wisdom, in despite of all the difficulties and dangers which this can possibly involve us in. For, what comparison is there between perfect bliss, and those empty shadows of it, with which this world beguiles and cheats us ? Between a moment and eternity ? And sure men never love themselves so well, as when they exercise that seeming cruelty, of selling all, even body and life itself, to purchase this one Pearl of great price. Sure God is never more kind, than when he afflicts and calls us to suffering upon a good account ; since, in so doing, he puts into our hands opportunities of securing to ourselves a brighter crown of glory, and nearer approaches to his own unspeakable felicities.

For, (which is the *last* consideration I shall offer from the words) this declaration of God's impartial justice, in distributing the honours and rewards of his heavenly kingdom, intimates to us the infallible certainty of our happiness and high advancement there ; provided we be not wanting to ourselves now, in the improvement of his grace, and of the favourable occasions his providence offers to us. Among the many things that may be urged, to beat down our esteem for the honours and advantages of this world, that is not the least, that they are scattered promiscuously, without a strict regard to the qualifications and deserts of the possessors. Birth, and fortune, and friends, and opportunity, and, which is still worse, flattery, and

fraud, and sinful compliances, are very often the steps and instruments, whereby men rise, and recommend themselves to the highest and most gainful promotions. And nothing is a more fatal check to industry and virtue, than the very great uncertainty, whether true merit shall ever be considered at all. Now here this best and most quickening spur to doing well is secured to us, that God will reward every man *according to his works*; nay, which is more, that he will reward the man's disposition, and the sincerity of his intentions and endeavours, though he may not have been able actually to accomplish all that he wished and laboured hard to do. In our great concern there shall be no respect of persons; so that every man's fortunes are (as it were) put into his own power; and he who fails of happiness, hath none but himself to blame for it. Were this the case on earth, how would it quicken our diligence? And shall our zeal be less than theirs, who strive for a corruptible crown, when we strive for an incorruptible? Oh, no! let us (as the apostle of this day did) *follow Christ without delay, and forsaking all carnal and worldly affections, be ever more ready to obey his commandments*, and the prize shall be our own. And if he command us to *drink of his cup, and to be baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with*, yet even then let us contentedly and thankfully comply with that call; and looking up to the joy that is set before us, esteem it a privilege to be conformed to the likeness of his sufferings. For we know most assuredly, that, if we continue *stedfast, immoveable, and* 1 Cor. xv. 58. *always abound in the work of the Lord*, we shall be considered accordingly, and no part of our labour shall be in vain in the Lord.

St. Bartholomew's Day.

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW.

THAT the first syllable of this apostle's name signifies *a son* is evident, from Bartimeus being interpreted the son of Timeus; and Simon Peter, who is called Barjona in one evangelist, called Simon, son of Jonas in another. The name then given here to this apostle, is not his proper, but patronymical name; and imports only the son of Tholomew, or Tolmai. That among the Jews there were persons so called, is evident from Josephus; who mentions one such, very notorious in his own time. So that we are still at a loss for his personal name, unless that conjecture may be thought sufficiently grounded, that this was indeed no other than Nathanael. To that purpose it is remarkable, *first* That, as no other evangelist makes mention of Nathanael, so neither does St. John, who mentions him, ever once make mention of Bartholomew. *Secondly*, That, in the catalogue of the apostles, (the giving which is the only occasion of naming St. Bartholomew in the rest) Philip and he are constantly coupled together; and those pairs are thought to join the persons as sent together *two by two*, upon the power of miracles first committed to them. Very fit companions, supposing Nathanael the man; whom Philip, it is plain, had intimacy with, and was the first instrument of bringing to Jesus. Again; he is, by St. John, named in company with several other apostles, and so, that we have reason to conclude him one of the twelve: for it is upon our Lord's shewing himself at the sea of Tiberias, after his re-

Mark x. 46.

Matt. xvi. 17.

John xxi. 15,
16, 17.

Ant. L. XX.

C. I.

Matt. x. 3.

Luke vi. 14.

Mark vi. 7.

John i. 45, &c.

xxi. 2.

surrection. This the evangelist declares to be the *third time* of his doing so. But the two former appearances are expressly recorded to be made to the *eleven*; the rest named here are of that number; the word *disciples* must in all reason be so restrained, as to signify the same persons here, as in the former accounts. Consequently, it is highly probable, I had almost said evident, that Nathanael was one of the twelve apostles. Which will be very hard to account for, otherwise than by taking the same person to be meant by St. John, under Nathanael his proper name, and in the other gospels under his patronymical of Bartholomew.

By our Lord's discourse and his, in the *first* of St. John, he seems to have been skilled in the law, and is thought by St. Augustine a doctor of it. His knowledge in this way was rightly employed; such as received a noble commendation of sincerity, made acknowledgments of the Messiah, becoming a man of that character, and was honoured with promises of future and more ample discoveries of our blessed Saviour's glories.

His preaching was employed in India, Lycaonia, and the greater Armenia. But in what order he travelled these countries, is not agreed. The evidence of his being in India we have in Eusebius, who says, that Pantoëtus of Alexandria, carried thither by his zeal to propagate the faith, found among the people St. Matthew's Gospel in Hebrew; that this had been left there by St. Bartholomew, and was preserved with great care, as a most valuable treasure. This India is by St. Jerom called the *Fortunate*, and by Socrates distinguished to be that lying next Ethiopia. He adds, that, in the distribution of the world among the apostles, this part fell to St. Bar-

Ver. 14.

John xv. 24, 25. 28.

Tract. in Joan.
VII.John i. 47, 48,
49, 50, 51.

Hist. L. V. C. 10.

Hieron. Catal.
Socr. Hist. I. C.
19.

tholomew's lot. Some will have it, that he came at last to, and finished his course in, this country.

Hom. in 12 Apost.

Dr. Cave.

Chrysostom calls him the instructor and civilizer of the Lycaonians.

He is also said to have suffered with Philip at Hierapolis, under the rage of the people ; but, escaping with life, to have taken care for burying his old friend's body there. St. Jerome is express, that he died and was buried at Albanople, a city of the Greater Armenia. And the lesson in the Roman breviary says, that, after having converted many in those parts, particularly Polymius the king, and his wife, and proselyted twelve cities, the priests, enraged at his successes, incensed Astyages the king's brother so against him that, having got St. Bartholomew into his hands, he had him flayed, and then beheaded ; others say, crucified. Sufferings so exquisite, render the Gospel for this day exceeding proper to be read, when a saint expiring under them is commemorated.

THE COLLECT.

O ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who didst give to thine apostle Bartholomew grace truly to believe and to preach thy word ; grant, we beseech thee unto thy church, to love that word which he believed, and both to preach and receive the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

ACTS v. 12.

12. Insomuch that they assembled openly at the temple, without any molestation.

12. ***B**Y the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people ; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.*

13. The twelve in the meanwhile being held in such veneration that none of an inferior character presumed to consort with them.

13. *And of the rest durst no man join himself to them : but the people magnified them.*

with them.

14. *And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women)*

15. *Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.*

16. *There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.*

COMMENT.

THE topic properly arising from hence, is the efficacy of miracles to establish the authority of the workers, and to convince the unbelieving. Which, having been handled heretofore, my reader is referred to vol. ii. p. 61, &c.

THE GOSPEL.

LUKE xxii. 24.

24. *AND there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.*

25. *And he said unto them, The kings of the gentiles exercise lordship over them: and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.*

26. *But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.*

27. *For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth.*

28. *Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.*

29. *And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me.*

30. *That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

PARAPHRASE.

24, 25, 26, 27.
See the Paraphrase on the Gospel for St. James's Day.

28, 29, 30. See the Comment.

COMMENT.

THE contention between the apostles, related in this scripture, St. Matthew and St. Mark expressly declare to have been occasioned by that indignation which they conceived against James and John, upon requesting that they might sit, the one on our Lord's right-hand, and the other on his left, in his kingdom. The nature of which petition, and our blessed Saviour's answer to it, have been sufficiently explained and considered, the last festival. Whether St. Luke hath placed this strife in the right time and order of things ; or whether the apostles were more than once guilty of such weakness ; are critical inquiries, of no great importance, and beside the purpose of these practical discourses, to enter into. Let it suffice to observe the agreement of all three evangelists thus far ; that this dispute immediately followed, upon warning given of our Lord's death and his resurrection consequent thereupon. A plain

Gospel for St.
James's Day.

confirmation of the remark I formerly made, that the apostles expected those events to be presently succeeded by Christ's solemn entrance upon some glorious exercise of a temporal dominion. A mistake, which was then shewn to be in some degree refuted, by our Lord's reply to the two sons of Zebedee: and it is designed to be yet more fully exposed, by this discourse to the whole body of the apostles, which falls under our present consideration.

Some interpreters have taken pains to acquaint us, what reasons, they imagine several of this number might find, to feed their hopes of obtaining a pre-eminence above the rest of their brethren. St. Peter, they tell you, is not only mentioned first, but, upon his confessing Jesus to be the Christ, *the Son of the living God*,

Matt. xvi. 16. 19.

he received the peculiar honour of this answer, *Blessed art thou Simon-Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.* St. James and St. John

had been dignified with the title of *sons of thunder*: had been equalled with St. Peter by the same admission to the privacies of their Master ; particularly at the raising of Jairus's daughter,

Mark iii. 17.

———v. 37.

Matt. xvii. 1.

———xxvi. 37.

and his glorious transfiguration in the Mount ; as we find them again shortly after this, at his agony in the garden : (distinctions of favour, which perhaps were made encouragements to that request mentioned even now. St. Andrew

John i. 37—42.

was first of the whole fraternity brought to the knowledge of Christ, and introduced his brother Peter to him. St. Matthew had quitted a very gainful employment

Matt. ix. 9.

for his service. St. Thomas seems to have excelled the rest in courage ; and, when his Master, notwithstanding the representation they made of his danger, determined to return into Judea, he exhorts them all to follow

John xi. 7 : 16.

his fortunes, come what would ; *Let us also go, that we may die with him.* For thus it

See St. Thomas's Day.

seems to me reasonable to understand that passage, rather than spoken in a sense of fear and irony, as hath been argued before. Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Thaddæus, might

Matt. xiii. 55.

think this preference a natural effect of their near relation to Jesus in blood. And Bartholomew, by many supposed the same with Nathanael, on account of the high

John i. 45—51.

character given him ; the promise made of seeing Christ's glory ; to which some add the consideration of his being more learned in the law, and of greater quality, than the other apostles.

Such have been the conjectures (and no better than conjectures) advanced upon this occasion. But, whether these or any other causes kindled their emulation, our blessed Lord does here give his apostles to understand, that neither their ideas of his kingdom, nor the expectations they had conceived thereupon, had any just ground in the nature of the thing. To which end he shews the difference between the pre-eminences in use and esteem with the generality of the world, and those peculiar to the gospel and their character. And then he declares and describes the mighty honours, which were reserved, as a proper recompense for their service and fidelity to him. The former of these arguments is contained in the *twenty-fifth, sixth, and seventh*, the latter in the *twenty-eighth, twenty-ninth, and thirtieth* verses.

1. The words, in which the former reason lies, are these. *The kings of the gentiles exercise lordship over them, and they that exercise authority upon them, are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so ; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger ; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For, whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth ? Is not he that sitteth at meat ? But I am among you as he that serveth.*

Referring my reader, for the sense of these words, to the explanation given in a former St. James's Day. paraphrase, I observe only, that the argument contained in them, cannot by any means be, what some have inferred from hence, *viz.* that it is inconsistent with the character and duty, either of a Christian in general, or of an apostle or minister of Christ in particular, to bear rule, or exercise authority over others. The forbidding this to Christ-

ians in general, must have introduced confusion and endless calamities ; by excluding those from power, who are upon their own principles, of all men best fitted for it, and most likely to use it conscientiously and profitably. And we cannot imagine, our Lord designed so great a mischief to the world, as to ordain, that none of them should govern, who, if they act as they profess, must needs be such, that it were to be wished rather, and would certainly turn to best account, to have it lawful for none but them to govern.

Nor can our Lord's intention be to debar the apostles in particular, and their successors in that dignity, from all manner of jurisdiction over others. For it is plain, from several passages in the New Testament, that he did instate them in such powers, as are signified by the *keys of the kingdom of heaven*, by *binding and loosing the sins of men*, and the like. It is abundantly notorious, that they did not only exercise such powers in their own persons, but thought themselves bound to delegate them to others. And accordingly the epistles furnish several directions for the execution of the charge so delegated ; which had been the vainest caution in the world, supposing the writers to have no authority to give, and the persons written not to have received any such commissions. Nay, this interpretation is evidently confuted by the very passage now in hand. For our Lord does here, in the same breath, declare that he had *appointed to these apostles a kingdom, as his Father had appointed unto* Ver. 29. *him*, and had constituted them judges in that kingdom. Unless therefore we will deny that Christ himself is a king and a judge, we must either allow those expressions to denote some power and authority derived from him to his apostles ; or else we make one part of the argument urged here, to stand in perfect contradiction to the other.

From hence it seems undeniably to follow, that

the opposition between these apostles and the princes of the gentiles, does not properly consist in authority, and no authority; but in the different nature and kind of their authority, and the different manner of exerting it. Our Saviour, when declaring before John xviii. 36. Pilate, that his *kingdom is not of this world*, assigns that for a reason why his servants did not rescue him by fighting, as the subjects of other kings do, when their governors are in danger. And, in proportion as the apostles are like him, so are they more and more unlike to other princes. The power of these extends to the bodies and estates, but theirs is over the souls and consciences of men. The end of that is to establish temporal, but of this to secure eternal, peace and happiness. The exercise of that is generally tyrannical and arbitrary; and, though the persons possessed of it affect titles, which speak public good; yet do they rather import what princes should be, than what they really are; for the aim of those gentiles was to gain ease, and pomp, and grandeur to themselves, at the infinite sufferings and expense of their people. But the exercise of the apostolic authority was to be conspicuous in humility and meekness, in universal charity, in unwearied labours, and unparalleled condescensions: in foregoing and despising personal safety and advantage: in spending and being spent, to promote the common interest of those under their care; and in not disdaining to become servants to the meanest, for the sake, and after the example, of Jesus.

This I take to be the true state of our Lord's first argument. And thus it comes directly up to the point for checking that exorbitant ambition of the disciples; which, as was said before, was kindled and cherished in them by that vulgar error concerning the Messiah's kingdom; as if the distinctions of those that should be chief in this, were to consist in all that gaiety and splendour, and proud greatness,

which the unbelieving world valued themselves upon.

2. I pass now to the *second* argument, which is designed to quiet the emulation of these apostles, by declaring, that, although no such dominion was intended for their reward, as they fondly imagined; yet a reward their good services should not want; and that such, as had both honour and pleasure to recommend it. *Ye (says Christ) are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a king-*

Luke xxii.
28, 29. 33.

dom, as my Father hath appointed unto me: that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. To clear this point, it will be expedient, *first*, to explain some expressions in this promise, and then to shew the weight of our Lord's reasoning in it.

First, then, for explaining the terms in which this promise is delivered; I observe, that, by *continuing with Christ in his temptations*, are undoubtedly meant the several instances of fidelity, by which these apostles had signalized themselves. Such as, adhering stedfastly to their Master, notwithstanding all the discouragements and difficulties they met with, or saw him exposed to; relinquishing the world for his sake; being content to trust their all with him; to undergo the same painful labours and long journies, the same poverty and hard fate, the same malice and persecution, the same derision and contempt, which he did. Not taking distaste at any of those mysterious doctrines, which some thought *hard sayings*, and, as St. John says, thereupon *walked no more after him*. Not

John vi. 60. 66.

betraying any of those defects in their temper, which the parable of the sower describes, in such hearers, who, like the seed on stony ground, were of promising and hopeful beginning, but brought no fruit to maturity: zealous and forward, while matters went well; but, as soon as tribulation

arose, presently offended. In short, they are here commended for the virtues of sincerity and constancy, patience and perseverance.

Secondly, By Christ's *appointing to them a kingdom*, as *his Father had appointed unto him*; we are to understand not an equality, but only a likeness, of promotion. God gave Jesus a name above

Phil. ii. 9, 10.

Heb. i. 13.

every name, so that none could come up to his degree of exaltation. *Sit thou on*

my right-hand until thine enemies be made thy footstool, was the conferring of a dignity so excellent, that not any of the blessed angels themselves could aspire to it. Nor indeed could any other pretend to merit it, but the Son; because none but he was in the *form of God*, and *humbled himself*, notwithstanding, to the *form of a servant*, and the *death of the cross*. But, as God exalted this Son for his voluntary humiliation and sufferings; so he decreed, that all who suffered with him, should also reign with him; that they should partake of his glories, who had been partakers of his hardships; that they should receive an elevation, in proportion to what they had done and suffered for his sake; though incomparably beneath his, because their actions and sufferings were incomparably, nay infinitely, beneath his. This difference is here expressed, in that Christ assumes to himself the prerogative of distributing the rewards and advancements, which the rest should receive. He, as God, had a kingdom from everlasting; and, as man, he had a regal power invested in his human nature; they should be kings and priests to God and his Father too; yet not supreme and paramount, as he was; but kings of his making, and by virtue of his blood and merits, that sits upon the throne.

Thirdly, The description of this kingdom does likewise deserve to be carefully considered. For by *eating and drinking at his table*, we must not understand any gross feasts, or gratifications of a fleshly

appetite. But because, while we continue in these bodies, and lead lives of sense, it is not easy for us to apprehend things purely spiritual; therefore resemblances of sense are made use of, to convey to our understandings the ideas of things above us, by those which bear some proportion to us. Thus the plague of heat and thirst is used to describe the torments of the *rich glutton* in hell, and the sad condition of a wretch, who with such vehemence implored *a drop of water to cool his tongue*. Thus the saints are said *not to hunger or thirst any more*; and those who come into the gospel, to *eat bread* with the holy patriarchs *in the kingdom of God*. In like manner these words here intimate a condition of plenty and pleasure, where nothing that can contribute to true happiness shall be wanting; but all that ease and abundance and delicious enjoyment shall be had, which answers to the condition of men, who live and eat with princes, and partake of all their state and entertainment.

Lukè xvi. 24.

Rev. vii. 16.

Matt. xviii. 11.

What the importance of that other part is, wherein these apostles are said to *sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*, interpreters do not so generally agree. Some have thought their authority in the church militant upon earth to be meant by it, of which I had occasion to speak before. Others, and most indeed, understand it of honours to be conferred upon them in a future state. And here some have taken great pains to determine, what judgment these persons shall pass; as, that they shall condemn the errors of wicked men by their doctrines; the malice and obstinacy of infidels by their persecution; and the like. Others have undertaken to assign them their parts in the appearance and process of the great day of judgment; and represented them, as so many assistants to Christ, like the bench in our courts of judicature to the judge in

Epist. St. Matthias's Day.

commission : so construing their privilege here literally, that they shall sit upon the examination and trial of mankind, and all the rest stand at the bar, as prisoners upon their deliverance. But, though we are well assured, that such a judgment shall be ; yet, as to the particular circumstances and formalities of it, the Scripture seems to give us but a very slender insight : so that, setting all the dark conjectures about this matter aside, the most safe and probable way (in my apprehension) of applying this passage, is to look upon it, as spoken after the manner of men, to signify in general a brighter crown, and more exquisite degrees of happiness and glory : just as those in princes' courts are most highly honoured, who are allowed to sit down with them at their own tables, and are in the chief places of trust, and most eminent posts about them. These persons accompanied, and owned, and stuck close to Christ in his lowest estate ; they kept the faith, when there were the greatest temptations to draw them off from it ; they were indefatigably diligent, undauntedly constant, in their labours and sufferings for the truth ; and most eminently serviceable in advancing the kingdom of Christ upon earth : and therefore they shall receive an eminent distinction in his kingdom in heaven. This is what the words undoubtedly denote ; even in the notion of those, who contend for a strict interpretation of them. And this is enough for the present purpose ; and avoids any inconveniences liable to be charged upon a construction, which the Scripture does not seem to have left any sufficient warrant, at least not any necessity for. The pre-eminence of the apostles however, which I contend for, is manifest in both acceptations. For, if they shall actually have their thrones and assist in that great work, this is a signal prerogative ; and, if the thrones and the sitting here be metaphorical, as the table and the eating and drinking are before, even thus a very remarkable

preference is acknowledged to belong to them also.

The words of the promise being thus explained, it is fit I now apply myself to shew, that this argument used by our Saviour, is a very fit one for his design: which was, to check that vain ambition of his disciples, and to bring them off from their fondness of such worldly promotions and advantages, as they falsely conceived and hoped, would shortly be bestowed upon them. Now this he does these three ways.

1. *First*, By putting them in mind of the manner of life they had led together, a life of *temptations*; that is, of great adversity and severe trials. And this might, if duly attended to, convince them, that the kingdom they were to partake of could not possibly be like those of this world: for every wise master takes care to initiate and prepare those under his direction, for the several posts they are designed to fill. The great and honourable are accustomed to courts and august appearances; they are let into secrets of state, and taught the arts of government betimes, by conversing with greatness, and rendering it familiar. Thus they may rise to and be qualified for it by degrees; and not grow giddy with the surprise of a sudden advancement, nor betray their rawness and ignorance, when invested with honours they know not how to manage. But how mighty distant from this, was the method Christ took with himself and his disciples? He chose most of them from mean employments, and sought not to improve them with those of higher rank. They led lives of solitude and privacy, except when the business of preaching and doing miracles called for their appearance in public; and then the entertainment they met with, was commonly opposition and scorn. The whole of their practice was to endure, and to harden themselves against, any severe encounters, which their faith

might be engaged in. The principle, upon which they were taught to perfect themselves, was that of patience and meekness : to the poverty of their fortunes they were taught to add that of their spirits too ; to forbear and despise the pomps and vain delights of the world ; and to take no joy in any thing, equal to that, which sprung from being persecuted and spitefully used, reviled, and defamed falsely, for the sake of God and goodness. Resisting unto blood, and laying down their lives ; being led as lambs to the slaughter, and dumb all the while, as sheep before the shearers : these were dispositions exceeding contrary to those which secular princes are instituted to. And, as foreign as these are from arms, and war, and garments rolled in the blood of those which contend with us : so far were the victories, and the triumphs, and the crowns of Christ and his followers, from the laurels and trophies of them, whose business and glory it is, to defend or to enlarge their territories, and subdue all opposition by dint of sword and revenge. By all the instruction, therefore, and by all the exercise these disciples received under their Master, it might, one would imagine, have easily been discerned, that the adversaries, against whom they were trained, are of another kind : the passions and the weaknesses of their own minds, and the malice and perverseness of other people's. And therefore the reward and advancement to be expected, consequent to such an institution, must have been somewhat spiritual and future. For it could not consist in any thing of this world, the contempt and abandoning whereof was so eminent a branch of their duty ; and the perpetual adversities and persecutions they engaged with in it, were an expedient purposely designed to wean their affections from it, and teach them to place their hearts and desires on a better state. And in this sense we may understand our Lord, when he says, *he appoints them a kingdom, as his Father had*

appointed unto him; that is, he ordained that they should attain it by the same methods of trials and sufferings, of which they had already seen him encounter a great deal, and would now immediately be eye-witnesses of his enduring infinitely more; even in the passion, and agonies, and ignominy, and death, which at that instant, when he spoke these words, were drawing on apace to attack him. Now, what could be more proper to compose the contentions about precedence than this; that there was no manner of occasion for any such disputes in their present circumstances; and that their fortunes and affairs in the world were, and would be such, that afflictions and calamities ought rather to employ their thoughts, than honours, or any secular advantages? If then a strife must grow among them, the only seasonable subject of it was, not who should rise highest, but who should endure most indignities; which should lay himself out for the good of others with greatest zeal, and suffer with the greatest resignation and most invincible patience.

2. *Secondly*, By saying that he *appointed unto them a kingdom, as his Father had appointed unto him*, he intimated to them, that their happiness should be of the same kind with his. And this is another motive to peace, and ceasing all strife about superiority. For our Saviour had given many instances in his life, to manifest the truth of what he afterwards told Pilate, that *his kingdom is not of this world*. When the multitudes, who had been miraculously fed in the wilderness, would have acknowledged him as their leader, and desired that he would take the regal honour upon him, he industriously avoided it: and when two brothers at difference about an estate, desired him to interpose and determine their controversy, he declined all pretensions to the quality of a ruler or a

John xviii. 36.
— vi. 15.

Luke xii. 13, 14.

judge over them. When a treacherous disciple had betrayed him into the hands of those bloody wretches, who impiously sought his life, he reprov'd the forward zeal of a servant that attempted to rescue him : nor would he, as it is the custom and duty of temporal princes, suffer his friends to fight for him. Legions indeed he had, but they were legions of angels ; and his territories are those glorious regions above, where blessed and immortal spirits dwell : this was the principality God had prepared for his Son. And sure what the only-begotten and best-beloved was destined to, his servants had reason, not only to be content with, but to prefer before all other promotions whatsoever. It was enough in this case, that the *servant should be as his Lord, and the disciple as his Master*. If the honours and pleasures of a lower world were not set apart for the encouragement and reward of such fidelity ; the reason is, that they were not worthy the acceptance of him and his friends ; and, that God had provided some better thing for them. Honour before the majesty of heaven, stable and certain ; instead of that fleeting shadow, that blast of popular breath, that mushroom which comes up and dies in a night : which is often given, and as often taken away, without reason or desert, falls upon good and bad promiscuously ; and, after a short glittering splendour, sets and dies in hatred and disgrace : a crown, without the thorny cares that all earthly ones are beset with ; not subject to change or decay, but above even mortality itself. A range of happiness vast and unbounded ; such as fills the largest heart, and even exceeds the imaginations and wishes of them that labour after it. A condition of tranquillity so absolute, of love and joy so generous and great, that every soul delights itself with the felicities of others, and counts them an addition to his own. So that no place is left for ambition or emulation : no envious or greedy passions inhabit there, and they,

who look up to this bliss, will be very far from grudging any of the difficulties undergone for the attainment of it; will esteem whatever earth contains, or can propose, a trifle in comparison; will find no temptation to strive for greatness there, since no one's abundance shall create another's want; but all shall abound, and all be greater than they now can ask or think.

3. But, *thirdly*, Though all shall abound, yet we are not from thence to conclude, all shall have an equal portion. And for this reason, what our Lord adds in the *thirtieth* verse tends thus far to the satisfaction of the apostles in this thirst for honour, that there shall be a difference of honour and happiness in that spiritual and eternal kingdom also; and, that the highest room was reserved for them. So then a superiority and precedence there will be, though not such a one as their yet carnal understandings had formed ideas of. It is true, indeed, the lowest place in heaven is prodigiously above the merit of the purest saint; but yet, such is the mercy and bounty of God, that he does not only bestow upon every one more than he deserves, but observes a proportion, even in the excesses of his goodness; and to those, who labour more abundantly, and make larger improvement of talents committed to their trust, he assigns a more plentiful recompense. The character of a righteous judge is, not only to punish the evil, and reward the good; but to assign a sorer punishment to those who have offended more grievously, and a better reward to them, that have been more faithful and diligent. And when we are told, that every man shall receive from Christ's tribunal, *according to what he hath done* 2 Cor. v. 10. *in his body, whether it be good or bad*, it is very agreeable to reason, to interpret that passage, not only, that they who have done good shall receive good, but that they shall receive *according to what they have done*; that is, the degree of their

happiness shall be increased or diminished, in correspondence to the degree of the good they have wrought, or of the evils they have suffered, for the sake of God and their duty. So likewise St. Paul 2 Cor. ix. 6. tells the Corinthians, that *he who soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly, and he that soweth plentifully shall reap plentifully*. From whence it follows, that God is not unrighteous. He forgets not any man's least labours; all shall reap who have sown, but all shall not reap alike, because all did not sow alike. And therefore the quantity of the crop at this harvest, will depend upon the liberality of him who scattered the seed.

There is yet another passage commonly insisted upon to this purpose; it is, that whereas good persons, for the generality, are promised that they shall be with the spirits of the just men made perfect, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the like; those patriarchs and prophets are said to sit down with Christ at his own table, in his kingdom. All shall see God, and in that beatific vision consists their happiness; but all shall not have so near, so full a prospect of him, nor be equally ravished with that prospect. All shall be crowned, but every crown shall not be equally bright; though every crown shall be a crown of glory, and every one immortal. And the signifying this to the apostles was very fit to quiet their present emulations, to excite their zeal and vigilance, and to render them easy and content with their care and their sufferings; when they were thus assured, that none of these things should pass unregarded; and that the only way, not to be behind any of the others, was to *labour more abundantly than they all*. The advice then given them, in the words immediately foregoing, was the most gainful method, the readiest and surest way of acquiring honour in Christ's kingdom, *he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve*.

The sum of our blessed Lord's argument to check his disciples in their ambitious emulation, turns (you see) upon these three points. 1. That it was a most absurd expectation, to imagine that any thing so contrary to their institution and whole method of life, as worldly greatness was, should be the happiness intended for them. 2. That a happiness however was reserved for their reward, and that too of the very same nature with their Master's, the Son of God himself; such as they should be highly satisfied with, and find no occasion to envy any other for, or to strive about precedence in. 3. Yet, that some priority there was; and, whosoever among them exceeded in diligence and humility, and condescension in doing good, and patience in enduring evil, for Christ's sake, and in pursuance of their office in propagating the gospel, should find a due respect had to his pains and faithfulness, and be preferred in the kingdom of heaven accordingly.

And now, after having insisted thus long upon the meaning and importance of these words, with regard to the case of those contending apostles, I shall very briefly mention some reflections, fit to be drawn from hence, such as suit the circumstances of men in general.

1. As, *first*, Since the temptations mentioned in my text were poverty, shame, danger, and other kinds of adversity; it may be of use to observe, how well the ends of religion are served by such providences. For they render the virtue of the persons more conspicuous; their patience and constancy, and trust in God more approved; and especially they vindicate their sincerity from that insinuation of the devil against Job, and the too common jealousy of wicked men, that God is served only for the sake of temporal interest. When adversity falls upon pious people, it shews them to themselves, and to others. It gives them the satisfaction of knowing their own stedfastness; and convinces the unbeliev-

ing world, that there is really such a thing, as cleaving to God out of a principle of duty and conscience ; that some can abstract from all those advantages and encouragements, for which Christians are often suspected to have a greater regard to the gain, than to the godliness, of their obedience.

2. But, *secondly*, We ought to observe likewise, what proof is given of our integrity in such cases, and upon what terms any benefit is to be expected from them. Which is, only upon condition of our *continuing* with Christ in these *temptations*. Perseverance and faithfulness unto the end, not fainting under tribulation, not growing weary of well-doing ; these are the terms, these are the evidences of our virtues, to which a crown of life and righteousness

Gal. v. 7. is promised. The Galatians *ran well once*, but *they suffered themselves to be hindered from the obeying of the truth* ; but he that wins the prize, must run on till he reach the goal. Several others addressed to Christ, and kept him company for a while, but they forsook him again ; and the commendation here distinguishes these apostles from such a levity, as those deserters were guilty of. We cannot indeed continue with Christ at this day, in the same manner they did then ; because we do not converse with him as they did, nor see the abuses he suffered in our flesh. But we do continue with him in temptation, as oft as any difficulty besets us, but cannot draw us off from our duty, as oft as any misfortune assaults, but cannot vanquish our hope and patience ; as oft as we see his holy doctrine traduced and vilified, his blessed name profaned, his precepts neglected, his promises and threatenings slighted and ridiculed ; and yet slacken not our zeal one whit, nor in any degree ashamed of being esteemed those simple honest men, which the gospel calls *Christians*. For it is a very commendable instance of our piety, not to be seduced by example, nor borne down with the torrent

of a common vogue. To hazard the reproaches of being singular and precise, rather than to sacrifice our conscience to a false reputation, or join in a fashionable contempt of religion. And happy are those men who can make David's profession, *The proud have had me exceedingly in derision, yet have I not shrinked from thy law.* Psal. cxix. 51.

3. *Thirdly,* If we consider the persons to whom, and the time when, these words were spoken, there is yet this farther comfort to be gathered out of them, that God hath great compassion upon our weakness; and does not reckon a good man's perseverance lost and broken by any interruption, which human frailty and a surprising occasion may make in it. For, did not our Lord deliver himself in these words a little before his passion? Did not every one of these apostles forsake him? Did not one of them deny him in a few hours after? Did he not know, nay, had he not already foretold, this scattering and offence because of him? Yet you see all this notwithstanding, he allows these very persons the character of friends, *that continued with him in his temptation*; and promises a reward for their courage and constancy in so doing. From whence now we have leave to argue, that God does not shew himself *extreme to mark what is done amiss*, but sets a just distinction between failings and faults. That some calamities, when sudden and violent, may put us beside our duty, and prevail too far upon our passions, without the utter ruin of our souls, or forfeiting the praise due to our former piety. And provided we be diligent in calling back reason and religion to our assistance; if we return, as soon as possible, to a right mind, and do well, and lament our offence, all may be very well. For to those, who do not transgress wilfully, nor indulge their passions till they grow into voluntary and presump-

tuous sins, the slips of mere infirmity shall never be imputed to their prejudice.

4. *Lastly*, The subject before us teaches us to despise the world, and to long for a better. This, you see, is not the place of rewards; it hath nothing in it capable of being a reward; nothing worth the sufferings and obedience of a good Christian; nothing that can satisfy the desires of a truly great soul. If therefore we would indulge a lawful and commendable ambition, let us seek that honour, which cometh from God only; and endeavour to be persons whom the King of heaven may delight to prefer. If we thirst after plenty and pleasure, none of the trifles here below can satiate our appetite. It must be sincere and lasting pleasure; it must be true and stable honour; and such is only to be had in that kingdom, which Christ appoints to all them who continue faithful in *temptations*. Which God grant us all grace to do here, that we may have glory for it hereafter. *Amen.*

St. Matthew's Day.

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF ST. MATTHEW.

THAT this apostle descended from Jewish parents, there can be no manner of reason to doubt; if we suppose him, as has been generally believed, to be the same with that Levi, the son of Alphaeus, whom St. Mark in the *second*, and St. Luke in the *fifth*, of his Gospel, make mention of. The custom of having more names than one, is known to have prevailed among the Jews; and the circumstances of the account, given by those evangelists, carry so exact an agreement with the Gospel of this day, as will not suffer us, I think, to understand them of different actions and persons. An ancient writer makes the

Mark ii. 14. 17.
Luke v. 27. 32.

place of his birth to have been Nazareth, and derives his parents from the tribe of Issachar. However that be, his employment we know was a publican: concerning which office, the corruption it was generally exercised with, and Gosp. Sund. xi. after Trinity. the great disrepute it fell under upon that account, enough hath been said formerly. Meanwhile, this presents us with an instance of charity in the writers of the other gospels; who, to cover infamy of this their brother's former way of life, seem industriously to have declined all mention of his business before the call to the apostleship, and to have chosen to speak of him under his other name. It gives us also an evidence of his own great humility, who, in the gospel written by himself, does not only take the more commonly known x. 3. name of Matthew, but adds that odious and despised title of Matthew *the publican*. By this, no question, he intended to magnify the grace of God, and the condescension of our blessed Saviour, who did not only admit to his conversation and the means of repentance, but disdained not to take into the highest dignities of the Christian church, those whom the world accounted most vile: those who were qualified for such distinguishing marks of favour, by being vile in their own esteem.

That he lived in circumstances of plenty may be reasonably presumed; not only from the exorbitant gains usually made of the publican's office, but from the greatness of the entertainment, and the number of the guests, wherewith our Lord was received at his house, immediately after his call. And yet this wealth, and all the prospects of more, were no obstruction to quitting all secular advantages, and the following the person and fortunes of a Master, who made no scruple of declaring, Luke ix. 58. that he *had no where to lay his head*.

So sudden and powerful are the changes wrought in our hearts, when effectually touched by divine

grace: but withal, so rational, and so free from all just imputation of rashness and enthusiasm, was the compliance of this apostle; when it is considered, that his abode and business at Capernaum, and that the fame of our Lord's miracles done there in great

abundance, and particularly that famous one upon the paralytic just before, must needs have been a good preparation toward it, with any attentive and unprejudiced mind.

He continued with our Lord during his abode upon earth; and, after his ascension, preached the

gospel in Judea, for about the space of eight years. Then it was, as

Euseb. Hist. L. III.

C. 24, 39. L. V.

C. 8, 10. L. VI.

C. 25.

Hieron. Catal.

Script.

Iren. L. III. C. 1.

der his name.

See Mill. Prol. in

N. T. p. viii.

But others, calculating from Irenæus, the time St. Paul's being at Rome, rather place it about the LXI or LXII year of our Lord. To make it more useful to them, at whose instance he wrote, the original language of it was Hebrew. To what hand we owe the Greek version, is not so uni-

versally agreed. Some ascribe it to St. John; others to St. James, the brother of our Lord, and first bishop of Jerusalem. Which conjecture, if true, renders the inspired translator of equal authority with the first author. That this gospel was written long before the other three, is out of question; and how valuable a treasure, and authentic an account of our Lord's actions and doctrine it was esteemed, the reader could not but observe from the account given of St. Bartholomew: whose carrying this book with him into foreign countries, as the standard of the Christian doctrine, is thought by some to have been an act of respect, practised by all the apostles,

Mill. Prol. p. viii.

when distributing themselves for the propagation of the faith, through the several parts of the world. The countries in which he chiefly preached, are said to be Parthia, and Ethiopia; the latter of which is expressly said, by Socrates the historian, to have been St. Matthew's lot, when the apostles had their respective provinces assigned to them. In all these places he signalized himself by a life of exemplary abstinence. And at Nādar, a city in Ethiopia, he is most probably thought at last to have suffered martyrdom. But of the time and manner of his death no certain account is transmitted to us.

Lib. I. C. 19.

Clem. Alex. L.
II. C. 1.Dr. Cave from
Ven. Fort.

THE COLLECT.

O ALMIGHTY God, who by thy blessed Son didst call Matthew from the receipt of custom to be an apostle and evangelist; grant us grace to forsake all covetous desires, and inordinate love of riches, and to follow the same thy Son Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

Matt. ix. 9.
Mark ii. 14.
Luke v. 27,
28.

THE EPISTLE.

2 COR. iv. 1.

PARAPHRASE.

1. **T**HEREFORE seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not:

1. Since God hath appointed us ministers of this better dispensation, we, in

a due sense of the mercy, execute our office with diligence and courage.

with diligence and

2. *But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

2. And with all possible integrity too; not stooping to any unlawful art or fraud, or sinful accommodation, to

ease ourselves, or gratify others ; but by delivering the gospel as it really is, and as becomes men acting in the presence, and accountable to the judgment of God.

3, 4. And if the force of this doctrine be at any time lost, it is not from want of any advantage or excellence fit to recommend it: but from want

3. *But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost :*

4. *In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

of a good disposition to receive it, in them, whose wilful, God hath punished with a judicial, blindness ; by permitting the temptations of worldly interests and carnal lusts to keep their minds still dark ; so that they perceive not the excellence of this doctrine, nor of Jesus Christ its author ; in and by whom the glorious perfections of God the Father are exhibited to mankind.

5. For he alone is the subject we preach ; and the knowledge of him

5. *For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord ; and ourselves your servants for Jesus sake.*

is the end we aim at: not any honour or profit of our own ; who are so far from exalting ourselves above the persons we preach to, that we think no kind office, which may do them good, too mean to submit to, for the sake of their and our common Master and Saviour.

6. And in this again we of the new, resemble Moses the minister of the former, dispen-

6. *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

sation ; that the same God, who in the beginning did, with a word, bring light out of darkness, hath, by his eternal word, Jesus Christ, produced spiritual light in the minds of men ; for he hath commanded the glory of his Son resting upon him, and reflecting from, us his apostles and ministers, so to shine on our hearers, as the glory of the Lord heretofore first left a lustre on the face of Moses, and from thence was reflected down upon the people.

COMMENT.

THE designs, inspired by avarice and ambition, are seldom so successful, never so wicked and

dangerous, as when hypocrisy, and a pretended zeal for religion, are the instruments to cover and promote them. The management in these cases is sometimes so artful, that truth itself is made to lead the way to error, and the gospel of peace abused to purposes of faction and division.

Hence St. Paul complains to the Philippians, that as some *preached* Phil. i. 15, 16, 17, 18.

Christ from a principle of *love and good-will*; so there wanted not others, who preached him *not sincerely*, but *out of contention, and envy, and strife*. The joy he professes there to take in Christ being preached however, *whether in pretence or in truth*, is to me a sufficient intimation, that, how blameworthy soever the design of such preachers might be, who supposed thus to *add affliction to his bonds*, yet the matter by them delivered was orthodox. For surely no consideration could have rendered the propagating false and dangerous doctrines; though mingled and set off with plain and profitable truths, a just occasion of joy, to so judicious and so zealous an apostle.

The different treatment of those adversaries, who set up as teachers in the church of Corinth, argues the case here to have been far otherwise. He charges them with advancing doctrines, which would not *abide the trial*; and such as the most innocent and best intentions would but just leave a possibility for the author's escape for maintaining; he compares their superstitions and absurdities to *wood, and hay, and stubble*: such as, though they did not destroy, were yet far from adding either beauty or strength to, or being at all of a piece with the good *foundation* they were built upon. He threatens not only them, but their abettors, with the spiritual *rod*, in case they persisted in their faction, and refused to hearken to the instructions sent by Timothy. And, in this *second* epistle, he sig-

1 Cor. iii. 12—15.

1 Cor. iv. 17—21.

nifies to us the nature of those doctrines, and the qualities and behaviour of their teachers. The former, in the *third* chapter; where his comparison of the law and gospel, and the mighty pre-eminence ascribed to the latter, are evidently levelled against the magnifiers of the *Mosaic* institution. The latter, in the passage now before us; where, by a figure usual in rhetoric, he obliquely taxes his adversaries of those crimes and indirect practices, from which he only expresses a vindication of himself and his fellow-labourers in the truth. For such an edge as this, upon the scandalous and licentious, the subtle and fraudulent, the inviegling and popular measures of schismatical preachers, the *second* verse appears to carry with it; when saying, *We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

Abstracting from the charge of corruption and fraud, thus laid upon our adversaries, the substance of what the apostle alleges for himself and his fellow-labourers in the gospel amounts to thus much: 1. That the doctrines by them advanced, and the method of inculcating these doctrines, were such as had a natural tendency, and must, in the reason of the thing, be effectual, to convince men of the truth, and persuade them to the practice of the Christian religion. And, 2. That whensoever it should, (as in many instances it did) happen, that their hearers were not actually so convinced and persuaded; this inefficacy could not be justly imputed, either to want of force in the arguments urged for that purpose; or to any defects of mismanagements in the persons urging them; but proceeded from the faults and indispositions of those hearers themselves.

Of these two points the scripture now under consideration does plainly consist: a scripture, very properly taken into the offices of this festival;

which commemorates that apostle and evangelist, to whose holy labours the church is indebted, for the earliest account she now enjoys of our blessed Saviour's actions and discourses: a scripture equally applicable to him, and the succeeding writers and preachers of the gospel in its primitive purity, as to St. Paul and his companions. And therefore it is now especially seasonable to observe, *first*, What evidences and motives they have left us for our common Christianity; and then, *secondly*, How it comes to pass, that these do not always operate upon the minds of men, as it is but reasonable to expect they should do. The former of these particulars will be of service for confirming us in our own duty; the latter will help us to account for other people's failing in theirs.

In speaking to the former, which seems to be meant by the apostles *commending themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God, by manifestation of the truth*, we will briefly take a view of two things.

1. The nature and condition of the truth so manifested; and,

2. The manner chosen to manifest it by.

Truth here must be extended to the whole of that doctrine, which the apostles, by our Lord's command and after his example, thought themselves bound to impart to mankind, as necessary to their salvation. And because this was compounded, partly of things to be done (but these latter to be done, in consequence of those former being believed;) therefore the manner of manifesting this truth must be justified, by proving, that they who undertook this mighty work, were careful so to propound the articles of faith, that assent to them could not fairly be refused; and so to inculcate the rules of life, that (those articles being received) the practice of these could not reasonably be declined. Accordingly I shall, in as few words as I

can, state the nature of these several subjects, and the methods used for treating them, as the nature of each required.

The objects of our faith in this case are of two sorts. 1. They may be facts already done; such as the incarnation, birth, life, miracles, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascent of the Lord Jesus; his mission of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles; and, in virtue of that power, the wonders wrought, and the church established by them, and the like: or, 2. They may be doctrines grounded on those facts; and so the remission of sins is, upon our Lord's meritorious death; the resurrection of our bodies, upon his rising again; the judgment to come, upon his exaltation to the throne of God; and the like. Or, if there be no such particular dependance and relation as this, yet they may be such, as are therefore said to be grounded on facts already done; by reason the very doing of those facts rendered the testimony of that teacher, by whom they had been done, worthy of belief.

Now those facts have a right to our assent, which are related by persons, who must be presumed to have had a perfect knowledge of the matters they report, and to lie under no temptation of misrepresenting what they know. The former qualification will preserve them from being deceived themselves, the latter will free them from any suspicion of designing to impose upon other people. This is all we ask for establishing the credit of any witness; and no history was ever yet transmitted to the world, with an authority equal to that of the holy penmen, upon both the forementioned accounts.

1. The facts reported were abundantly notorious. Those concerning our Lord's incarnation and nativity were proved, by the known pregnancy of the Virgin, before any cohabitation with her espoused husband; by the prediction of the angel to Zacharias

first, and then to Mary: the former of these had been made a general discourse, from a sudden loss of speech, and the no less surprising restitution of it: the latter by Mary's three months abode with her cousin Elizabeth: the place, time, and manner of being delivered of her wonderful child; the occasion that brought them to Bethlehem; and the report of the shepherds, concerning the vision of angels, and all the particulars they had seen, to the amazement of the whole country.

The rest, and much the greater part of these facts, (by which those other received abundant confirmation) were the miracles, the discourses, and most memorable passages of our Lord's life and death; his return into the world again, and the circumstances of his leaving it. Now these were all objects of sense: such consequently, as the meanest and most common men are capable and competent judges of. They had been done, not in the presence of one or a few fanciful or partial spectators, but before great multitudes at once: many of them, at those public festivals, which, by requiring the attendance of the Jews, brought a vast concourse of people to Jerusalem, from the several quarters of their country; a country of but small extent, within which the scene of this whole transaction lay: a transaction that took up the space of but three or four years after Christ's baptism by John, and the entrance upon his public ministry: and a ministry, whose most remarkable occurrences appealed to the evidence even of enemies, who neither wanted the skill strictly to examine, nor the malice most wickedly to traduce and blaspheme, the mighty works too plain to be denied. So far would they have been from sparing to expose any fraud or misrepresentation, could such have been discovered, either in the actions themselves, or in the accounts of them afterwards given to the world.

All this indeed we must conclude them highly

concerned to do, in opposition to the consequences, which, they plainly saw, would be drawn from the acknowledgment of their truth. For it is farther to be noted, that most of Christ's actions, recorded by the evangelists, are of a very extraordinary nature. Such as foretelling future contingencies, healing the sick in an instant, restoring speech to the dumb, limbs to the cripples, sight to the blind, nay, even life to the dead, and many other marvellous works. But, above all, that of raising himself the third day, after undeniable demonstration of his expiring upon the cross, after the burial of his body, and all possible care to prevent any access to it.

Now if these facts could not, as we may fairly affirm they could not be, because they were not, disapproved; it was easy to see, and the enemies of Christ and his religion were sufficiently aware, that such use would be made of them, as would not comport either with their interests or inclinations; and yet, such as it was not possible to avoid the mortification of. That these were acts out of the course, and beyond the power of nature, was obvious: that the doer of them was assisted by an evil spirit, was incredible: for the design of our Lord's miracles was directly opposite to the devil's kingdom; neither does it appear, that the devil can control the powers of nature at pleasure: and least of all is it to be imagined, that Almighty God, whose force is confessedly superior to his, would allow him in such a course of stupendous effects, as must needs reflect upon infinite goodness and truth, by leaving it impossible for the most sincere of men to know, when his assent is required to any doctrine, as of divine revelation; and (if these of Jesus were not so) what those mighty signs are, in which we ought to acquiesce, as the finger and undoubted works of God.

In all those texts, which look the other way, ex-

press notice is taken of God's permitting sometimes, extraordinary operations of this kind, either for trial or for punishment. The former in Deut. xiii. the latter in 2 Thess. ii. Concerning which, when our Lord himself is speaking, Matt. xxiv. 24. he inserts that very remarkable clause, (for the security of truly good persons, and to shew that they shall be preserved from any fatal delusions) *that the signs and wonders wrought by false Christs and false prophets should be such as to deceive* (if that were possible) *the very elect*. The meaning whereof I take to be, that the truly virtuous and good, whose integrity needs no farther trial, and who have not, by any wilful opposition of the truth, deserved the punishment of such temptations, are in no danger of falling under them.

To proceed then. After what hath been offered upon this subject heretofore, I suppose there is no need of adding, that the true and proper credentials of a message from heaven are miracles: that this is an issue, upon which, Jews and gentiles in all ages have been content to be tried: so that, unless the miracles of our Lord and his apostles could be denied to have been wrought by a divine power, there can be no just ground for denying our assent to any doctrines taught by them. And unless the facts themselves could be disproved, there is no possible way left to persuade any reasonable man, why he should not believe: since there is no ground at all for imagining, that the wonderful things recorded of them were, or indeed could be, the effects of any power other than divine.

Gosp. ii. Sun.
after Eph.

Thus much may suffice for the nature and condition of those truths propounded to mankind, as articles of the Christian faith. We will now observe, how justly the persons proposing them might be said, from their manner of proceeding, *to commend themselves to every man's conscience, by manifes-*

tation of the truth: that is, to have acted so clearly and fairly, as would take away all excuse from those unbelievers, who refused the truth so manifested by them.

And, *first*, This was done by the method taken in publishing the history of the gospel. It is certainly a very great advantage to any truth, to have escaped all endeavours of suppression, notwithstanding the fairest opportunities, put into the hands of its adversaries for examining and confuting it. As particularly, if the time, place, manner and importance of the relation do all so concur to this purpose, that if we should conceive it to be false, we must at the same time conceive it utterly impossible, that it should ever have been received for true.

(1.) But now the gospel-history, and the doctrines founded thereupon, did quickly get footing, and do still (God be thanked) maintain their ground, with a very considerable part of mankind. And yet no lie was ever so ill contrived to pass upon the world, as this was, had it been one. For they, who labour to impose false characters and accounts, are wise enough to wait a proper season. And such mortality is sure to give ; when the present generation are laid to sleep, and credulous posterity prepared for impressions depending upon distant reports, which none can contradict. But the evangelists did not stay, till all memory of the matters recorded by them was worn out. These, as hath been hinted before, were all done within the remembrance of most men then alive : by far the greater part of them in a very little while before. They began to be published abroad immediately ; in ten days after our Lord's ascension ; the event, most of all insisted on, as an evidence and confirmation of the rest, (I mean our blessed Lord's resurrection from the dead) was openly preached, in fifty days after it happened ; and continued to be so from thenceforward, without any interval of cessation : the whole

account of our Lord's life and death was committed to writing by the evangelist and apostle of this day, about eight or ten years, (as some) or at most within eighteen (as others of the ancients have computed) after that death of his. This prudent care of preserving the truth from the variations, mistakes, and corruptions to which verbal or too hastily written reports are inevitably exposed, induced the apostles to take copies of this gospel into the several regions where they travelled. And, by these left behind them, to supply the want of their own presence and preaching, when the service of religion called them off to other countries. The same reasons moved St. Mark and St. Luke to write their account not long after. And St. John's, the latest of all by far, was yet early enough, to have been disproved by great numbers then surviving, had any thing contained there been less liable to just censure. Of these four, two, we know, testify, what themselves saw and heard; and the other two had their accounts at the very first hand. St. Mark, as I took notice formerly, from St. Peter, and St. Luke, as himself declares, *had a perfect understanding of all things from the very first, communicated to him by those, who were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word from the beginning.* But all of them agree in a fair challenge, as it were, to any who should presume to question their authority: by this early appeal, for the truth of what they reported, to the memories and consciences of many thousands, eye and ear-witnesses as well as themselves, and still in being, to attest, to contradict, as they should see just cause. All which was making an experiment, which no man of common sense or modesty would have the hardiness to venture upon, if not conscious to himself, that his reports will bear the test, and gain more credit, in proportion as they are more nicely inquired into.

St. Mark's Life.
Luke i. 2, 3.

(2.) The same argument holds good with regard

to place. For if a man were disposed to form a modern hero out of his own brain, the scene would certainly be laid in some very distant country, quite out of all knowledge, and if possible out of all communication with that, whose inhabitants he intends thus to amuse. This is a notion so natural, as to render the liberties taken by great travellers (as the last particular of time does the discourses of men in extreme old age) suspected, even to a proverb. But, would any man in his wits hope to put off a forgery, not only near the time, but in the very place, where the matters contained in it are said to have been done? and yet to Judea and Galilee, but chiefly to Jerusalem it is, that all our Lord's actions were confined. The whole country small enough to be without any great pains searched over: but neither of that had men any need; since those reported to be done at Jerusalem lay ready at hand, and those done in any other part might be easily known, by examining the multitudes, who from every part paid thrice each year their attendance at Jerusalem. And yet in this very Jerusalem it was, that the apostles first published these things. Here they insisted on them, especially at those solemn festivals. Here they continued a long time, as ready upon all occasions to justify themselves, and to answer all opposers. And here the substance of what they affirmed and taught, was first committed to writing. But of all places, why here? To be sure, had they been impostors, this of all places was the most inconvenient. Instead of tarrying in the city, they should have fled out of it immediately, transported themselves to the remotest and most barbarous countries, and hastened to tell their tale there, before truth and their own infamy could overtake them. And this, no doubt, would have been their method, had they designed a fraud. But truth and the propagators of it, desire the light. And the daring to stand their ground was a plain indication,

that Jerusalem, as had long ago been prophesied) was the common centre, from whence their doctrine should extend itself over the whole world: because the centre, in which our Lord's actions and sufferings, and the evidences of them met. Here every fresh comer might either come a witness, or go back a proselyte; and from hence the apostles distributed themselves, to make an easier conquest of the world; after the fame of multiplying converts, and a long triumph here, over the vain contradiction of them; wanted nothing but the power, to destroy their reputation and their persons together.

Isa. ii. 3.
Mic. iv. 2.

(3.) The credibility of the gospel-history appears yet farther, by the great variety of facts there related, and the many remarkable circumstances with which each of them is set forth. When men write with an intention to deceive, they find it the safest course, to be as little particular as well as they can, to confine their discourse to a few instances, and to report things in general terms, and in a summary way: but in this case a direct contrary method is taken. The number of our Lord's miracles is almost infinite; and yet that number was so far from being affected, or proceeding from a vain ostentation, that *many other*, indeed the yet many more *things which Jesus did*, were industriously omitted. The reason is, because the end aimed at in these writings, was to give us sufficient, but not to oppress us with superfluous, evidence of his divine nature and power.

John xxi. 25.

Again, In the miracles expressly recounted, we have punctual notice taken of the times when, the places where, and frequently the dwellings and the qualities, and the names of the persons upon whom they were severally done. All which contributed to render the inquiry more easy, for any who had the curiosity to make it. And, as it furnished a ready way to remove the doubts of them who were de-

sirous of full satisfaction, so it gave great scope and opportunity to those who thought themselves concerned to weaken the credit of those historians. And this would have been effectually done, if any one out of so many facts, nay, if any one circumstance belonging to any one of those facts, could have been clearly refuted. But this is what we never find yet done; either by detecting a falsehood in any of these writers separately; or by shewing any inconsistency between the report of each, when compared with the rest: an advantage, which we may be confident was not neglected; if we suffer ourselves at all to reflect upon another consideration yet behind, I mean

4. The importance of the facts related here. Now this was no less, than the establishing a new religion, in many points diametrically opposite to those, wherein education and custom, natural inclinations, vicious habits, and worldly interest, had already engaged men. Religion hath ever been esteemed a matter of the last concernment by sober people of all persuasions whatsoever; not to be taken up, or parted with, rashly and upon slight surmises. Had therefore the Christian religion found men unprepossessed in favour of any other, it is not to be conceived, that even thus it should have been embraced without long and serious examination. But where the prejudices to be vanquished were so many and so strong, the making its way through all these must needs have been a work of exceeding great difficulty. The generality of people would be very tenacious of their old way, glad of any objection to keep their unbelief in countenance, and sure to allow every fresh one its utmost force and efficacy. We may therefore depend upon it, that no pains were spared in a nice, and critical, and even partial, inquiry into those facts; facts, which, if once admitted, drew so long a train of unwelcome consequences after them, as nothing

could prevail for submitting to, less than the clearest evidence and irresistible power of truth. And however weak it may seem, in other cases, to argue from actual non-existence to impossibilities: yet in this it seems no more than reasonable, from the event and demonstration that there *was not*, to infer, that there *could not be*, any falsehood or collusion charged upon the evangelists, or their writings, as now contained in the New Testament.

I should add, as another proof of all imaginable fair dealing upon this occasion, their great sincerity and impartiality; so plainly to be gathered, from not concealing many passages, relating both to their Master and themselves, which would naturally tend to lessen both in the common opinion of the world. Such are, the meanness of our Lord's parentage, the obscurity of his life for thirty years, the scorn and insults of his enemies, the infirmities and passions he condescended to, the disorder and trouble of his agony in the garden, the scandal of his death, and the like. Such again are, the infamous occupation of some, and the poor ones of others, in their own fraternity, before their conversion and call; their heaviness and rebukes, the treachery of the one, the denial of another, the positive and pertinacious unbelief of a third, the cowardice of all. But this argument having fallen under consideration heretofore, I content myself with a bare mention of it at present.

Gospel for St.
Thomas's Day.

If we now proceed to those rules of living, by which Christians were to walk; here again we shall find undeniable marks of their integrity, particularly in the following instances:

1. They urged the absolute necessity of a virtuous life, as the natural product of a true faith; and that, without which Christ is called *Master and Lord* to no manner of purpose.

2. They ground the necessity upon the commands of our Saviour, the encouragements and as-

sistances of his grace, the awe due to the all-seeing God and searcher of hearts, the present reproaches of conscience, the certainty of a future judgment, and the eternity of rewards and punishments; each in their kind unconceivably great, according to the good or bad things done in this body. Motives too forcible to be in reason withstood; such as leave no room for indulging one's self in hypocrisy or secret sins; but must prevail, if any can, for *cleansing ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and* 2 Cor. vii. 1. *spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* And this the apostle seems to have had in view, when professing himself here to have *renounced the hidden things of dishonesty.*

3. They inculcated these rules *without respect of persons*; not accommodating their doctrines to the lusts or humours of men; not courting the favour of the great, nor soothing the vanity of the learned and witty, at the expense of truth and their own integrity. They gave all people plainly to understand, that God, in the day of trial, will make no such distinctions, as are but too much regarded in this world; and those, whom this plain-dealing would not go down with, they dared, in conscience of their duty, to disoblige: as knowing, that, whatever were the consequences, they *ought not to go beyond the word of the Lord, to say less or more.* A noble pattern for their successors, the ministers of the gospel in all ages: which they, who are not careful strictly to imitate, betray the cause of God, prostitute their character, and have lost all right to this most valuable comfort of St. Paul before us, of *not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully.*

4. They lived up to the principles taught by them, and confirmed their instructions by their examples. Of how great influence this is, common experience proves. Every one sees the justice of that indignation, with which our Lord rebukes the

hypocrisy of those *pharisees and scribes, who bound heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and laid them on men's shoulders;* but they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers. These teachers, quite contrary, declined no hardship, omitted no duty to which they exhorted others; but, like true leaders in this spiritual warfare, distinguished themselves by the most eminent degrees of piety and virtue. They could appeal to every place they came to, *how holy, and just, and unblameable* their behaviour there had been. Their

Matt. xxiii. 3, 4.

1 Thess. ii. 10.

bitterest enemies indeed, though they fought with all the nicety that envy and hatred could inspire, were not able to find any occasion of reproach in them. The only crime alleged against them, was undaunted zeal in propagating Christianity, and inflexible constancy in the profession of it. Which was in truth not a crime, but one of their brightest virtues, and gave another undeniable evidence of their faithfulness and honesty. That,

5. *Lastly*, Of suffering and dying in testimony of the doctrines taught and written by them. This was the case of every evangelist, every apostle (St. John only excepted) so far as any notices of their lives and deaths have been delivered to posterity. And how justly he also may be reckoned among the martyrs, hath been formerly observed. Of what they endured, and how little threatenings and persecutions weighed with them, the book of Acts gives a large specimen. But, after enduring bodily torments, and all that makes this life uncomfortable, to lay down even life itself; to *refuse deliverance*; and neither be softened with allurement, nor broken with terrors; is not this a proof of believing themselves, and being in very good earnest? Can lies and forgeries, can humour and obstinacy, can artifice and popularity, can affectation of novelty

Gospel for St. John and St. James's Day.

living, or of a name when dead, produce one such martyr since the creation? But if some one were so infatuated, could *twelve* men be supposed to persist in such wickedness and folly? Could those twelve not only sacrifice themselves, but persuade others, that it is their duty to do the like, when called to it; and in this argument succeed so well, that hundreds and thousands should actually do the like; and, for three centuries together, continue to offer up themselves with joy and triumph; and in so great a number, and so long time, not one, when put to the question, discover the fraud, and at once save himself, and do his duty? These are extravagances never to be supposed: and those are effects, that never were or could be produced, by any cause less powerful, than a full assurance of innocency and truth. Both which are so evident and illustrious in the first preachers and writers of the Christian religion, that a candid and considerate man may almost stand amazed, how there should remain such a thing as an infidel in the world. He must do so, had not St. Paul here told us, whence this comes to pass; when saying at the third and fourth verses, *If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

These words suggest a *second* general topic of discourse, comprised in the passage now before us, and seem to import thus much: that when the Christian doctrines have not their intended success; such inefficacy cannot always be with justice imputed, either to the want of sufficient force in the arguments, brought for it; or to the defects or mismanagements of the arguer; but is frequently, generally indeed, owing to the faults or indispositions, the wilful or the judicial blindness and hardness of their

hearts, to whom such arguments are proposed in vain.

Two points this subject would now engage me in, but that they have been considered in some former parts of this work. The *first* concerns the fatal power of prejudice; especially that which proceeds from the consideration of worldly advantages. The other respects the nature of that blindness and hardness of heart, which is inflicted as a punishment, and the justice of God in punishments of this kind.

I conclude with calling upon my reader, seriously to weigh these signatures of truth here briefly touched upon, and the many more that might have been laid before him. Particularly, that of these very historians attesting their own veracity and mission, by the like credentials from heaven, as their great Master had done his; and the astonishing success with which their labours were so early crowned. The more such considerations are attended to, the more surprised we must needs be at the boldness and impiety of a set of men among us; who, at this time of day, undertake to free their brethren, as they sometimes speak, from the bondage of religion, by insulting and attacking the authority of the Holy Scriptures; a wickedness, as impotent and absurd, as it is malicious and perverse. For how vain an imagination is it, to think of prejudicing men against these writings, with an idle pretence of forgeries and frauds, of which they, who had equal good-will to Christianity, but much greater opportunities of tracing and detecting, could never find the least footstep? Can any thing new be expected at this distance, in a cause which it was every body's concern and endeavour to try, with the most curious and severe inquisition? and which, after such trial, hath kept possession for sixteen hundred years? If not, can a greater affront be put upon mankind, than to hope they will be bantered out of their religion, by the nauseous cavils of infidels and here-

tics? There was a time, indeed, when those, how weak or wicked soever, were at least not out of season. But now, to serve them up afresh for new discoveries, after having been canvassed and refuted over and over, many centuries ago, is to put too much upon the world; and equally proves the modesty, the probity, and the sagacity of these undertaking men.

In short, if the writings of the New Testament be false, it will not be possible to know, that any are, or ever were true. If the matters of fact related there are all fiction, not only the sacred, but profane story, persons unconcerned in the cause, strangers, nay enemies, have helped forward the imposture, by their concurrent testimonies. So that, either the Scripture must be kept in veneration, or the credit of all contemporary history must sink with it. But, above all, let it not be objected, that several miraculous actions and events, recorded by the evangelists, exceed our belief, since this will turn again upon them that make it. For, that the Christian religion should prevail, and obtain so long in the world; a religion, so contrary to sensual lusts and worldly interests; consisting of many truths, to carnal understandings, such as St. Paul calls the *natural man*, offensive and even folly: that such a religion, I say, should bear down all that were before it, make such wonderful progress, and maintain its conquests, in despite of all the opposition made against it; and all this, without any miracles to introduce and support it, is an event more unaccountable, more incredible than any, than all the miracles recorded by the four evangelists, and in the history of three hundred years, taken together.

In a word, infidelity and irreligion are a *blindness* brought upon the *heart* by the *God of this world*; and the true way to believe and obey the gospel, is to aspire after the disposition of that writer of it, commemorated this day. For, till *we have forsaken*

covetous desires, and inordinate love of riches, it will not be possible for us, with him, sincerely to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. To whom, &c.

THE GOSPEL.

MATT. ix. 9.

PARAPHRASE.

9. *AND as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, * Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.*

9. Compare St. Mark ii. 14—17. and St. Luke v. 27—32. * Quit that gainful employment, and at-

tend on me for the future; and he did so immediately.

10: *And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came, and sat down with him and his disciples.*

10. Hereupon he made a great feast for Jesus, at which were many of the same corrupt occu-

pation with himself, (invited probably with a purpose to give them opportunity of receiving the benefit of conversion, as he had done.)

11. *And when the pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?*

11. &c. See the Comment.

12. *But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*

13. *But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

COMMENT.

WE have this day set before us another eminent instance of the absolute freedom, the unspeakable mercy, and the wonderful efficacy of that divine grace, which we are to consider as once before of a persecutor, so now of a publican making an apostle. This was indeed first in order of time, though the

See St. Paul's Day.

course of the year presented the order first to our view. But the prevalence of erroneous zeal and worldly affections is so fatally great, that no meditation, proper upon the change of a Saul in his way to Damascus, can misbecome that of a Matthew, at the *receipt of custom*.

The nature of this employment, and the vices, for which they who exercised it were deservedly notorious, my reader hath been told already. From the infamy of which, however, the other evangelists (as in charity and good-nature become them) endeavour to cover this their brother; yet he, in great humility, both reports his own conversion, and constantly mentions himself in such a manner, as will not suffer us to doubt whether he, who is now so great in the kingdom of heaven, were not once that vile and wicked thing, *a publican*.

The danger and misery of his condition while such, the speedy and happy escape out of it, the goodness of our Lord in calling, and the readiness of this apostle in complying; the constancy of his faith and sufferings, the indefatigable zeal of his labours, and the lasting benefit of his writings, are subjects, which we may make the right improvement of, by turning our eyes and thoughts back upon the instructions already laid down in the cases of St. Andrew and St. Paul. At present, therefore, I choose to insist upon fresh matter, with which the Gospel for the day hath furnished us, from the *tenth verse* to the end.

This passage, compared with the parallel places of St. Mark and St. Luke, (as referred to before in the margin) acquaints us, that the person, said at the *ninth verse* to have been called by Jesus, and to have followed him, did, after this conversion, *make him a great feast at his own house*.
 Luke v. 29. Our Lord was pleased, not only to ac-

cept of the invitation, but when there, not to disdain the company of many guests as liable to censure and reproach, as the master of the entertainment had lately been himself.

Of that freedom, the pharisees endeavoured to take a malicious advantage. They insinuate here, that it was a matter of just offence, and very much unbecoming the character of one, who professed himself a preacher of righteousness, to admit lewd and lost wretches into so great familiarity, as sitting and eating at the same table. These were such, as the pharisees themselves thought it a profanation and mighty disparagement to be seen among. And therefore, when they observed Jesus less scrupulous in the point, they endeavour to lessen him in the esteem of his disciples, by that question at the *eleventh* verse, *Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?*

From this malicious reflection our Lord vindicates himself in the two following *verses*; by arguments, not necessary to be taken notice of now, because they will have their due place of being explained by and by. For my design in making choice of this passage, is to draw out of it some rules, which may be useful in common conversation. This question of the pharisees plainly implies, not only in themselves, but in the disciples to whom it was put, an opinion that (ordinarily speaking) a good man will not, may not, keep company with vile and notoriously evil men. On the other side, our Saviour's defence of his own practice proves, that such opinion, however reasonable in the main, is not so necessarily and universally true; but that this may sometimes be done, and that by Him particularly it was then highly fit to be done. Now the thing I aim at in the present discourse, is to shew, In what cases, and with what limitations, it may be lawful to frequent the company of scandalously wicked

persons. The consequence whereof will be, that the general rule of avoiding such company holds good, where those circumstances do not make an exception to it. For the more regular proceeding in which point, I shall observe the following method.

First, I will consider several passages in Scripture, which dissuade us from such company, and the reasons, which not those texts only, but these pharisees went upon, in condemning them that frequent it.

Secondly, I shall shew the force of our Lord's arguments in his own defence, and, that none of those reasons rendered his behaviour blameable in this matter. And then,

Thirdly, I shall lay down some cautions, necessary for those who pretend to govern their behaviour by our Lord's example here; lest, for want of discretion in applying it to their own case, they make this action of his an occasion of danger and sin to themselves.

I. The *first* thing I propose, is to consider some passages in Scripture, which dissuade us from the company of wicked and scandalous people; and the reasons, which both these texts and the pharisees went upon, in condemning them that frequent it.

Now some of the principal passages of Scripture, referring to our present purpose, are these that follow. *Blessed is the man that walketh*

Psal i. 1. *not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. I have not dealt with vain*

persons, neither will I have fellowship with the deceitful. I have hated

Psal. xxvi. 4, 5. *the congregation of evil doers, and I*

— l. 18. *will not sit among the ungodly. When*

— ci. 4. *thou sawest a thief, thou consentedst unto him, and hast been partaker with the adulterers.*

Prov. xiii. 20. *A froward heart shall depart from me, I will not*

know a wicked person. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. To which we may add that of the son of Sirach. *He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled therewith, and he that hath fellowship with a proud man, shall be like unto him.* Eccl. xiii. i.

In the New Testament St. Paul tells the Corinthians, *Now I have written unto you, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such a one, no not to eat.* And, in his Second Epistle, *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God: as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you.* And, once more. *We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.* Agreeable whereunto is that exhortation to the Romans. *I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.*

There is no need of explaining the particular occasions, and immediate intention, of these and other such like texts. It is sufficient, that we understand in general the main ends they drive at, and the

grounds they go upon. And, I think, it is very plain and easy to discern, that all of them proceed upon some one or more of these three reasons.

1. *First*, We are commanded to avoid men of ill principles and practices, for fear our own should be corrupted by conversing with them. For it is not only by what we do ourselves, but by what we see others do, that vicious habits get ground upon us. And there are moral as well as natural diseases, of a contagious quality to those that come near; such as will certainly be caught, except we be armed before-hand with very strong antidotes, against the power of this spreading pestilence. Hence Solomon makes use of those lively resemblances to express our danger in this case. *Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burnt? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burnt?* Prov. vi. 27, 28.

When God brought his people into Canaan, he commanded them to destroy all the idolatrous inhabitants of the land. This was enjoined, not only as a punishment of the past abominations those wretched men had provoked him with, but for the security of these new comers, lest they should be mingled with them, and so learn their works. And indeed venturing a man's self in debauched conversation, needs no other proof of the infinite hazard attending it, than the numberless instances of souls hardened in all manner of wickedness by ill examples and profligate company. The justest abhorrences cool and wear off, by being drawn in, first to a liking of the wit and the persons, and then to a favourable judgment of the failings, till at last we grow partial to the very vices of our friends; and no excesses or profane liberties are so dreadful, but we are then content to see and allow, to comply with, nay, even to vindicate and take delight in them. Thus do the very things, which were formerly wont to raise the

greatest indignation, and even astonishment, engage first our affections, and then our imitation : and we by degrees are formed into those prodigies of wickedness, we used to stand amazed at. Thus do these pests of human society scatter the plague wheresoever they come ; and not only ruin themselves eternally, but make their acquaintance too, too often, by the force of custom, or persuasion, or example, as much or more the children of hell than themselves.

But, *secondly*, Another reason for our declining the company of notoriously wicked men is, that hereby we may, as much as in us lies, discourage vice. This seems more directly to be the design of those passages, which I quoted out of the New Testament. For though our own safety ought in the first place to be provided for, and all such temptations carefully avoided as may bring our souls into danger, yet is not the safety of these our only care. There is also a constant and very tender regard due to the reputation of virtue and religion. And this would suffer but too much, and too justly, in the esteem of the world, if no distinctions should be made of men, according to their principles and behaviour. For, how can we blame the many, who are chiefly guided by example, if they look upon virtue and vice as things indifferent, or of a very little consequence, when they see the same respects paid to the worst and to the best men ? And, what greater encouragement can the vilest wretches have, to persist in their sinful courses, than to be courted and caressed, and receive all those marks of honour and esteem, which are only due (and were originally intended for incentives and rewards) to men, whose worth and goodness hath distinguished and raised them above the rest of the world ?

Hence, not among the Jews only, but in the better ages of Christianity too, it was always accounted a blemish to associate with such wretches,

as lived in open breach and contempt of their duty. And the casting out such from the church by public censures, was ever looked upon as a punishment, which did not only shut them out from any right and part in the offices of religion, but declared them unworthy the benefits of civil society; and prohibited all the sound members of this body, from such communication with them in any kind, as might administer the least countenance and comfort, while they continued inflexible and unreformed. Nay, even where their corruptions were not so flagrant, or the discipline not so speedy and severe, as to bring them under this public cognizance; yet zealous and good men held themselves obliged, by withdrawing from their company, to shame them into better manners. And very certain it is, that nothing is more likely to work upon such tempers, and draw them off from their folly, than the making them sensible, by all prudent ways of expressing our indignation, that vice deserves to be despised; that it indeed creates an irreconcilable aversion and disesteem, in all whose friendship and regards are truly valuable; that is, in every wise and good man.

Among other appeals to God for the sincerity of his heart in his service, David Psal. cxxxix. 21, 22. makes use of this, *Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee; and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? Yea, I hate them right sore, I count them mine enemies.* Very reasonably. For if the consorting with rebels and traitors be, in the eye of the law, construed an abetting their villanous designs; how shall we approve our loyalty and affection to the King of kings, while we support and countenance those wretched creatures who trample his laws under foot, and do the utmost that their impotent malice can do, to undermine his government, and draw others into rebellion against him; so indispensably necessary

it is to put a difference between good and ill men, in the choice of our friendships and our conversation; for the more effectually discountenancing of wickedness, for the greater encouragement of virtue, for preserving the honour due to God and religion, and for the testifying our own sincere love of these to the world.

Thirdly, Another reason, which those passages of Scripture may be very well supposed to have in view, is the regard men ought to have to their own reputation. This, when it looks no farther than a vain ambition of being spokeman and thought well of, is indeed of little significance; but it is highly to be commended in other respects, as it gives credit and authority to our words and actions, and enables us to do abundance of good in the world. Those men, therefore, who suffer themselves to become indifferent to the opinion and judgment of others concerning them, seem not to understand the value and consequence of these things. Which are in truth so great, that where people are biassed in our favour, we may even work wonders upon them; and, on the other hand, where they are violently prejudiced against us, even wonders themselves will work nothing upon them. Now these judgments are frequently formed, not only from the actions we do ourselves, but from the morals of them who are particularly intimate and dear to us. When men see us choose and delight in the conversation of dissolute and scandalous livers, they will be apt to conclude us birds of the same feather; and that, whatever face we may put upon the matter, yet in our hearts we think very favourably of such men and their practices. For were there not some likeness in the dispositions, there could be no relish for a sort of conversation, which we profess to be so very distant from our own, and so perfectly unsuitable to our temper and inclination. Thus, when the pharisees here could fasten nothing of immorality upon our

Lord, from any other actions of his life, they thought it sufficient to tax his conduct in this particular; and, from that easiness of access, which he allowed the most infamous people, represented him to the world, as a *gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.*

Luke vii. 34.

Now it cannot be denied, but, according to the measures usually observed in our familiarities, the principles of judging men by their associates is not very unreasonable. It may perhaps be one of the surest rules, where we know nothing of the persons themselves, sufficient to form a judgment upon. But though this minister some ground of suspicion, that those men are bad, whose acquaintance are known to be so, yet we cannot draw any infallible conclusions from it: neither is either this, or either of the former reasons, of that necessary obligation, that every person should deserve to be condemned, who engages in conversation with wicked men. For, to set this matter in its true light, I shall now prove the pharisees mistaken in the case of our blessed Saviour. He eat and drank with publicans and sinners, and his enemies thought wickedly, that *he was such a one* as they; but *he reprov'd them, and set before them truly the thing that he had done.* This is what I propose therefore to consider in the *second* place.

II. The behaviour of our blessed Lord, and the force of the arguments produced in the defence of it: from whence it will appear, that none of the reasons alleged under the former head, came so up to his case, as to render him blame-worthy in this point.

The first of these arguments is contained in those words; *They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.* By which he intimates, that he was about the discharge of his proper business: and as a physician's profession calls him among such virulent distempers,

Matt. ix. 12.

where it would be the extremity of fool-hardiness for others to come; so he, whose office it is to heal souls, ought not to refuse his assistance to those, whose circumstances most of all wanted his help and advice. The more raging the disease was, the better it became his character to administer to it.

Thus the *first* of those reasons, formerly urged against conversing with notorious sinners, did not reach our Saviour's case. For he came not in the way of this infection, so as to endanger himself, but purely to relieve them that lay languishing under it; and to recover a sickness, which must have proved fatal, had not he in marvellous charity condescended to interpose his care.

The *second* argument used in his own defence is contained in that saying of the prophet Hosea, applied to this present purpose, *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.* Hos. vi. 6, &c. By the former of these, mercy, are meant all those instances of kindness to our neighbour, whereby we may promote his advantage: by the latter, *sacrifice*, the rites and ordinances of the ceremonial law; among which sacrifices was the chief. And, by God's declaring, that he *will love* the one, and *not the* other, is not signified his refusal, or absolute disallowance of either; but only, that he prefers *mercy* before *sacrifice*; and is desirous, that those duties, which are enjoined only as marks of our obedience to him, without any other consideration to recommend them, should give place to such as are of substantial benefit and intrinsic goodness. Now the Jews, and more especially that strictest sect of them, the pharisees, held it unlawful to keep company with, or come near to, men of other nations. And this was one pretence of shunning publicans; because they were either foreigners themselves, or engaged by their calling to have dealings with such, and so were in both regards looked upon as legally unclean. But this notion they carried yet farther; and made

that ordinance, which was designed to preserve their innocence, a pretence for hypocrisy, and moroseness, and disdain: they laid the chief stress upon the outward formality; accosted all, who were not equal to themselves in superstition, with a *Stand off, I am holier than thou*; and held such as were really, or such as they accounted to be wicked and profane, in so great contempt, that they took no care to make them better, but thought it even a fault and a defilement to converse with them, though for that very purpose.

But now our blessed Saviour's conduct was very different from theirs: and this conduct he vindicates, by putting them in mind, that, however the external rites and peculiar distinctions of the law might be acceptable to God, in their due place and season, yet charity to men's souls, which is the highest act of *mercy*, was much more esteemed by him. And that passage of the prophet Hosea might satisfy them, that God thought himself better served, and the honour of religion more effectually consulted, when men apply themselves to the turning sinners from their evil way, by seasonable instruction and reproof, and by laying before them the evil of their doings, than when such are suffered to perish in their folly, out of a most inhuman as well as unreasonable nicety, that it is not lawful to converse with such men at all. When things are come to extremity, and such precious treasures as souls lie at stake, it is no time to stand upon form and ceremony. And therefore our Lord set those punctilios aside in the present case.

Thus it appears again, that neither did his conversing with notoriously evil men come within the *second* reason for avoiding such, alleged under the former head: which was, for fear vice should by this means be too much encouraged, and virtue discountenanced. For the end and effect of Jesus admitting these publicans and sinners into his com-

pany, was the bringing them over from their vices, and promoting the honour and increase of religion.

Thirdly, Another argument, if it be not rather an illustration of those which went before, is comprehended in these words: *I came not to* Matt. ix. 13.
call the righteous, but sinners to repent-

ance. Thus he explains to them the great design of his appearance in the world, by declaring it to be the changing and reforming the corrupt manners and dispositions of men: a change, of which the righteous standing in less need, should no more grudge the opportunities of it to sinners, than the healthful ought to think themselves neglected and disparaged, when a physician forbears the visits to them, which he makes to the sick. And a change of so mighty benefit, where it can be effected, that no distinctions and points of mere ceremony are worthy to come in competition with it. So then, if God prefer *mercy* before *sacrifice* in general, no doubt can be made, but he would be exceedingly well pleased, that this highest and most beneficial act of *mercy*, the teaching and converting the ignorant and wanderers, should take place of that meanest branch of *sacrifice*, the declining having any thing at all to do with such men; in abhorrence of their vices, and out of a conceit, that their conversation stains and pollutes all that come near them.

Thus again our Lord acquits himself from the *third* reason under the former head; that of endangering his reputation by such company, and giving any grounds of jealousy, that he was secretly such himself. For all he did, was in pursuance of his office; he could not have answered his character, nor the end of his coming into the world, should he have behaved himself otherwise. And it were as reasonable to suppose, that a physician puts himself into sick chambers, to catch those diseases he comes to cure, as to object against our Lord's suf-

fering the publicans and sinners to approach him, that he was a friend and favourer of that wickedness, which he came to destroy and to dispossess. But how could this be done, except by shewing them the error of their ways, and enabling them to grow better for the time to come? So that, upon the whole matter, here was no offence given; and that which was taken, did not proceed from any mismanagement in our Lord's behaviour, but from the malice and blind superstition of the pharisees themselves.

Thus I have gone through the *two* first heads I propounded. The *former* shewed the reasons of avoiding ill company, which the texts of scripture concerning this matter proceed upon, and such as might minister some ground for that question, *Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?* the *second* hath contained those arguments by which our blessed Master proves himself unblameable in so doing. I proceed now to my

III. *Third* and last head, wherein I promised to lay down some cautions for governing ourselves after Christ's example here; lest, by an indiscreet application of this action to our own case, we should render that which in him was commendable and good, an occasion of danger and sin to us.

Now for the understanding this matter aright, it will be necessary to mention *three* things; which, when considered and justly compared with our own circumstances, will prove so many excellent rules to take our measures by, in the case now before us. And these are, *first*, The condition of the person, who allowed these publicans and sinners to eat with him. *Secondly*, The quality or disposition of those publicans and sinners themselves. And, *thirdly*, The end and design aimed at in this behaviour.

First, It is fit we observe the condition of the person who did thus eat with publicans and sinners.

It was our Master, *Jesus Christ*. He, by the personal union of his own divine with our human nature, and by the miraculous method of taking this nature upon him, was not only free from that original depravation which strongly disposes us to evil, but under an absolute impossibility of contracting any actual guilt. Safe then he was without all reach of danger in his personal capacity; and if to that we add his public character, what he might safely do in the former respect, it even behoved him to do in this latter. For how shall the physician heal those sick, with whose maladies he never acquaints himself? or how shall a reformer of manners call those sinners to repentance, with whom he never converses? so then, these circumstances of our blessed Lord instruct us, that some may, and that others should be sometimes conversant with notoriously wicked men. And they instruct us likewise, what sort of persons those are, who are either fit, and so may venture; or who are even obliged, and so must not refuse to take all seasonable opportunities of conversing with such people.

They then are proper for this hazardous undertaking, who resemble their Master in innocence and godly zeal. Resemble him, I mean, as frail men are capable; by keeping themselves unspotted from the world, by fixed principles of virtue, by tried resolutions, and long-confirmed habits of doing well. Such as have got the upper hand of temptations, and keep a strong and constant guard over their infirmities, and are thoroughly convinced of the necessity, the reasonableness, the excellency of a holy life. Or such, who, if they have not been so happy as always to have preserved their virtue unblemished, have yet profited by their own former dangers; and are possessed with so just an horror of the sins wherewith they were once entangled, that there is even less likelihood of their falling into

the snare again, than if they had never been overtaken at all.

But for others, who are raw and undisciplined ; for young people, whose passions and temptations are violent ; or for them, whose principles are not sufficiently settled by knowledge, and mature consideration, and experience, and an entire love of God and goodness, the best thing they can do, is to keep at a distance from evil. To mingle with vicious company and examples, is too dangerous an experiment for them to make. The best intentions will not be security sufficient for persons not qualified to persevere in them. Good principles too often degenerate : and though it be great charity to endeavour at the reforming of others, yet it is great imprudence to attempt what we are not a match for. Every man therefore should first measure his own strength, and not hazard the being beaten off from his own stedfastness. For, I doubt, it is no new thing, for unwary men, who labour to prevent a friend's falling down the precipice, and venture too near the brink to save him, to be pulled in with him, and so for both to perish together in their folly.

Again, our Lord, considered in his public capacity, proves that some are even bound, upon some occasions, not to decline the company of vicious men. That is, such as resemble him in that capacity. And such particularly are the ministers of the gospel. For they too are physicians of souls, they too are sent to call sinners to repentance. Therefore for these absolutely to refuse such conversation, is to withdraw from their duty, and to neglect the best opportunities of performing the great trust given them in charge. It is not by preaching and public instruction only, that sinners are won over to the principles of truth and soberness, but by private admonitions, by gentle and seasonable reproofs ; by applying our doctrines to the respective cases of men more perti-

nently and closely, than a discourse from the pulpit can, in the nature of the thing admit. It is by insinuating ourselves into their good opinion, gaining upon their affections by degrees, watching their softer hours, and the most favourable seasons of doing them good ; and so saying many things alone, which would not be received, or not make the same successful impressions, at another time and place. And every one, who at all reflects upon the constitution of mankind in general, must needs discern the usefulness of these holy arts. For men naturally love to be treated with respect ; but sourness of spirit, and an upbraiding haughtiness of behaviour, do as naturally beget dislike. And many will be prevailed upon by the charms of courtesy and condescension, and Christian compassion prudently applied, who would perfectly fly off and be but more provoked, and more desperately hardened, by a pharisaical disdain, or supercilious contempt. The wickedness and danger of our brethren calls for tenderness and pity, and a helping hand. But, even when indignation and severity become necessary, constant care must be taken, that this do not savour of spiritual pride. We ought to hate men's vices with an irreconcilable hatred ; but this must be so tempered, that it do not obstruct their reformation, by betraying us to insolence and scornful behaviour towards those who commit such wickedness. And therefore the same apostle, who forbids having such familiarities with evil men, as might encourage them in their sins, does not forget to command withal, that *we should not count such men as enemies but admonish them as brethren.* 2 Thes. iii. 14.

Secondly, The consideration of the persons, whom our Lord admitted to such freedoms with him, suggests to us another very useful rule of governing our behaviour in the present case. They were *publicans and sinners* indeed, men of very ill conversa-

tion and infamous character: but then they were such as thrust themselves upon Christ, coveted to hear him, were eager to be instructed, and at this time (most probably moved with the call of their old companion St. Matthew) were desirous to partake of like grace and reformation themselves. Now this plainly intimates to us, that there is a mighty difference between seeking the company of wicked men, and suffering it only; between disdain-ing them, and taking delight in them. And again, that there is a distinction to be made between those, who, though bad, yet are willing to be better; and others, who are perverse and unpersuadable, and even glory in their shame. None but ill men can make ill men their choice. To prefer and take pleasure in such above others, is a demonstration that our inclinations are naught. For only distempered palates can find an agreeable relish in corrupt and filthy, obscene or profane communication: but to endure such persons for their own profit, and in order to bring them off from their follies, is a mortification to ourselves, which in tenderness to souls under manifest hazard of eternal ruin, becomes us very well.

So again, when such wretches are fierce and intractable, heady and high-minded professed contemners and revilers of God and every thing that is sacred: though here the rule of coming out from them, who will not suffer any good to be done upon them, do certainly hold: yet where sinners are sadly sensible of their danger, or their ignorance, and would gladly improve by our company; God forbid, that the blackest and most scandalous offences should make us despise and neglect them. We should look upon such advances as very happy occasions, and account it a great matter, and a very promising beginning, that they are content to hear reason, and have any desires of knowing and doing better. And these desires we ought by all means

to cherish, and to gratify, by enlightening their dark minds; contending patiently with their prejudices; condescending, as much as fairly we may, to their infirmities; and thinking ourselves exceeding well employed, if we can, though but by slow degrees, weaken the power of vicious customs, restrain them from some acts at least of licentiousness, and plant the seeds of virtue in their stead. When we have found that this cannot be done, it is then time enough to shake them off, and to shew them, that we will not give countenance to, be partakers with them in their sins. But so long as they give us any hopes of reclaiming them, then, though we should run some risk of having our conduct misinterpreted, as our great Master's here was; yet even so, nothing should seem too much, no condescension too great, to compass so blessed a design, as the saving those souls from death and the power of Satan, who used to be *taken captive by him at his will*. For,

Thirdly, We must observe the end our Saviour aimed at by this behaviour. He conversed with sinners, for the very same purpose that others avoided them. Which was, to bring them off from the evil of their doings, and to promote repentance and holiness of life. And the keeping this end constantly in view will direct us, in what manner, and with what limitations, wicked men are to be kept company with. That is, so as may not hurt ourselves, and yet may be profitable for them. Never to mingle with such men is neither possible, nor convenient. Nature and relation, and interest, and many both private and public engagements, may bring us under a necessity of dealing and conversing with, and paying civil respect to, very profligate persons. For a man's being wicked will not excuse our forgetting, that he is a father, or a brother, or a superior, or useful to our own, or to the common good. But, where such a one hath the

most that can be supposed to recommend him to us, surely we may, and should so order the matter that he may understand, how much yet dearer and more acceptable he would be, if his virtues did also conspire to engage our affection and esteem for him. In fine, we should court the acquaintance of the good only for our own sakes; if we seek that of ill men, it should be purely for their sakes. And if such be refractory, and will reap no benefit by us, the most we can do is to bear them. Nor may we so far bear them neither, as to seem in any degree satisfied with their faults. We should rebuke them, where it can be properly done; and, where it cannot, we should shew all those marks of sorrow and displeasure, which can become our character and theirs. But this caution must constantly be observed: for sauciness and ill manners are not like to make converts; and such a zeal will find as little success, as it brings knowledge.

The considerations I have spoken to, if duly weighed and practised, will so moderate and direct our proceedings, that we shall keep the middle way, between the haughtiness of the pharisee, and the negligence of the dissolute and profane. We shall eat with sinners, without defiling ourselves by their acquaintance. We shall not only save our own souls, but theirs too. We shall cherish the penitent, and not encourage the abandoned and obstinate. We shall so satisfy the obligations of society, as at the same time to preserve those of religion entire. And, instead of falling in, and being borne down, with the torrent of ungodliness; we shall *walk warily in these dangerous days*, move others to earnest and speedy repentance, and become *burning and shining lights, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation*.

St. Michael and all Angels.

THE COLLECT.

O EVERLASTING God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of angels and men in a wonderful order ; mercifully grant, that as thy holy angels always do thee service in heaven ; so by thy appointment they may succour and defend us on earth, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Psal xxxiv. 7.
—xci. 11, 12.
Matt. xviii. 10.
Heb. i. 14.

THE EPISTLE.

REV. xii. 7.

7. **T**HERE was war in heaven : Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels.

8. And prevailed not, neither was there place found any more in heaven.

9. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world : he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

10. And I heard a loud voice, saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ : for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

11. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony ; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

12. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, and of the sea : for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

COMMENT.

IN speaking to this Scripture, I shall lay before my reader the several interpretations of learned men upon it ; and then make such use of these, as may be most proper and practical.

But, before we proceed to either of these, it is fit to observe one point, wherein they seem all to agree. Which is, that Michael, and the squadrons under his command, are those good angels, whose ministry God hath been all along pleased to employ, for the benefit and defence of his people. That archangel, according to the ancient traditions of the Jews, is generally described, as the patron and conductor of Israel under the law. And he is here understood, as one constantly intent upon performing the like kind offices to the spiritual Israel, under the gospel.

On the other hand : Satan, or the devil, hath been as constantly represented for the prince of those evil angels, who, *having fallen from their first estate* of holiness and bliss, act in direct opposition to that other prince and his good angels. Their constant business is to contrive all the mischief and calamities that possibly they can, to the church and people of God. In order to effect which, they neglect no means or opportunities, of which their condition renders them capable, to corrupt the principles and practices of mankind ; thereby to deprive them of the divine favour and protection, and to make them the just objects of his displeasure and wrath, in whose fatherly care and affection all their safety and happiness consists.

In pursuance of these notions, common to all interpreters, some have looked upon this passage wholly allegorical. By heaven understanding good Christians : so called because their affections and conversation already are, as they hope their souls and bodies will one day be, and reign for ever, in heaven. By *war in heaven*, they mean the temptations of sin, during the warfare of these good men here below : which the powers of darkness perpetually suggest and promote ; while those of light, labour with equal industry, to prevent

Zeger.
Ver. 7.

and defeat them. By the *devil being cast out*, Ver. 8. *and having no more place in heaven*, they suppose to be meant, the overthrow of vice and error, the happy and wonderful improvement of knowledge and virtue; but particularly the utter extirpation of idolatry, and of all those diabolical superstitions and beastialities, which made so great a part of the heathen worship, by the propagation and progress of the Christian faith. All which St. John describes, as a victory obtained *by the blood* Ver. 11. *of the Lamb, by the word of testimony, and not loving their lives unto the death*: because faith in Jesus Christ, as the Saviour and sacrifice for the sins of the world, the pure doctrine of the gospel, and the constancy of those sufferings and persecutions endured for the sake of the truth, were the instruments, whereby this glorious change was wrought. A natural consequence where- Ver. 10—12. of are those praises and exultations of the heavenly powers, who rejoice in the happiness of us their fellow-creatures, and a charitable commiseration of the unconverted world. The gross and carnal, the tumultuous and fluctuating state of whose minds are, by an elegant metaphor, styled *the earth and the sea*, upon whom the evil spirits do still exercise a less controlled dominion.

Others apply this passage to the celebrated defeat of Simon Magus, at Rome: that dragon, as St. Cyril calls him, the ringleader and first head of heresy: who gave out, that he was the same God, that appeared at giving the law in Mount Sinai, and had now again exhibited himself in the person of Jesus Christ. As such he required adoration of his followers; and prevailed at Rome so far, as, in the reign of Claudius, to have a statue erected to his honour: but in that of Nero, he was openly confronted by St. Peter and St. Paul; and having, as a

Dr. Hammond.
Grotius.
Catech. vi. 9.

proof of his divine power, promised to fly in the air upon a fiery chariot, these two apostles, did by their prayers so confound his sorceries, that he fell in the presence of the people, broke his legs, retired to Brunda, and there not able any longer to support the pain and shame this vain experiment had cost him, he threw himself from the top of a house, and perished in despair. This conquest of the impostor opened the eyes of many, and brought them over to a resolute confession of the faith, notwithstanding Christianity at that time lay under the severest interdicts.

This contention therefore between idolatry and Christianity, in the persons and miracles of Simon and the apostles, is thought to be designed here by the respective patrons of those

causes, Michael and the dragon fighting with each other : the conversions which followed hereupon, and the confusion of Simon's adherents, are the *casting out of that dragon, and establishment of the kingdom and power of Christ*. The

false accusation of the brethren is thought to mean the scandal brought upon Christianity, by that *gnostick* principle and practice of renouncing Christ in time of danger : the overcoming this by

the blood of the Lamb, and the lives not loved unto death, to import the vindication of the Christian doctrines, by sacrificing themselves, in testimony to the truth of them : And the

great wrath of the devil, that terrible persecution ; to which, in revenge for so notable a defeat, he instigated Nero shortly after ; and in which, as hath formerly been remarked, St. Peter and St. Paul, the instruments of this defeat, were both put to death.

Others again, understanding by the *woman in heaven* (ver. 1.) the Christian church ; and by the *man-child brought forth by her, who should rule all nations*, (ver 5.)

Arnob. adv.
Gent. L. II.

Ver. 7, 8.

Ver. 9, 10.

Ver. 11.

Ver. 12.

See St. Paul and
St. Peter's Day.

Mr. Mede.
Whiston.

the first Christian emperor, do suppose the passage now in hand to denote the state of the Christian religion and its professors; from the first beginnings of it after our Lord's ascension, answering to the time of conception and pregnancy, to the advancement of Constantine, his conquests over the other tyrants and Licinius, and the edicts of liberty and favour to the Christians, answering to the *birth* of this man-child. According to this sense, *the war in heaven* implies all the struggles of the primitive saints with enemies and persecutors; *Michael and his angels*, the confessors of, and champions for, the Gospel; *the dragon and his angels*, the idolatrous and bloody tyrant of Rome heathen, and all other persecutors of Christ in his members: the *casting out this dragon* was the overthrow of idolatry, when pagans lost the throne: the *accusation* of the *brethren*, those abominable but altogether groundless calumnies, cast by the worshippers and slaves of the dragon upon the Christians and their religion; which made the many noble apologies, written by the fathers, so necessary. And *the wrath of the devil*, when thus subdued, exerted itself in the violence of some succeeding emperors, the heresies and discords sown among Christians, and all the miseries consequent upon the inundation of barbarous nations, which tore in pieces the Roman empire itself.

4. The *last* construction of this place that I shall mention is theirs, who apply it, in the most literal sense, to the expulsion of the devil and his angels from the seats of light and bliss, after their rebellion against God. The crime, whereof the devil was guilty originally, seems from several passages of scripture to have been pride: an overvalue of, and too great self-complacency in, the excellencies of his nature and condition. Such as, instead of disposing him to a grateful obedience, lifted up his mind to a vain affectation of equality with God, at

least independance upon the giver and source of all his good. To this first of all transgressions some have applied the son of Sirach's words ; *the*

Ecclus. x. 12, 13. *beginning of pride is, when one departed from God, and his heart is*

turned away from his Maker. For pride is, or (for so it may be rendered was the beginning of sin : and those of St. Paul, who gives this reason, why a

1 Tim. iii. 6. *novice ought not to be made a bishop, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into*

the condemnation of the devil ; that is, from resembling the devil in his fault, come to resemble him in

his punishment. The same application

Isa. xiv. hath been made of two prophecies in

Ezek. xxviii. Isaiah, and Ezekiel : for although the

historical sense of the former do doubtless concern

Nebuchadnezzar, yet he there, and the prince of

Tyre in the latter, are plainly described with such

marks of elation, as exactly in their literal sense

agree with what ancient tradition hath delivered

down, as a received opinion concerning the fallen

angels. And indeed, the devil's aspiring after equality

with God was abundantly manifested afterwards, in his tempting men chiefly to idolatry ; that

so by their false worship of him, this vanity might,

on earth at least, be gratified.

Now that tempting, and corrupting of man-

kind, are effects of the *wrath* mentioned ver 12.

Whereby the ancient writers understand his envy

to have been a *second* crime, naturally subsequent

to the former. The object of this envy, they all

consent, is *mankind* ; but about the occasion, that

provoked it, there is some difference. Some im-

pute it to God's making this creature,

taken out of the dust of the earth,

after his *own image*, and giving him

dominion over his fellow-creatures

here below. Others to God's design-

ing heaven and immortality, and the

Iren. L. IV. Cap.

78.

Tertul. de Patient.

See Petay.

Dogm. T. III.

enjoyment of those blissful glories of L. III. C. II.
 the divine presence for mankind, as a S. 12.
 supply of inhabitants, when he and his wicked ac-
 complices had, for their offence, been cast out.
 Others will have it to proceed from an indignation
 conceived at the unspeakable honour intended us in
 the redemption of the world. When the Son, *God*
blessed for ever, should not take upon him
the nature of angels; but should take upon Rom. ix. 5.
him the seed of Abraham: That in pro- Heb. ii. 16.
 spect of this, he rebelled first in heaven; and hath,
 in resentment for its being done, ever since employed
 his utmost efforts upon earth, to counter-work and
 interrupt the prosperity and peace of Christ's king-
 dom. So differently does pride judge of greatness,
 from what in truth it is; for goodness and love are
 truly great accomplishments of an intelligent mind.
 Infinitely more so, than power, and all the formi-
 dable appearances, which awful distance and dis-
 dain can produce. As therefore the kindness and
 tender compassion, so likewise the majesty and un-
 conceivable excellences of God never shone so
 bright, as in the condescensions of his Son incarnate.
 To be born, and live meanly, and die ignominiously,
 for the sins of them, who were thus made brethren
 of the same race and blood, was unparalleled great-
 ness; because unparalleled goodness. It was an
 honour done to human nature, at which the good
 angels rejoice: a mystery, which, we are
 told, they *desire and delight to look into:* 1 Pet. i. 12.
 a mercy, *promised before the world began;* 2 Tim. i. 9.
 and consequently declared, and commu- Tit. i. 2.
 nicated to some beings, before the creation of man-
 kind; and a dispensation, which should not, and,
 except when looked upon by evil angels through
 the false glasses of pride and envy, could not be
 judged, either an injury to the angelical nature, or
 an indignity to the divine.

And yet against this dispensation, only as such,

the malice and rage of these fallen angels is very probably thought to set itself. At least, since that fall, we know how the case stands: our Lord and

Matt. xii. 26.

— vi. 24.

2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.

his disciples have frequently declared the irreconcilable enmity between the kingdom of *Christ*, and that of *Satan*: the necessity of renouncing all faith and friendship with the one, whenever we enter into covenant with the other; the treachery, and subtlety, and indefatigable application of our common adversary; the danger of being dismayed by the roarings of this *devouring lion*, and the no less danger of being beguiled by the counterfeit

1 Pet. v. 8.

2 Cor. xi. 3.

beauties of this pretended *angel of light*.

Ver. 14. In short, the faith and practice of the Christian religion is the sure destruction of his power, and of all the wicked designs he labours to advance by it. And therefore this, 'tis manifest, he does his utmost to obstruct; by persecutions and calumnies from without; by heretical doctrines and uncharitable divisions within; by all the impudence of profaneness and irreligion, deism and scepticism, and every art that may be of service, for invalidating the authority, and perverting the sense of Scripture. As knowing, if the glory of the gospel, and the mysteries of our redemption, can be eclipsed and brought into contempt; that the love of God will wax cold, and the incentives to piety and virtue built upon these doctrines, as on their proper foundation, must needs be shaken and fall with them. So certainly we may gather, whose instruments they are, and what design they carry on, who pour out their invectives upon the Christian institution; and, by persuading us out of the belief, would rob us of the benefits of our Lord's incarnation, satisfaction, and sacrifice for sins; and of the ordinances by him appointed, as means and conditions for conveying to each of us respectively a personal right, in

the mighty things done in behalf of, and of sufficient virtue for, all mankind in common.

Meanwhile, the only possible method for baffling the attempts made against the cause of religion in general, and the salvation of each man in particular, is that mentioned here: *the blood of the Lamb, the word of testimony, and lives not loved unto death.* Affiance in our Saviour's sufferings, a firm belief of his gospel, and resisting, if occasion be, even unto blood for the truth's sake: these are the weapons of our spiritual warfare; by the force of these, Christianity hath sustained itself, preserved its purity, triumphed over both the frauds of corrupters, and the cruelties of its persecutors: and will, we trust, continue so to do to the world's end.

Undertaking to be wise in matters of religion, beyond that which is written, can be neither safe nor becoming. But what hath been delivered on this subject, will, I hope, be readily acquitted both of hazard and immodesty. For that some of the *angels did sin, and were cast out of heaven*, the Scripture is express. The

2 Pet. ii. 4:
Jude 6.

The particulars of their rebellion and punishment (being a subject of no great use or concern to us) are not indeed described at large. The several allusions to, and applications of, this matter to other subjects, do however imply, and presuppose a sense of literal and historical truth, as their basis and support. And the quality and occasion of the crimes, which sunk them into hell, seem, if not plain and necessary, yet at least probable and fair deductions, from the hints and touches left us in holy writ: which, how slight and remote soever, will yet bear us out, I am sure, in the few practical reflections which I am now about to conclude this discourse.

First, The never-ceasing malice of the devil and his angels, which the former interpretations of this scripture took notice of, should awaken every man's care, and put all Christians upon their guard against

so active and powerful an enemy. What succours and encouragements may be expected in these combats, I shall have occasion to observe, upon the gospel of the day. My design at present is to excite men's diligence, from the consideration of their danger, and the example of their enemies. And how can we be secure, after so many monuments of souls lost and undone, purely by flattering themselves with an imaginary safety? And why should our concern and endeavours be less zealous in our own preservation, than those of our adversaries are, to compass our destruction? The devil hath no real profit in his pains, nor is there any fruit possible to be reaped from them, save only the barbarous joy of having more companions in his guilt and misery: but we fight for heaven and happiness, our all is at stake; and no middle state is left us, between triumphing in glory, and lamenting our defeat in torments everlasting.

Again, as this consideration should make us vigilant for ourselves, so should it, for the truth of religion, and the people of God in general. Vice of all kinds is most effectually introduced, by loosening and debauching men in their principles. And as ill morals put men upon corrupting the faith, so faith, once corrupted, naturally degenerates into profligate conversation. In those heresies particularly, which pervert the doctrines of our Lord's incarnation and satisfaction, the very sinews of piety are cut asunder, by restraining the benefit of the Messiah's coming to instruction and example only. This must needs damp the gratitude and ardent zeal, the humble adoration and holy wonder, arising from the contemplations of God incarnate, emptying himself for our sakes. This makes but poor provision against the reproaches of guilt, and dismal apprehensions of future punishment; in comparison of that peace of conscience, which penitent sinners find from a firm reliance on the merits and

acceptance of an all-sufficient sacrifice offered in their stead. This (once more) unties the strongest band of love, and gives up the noblest and most unanswerable motive to mutual and generous beneficence among men; by eluding the force of such texts as these, *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.* And, *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*

1 John iv. 11.
iii. 16.

So great account must the enemy of God and all goodness needs find, in sowing the seeds of heresy: and so false is that suggestion of his (for it ought to be looked on as no better), that the articles of our faith are merely speculative notions, without use or importance for the improvement of our virtue. Whereas it were easy, I conceive, to shew, that every one of those mysteries, treated with so much scorn in these days of libertinism, when pursued through all its just consequences, is of mighty influence; that each hath a direct tendency to regulate the manners and passions of mankind; whether we consider them in their private capacities, or as united in societies. Sad experience hath proved how miserably the peace of the world hath been disturbed by corruptions in points of belief; how close they have ever been followed by scandalous corruption of manners; and how much greater prejudice was done to the reputation and true spirit of Christianity by this artifice, than ever the continued persecutions of three hundred years were able to effect before. All which renders St. Jude's exhortation of universal and perpetual obligation, *that we should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.* The

Jude 3.

Neutrality and indifference are more blameable here, than in any dispute of temporal rights whatsoever. And they, who under any specious pretences, sit still, and do not, in their respective stations, exert a vigorous zeal in discountenancing, opposing, suppressing the insolence and impiety of profane and licentious revilers of Christ and his institution, are enemies to the public; abettors of the devil and his instruments; and can never answer such lukewarmness, either to the body of which they are members in this world, or to God and their own consciences in the next.

2. The last and literal sense of this scripture, (which, by referring it to the fall of the angels, seems best to answer the church's design in the use of it on this festival) may be serviceable to us in several respects.

As *first*, (for that cannot be inculcated too often) by making us duly sensible of the spiritual hazards, to which we stand exposed. If beings so far superior to us in wisdom and power; disengaged from such bodies and their affections, as we bear about with us; happy in the presence of God, and highly advanced in the court of heaven: if these glorious spirits, provoked by no ill persuasion or example from without, did yet sin; and so highly incense Almighty God, as by him to be laid under an irrecoverable decree to everlasting darkness and torments: how should we, poor worms, betray our deluded souls, by vain imaginations of safety, and the carelessness naturally consequent thereupon? We, whose very wisdom is folly, and our strength weakness? We, who when we would rise above the world and its vanities, find ourselves dragged back again, and fastened down, by the flesh and the weight of its appetites: we, who in this conflict between spirit and sense, are situated in the enemy's country, amidst stratagems and ambuscades; obliged to be daily conversant with the instruments and

occasions of our ruin; and supported in the fight, not by present fruition, but distant prospects only, of a happiness, which, while in this state of trial, it is our virtue, and our defence, continually to thirst and pant after? But especially we, who, besides the original weakness of our minds, the natural tendency of bodily inclinations, the constant impression of objects from without, the corrupt bias of our now depraved state, and the never-ceasing solicitations of a tempter, who takes the advantage of all the rest against us: how monstrously stupid should we be to live without thought, without apprehension of the death hanging over our heads, when instructed by the dismal fate of an order of beings, so much more likely to stand, and yet made so miserable by their fall?

So reasonable and necessary it is, that the fate of evil angels should rouse us out of sleep, and quicken our care. But then, to render that care effectual, it is no less necessary to reflect upon their fault too, and what it was that caused them to fall. Now this we have seen was pride. The properties whereof are, an inordinate value of any real or supposed excellences, by attributing the merit, the praise of them to one's self; forgetfulness of, and unthankfulness to the author and giver of them; discontent with the present state of things; aspiring and grasping after more and higher, as his supposed due; and envy at the advantages of all others. By which vile complication of qualities, it is manifest, that pride hath in its own nature, the seeds and principles of rebellion, and is the source of malice, contention, and every evil work.

It should raise in us a yet greater detestation of this vice, that not angels only, but mankind also, fell by it. The aspiring to be like gods, and affecting to know what God thought fit to be concealed from them, was the prevailing temptation urged by him, who from his own experience, had learnt on

what side a rational soul is most successfully attacked. The same disdain of continuing ignorant in matters above our comprehension, hath been the bitter root of all the heresies and schisms, that ever infested the church. And if the fomentors of these have at any time been persons of a severe conversation, yet will not even this, break the force of that maxim; that the indulgence of vicious dispositions, is the true cause of corrupt doctrines. For it is a great mistake to think all those men virtuous, who are not sunk into carnality or excess. These indeed have more of the beast, and are sins of the body. But the sins of the mind have more of danger, though usually less of reproach. And they were undone, by striving to be more than angels; whose nature was not capable of the vices which make us less than men. Vanity, self-conceit, and not submitting to allow any other wiser and better than themselves, could debauch even heavenly beings. And earth was made a scene of misery, by an inordinate desire of that, which to desire regularly, and to possess humbly, is the greatest accomplishment of a wise and good man. So far are they from being truly wise or mortified, who are yet untaught to be content with *thinking soberly*, and have not ceased to be *wise in their own conceits*. So much ought we to be upon our guard against the extravagances of this vice; so careful to crush this cockatrice in the egg, which extracts poison out of our very virtues, could shed its venom even in heaven, and by a most pernicious fruitfulness, hath engendered and propagated sin and destruction, over all parts and ages of the world.

But, *thirdly*, While we contemplate the wisdom and justice of God, in permitting and punishing the sins of evil angels, and all the dire effects of their malice to mankind; let us by no means forget the difference his mercy hath put between their case, and that of sinners tempted by them. 'Tis true,

they offended against a light infinitely clearer, without the impulse of any suggester; and consequently they sinned with more perverseness, as well as baser ingratitude. But all these, and any other aggravations notwithstanding, it is to the free and unbounded mercy of God, that we owe the redemption of men: while spirits, once so much higher in dignity, and so much more nearly allied to the divine nature, are left under hopeless and irrecoverable condemnation. For, who can sufficiently adore the kindness and compassion, which passed by this glorious order of beings, and did not disdain to assume the flesh and blood of poor feeble mortals into the Godhead, that by becoming one of them, he might exalt them to that state, from which their betters by transgression fell.

Their hearts, which turned themselves away from God, are finally left in that alienation. Our alienation is chosen too, but yet we are not given over to sin. The Spirit of God strives with us, and, by his sweet attractives, regulates our affections when warped, helps us to be sensible of and sorry for our follies, and brings the prodigals back to their right mind. One fault drove them out of the beatific presence of God; but that one (the grace of repentance not being granted) productive of infinite more, and so at once the increase both of their guilt and misery: we after many may obtain an entrance there: and though our *sins be red as crimson, and more than the hairs of our head*; yet may they be *white as snow*, when washed in that *blood of the Lamb*, by which the victory was gained over the devil and his accomplices, making *war in heaven*: that blood which overcomes him, no less in the quality of our enemy, than God's.

Isa. i. 18.

Psal. xl. 12.

Rev. xii. 11.7.

It is true, as such, he is not only his own, but to the utmost of his ability, our destroyer. And how perilous our condition is upon that account, hath

Gosp. i. Sund. in
Lent.
Epist. St. Philip
and St. James.

been already noted. But, though earth be now become the seat of war, and our whole life a season of perpetual action: though our adversary be mighty, and our frail selves by no means a match for him: yet are we not left in his, no, nor (blessed be God!) altogether in our own hands. Powerful auxiliaries are appointed to sustain us, equal in strength and sagacity to the foes we combat with. But the quality and service of the heavenly hosts, and the great variety of good offices done by them, and the uses proper to be made of their readiness to assist in our extremities, I forbear to say more of here; because these are subjects reserved for a particular consideration upon the gospel for the day.

THE GOSPEL.

MATT. xviii. 1.

1. *AT the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*

2. *And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,*

3. *And said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

4. *Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

5. *And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me.*

6. *But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*

7. *Woe unto the world because of offences: for it must needs be that offences come: but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.*

8. *Wherefore, if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maim-*

ed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.

9. *And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.*

10. *Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.*

COMMENT.

THAT part of the scripture now before us, which comes up to our present purpose, and seems to have entitled it to a part in the service for this day, I take to lie in those words of our Saviour, at the *tenth verse: Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.* In order to a right understanding whereof it will be necessary to satisfy *three* inquiries, which may supply the place of a paraphrase upon the whole. For it cannot be expected, that we should bear due respect to the command contained there, till it be made appear,

I. *First*, Who the *little ones* are, mentioned here.

II. *Secondly*, What is meant by *despising* them.

III. *Thirdly*, And especially, wherein the force of that reason consists, for which it is said we ought not so to do, *viz.* because in *heaven their angels do always behold the face of Almighty God.*

I. *First*, then, let us examine, who those *little ones* are, which our blessed Saviour, with so much solemnity, forbids us to treat any of with contempt: *take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones.*

We read in the beginning of this chapter, that the disciples applied themselves to Jesus, with a desire to be resolved, *Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* Which question, proceeding from an ambitious strife and desire of pre-eminence above their brethren, our Lord was willing to rebuke by giving

them a sensible representation of the excellences, which distinguish men under the gospel state. He therefore *called a little child*, and set him in Ver. 2. the midst of *them*, as a pattern to his disciples. And, lest they should neglect to make the application, he declares expressly, that the resemblance of such infant innocence, in meekness, and gentleness, and harmless simplicity of mind, was a proper and necessary qualification for his kingdom : that, however such a temper might fail of esteem, or perhaps meet with derision and reproach among men ; yet God, he says, hath a true value and very high regard for it. Hence it must follow, that they ought to be exceeding careful not to offend or despise the meanest, most despicable Christians ; whom, for their likeness to that child, then propounded to them for an example, he does both here, and at the *sixth verse*, distinguish by the title of *little ones*, and those *little ones which believe in him*.

II. The *next* thing therefore to be considered is, what our Lord intends by *despising* these meek and lowly Christians. And this is likewise easy to be gathered from those parts of the discourse that went before. Our Saviour there warns men against offences, and particularly charges his disciples not to give any. Now this, in the gospel-sense of the word, is done, when we minister to our brethren occasion of sin, or discourage them in the performance of their duty. And because the doing either of these argues a want of becoming tenderness for the good of their souls, and that want of tenderness proceeds from a want of a due value for their persons, as not thinking them worth our concern : therefore our Lord does here admonish men against that contempt and disregard for the safety of their souls, which either the meekness of our fellow-Christians, or the meanness of their circumstances, might tempt us to treat them with. And this he does by assuring us, that however patient and slow of resentment the sufferers may be,

and what security soever the offenders may support themselves with, from a want of ability to revenge such wrongs and insolences; yet they had powerful friends above, and such as would not suffer these things to be so tamely put up, as those despisers vainly imagined. For that is plainly the importance of the last words, *Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.*

III. And thus I am led to the *third* inquiry: which, as I said, is the main point; (and most suitable to the design of this festival) in the consideration whereof it will therefore become us to be somewhat large and particular. For we shall not do justice to the argument, comprehended in this reason alleged by our Saviour, without taking a distinct view of these three things.

1. *First.* The persons here spoken of, the angels.

2. *Secondly.* The concern they are intimated to have for these *little ones*, and the relation they bear to them, they are called *their* angels.

3. *Thirdly.* What it is, that renders the contempt of those *little ones* of so dangerous consequence upon their account: implied in those words, that these *angels* of theirs do *always behold the face of Christ's Father which is in heaven.*

First, We must observe the persons here spoken of, *the angels.* The word, in its first and proper signification, denotes no more than *messengers*: but it is now in common speech attributed, by way of excellence, to a particular sort of being sent and employed by Almighty God, upon such weighty affairs and special occasions, as I shall presently take notice of. In the meanwhile this (being a title of office only) can give us no light at all into the nature of angels; and therefore it will be convenient to observe, what descriptions the Holy Scriptures have left us of them. Now there we may be satis-

fied, so far as is necessary for our purpose, both what they are, and how admirably qualified for performing those services, which Almighty God is pleased to make use of them for.

Here then we are first of all informed, that the angels are *spirits*, freed from that gross and mortal nature we have; and consequently, though they be not present in all places at once, (which none but God can be) yet they are not clogged and limited in their motions, by the same weight, and the same laws and matter and bodily substance, that we are: they fly swift as our very thoughts, and have an activity far greater than is easy for us to conceive. For these reasons it is, that the cherubim and seraphim, which are orders

or kinds of angels, are described to us with wings, and that these ministers are called a *flame of fire*. They are also said to *excel in strength and wisdom*, and the different ranks of them are styled *thrones, and dominions, and principalities, and powers*. For thus St. Paul reckons up the invisible parts of the creation (Coloss. i. 16.) and that there are distinctions and degrees among them is plain, not from hence

only, but from Michael being expressly styled an arch-angel, and said to have other angels under his conduct, whom he led on to fight.

Thus much is common to angels in general, and of both sorts. For we are farther taught, that they are of two sorts; angels of *light* and a *heavenly host*; and angels of *darkness* and the *bottomless pit*: *holy* angels, and *evil* angels: the angels of *the Lord*, and the angels of *the devil*: some *who kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, and are reserved in everlasting chains under*

2 Cor. xi. 14.
 Luke ii. 13.
 Rev. ix. 11.
 Matt. xxv. 31.
 Psal. lxxviii. 49.
 Matt. xvi. 27.
 Rev. xii. 7.
 Matt. xxv. 41.

darkness unto judgment of the great day: and others, that wait continually about the throne of God, hearkening to the voice of his words, Jude 6.
and ministering unto him, as he sees fit. Luke i. 11.

And of these, because this text (as well as this festival) is chiefly concerned with them, I shall add these few farther remarks.

These, we are assured, are vastly numerous. *Thousand thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand;* and the author to the Hebrews calls them an *innumerable company*. Wonderfully diligent in the business committed to their charge; and therefore called his *hosts and armies*, the servants that *fulfil his commandments, and do his pleasure.* And what they are principally employed about, the apostle hath told us, when he *calls them ministring spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.* That is, God makes these the instruments and ministers of his good providence, for the eternal advantage of his chosen and faithful. Their office is executed, sometimes by guiding them in difficulties, as in the case of Abraham's steward, and Jacob's flight: sometimes, by preventing their sins and calamities, as it was with Hagar and Balaam: sometimes, by warning them of dangers, and assisting them in the proper means of escape, as in the case of Lot at the destruction of Sodom; and of Joseph, and *the wise men from the east*, when Herod sought Jesus's life: sometimes, by assuring them of unexpected deliverances, as in the case of Gideon, and Sampson, and St. Paul in his shipwreck; sometimes, by being the good man's protection and guard

Rev. v. 11.

Dan. vii. 10.

Heb. xii. 22.

Gen. xxxii. 2.

Psal. ciii. 20, 21.

Heb. i. 14.

Gen. xxiv. 7.

xxviii. 12. 15.

xxii. 1. 24, &c.

xvi. 9.

Numb. xxii. 22.

Matt. i. 20.

Gen. xix. 12. 15, &c.

Matt. ii. 12, 13. 19.

Judges vi. 11.

— xiii. 3.

Acts xxvii. 23.

from the enemies, or the casualties that threaten him : and thus David says, *The angel*

Psal. xxxiv. 7.

of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them ; and he shall give

Psal. xci. 11. 12.

his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways ; they shall bear thee up in their hands, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Sometimes they are made the

Gen. xix.

executioners of vengeance upon wicked

2 Sam. xxiv.

men, as in the destruction of Sodom ;

the pestilence sent upon Israel for

David's numbering the people ; the *hundred four-*

Isa. xxxvii. 36. *score and five thousand Assyrians, cut*

off in one night by the hand of a destroying angel : and in the case of Herod, smitten

Acts xii. 23.

by an angel, for receiving the blas-

1 Cor. xi. 10.

phemous acclamations of his flatterers.

Eccles. v. 6.

Besides these, and many other in-

stances, we are taught, that the angels are present at

our worship ; that they conduct the souls of pious

men when they die, as they did Lazarus,

Luke xvi. 22.

into the seats of bliss appointed for

them ; that, at the last great day, they shall summon

mankind, and gather them to judge-

Matt. xxiv. 31.

ment ; and, after sentence passed,

xiii. 41. 49.

shall cast the wicked into a furnace

of fire, their place of everlasting tor-

ture and punishment.

So various are the offices, in which the good

angels are employed, so constant their attendance

in the execution of their great Master's orders,

that many have believed their ministry made use of

in all the disposals of Providence, and the continual

government of the world. An imperfect notion of

this matter seems to have been the ground of the

heathen idolatry. At least so far as it believed and

taught a number of inferior deities, assisting and

directed by the one supreme God, by him appointed

to particular stations, and endued with a limited

power. Insomuch, that the concern in all human affairs which the Scriptures attribute to angels, belonging to a sort of excellent and spiritual beings, far superior to us, but subordinate to God, seems to have been a constant and universal tradition both among the Jews and gentiles. And its being so generally received seems to be the very reason, why the Old and New Testament both, are not more particular and express, in the explanation of their condition and employment. It being sufficient, only to relate some particular facts of angels upon special occasions; when the sacred writers addrest to men, who are already satisfied, that such creatures as these there certainly were, and who allowed them capable of performing the things there ascribed to them. Now this all the Jews manifestly did, except the Sadducees only: they, when they disclaimed all immaterial spirits, found themselves obliged, in consequence of their own principle, to deny that there were angels. And thus we read they did, Acts xxiii. 8. In a word, the presence of God seems to have been exhibited by visions of angels; the guardian of the Israelites in the wilderness is called the *angel of his presence*; the law delivered in Mount Sinai is said by St. Stephen to have been received by the *disposition of angels*. And visible they thus became, by taking upon them some bodily shape: as we find particularly they did that of a human form, when coming to *Abraham, and † Lot, and ‡ Manoah, and upon sundry other occasions. To be short. It hath been generally thought, that the angels have so great a share in the administration of human affairs, as to have particular persons assigned to them for their charge. Which brings me to the *second* thing,

Isa. lxiii. 9.

Acts vii. 53.

* Gen. xvii. xviii.

† — xix.

‡ Judg. xiii.

2. The concern they are here intimated to have

for these *little ones*, or the relation they bear to them, in that they are called *their angels*. A like expression we have in the book of Acts, when Peter was miraculously released out of prison, and came to Mary's house, where the disciples were met and joining in prayer. The servant, who brought in Acts xii. 15. word that Peter spoke to her at the gate, was answered, that it could not be he, but *was his angel*. Now how far soever this might be strained beyond the true importance of the words, yet this much, I think, without any wresting it, must be allowed to infer, that, not only the Jews, but the first Christians too, were of opinion, that the angels took a more than ordinary care of good men. I do not at present contend for that doctrine of a guardian angel, assigned to each particular person, as his proper protector. Though there be great authorities of learned men in behalf of that also, and many have looked upon it as sufficiently asserted in these two passages. But, whether that angel, who unlocked the prison-doors and set Peter at liberty; whether that, which was supposed to be his angel, had other saints under his care besides Peter; or whether Peter might have more angels than one concerned for his preservation: thus much methinks we may fairly infer, that those Christians, who thus expressed themselves, made no doubt of his having some angel that took care of him. I am very sensible, how easy it is to mistake in such matters as these, relating to the actions of creatures above us; and such as we have no means of acquainting ourselves with, farther than Almighty God, who distributes to each of these ministers his business, hath thought fit to let us into the knowledge of them and their doings. I would not therefore advance any thing, in which the Scriptures have been silent. They give us no foundation for that conceit of *Origen*, that every man, from his birth, had a good and an evil angel

attending him; the one with all his might labouring his hurt and ruin; the other countermining those designs, and with equal industry promoting his safety and happiness. They do not perhaps give us sufficient warrant to conclude, that every man, or even every good man, hath one angel distinctly to himself. But yet thus much the Scripture does in the point: it makes it very probable, that nations and churches have their respective angels, from that account of Gabriel and the Prince of Persia in Daniel: it assures us, that the great and proper business of the good angels is to be assisting to them, who shall be *heirs of salvation*: it describes their kind regard and affection, and earnest desire for the good of our souls; not only by that universal joy for the redemption of the world, expressed in hymns of praise by a multitude of this *heavenly host*, at the birth of our adorable Redeemer; but by affirming, that they rejoice at the repentance of any *one sinner*. It seems in this very place to declare, that no sincere good man whatsoever is destitute of the protection and tender care of angels. It asserts their constant readiness, to observe what happens to good men, to do them right, or to represent the wrongs and indignities offered to them: and to make use of those opportunities, which their constant fruition of the divine presence gives them, for the benefit even of the meanest and most humble Christian. For that is the sense and design of our Lord, evidently, and beyond all reasonable contradiction; and leads me to the *third* particular, namely,

3. What it is, that renders the contempt of any one of Christ's *little ones* of so dangerous consequence; which is, that *their angels do always in heaven behold the face of Almighty God*. The only difference in this point is, what we are to understand by *always beholding God's face*. The most pro-

Dan. x. 13.

Heb. i. 14.

Luke ii. 13.

— xv. 10.

bable, and I think the most approved, interpretation whereof I shall lay down as follows :

Nothing is more frequent in the writings of the New Testament, than to shadow out to us the condition of Christ's spiritual kingdom, and the privileges of the saints, by similitudes taken from the usages and proceedings of earthly princes. Thus, because the right hand is the place of honour among men, and coming nearest the person of the prince, being admitted to his table, sitting with him in judicature, &c. argues a preference above them who are kept at a greater distance ; the highest advancement in Christ's kingdom is pointed out to us by

such figures, as *sitting on his right-hand*
 Matt. xx. 21. *and on his left* : the authority of the
 23. apostles, by *sitting on twelve thrones*,
 — xix. 28. *judging the twelve tribes of Israel* : the
 Luke xxii. 30. happiness and high honour of their future state, by *eating and drinking with him at his table in his kingdom*. And many other such resemblances there are, which must not be expounded in their strict and literal sense, just as the words sound, but according to the proportion they bear to these customs and privileges among men.

In like manner, as in earthly courts it is a mark of favour, and interest, and great power with the king, to be continually in his presence, in constant attendance upon his royal person, and without any difficulty to approach, and to have the honour of his ear ; so our Lord, by saying that these *angels always behold the face of God*, implies, that they were not only such, as are of the lowest degree, and least interest ; but angels of the first quality, and peculiar favourites, in the court of heaven : again, as men are well aware, how great a risk they run, in injuring or affronting any person, whose interest the prince's bosom-friend or principal officer espouses zealously ; so they are warned here, to take heed how they offend or despise any of these *little*

ones, who have such potent patrons with the King of heaven. And, once more : as the monarchs of this world could give no greater demonstration of their kindness, than to commit one whose safety they value, to the care and management of a person, who is always ready at hand, always permitted to represent the case of this charge of theirs, and to require speedy revenge and effectual redress for any slights or wrongs offered to him ; so we are admonished here to bethink ourselves, what a danger we tempt, and to what formidable mischiefs we stand exposed, if we shall dare to despise any of those, who, however little they may be in our esteem, are yet so highly prized by the King of heaven, that he hath appointed them advocates and protectors ; so far from finding any difficulty of access to God on their behalf, that they *always behold his face* ; that is, enjoy all the advantages of his divine presence and favour, and stand continually before his throne in *heaven*.

The true meaning then of our blessed Saviour, and that which he designed to teach us in those words, I conceive, upon the whole matter, to be this. Not to inform us, that the holy angels in heaven enjoy the presence of God perpetually ; nor to assure us, that every good man and sincere believer is under the constant care and inspection of these spiritual guardians ; (for both these things the persons, to whom Christ spoke, most firmly believed and took for granted before.) But he intended to shew, that the very meanest, meekest, and most despicable of those *little ones*, who believe in him, are thought not unworthy the very solicitous concern, and never-failing patronage, of the highest and greatest of the angels : such as, in their power and capacity above, answer to the nobility and prime-ministers of state, in the courts of earthly princes : and because the consequences of slighting and injuring those, who are secure of such zealous and

such powerful friends, must in all reason be supposed very terrible, *Therefore take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones*, says Christ; whom the great God, and his servants, the blessed spirits above, are so far from despising, that *I say unto you, in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.*

Thus much must suffice for the explanation and doctrinal part of that passage. It shall now be my endeavour to draw from thence some few practical inferences, suitable to the sense and intention of our blessed Lord; and such, as every considering man's own mind would naturally suggest to his thoughts upon this occasion.

1. And, *first*, Can we reflect upon this wonderful economy of the angels being ministring spirits for the benefit of good men, and not feel our souls very powerfully excited to thankfulness and praise, for such love and care of us? For, what is man; that God should thus remember him; or the son of man, that he should give his angels such strict charge over him? That not only creatures of an inferior quality should be made for his use and service, but that spirits, so much higher and more excellent than we, should in some sort become our servants too? That these bright guards, who never slumber nor sleep, should pitch their tents round about us, and watch perpetually for the preservation of such frail helpless wretches? That our souls should be esteemed at so high a rate, as to engage the host of heaven in their cause, to add to their joy, and make their heaven yet more heaven, upon every conquest we gain over sin and Satan? This honour did we but duly consider, the most stupid of us all would find a sensible change in his affections; and could not but admire and adore the wisdom of Providence, which hath thus disposed all things for the advantage of such vile, such polluted, such unworthy creatures. Ingratitude for such distinguishing marks

of favour cannot possibly be the effect of any thing else, but perfect thoughtlessness, and extreme insensibility. For they, who think at all, must be amazed at the proceeding; and, full of holy surprise, will at every turn feel David's exclamation uppermost in their minds and mouths, *Lord, what is man, that thou bearest such respect unto him, or the son of man, that thou makest such mighty account of him?* Psal. cxliv. 3.

2. But, *secondly*, Let us be well assured that we are not thankful for this marvellous loving-kindness and condescension truly, and as we ought to be, unless this appear by our imitation of it, as we have power and opportunity. *Beloved*, if God and the holy angels are so very solicitous for *our* souls, we ought also to be concerned very tenderly for *one another's* souls. Much more indeed ought we, upon that very account, because they are. Our safety is owing to their care of us; and what can be greater baseness, than not to impart to our brethren the little assistance we are able, when we reap such mighty benefit from the succour of others? What fouler ingratitude, than not to unite in the same glorious design of saving souls, which all heaven is unanimous in, and every good spirit so assiduously promotes? But they are removed far above us; and though man be next in order of the creatures, still betwixt us and angels we may easily perceive the distance to be very great. But yet this distance hinders not their concern for us, from being expressed in the most diligent, the most profitable, the most necessary manner, that the dearest and most officious affection can suggest. The most exalted and brightest of all those sons of God disdains not the doing good offices for the meanest Christian; nor ever thinks his interest in the court of heaven better employed, than when it is used in the service of any of those *little ones*, whom men are so apt to despise. And shall men still despise them? Shall

our superiors not think it beneath their dignity, to do them good ; and shall we be cold and indifferent what becomes of them ? Shall they, who are of a more excellent nature, stoop so low, as to watch and guard them ; and shall we, of the same passions and infirmities, cast a haughty negligent look, stop our ears to their cries and complaints, value ourselves upon the vanity of a little outward pomp and wealth, and account it a disparagement to lend our helping hand ? The angels are past all danger of falling, but we are in daily hazard. And if they compassionate the miseries and fears they cannot feel ; how hard-hearted, how insensible are we, if the wants and the dangers, which every day makes our own, do not move our pity, and inspire a very quick and tender sense for the poorest and most destitute fellow-Christians ? In short, angels we must be, or brutes, or devils, to one another. Angels we are ; if we, like them, are affectionately concerned for, and industrious to advance, the happiness and salvation of their souls ; brutes, if we feel no impression, have no regard to their sufferings and fears, their dangers and distresses ; but devils, if we be so far from endeavouring to rescue, as to engage them deeper, and entangle them yet more, in the snare of the tempter, by enticing them to sin ; or if our hearts have so much hell in them, as even to be pleased with their wickedness, or to triumph in their miseries. Such wretches would do well even to *despise these little ones* ; that is, to let them alone, and utterly disregard them, in comparison of what they now do. For to lead men into sin, and to rejoice in their ruin, is directly to counter-work the blessed angels, and to become ministers to those that shall inherit darkness and damnation.

3. *Thirdly*, The consideration of what hath been said concerning the holy angels, and their concern for us, may be of admirable use to encourage and

fortify us in our conflicts with temptations. We readily enough acknowledge the power, and subtlety, and fatal diligence, of the devil upon these occasions. But who is the devil? An angel, once of light, but now of darkness: and all the shining excellences he formerly had, are turned into malice, and apostacy, and mischief. But then let us remember, that, as our adversary is an angel, so are our guards angels also: of the same natural wisdom, and activity, and strength; as zealous to save, as he can be eager to destroy; as watchful and diligent in their post to defend and repulse, as he to attack, and get ground upon us. If he suggest evil thoughts, they have the same power to instil good ones. And there is no reason, why we should not believe the one of these to be done, as well as the other: none, why they, who are by nature equal, should not have; none to suspect they do not use, all the ways of counter-working his designs, and all the same methods of insinuating themselves for promoting piety, which he can possibly have for the hardening us in vice. 'Tis true, indeed, there is treachery within; the corruption of our hearts, and the infirmities of human nature, render the place hardly tenable, and defended it could not be by our own strength. But, do we consider what unseen guards we have, what forces in reserve? A numerous and powerful recruit, like the horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha, are encamped on every side us. The armies of the most high God, valiant and wise, faithful to their charge, and zealous in our defence. And, if we do not forsake these succours by surrendering, but resolve to hold out the siege, though we be compassed round with enemies, yet we may encourage ourselves, as that prophet did his timorous servant, who was safe but knew it not, *Fear not, for they that be with us, are more and mightier than they that be against us.*

2 Kings vi. 16, 17.

4. *Fourthly*, The constant presence of these angels with us, and the knowledge they have of our actions and affairs, should make us very careful of our behaviour. Those, who thought each man to have a good and an evil angel always attending him, were of opinion, that, when any man grew froward and perverse, and gave himself up to wickedness, the good spirit took its flight, and the evil one took entire possession of him. But, however that be, 'tis certain, these angels that guard us are spirits of holiness and purity; that they have an irreconcilable aversion to filthiness and vice; and therefore we ought by no means to provoke or grieve them, by indulging such lusts and practices as they cannot but hate. Many restraints we put upon ourselves, when under the observation of good or great men. And shall we not pay the same or greater deference to witnesses so much higher in quality, so much more perfect in goodness, than the best or greatest of the sons of men? Eccles. v. 6.

Solomon makes it an argument against rash and hasty vows, that the angel is an evidence of our error. And St. Paul orders 1 Cor. xi. 10. the women to come decently habited to church, because *of the angels*. Now the same reason will hold in other instances of human life. But especially, we shall do well to make it a check upon us, that we carry ourselves with all comeliness, and gravity, and reverence, in our public and private devotions; that no lightness, or negligence, betray a disrespect of those who stand by us, and overlook us in these actions; and that they, who *always behold our Father's face in heaven*, may have no cause to think themselves affronted, or to complain of our rudeness and ill usage to them, in that court above.

But, *fifthly*, This respect must be so tempered too, as not to run out into excess or superstition. Their knowledge of, and care for us, challenge our re-

verence; but neither this, nor any thing else can demand our adoration, or render it allowable to worship and pray to them. When St. John, in a transport of indiscreet zeal, had prostrated his body before the feet of an angel, he was reproved, and informed of the unlawfulness of the thing, in these very remarkable words: *See thou do it not, I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus; worship God.* They are of a nature more excellent than ours, but still they are *brethren*; and we must not pay that duty to any of the children, which belongs to their and our common Father only. They are our fellow-servants, though servants in a higher post: but let their station be never so high, still we must preserve the distinctions, which are due and peculiar to the Master of the family. To pay them no regard is ingratitude and ill-manners; but to pay them bodily adoration, and offer up our prayers to them, is injustice and sacrilege, superstition and idolatry. And therefore *see thou do it not; worship God.* For God alone is, God alone can be, the lawful, the proper object of worship.

Lastly, From the several cases of the angels being said to assist and defend holy men in Scripture, we have reason to believe, that the benefit of their protection extends, not only to spiritual, but also to temporal, dangers and adversities: that they shield us from many misfortunes, prevent many sad casualties, and put by many a sore thrust, which our enemies endeavour to make us fall by. To what else indeed, but to such an unseen defence, can we attribute the wonderful preservation of little children, the infinite escapes from sad and surprising accidents, the surprising deliverances in cases of extremity, where human helps were vain, and we had given all for lost? Our souls, 'tis true, are their chief care; and so they ought to be our own too. But such afflictions, as 'tis profitable for us to

be guarded from, are driven away by these instruments of a good Providence towards us. Such again, as it is better for us to be exercised with, they give way to; and suspend the protection of our bodies, that *our souls may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*. Let us then thank God for these bright guardians; let us imitate their diligence and condescension in doing good; let us hearten ourselves with their assistance against temptations; let us behave ourselves, as becomes men under their observation: and not only pray, but endeavour daily, that *the will of our Father may be done by us upon earth*, with the same cheerfulness and vigilance, as *it is by them in heaven*. And let us beg

Collect. of God, that *as they always do him service in heaven, so they may succour and defend us on earth*; and at last, when we shall leave this earth, that they may conduct us to the regions of immortal happiness, to *the innumerable company of angels*, where we shall be ever with them, and like them. All which we may hope to obtain, through the sole merits and mediation of their and our Lord and King, even Jesus Christ the righteous; who submitted, for our
 Heb. ii. 7. 9. *sakes, to be made lower than the angels*; but is now set down at the right hand of God,
 1 Pet. iii. 22. *angels, and authorities, and powers, being made subject unto him*. To him, therefore, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three persons and one God, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, might, majesty, and dominion, henceforth and for evermore. *Amen*.

St. Luke's Day.

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF ST. LUKE.

THE place of his birth was Antioch, the metropolis of Syria; a place famous for good education, and the study of the liberal arts. After some improvement in these, which St. Luke is supposed to have laid as a foundation, he betook himself to physic. He is thought to have been converted by St. Paul, at Antioch; a companion of whose travels and sufferings he plainly appears to have been, from the time of his first going into Macedonia. Of this his change of style, including himself as a party concerned in the narrative, from Acts xvi. 10. and so forwards, is evidence clear enough. Some passages in the epistles shew him to have been very useful and dear to that apostle; and to have continued his attendance upon him, not only till his first, but second coming to Rome, and near the approach of his martyrdom.

Colos. iv. 14.

Chrysost. T. VII.

Orat. 95.

2 Cor. viii. 18, 19.

2 Tim. iv. 11.

How he disposed of himself afterwards, is not so certain. It is said by some, that he preached in Dalmatia, Gallia, (or Galatia) Italy, and Macedonia: by others, that he travelled into the east, Egypt, and Lybia. As uncertain is the time, and place, and manner of his death: though it be generally believed, that he suffered martyrdom about the eighty-fourth year of his age; and some affirm him to have been hanged on an olive tree.

Hieronym.

Catal. Script.

That he was one of the seventy disciples, is a notion, inconsistent with his own declaration at the beginning of his gospel. For he tells us the facts there recorded, not as of his own knowledge, but as communicated to him by those who were eye wit-

nesses : which also overthrows their opinion, who suppose it dictated to him by St. Paul. The time of writing this, is reasonably concluded to have been before the sending of St. Paul's Second Epistle to the

2 Cor. viii. 18. Corinthians : for upon this account it

is, that he hath generally been thought to be there styled, *The brother whose praise is in the gospel*. Which treatise, if it were meant by St.

2 Tim. ii. 8. Paul, when he says, *Jesus Christ was raised from the dead according to my gospel* :

the sense of those words, I take it, must be, that St. Luke's gospel was seen and approved by him, as in all points agreeable to the doctrine which he preached, and had learned by revelation. And

thus we may understand Eusebius, Hist. Lib. III. C. 8. when he says, St. Luke committed to writing the gospel preached by St.

Paul. The occasion of this undertaking himself intimates to have been the rash and wrong accounts, given to the world, by some who had, either ignorantly or presumptuously, misrepresented the actions and doctrines of Christ, and sowed the seeds of error in the church. He is more circumstantial in relating the facts, and more exact in the method and order of them, than either of the two evangelists who wrote before him : in all probability, for the reason last mentioned.*

* This opinion seems to have been favoured by St. Ambrose and Erasmus ; and Beza espouses it so far, as to say, that any difference of this kind will be best adjusted, by accommodating the other evangelists to St. Luke, not St. Luke to them. But many are of a contrary opinion, and think this preference hath proceeded from overstraining the sense of the Greek words at chap. i. ver. 3. which we translate *to write unto thee in order*. Now in this so strict sense none of the evangelists seem very solicitous to have *written in order*. Concerning which the reader, who hath capacity and leisure, may entertain himself very profitably, with the perusal of chap. v. of Chemnitius his Prolegomen. to his Harmony.

Thus much however must be allowed, that to St. Luke we owe, not only the relation of several facts and discourses, wholly omitted

The book of Acts is also of his composing;* written at Rome, and designed for a continuation of his former history. To this we owe the account of the first miraculous effusions of the Holy Spirit, and the mighty effects consequent thereupon. Which book, containing the accomplishments of our Lord's parting promises, the laying the foundations of his church, and the evidences of his glory and exaltation, the church heretofore thought it proper to read in her public assemblies, between the feasts of Easter and Pentecost, or Whitsuntide.

These books are both addressed to Theophilus: who by the style of most excellent, is supposed to have been a person of eminence and authority, and possibly one of Antioch, converted by St. Luke. Theophylact.

THE COLLECT.

ALMIGHTY God who calledst Luke the physician, whose praise is in the gospel, to be an evangelist and physician of the soul; may it please thee, that by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed, through the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Col. iv. 14.

2 Cor. viii. 18.

by the two who wrote before him; but also the knowledge of the reasons and occasions for many things being done or spoken, which give great light and beauty to those accounts in St. Matthew and St. Mark, where no such connexion hath been observed. Examples of the former sort we have in chap. i. ii. iv. from ver. 14 to 30. vii. from ver. 36 to the end; ix. from ver. 51 to 57. x. from 29 to the end; xii. from ver. 13 to 21. xiii. from ver. 1 to 18. the greatest part of the xiv. xv. and xvi. chapters; with many others in the following parts of this gospel.

Of the latter sort are, Luke v. to ver 12. compared with Matt. iv. 18—20. and Mark i. 16—18. Luke vii. 11—22. with Matt. xi. 2—4. Luke xi. 37, &c. compare with Matt. xxiii. 23, &c. Luke xv. 4—8. compare with Matt. xviii. 12—14. and other instances, which a diligent reader will find pleasure in discovering.

* Hieron. Catal. Script.

THE EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

2 TIM. iv. 5.

5, 6. Be vigilant and patient, diligent in every part of thy office: not discouraged, but rather quickened, by my danger and death.

5. *WATCH* thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

6. *For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.*

7, 8. The approach whereof I can see with joy, supported by the testimony of my conscience, the remembrance of my past sincerity and

7. *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*

sufferings, and the prospect of a glorious reward, reserved for me, the day of Christ's coming to judgment.

8. *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

9. *Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me.*

10. Demas, willing to secure his person, hath so left me in this place of danger.

10. *For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica: Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.*

11. Luke sticks close to me, and is not dismayed at my sufferings.

11. *Only Luke is with me. Take Mark and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.*

12. *And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus.*

13. *The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.*

14. *Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works.*

15. *Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.*

COMMENT.

THIS portion of scripture seems to have been now chosen, on account of the commendation of St. Luke's constancy, ver. 11, by which he distinguished himself at a very trying time. Of that notice hath been taken already ; and no other subject offering itself, which hath not already been spoken to, I pass forward to the Gospel.

THE GOSPEL.

ST. LUKE x. 1.

1. **T**HE Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city, and place, whither he himself would come.

2. Therefore said he unto them, the harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few : pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.

3. Go your ways : behold I send you forth as lambs among wolves.

I who send you will protect you in it.

4. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes : and salute no man by the way.

paraprase, nor lose time in unnecessary delays. &c. is a phrase, intimating all possible dispatch to be made. (See 2 Kings iv. 29.)

5. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house.

6. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it ; if not, it shall turn to you again.

be well disposed ; but if otherwise, they shall have no benefit by your prayers.

7. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give : for the labourer is worthy of his hire.

PARAPHRASE.

1. Seventy.] Of a second order, and inferior to the twelve apostles.

3. The message I send you upon is full of danger, but

4. Depend upon me for provision, and make no preparation, nor lose time in unnecessary delays. *Saluting no man,* (See 2 Kings iv. 29.)

5, 6. Implore a blessing on the houses you come to ; which ye shall do with good effect, if the family have no benefit by

7. Let not niceness or curiosity carry you to change ; but re-

main contented with the entertainment you find. For which they, who so receive you, will not think you indebted; for your ministry deserves this return at their hands.

COMMENT.

IN discoursing upon this passage, I shall confine my thoughts principally to those words at the *second verse*, which our blessed Saviour saw so important, as, after having spoken them at the first mission of the twelve apostles, to repeat them here again at the sending out of the seventy disciples. Upon this occasion I will,

First, Explain the terms, in which our Lord delivered himself: and then, *secondly*, I shall raise such observations and inferences from thence, as may be useful and improving to us.

1. In order to a right understanding of the words, it will be necessary to inquire into these *four* things.

First, What is meant by the *harvest* in the text.

Secondly, Who are the *labourers* here.

Thirdly, Who is the Lord of that harvest; and,

Lastly, After what manner he *sends forth his labourers into it*.

1. As to the *first* of these, what is meant by the harvest: we read indeed of a harvest Matt. xiii. 39. in the parable of the tares, which answers to the end of the world, and the reapers to the angels, who shall then gather all mankind together to judgment. But this here is of a quite different nature; and no great question can be made, but the bringing in the yet unbelieving part of the world, and particularly the Jews, to the acknowledging of the truth, and to the church of Christ, is intended by it. Now the propriety of this metaphorical expression may very easily appear to us, if we consider the mutual resemblances which these two things bear to each other.

The *harvest*, we know, is the season of gathering in ripe fruits; and supposes not only the labour of

tillage and seed-time, but all those other advantages of good soil, and kindly weather, to have gone before, which are necessary for bringing the crop to its just perfection. Thus the propagation of the gospel is very fitly termed the *harvest*; with regard to the law and the prophets, and all those other dispensations which went before, and were purposely designed to lead men to, and by degrees to prepare them for, this last and complete revelation of the divine will. The light of nature, to the *gentiles* and all mankind in general, scattered the first seeds of this spiritual fruit; the types and sacrifices of the *Mosaic* institution were farther improvements of the same husband: the predictions of the *Messiah* and his kingdom helped yet more to bring it forward: and the profiting under such ordinances was the growth of the corn. But yet none of these could be called the *harvest*, because men had not under them arrived to their due maturity. That was reserved for the gospel-state of perfection, which all the rest were industriously contrived to promote and be subservient to.

When therefore the fulness of time was come, they who gained men over to this state fulfilled the end of all the preceding dispensations. They gathered in the product, which those dispensations had made ready for them. Upon which account it is, that our blessed Lord himself speaks of the disposition the world was then in, to receive the doctrine of his disciples; under the figure of *the fields being white to harvest*. He calls those, who should preach that doctrine, *gatherers of fruit unto life eternal*. He applies to them, as succeeding the priests and prophets heretofore, that proverb, *one soweth and another reapeth*, and says upon the same occasion, *I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour; other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours*.

John iv. 35.

Ver. 36.

Ver. 38.

These passages, as they give some light, and help us considerably, to a right apprehension of this before us; so do they likewise furnish us with a very good reason, why our blessed Master should represent the propagation of the Christian faith under the notion of a harvest. And that is, the mighty encouragement hereby administered to all, who were about to embark in so profitable a design. What St. Paul hints to the Corinthians our particular sense and experience confirms abundantly to every one of us; that *he that ploweth, ploweth in hope; and he that thresheth in hope, does it to be partaker of his hope*. For, as no advantage can be attained without labour, so no labour would be borne, if the prospect of advantage arising from thence did not sustain and quicken men under it. Now though none be more toilsome, yet none, it is plain, is more cheerfully undergone, than that of harvest. The reason whereof is manifestly this; that it brings its own reward along with it, and puts that very increase into present possession, which men had long and earnestly expected, and were content to sweat and drudge, and be at expense for, in the earliest and most distant seasons, indeed in all the parts of the whole year throughout.

Now this was the case of the apostles, and others who undertook to establish Christianity in the world. The attempt, it is true, was laborious and difficult: but then their condition was very different from that of prophets and priests in former ages. These planted and sowed, but brought not any fruit to perfection. And this was but an uncomfortable sort of employment, in comparison of theirs who came into the reaping part; who found all things ready to their hands, and whose business was to give the finishing stroke only. For it was their privilege and particular satisfaction, to see and enjoy the success of their own endeavours, by bringing in multitudes of souls, like wheat into the garner of

their Lord, and carrying up religion to as high a pitch of excellence, as ever it was designed to reach in the present world.

Thus the gospel, and the preaching of it, being the saving of those souls, which the less perfect revelations of God's will had ripened and made fit for this better covenant; the present advantage of the persons concerned, who reaped the benefit of those pains which had long been preparing the world for that perfection of righteousness which they never lived to see the accomplishment of, is very reasonably styled a *harvest*. For it is the just ripeness of the law of nature and of Moses: and it encouraged the labourers employed to gather it in, by the present and mighty compensation of all their sweat and toil upon this occasion.

By this long insisting upon the *first* inquiry, we shall find our trouble much shortened in them that follow. For nothing can be plainer, from the analogy of this whole similitude, than that by

2. The labourers, *secondly*, are meant the ministers of the gospel. The souls of men are the *fruits*; the bringing these over to truth and salvation is the *gathering* of the fruits; and, consequently, the persons employed and particularly intrusted in this office, are the *labourers* mentioned in the text. By the harvest *being great*, then, are meant the infinite numbers of persons which should be converted to the Christian faith; by the *labourers being few*, the very small number of preachers, at that time exceeding disproportionate to the occasion there was for them; and by *praying the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers*, they were commanded to beg of God so to qualify and appoint men for the undertaking this great work; that so promising and plentiful a crop might not be lost, for want of hands to get it in: that they who wanted no inclination, might not be destitute of sufficient means, fit and

able instructors, whereby they might be *saved*, and *come to the knowledge of the truth*.

3. As little difficulty will there be, *thirdly*, in discerning who this *Lord of the harvest* is. For that can be no other than Almighty God, who hath declared that *all souls are his*: more particularly the Son of God, and Saviour of the world. For he, besides his original right of creation, had acquired another title to them, even that of purchase, these being redeemed at the price of his own blood. But is it not amazing that he who, with regard to his divine nature, was the proprietor and Lord of the harvest, should not disdain to take upon him human nature, and in it to perform the office of a *labourer* himself? And yet thus he *went about doing good*, teaching the ignorant, working miracles in confirmation of the truth, persuading, convincing, exhorting, and by all the arts of holy eloquence, turning those into good corn who before were weeds and tares in this common field. To his pains, and merits, and love, the very best of men owe their happiness of being brought into the threshing-floor of the church, cleansed, and receiving into the granary of this spiritual Husbandman. For in themselves they are no better than chaff and refuse, and had deserved to be cast out, and burnt with unquenchable fire. Such was his condescension. And for his authority; that he asserted, as by several other instances, so particularly, by dispatching the twelve apostles in the tenth of St. Matthew, and the seventy disciples here, upon this errand of converting men to the truth. For none but the *Lord of the harvest* could of right send forth *labourers*; and he therefore sent them, because the harvest was *his*: which leads us to consider,

4. *Fourthly*, That as the labourers whom this Lord sends forth into his harvest, must of necessity denote the persons entrusted by him in the business

of man's salvation; so the sending them forth as manifestly imports his command and commission, by virtue whereof they engage in this great work. Thus the twelve apostles first, and afterwards the seventy, were commissioned by that positive and express authority which Christ gave them from his own mouth; and the power of casting out devils, healing diseases, and doing many other wonderful works, was not only an effectual qualification for persuading those to whom they addressed their discourses; but it was likewise an evident proof of their being sent from God, and delivering such things as were true, and exactly agreeable to his good pleasure. Reason and common sense teach men naturally to argue thus: that God alone can overrule the settled course of causes and effects; that whoever exceeds the fixed rules and powers of nature, could not do this but by the concurrence of his almighty power; and that it can by no means consist with the infinite justice and goodness of God, to lead honest well-meaning men into such dangerous deceits as must be the consequence of believing those doctrines which they submit to in an humble confidence, that the God of truth will not set his seal of miracles to a lie.

But in regard the calling this gospel-dispensation God's *harvest*, implies it to be the last and most perfect dispensation, and consequently to continue till the end of the world: in regard Christ himself hath long ago returned into heaven, there to abide till the final consummation of all things: it is manifest that the ministers and labourers meant here cannot, in succeeding ages, be supposed to receive their authority from this Lord of the harvest, in the same immediate manner as they did who conversed with him in the flesh, and were instructed at his own mouth. Again, since the whole harvest is his, and none are lawful labourers but those whom he appoints, it must needs be of great importance to know how

we may distinguish between the lawful and the usurping labourers: who are entrusted by Christ in the gathering this fruit unto life eternal; and who they are who busily thrust their sickle into another man's corn, and work upon their own heads.

Now when the author to the Hebrews says (chap. v. 4.) *No man taketh this honour to himself but he that is called of God, as was Aaron*; his meaning is, not only that Jesus, as the gospel high-priest, derived his commission from God, as well as the priests under the law; but also that none may presume, under this state of things, to execute the priest's office without such a commission. For the regular issuing whereof our Lord himself made provision, when, after his resurrection, imparting to the apostles the gift of the Holy Ghost, he John xx. 21. says, *As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you*. His Father sent him with power to impart authority for preaching the gospel to his apostles, who, after his ascent into heaven, were to be the visible directors of the church in his stead. But those apostles were mortal; and therefore he sent them with the same power of imparting their authority to others, who, after their decease, should govern and direct the church in their stead. Thus the power is perpetual, and always the same, though the persons exercising and invested with it are frequently changed. Accordingly we find that power used, and directions for the use of it, and what sort of persons ought from time to time to be entrusted with it, in the Epistles of the New Testament; and, therefore, all they whom the successors of those apostles, the bishops and pastors of the Christian church, do examine, and approve, and appoint to the ministry of the word and sacraments; all these, I say, are *labourers* sent by the *Lord of the harvest*; and these he sends when, as the apostle expresses it, (Eph. iv.) *He gives some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and*

teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. These several orders and degrees of men, their succession, and their commission, are no less from him, than that of his own *twelve*, and *seventy* sent by himself. The distance of the remove makes no difference in the nature and validity of their call; but all they are sent by him who are sent by those whom he sent with express power to send others. And as such, and such only, are true ministers of the Christian church at large; so those whom the laws of each particular church and state (agreeably to the laws of the Christian church at large) have determined to some particular places for the exercise of their charge, are to be looked upon, as the labourers entrusted with that part of this common field; and all within their several jurisdictions, their several provinces, dioceses, parishes, congregations, are bound, as they will answer it to that Lord of the harvest whose labourers these are, to hear, and reverence, and to submit to them, as the persons set *to watch over their souls*.

Thus much, I think, may very well suffice for my *first* head; which undertook to explain the text, and give the true importance of those figurative terms in which it is expressed. I now proceed to my *second*, which I said should consist of some such observations and inferences arising from thence, as may contribute to our improving by it.

1. And *first*, This spiritual *harvest*, and the greatness of it, gives us a fair occasion to contemplate and admire the power, and wisdom, and goodness of Almighty God, in the astonishing success of his gospel. This is undoubtedly the Lord's *doing*, and such as can never be sufficiently *marvellous in our eyes*. And therefore we who are, as the apostle calls his Corinthians, *God's husbandry*, ought to reflect upon the mighty operations of his grace in ourselves and others, with holy

1 Cor. iii. 9.

wonder and humble thankfulness. We should constantly stir up our zeal and diligence, to answer the good intents of so amazing a Providence, and take all possible care to bring forth fruits worthy of such mercy. For dreadful will be our case at last, beyond what we are able to fear or to conceive, if we shall fall under that aggravation of other sins, to have received this *grace of God in vain*.

2. *Secondly*, When the ministers of the gospel are here called *labourers*, this shews us the nature of our calling. That it is by no means a profession of ease and idleness, but of constant and painful care. When these again are said to be *labourers in harvest*, this is still a greater reproach to them that are slothful; since, at such times, and upon that emergency, even the laziest are content to work, or are thought inexcusable if they do not. It likewise intimates to us, with what vigour and alacrity we should perform the several offices required of us; since the labour of harvest is not only hard, but, notwithstanding all the hardship of it, usually attended with a sensible cheerfulness and willing heart, above all others. And again, when we are told, that this is the Lord's *harvest*, this shews us, what end we ought chiefly to propose to ourselves; that neither honour nor reputation, interest nor popularity, must be the things we seek; for this were to forget our Master's, and to do our own business. And, however any, or all those advantages may be the consequence of our fidelity and pains, and such as we may very lawfully desire in their proper place and degree, yet the glory of God, the good of souls, the promotion of virtue and truth, are, and ought to be the principal, the constant ends we should aim at. Nor is it any reasonable mortification to our diligence, thus not to seek ourselves in what we do; since he who appoints us our task, hath engaged to pay us noble wages; and we have ground sufficient

always to abound in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know, that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Cor. xv. 58,
Matt. xxiv.
45, 46.

Who then is that faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.

But, *thirdly*, as this passage quickens us of the clergy in our duty, so does it contain a great deal which ought to put the people in mind of theirs. And, therefore, I cannot but desire every one of my readers, in the next place, to look back upon the complaint, made at the beginning of the verse; and so to observe the condition of mankind at that time, as carefully to compare it with the church at this day. The *harvest then was great, but the labourers were few*; that is, (as the words have been explained already) the men of honest dispositions, and sincere desires to learn the truth, did very much exceed the proportion of those who were qualified to teach them. They wanted not so much the inclination, as the means and opportunities of growing better. But now, alas! the case is much otherwise. There is (in this part of the world at least) no scarcity of Christian pastors, no famine of the word to be complained of. The doctrines of the gospel are constantly and diligently expounded; the motives to a holy life urged with all the skill and care, that men, not immediately inspired by God, are capable of; the sacraments frequently and regularly administered in our churches; the necessity and efficacy of these means of grace fully proved; the invitations to accept, and to qualify ourselves for them, made in the most affectionate manner that can be; and, after all, our Saviour's parable is what we have too just occasion to apply to our respective congregations: *We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto*

Luke vii. 32.

you, and ye have not lamented. We tell men of the glorious privileges and promises of holiness, but these do not make them in love with it, We lay before them the terrors of the Lord, the dreadful consequences of neglecting their duty, and refusing so great salvation; but these persuade them not, nor leave any effectual impression behind. Consider then, I beseech you, how ye will answer the reversing this observation of our blessed Lord. And, if *the greatness of the harvest*, and the fewness of the *labourers*, moved his compassion then; think with yourselves, what different affections will be stirred in his breast, and how it must needs provoke the great Judge to anger and vengeance, when the *labourers* are so very *many* and the *harvest* so scandalously small. The *labourers*, I mean, of *his sending*: for, God knows, there are too many of their own; and the number of these is not a mercy, but a punishment. Which puts me in mind of a

4. *Fourth* thing to be inferred from the text; and *that is*, the great care men ought to take, in distinguishing between the regular and true, and those other busy and pragmatistical labourers, who, without any warrant or command from their Lord, will needs be *thrusting themselves* into *his harvest*. It was God's complaint by the prophet Jeremy of

Jer. xxiii. 21. *old, I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.* The abounding of such teachers, who of their own heads intrude into so weighty a concern, is ever represented in Scripture, as a very grievous curse and judgment. And, how God comes to suffer this, St. Paul hath given us some

2 Tim. iv. 3, 4. *account when he says, The time will come, when men will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth.* It seems, the curiosity of the people, and their not enduring

to be told necessary and plain truths, is the beginning of this mischief: a mischief, which soon grows to dangerous errors, and fatal deceit, and a settled dislike of sound doctrine. For it is scarce to be expected, that they who set up themselves, should bear the same conscientious regard to what they deliver, as others will, who are sensible they come by the direction, and upon the errand of their Master; and who know, they must be answerable for the discharge of their duty, to that regular and fixed authority by which they were sent. But still, allowing they contain themselves within the bounds of truth; admitting it were true, which for the most part it is not, that their gifts excelled those of our lawful pastors; yet is there still one prejudice against them, which singly ought to weigh down all their boasted, and even supposable advantages in other respects; I mean, that these are not the *labourers* sent by the Lord; that is, they have not the same commission derived from Him, nor are entrusted with the charge of souls, as lawful pastors are. This is a warning, which I could not omit, where there is given so fair an occasion for it. And I do, in the spirit of meekness, and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, beseech all those very seriously to consider it, who have suffered themselves to conceive any prejudice to their own duly established ministers; and who, upon any specious pretence whatsoever, are prevailed upon to make a breach in the order and unity of the church. And for the rest, I leave this particular upon them, with that exhortation of St. Paul, (Heb. xiii. 17.) *Obey them, that have the rule over you; that is, your spiritual guides, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you.*

After what hath been already spoken, there will certainly need but little to enforce that, which I de-

sign for my last inference, contained in this command of our Saviour. *Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.* The success of each man's undertakings in his respective profession, depends upon the blessing of God for making the means effectual: but the success of ministers is more entirely his. In other cases he needs only not forbid, or at most command, natural effects: but in this, when our persuasion bends corrupt minds to truth and goodness, he produces an effect, by instruments, in no degree sufficient for it. And therefore, in our daily prayer for *the clergy and the people*, we do most pertinently apply to God, as a *God who alone worketh great marvels.* For such indeed it is, to turn mens hearts, by the ministry of their weak and sinful brethren; who, without the continual dew of his grace, must needs plant and water in vain. This shews the strong obligation men are under, to beg of God, that he would prosper the labours of his ministers; which, how diligent, how skilful soever, will produce no fruit, except *he give the increase.* It shews too, of what importance it is, to be under the guidance of those, whom the Lord of this harvest sends. Because they, who labour by his command, may more fairly hope for his favourable concurrence; than those, who presume to run, when he never gave them commission. And, lastly, we cannot consider the state of Christianity at all, without being sensible of the mighty consequence, of being furnished with a competent number of teachers, and having those teachers duly qualified for so important a trust.

1 Cor. iii. 5, 6.

St. Simon and St. Jude's Day.

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF ST. SIMON.

THIS apostle (to distinguish him I suppose from that other Simon, surnamed Peter) is styled Simon Zelotes, or Simon the Canaanite.

The latter of which does by no means seem to refer to this country or kindred, but is indeed the same in sense with Zelotes, and derived from an Hebrew, as that from a Greek word, signifying *zeal*. Whether this title was given him, in regard of any personal warmth and vigour remarkable in him; or, whether to denote, that he was one of that sect called zealots among the Jews, we know not. If upon the latter account, his conversion is the more remarkable. For nothing could be more opposite to the meekness and gentleness of Christianity, than the irregularity and fierceness of that spirit by which this sect were actuated. A dismal account whereof Josephus has given in his books of Jewish war.

Matt. x. 4.
Mark iii. 18.
Luke vi. 15.
Acts i. 13.

L. IV. C. 5, 6.
L. V. 2, 3. 9.

That this Simon is the person reckoned among our Lord's brethren, there seems little reason to doubt, except we will allow the account in St. Jerome's catalogue to be a good one; where all circumstances plainly shew, that the saint of this day is mistaken for, and confounded with Simeon, the second bishop of Jerusalem. We have no particulars concerning him in the New Testament, save only his call to the apostleship, and that other passage referred to just now. Upon the dispersion of the apostles, he is said to have preached in Egypt, Cyrene, Africa, Mauritania, and the barbarous parts of Libya. To which some add Mesopotamia; and say,

Matt. xiii. 55.
Mark vi. 3.

Chrys. in 12 Ap.
Hieron. in Gal.
C. 4.

that meeting there with St. Jude, they went together into Persia, and there both received the crown of martyrdom. This tradition might possibly be the

Brev. Rom. cause why the church commemorates both together in one festival. Though

others are equally positive in a very different re-

Monolog. Græc. port: telling us, that he preached
ad X. diem. Maii. the gospel in Britain; and, after

many miracles wrought, and great hardships endured, was at last put to death for the testimony of the truth, by the then rude and barbarous inhabitants of this island.

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF ST. JUDE.

THIS person is also reckoned, with St. Simon, amongst our Lord's brethren; and, that he was

Matt. xiii. 55. certainly of that number, we have un-

Mark vi. 3. deniable testimonies. For his own

Ver. 1. epistle styles him the brother of James,

Gal. i. 19. and that James is by St. Paul styled

the brother of our Lord.

He is also called by the evangelists Thaddæus and Lebbaeus; names which might probably belong to him, for distinction's sake from Judas Iscariot. The former of them is supposed to have been chosen, for the affinity of its signification to the name of Judas, for both signify *praise*. But the Jews, superstitiously abstaining from the sacred name of Jehovah, extended that superstition to several other words, composed of the same letters: of which Jehuda (for so it is at length) being one, they might probably, as they did in many like cases, change it in common speech for another, of like importance, but different characters. Concerning the other name of Lebbaeus, conjectures have been various. Some, deriving it from a Hebrew word, which signifies the *heart*, will have it to intimate the extraordinary wisdom and courage of this

apostle. Others draw it from a root, which imports a lion; and think it an allusion to that prophecy of Jacob, which compares his son Judah to an old lion, and a lion's whelp. And a learned critic of our own age is of opinion, that this name was taken from Lebba, a town in Galilee, where he supposes this apostle to have been born. Lightfoot.

After his call to attend upon our Lord, as one of the twelve, we find nothing particular concerning him, except in one passage of St. John's gospel. There, interrupting our Lord's discourse, concerning his and his Father's presence with his servants and disciples, he gives occasion for a fuller explication of those peculiar favours and influences of the divine Spirit, which the faithful should not fail of enjoying to their infinite comfort; at the same time, that the rest of the world remained incapable of them. Chap. xiv. 22, &c.

After our Lord's ascent into heaven, St. Jude preached for some time about Judea and Galilee, then in Samaria, Idumæa, Syria, and Mesopotamia. I mention not Edessa, because, to say the least, it is very doubtful, whether this was the same Thaddæus, mentioned in the first book of Eusebius's history. And indeed that author speaks of his Thaddæus, under no higher a quality than one of the seventy disciples. He is thought at last to have travelled into Persia; and, at the instigation of the magi there, whom he had provoked with open rebukes for their idolatrous worship of the sun, and for several other idle superstitions, to have been assaulted by the common people, and, after other previous cruelties, crucified. Chap. 12.

Eusebius mentions some of his grand-children brought before Domitian. Wickedness had perplexed that tyrant, as it generally does great oppressors, with unreasonable jealousies and fears. He, no doubt, had heard of Christ's L. III. C. 20.

kingdom ; and, according to the then vulgar error, expected the greatness of it shortly to appear, in the conquest and dissolution of all other kingdoms. Understanding therefore that some of the lineage of David, and relations of Jesus, yet remained, he sent for these descendants of St. Jude, and examined nicely into their family, their condition, and their doctrine upon this point. Their answer to this emperor was like Jesus to Pilate, that his kingdom is not of this world. The mean figure they made, contributed greatly to the credit of their reply ; in-somuch that, being thought free from any design which might prejudice the empire, and incapable of effecting mischief, supposing them to design any, they were dismissed, as below a prince's anger ; and afterwards lived many years, in great authority, in the Christian church.

The only work St. Jude left behind him, is that epistle which bears his name. The authority whereof, though it was for some time doubted, has yet been long, and upon good ground, acknowledged by the church. The arguments commonly alleged on the contrary side, being indeed such, as will equally lie against other parts of the New Testament, which have always without any scruple been received as canonical. The design of it seems to be, to expose in their true light the corrupt principles and practices of those heretics, commonly called Gnostics. There is a great resemblance between this and the Second Epistle of St. Peter. The end aimed at in both is evidently the same. The arguments and expressions in many cases are so much alike, that it has been disputed, whether St. Jude hath here abridged that of St. Peter, or St. Peter enlarged upon this of St. Jude. But most are of the former opinion ; and indeed little doubt can remain, whether this were not the later in time, if the fourth verse here be compared with the beginning of St. Peter's second chapter.

THE COLLECT.

O ALMIGHTY God, who hast built thy church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner stone ; grant us so to be joined together in unity of Spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple, acceptable unto thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* Ephes. ii. 20.

THE EPISTLE.

ST. JUDE.

PARAPHRASE.

1. **JUDE**, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:

2. Mercy unto you, and peace, and love be multiplied.

3. Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

gorous asserting of the orthodox doctrines, delivered to the church, as the standard of that belief, which is necessary to salvation.

4. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ and his apostles, but other prophecies before them, foretold both the crime and the punishment, of this sort of men.

5. I will therefore put you in remembrance, though you once knew this, how that the Lord having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed them that believed not.

the church of God; for so were those Israelites of the church too,

3. The present circumstances of Christianity are such, as make it my duty to excite your zeal to a firm persuasion and vi-

4. Which though some have laboured to pervert and corrupt, yet ought not this greatly to surprise you; because not only

5. Whose wicked snares those who go into, will find no benefit by professing themselves members of

who perished for their disobedience in the wilderness, even after partaking in the mercy of the deliverance out of bondage in Egypt.

6. Nay, the very angels themselves escaped not, when shewing themselves unworthy of their dignity and bliss in heaven.

6. *And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day.*

7. An emblem of whose everlasting punishment we have in the irreparable destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha.

7. *Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*

8. Whose vices these heretics imitate in their beastly carnalities; and

8. *Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.*

patronize their filthiness, by false and horrid doctrines concerning the angels, and by contempt of their superiors.

COMMENT.

THE corruptions, against which the apostle here inveighs, are such as all history of the primitive church charges upon the Gnosticks, concerning whom my reader had some account, upon the epistle for St. John the Evangelist's Day.

The *first* argument he makes use of, for creating a just detestation of these seducers and their principles, is, that they are the pernicious people, of whom long and frequent warning had been given. Accordingly to them he applies a prediction as old as Enoch, Ver. 14. And of the same those many descriptions of the *last days*, have been by most interpreters understood, which we find given by our Lord himself, Matt. xxiv. and by St. Paul, 1 Tim. iv. 2 Tim. iii. as also by St. Peter, throughout his second epistle.

And in this sense it is, that some ancient and very good expositors understand, that they were said here to be *προγεγραμμένοι*. A sense manifestly true, and less liable to exception, than that very harsh one, which applies the word to an absolute decree, by which both the crime and the punishment of those men was predetermined inevitably by Almighty God.

2. His next argument is taken from the wickedness of the tenets and practices of these heretics: the inconsistency of both with the gospel of Christ, and the infamy from thence derived upon it: while they had still the confidence to profess a religion, to which both their conversation and their doctrine was a downright contradiction. This will be plain to any, who reflect upon the carnalities of those impure Nicolaitans, who cursed the confinements of marriage, as a contrivance of the devil; and pleaded for community of women, as a privilege, which ought not to be refused to our species, since nature had indulged other creatures in promiscuous mixture. These, and such-like unclean doctrines, were taken into the gnostic scheme: doctrines, so far from comporting with the chastity of the gospel, that the irreconcilable opposition between them is emphatically represented by *light* and *darkness*. And therefore, had there been no other, as indeed there were many, this alone had been reason sufficient, for styling the authors and abettors of such sensualities, *ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness*, and even thus (as well as by Simon Magus declaring himself God the Father to the Samaritans, and God the Son to the Jews) *denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ*.

3. A *third* argument is the certainty of their punishment, notwithstanding any exemptions they might flatter themselves with, on account of their retaining to the church and people of God. This

vanity he exposes, by instances of judgments heretofore overtaking persons who enjoyed the protection of the same or greater privileges. For the former whereof, relating to the Israelites, I refer my reader to the Epistle for Sund. IX. *after Trin.* And for the latter to that on *Mich. Day.*

THE GOSPEL.

PARAPHRASE.

JOHN XV. 17.

17. **THESE** things I command you, that ye love one another.

18. Let this encourage you in your sufferings for

the truth, that I have been already treated after the same manner, and upon the same account.

18. *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*

19, 20. See the Comment.

19. *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

20. *Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you: if they have kept my saying, they will keep your's also.*

21, 22, 33, 24. This behaviour is the effect of their not attending to the commission I come with, ner to the evidence of it; which have been far superior to any ever given before of any teacher coming from God. So that their infidelity does not proceed from ignorance, but from affected blindness, and obstinacy, a malice against God. For the despite done to me, who have been authorized and thus eminently attested by God, does not terminate in my person, but is done to God himself.

21. *But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.*

22. *If I had not come, and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin.*

23. *He that hateth me, hateth my Father also.*

24. *If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.*

25. *But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.*

25. Meanwhile that prophetic complaint of David (Psal. lxi. 4.)

never was so signally fulfilled, as upon this occasion, *They hated, &c.*

26. *But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.*

26, 27. See Gospel for Sund. after Ascension.

27. *And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.*

COMMENT.

THE immediate design of our Lord in this scripture, is to leave such impressions on the mind of his disciples, as might preserve their faith, and buoy up their hearts, in the midst of those distresses and persecutions, which they were shortly to encounter in execution of the trust reposed in them, the propagating and establishing his blessed gospel. His arguments to this purpose are chiefly two: *First*, That they suffered after the Lord's example: and, *secondly*, That the cause, in which they engaged, was such, as might reasonably support them under any hardship upon that account. The former of these I shall so consider, as to include all sorts of affliction incident to good men; the latter, so as may abate our surprise, and arm us with patience, when the endeavours of holy persons to promote the honour of God and religion, do at any time provoke opposition and despite.

Now, *first*, How high soever matters may be carried against us, or how hard soever they may bear upon us, it could not but be then to these disciples; it must in reason be to every good man, a mighty consolation, that the same malice and scorn, the same difficulties and sufferings fell upon the Son of God; and that, in this respect also, the great Author and Captain of our salvation did not disdain to

Matt. x. 24.

Luke vi. 40.

John xii. 16.

become our leader and pattern. The stress, fit to be laid upon this argument, may easily be collected from the frequent occasions taken to inculcate it. It is true, that the applications generally made of it do regard the approach and contempt, the persecutions and pains, sustained upon accounts purely religious, and especially by the first planters of the Christian faith. But, in regard the Son of God condescended to other griefs both of nature and of fortune; in regard that these also are by the wise ordering of God: as no followers of this Master ought to think it strange, if they find no better regard from men than he did; so it is much more manifest, they have no reason to repine at Providence, when called to suffer, in any other kind, what he hath felt and submitted to before them: for what is the best and greatest of the sons of men, in comparison of this eternal Son of God? It is confess, no injury was done to the dignity and innocence of this divine Person, because he freely consented to this humiliation. But then this ought to reconcile us to those severer dispensations, when God himself thought it no diminution to the perfections of his nature, to become a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. It could not have consisted with those perfections, to consent to any thing unworthy of God; and what it did not misbecome him to chuse, cannot possibly be beneath us to accept. Shall we grumble at poverty, when the Lord of the whole earth had not where to lay his head, and was sustained by the zealous ministry of others? Shall we be enraged and impatient for affronts and disgrace, when the majesty of the Holy One was traduced and blasphemed, buffeted and spit upon, scourged and crucified? Shall we grumble at sickness and pain, when we remember his agonies and tortures? Or accuse God for hiding from us the cheering light of his countenance, and the comfort-

able sense of his favour and love, when we read of his soul heavy and sorrowful even unto death; of his amazements and inward confusions, and such a suspension of divine presence, as, added to the extremities of a most bitter bodily torment, forced from him a complaint of God's having forsaken him? What do the most destitute, most miserable of men endure, that can be named with his unspeakable griefs? What are the highest, the holiest of them, if put into the balance with him? Far be it then from us, to think that measure hard, which hath been meted to the holy Jesus! Far from us, to receive with murmuring and indignation, what he hath condescended to! Far, to suppose, that God should be unjust, in making us happy by the self-same methods, which exalted the human nature of his Son to the throne on high! Far from us, especially, when we consider, that all he underwent was the effect of love and free choice; but that our afflictions are the effect of necessity, and such as are wisely and justly destined to.

Let us next consider the cause, which engaged these disciples, and proportionably all zealous promoters of the honour of God and religion. And this will minister one mighty support, by representing the ground of the world's hatred to be common to Christ and his disciples. So that they, who treated the one ill, cannot, if they will act consistently with themselves, deal friendly or respectfully by the other. This subject hath indeed been touched upon before; but, upon offering itself again, I will now enter into it a little more particularly.

It was formerly observed, how vain it is to expect, that any scheme of religion, or the Author and professors of such a scheme, should recommend themselves to the world, or be much in its good graces; since they do not only not suit with the dispositions and practices most in vogue, but take upon them to rebuke, and, if it be possible, to de-

stroy these, and bring in the direct contrary in their stead. Now how this was the case of Christ and his apostles, and is so in some degree of the preachers and conscientious professors of the gospel ever since, though it be plain enough one would think of itself, yet it may not be amiss a little to explain.

The appearance of Christ in the flesh, his birth, and manner of living, were very mean and ordinary, and this begat in the Jews a great aversion to him; as did afterwards the scandalous circumstances of the death he vouchsafed to die, in Jews and Gentiles both.

But besides the disappointed expectation of a Messias, glorious and triumphant over the temporal enemies of the Jewish state, the very temper and design of Christ's doctrines in general is such, as contradicts the common disposition of mankind. And this is a reason, why it always had, and always will have, a numerous party against it; not only in the seasons of persecution, but in those of peace and public tranquillity; not among the profest infidels alone, but pretending believers and admirers of it.

The constitution of mankind, as now corrupted by sin and concupiscence, disposes them to pride and a mighty conceit of their own abilities. It blows them up with fond opinions of knowledge; and when, by comparing themselves with creatures of an inferior condition, they find, that reason is the peculiar talent, with which the great Lord of all things hath enriched human nature, they grow big with their privilege, and are loth to allow that any bounds should be set to it. Now the doctrine of our Saviour, though in the practical part it carry the most perfect agreement to the best reason; and there is not any one precept in the whole scheme of it, which may not very fairly be accounted for; yet it proposes withal several articles to be received, which are full of mystery, and by no means of a

size with finite understandings. Hence arises the virtue mentioned by St. Paul, of *bringing every thought into captivity*, and paying that, which is upon this account most emphatically styled the *obedience of faith*; that is, to rest upon the truth and revelation of God, and silently to adore what we cannot comprehend. Now this hath all along given people a prejudice to the Christian religion, and provoked them either to deny, and oppose, and ridicule it; or, which is but little better, to mangle and pare it away, till they have brought it down to the model of their own comprehensions. All which is the effect of an inborn, absurd vanity; that knows nothing above one's self in wisdom, and will not allow the great God to say or do any thing, which wretched ignorant man cannot conceive and explain.

Very near of kin to this sort of pride is that other, by which we are led into false notions of our virtues and performances, and swelled with imaginations of our own worth: and thence arises another aversion against Christ and his religion, in regard it obliges men to disdain all merit of their own; breaks all the false glasses, which nature or industry had held to them; and shews them to themselves, without a magnifier, the very same impotent, frail, sinful creatures, that really they are. It lays their mouths in the dust, and declares all flesh guilty before God; so that no acceptance, no salvation is to be expected for any righteousness of theirs; a righteousness interrupted and blemished with a mixture of many bad actions; a righteousness short and imperfect in its very best actions, and therefore standing in need of an unspotted innocence, a complete obedience, a sufficient propitiation, to be justified and saved by; to atone for miscarriages, to fill up what is wanting through weakness, and to recommend the imperfect, when they are honest, en-

deavours. This was the choaking principle to the Jews, as rendering their law unable to effect what they promised themselves from it. And it is so to all men; for almost all do so far Judaize, as to depend upon carnal confidences; and rather trust to the sandy bottom of their own worth and supposed sufficiency, than renounce that wicked partiality of admiring and trusting in themselves. So hard a submission is it, in good earnest, to confess themselves objects of mercy, and to cast their whole hopes of comfort and safety upon the sufferings and services of a crucified Redeemer.

Again, The condition of our nature hath made us subject to different sorts of desires and inclinations: for, by consisting of a body as well as a soul, we are necessarily wrought upon by the motions of both. This was no inconvenience in our original make; because then each part knew and kept its distance, and the sensual submitted to the dictates and directions of the reasonable soul: but, since that order hath been confounded by the fall and corruption of man, nothing but rebellion, and discord, and perpetual struggles have ensued. The passions gather and get head, and oftentimes hurry us away, not only beyond, but even contrary to reason. They propose to us objects, which consideration cannot like; and betray us into extravagancies, which our cooler and soberer sense is heartily ashamed of. Now the design of Christianity is to reduce these rebels, to deliver our minds from usurpation and tyranny, and to settle the rightful sovereign, reason, in the throne again: it shews us the folly of enslaving ourselves to violent appetites, and teaches us to proceed upon the measures of good and evil, and to make our choices according to the real proportion of that good and that evil. To this, one would think, men should easily be brought; but here lies the difficulty, that the gospel propounds the happiness we ought to seek as a very

distant thing ; and turns us over to a long day, a future and invisible state, for the attainment of it. And yet at the same time it expects so stedfast affiance in God's word, and so fixed a resolution in our duty, that, if we are called to suffering, no hardship must be thought too great to undergo for his sake ; and, if the whole world were to be had in exchange for our souls, that is, with the commission of one wilful deliberate sin, which will expose our souls to damnation, and the wrath of God, we are taught to refuse those terms, as being not only an unlawful, but an imprudent bargain. Now these things are such, as require a very exalted virtue to comply with them ; and though a man, when he sits down coolly, may be able to convince himself, that they demand nothing of us but what is highly reasonable ; yet it requires more than bare speculation, to behave one's self accordingly in a present strait. Our Saviour compares those to corn in stony ground, who receive the word with joy, and in time of temptation fall away : that is, agreeable to his own interpretation of the parable, who had considered and understood the doctrines he taught, and were highly satisfied in the fitness of what God expected from them ; but yet, when any uncommon trial happened to make an assault, the same consideration did not serve them in the time of the greatest exigency. Some alluring prospect of pleasure or profit blinded their eyes : some horrid appearance of danger frightened away all their presence of mind ; and so sense prevailed against reason, and either justled it quite aside, or else bore it down in the conflict. This is the condition of such, as we are content to think good men for the main ; but, as for them, who have given themselves up to work all manner of uncleanness with greediness, they have set up their rest in present enjoyments, and entertain all exhortations to a sober and severe virtue, all threatenings and

promises that concern a future state, with drollery and scorn. And if a system of goodness and sobriety, of meekness and mortification, do not suit the relish of an intemperate, and revengeful, and narrow-spirited man, we are not to wonder. The reformation of manners, and introducing a pure and spiritual worship, in the room of those abominable rites and beastly mysteries of heathen idols, made the gospel so hard of digestion to the gentiles. The requiring substantial holiness of heart and life, and throwing off the Levitical dispensation, which consisted in ceremony, and cheated men with a false hope in external sanctifications, made it offensive to the Jews. And all the loose and dissolute part of the world have the same quarrel to it still. Our Lord was instant and bold in reproving the Jews, and shewing them their faults; his ministers are commanded to *cry aloud, and shew the people their transgressions*; to set before them what they do not care to see; and press them perpetually to that, which they do not like to practise. This made him so spitefully used; and the same invidious and unwelcome office, will not fail to entail the same coldness, and disrespect, and despite upon us. And since those, who are not sent with special commissions, but only perform the duties of private Christians well, do yet by their good works reproach and expose the bad ones of ill men, who *hold the truth in unrighteousness*, they also must expect to come in for a share in the same angry resentments. Could there any possible way be found out to accommodate precepts to inclinations, such an expedient would have reconciled the world to Christianity. But when it was declared, that there is an absolute necessity of denying ungodliness; of abandoning this, or giving over all thoughts of heaven, and hopes of happiness; the only method left for people wedded to worldly and carnal lusts was, and we see daily is, taken up: and that is, when the truth can-

not be for them, nor religion bend to their liberties and vitiated palates, to take distaste at truth, and, by way of revenge, to resolve, that they will no longer be for religion.

The persons and the principles then of Christ and his disciples, are hated and discountenanced ; but it is because they give the first provocation ; because they are too divine ; too good for polluted wretches ; and men, who have not the grace to be reformed by them, think it for their interest to run them down. This is a refuge, to cover the deformity of their own vices, and to keep sin in countenance, by proclaiming war against that, which can never be at peace with it. Justice and charity to the poor are grievous, but it is to the covetous and ill-natured that they are so. Humility, and meekness, and poverty of spirit are decryed and ridiculed ; but they are the insolent and the proud, that endeavour to expose them. Forgiveness of injuries, and putting up of affronts are rallied ; but the reason is, because they tie up our hands from cruelty and revenge. Suffering for righteousness sake is traduced as a most unnatural duty, and extravagant hardiness ; but it is by those, who are sunk into flesh and sense, and have either no belief, or but very poor and weak notions, of the kingdom and crown hereafter, and that eternal weight of glory, to which such gallant fidelity entitles us. Thus the case plainly stands in all other instances. For even the severest of these virtues justify themselves to impartial and good men. Every one is content to allow the reasonableness of religion abstractedly considered ; or so far as it suits his own complexion, or humour, his satisfaction, or his interest. But, when it once comes to grate close, when it crosses his appetites, and goes against the grain ; when it robs him of any delightful enjoyment already in possession, or checks him in the pursuit of any in view ; then he shakes hands, and can be no longer friends with it. The frugal and

covetous man sees the fitness of temperance, and industry, and all those commands that forbid luxury, and riot, and every vain and immoderate expense. The profuse and sensual discern and detest the deformity of avarice. Thus every part of religion approves itself to the judgment of the disinterested and unprejudiced. But let us turn the tables, and apply the rules to each man's own voice ; tell the voluptuous, that if he will be Christ's, he must crucify his affections and lusts ; and the miser, that the matter can never be compounded between God and Mammon ; and then, oh ! these are hard sayings, who can hear them ? the man of pleasures, and the man of possessions, will then go away sorrowful, like the rich youth in the gospel ; and think it a hard bargain to sell his lands, or his delights, though never so much assured that he should purchase heaven in exchange.

So evident is it, that the world hates goodness and good men, because itself is wicked. The general acknowledgment of mathematical truths hath very reasonably been thought to proceed, not entirely from the clear and demonstrable certainty of them, but in some degree from hence, that men can have no interest in opposing them. It signifies nothing to any man's pleasure or his profit, whether the right angle of a triangle be equal to the other two ; no one desire is curbed or gratified, no advantage, no sensual enjoyment, promoted or debarred one whit, by it being thus or otherwise. But in all moral truths we ourselves are parties as well as judges, and have some end or other to serve in pronouncing of them. Our affections here, like a corrupt jury, are bribed before-hand, and not at liberty to receive the evidence as it is. So that in order to doing justice, much temper and a sincere candid sentence is needful ; and this cannot be had, but from persons of integrity and unblameable lives. Such men can approve what condemns wickedness.

because they have no bias upon their minds, and are under no fear of being reproached by their own consciences. But a profligate liver knows, that he condemns himself at the same time ; and so is forced to reject openly, or at least must seem to disallow, religion in his own defence. And it is a very fatal as well as a very common consequence of sin, to propagate itself from the affections to the judgment ; to drive men from consideration, and either incline them not to think at all, or at least to hinder them from thinking true. For passion and guilt will darken the glass quite, or else so confound the distances and colours, that no objects shall appear there as they really are.

So then, if virtue and vice were to stand and fall by the poll, Christianity might be in some danger. But since it is not the majority, so much as the quality of voices, that wise men value ; there can be no possible good reason, why the common hatred or contempt of religion should make us one jot the less in love with it. For the votes of those against it are of no moment in the world. They are the clamours of fools, the ravings of madmen, or the perverse oppositions of a faction ; men whose dishonesty and whose interest ought in all equity to be excepted against, and therefore these are in effect but so many ciphers, ten thousand of which, when alone, make no number. And sure that man's principles and resolution are very weak, who will suffer himself to be carried away by the torrent of a senseless or a prejudiced multitude : who will be jested out of the practice of godliness, which hath no enemies that are worthy to be its friends ; but, if it were less lovely, would not fail to be more generally beloved.

THE COLLECT.

Col. i. 18.

Eph. iii. 15.

iv. 15, 16.

O ALMIGHTY God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord ; grant us grace so to follow thy blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys which thou hast prepared for them that unfeignedly love thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

THE EPISTLE.

PARAPHRASE.

REV. vii. 2.

2. After the intended judgments upon idolaters and infidels, represented ver. 1. God was pleased to signify his resolution to save from the common calamity those faithful servants, who had been careful to save themselves pure from the common corruption.

3. And this signification was made, by the form of an angel (Christ himself, as some, or, as others, one of those good spirits commissioned and sent by him) declaring this merciful decree of God ; and commanding the other spirits, who were about to inflict the judgments, to suspend the execution of them, till a discriminating mark was set on those, whose fidelity had moved God to except them out of the power of hurting, allowed to take place on all not so distinguished.

4. The converted Jews, who partook of the mercy, were represented to me, as sealed, a certain number of every tribe.

5. See the Comment.

2. *AND I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth, and the sea,*

3. *Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.*

4. *And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand, of all the tribes of the children of Israel.*

5. *Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand.*

6. *Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve*

thousand. Of the tribe of Nephtalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand.

7. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand.

8. Of the tribe of Zebulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

9. After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

10. And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

and these were in the presence of God and Christ, worshipping, and unanimously praising his mercy, for their deliverance out of, and conquest over, their trials.

11. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders, and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God.

12. Saying, Amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

same laud and adoration. By those united hearts and voices testifying their unity with the church on earth: and teaching us, what order and agreement there ought to be, in all the members that compose this body.

9, 10. Then appeared to me Gentile converts, in vast numbers; representing the church catholic all the world over, with marks of innocence and victorious constancy:

11, 12. In which act of devotion and thanksgiving the heavenly powers, and all the church triumphant, did likewise seem to join: repeating and confirming the

COMMENT.

I do not propose upon this occasion to detain my reader with the disputes set on foot by interpreters of this book concerning those events, and that state of the Christian church, to which the passage before us is severally applied. Let them,

who have learning and leisure sufficient, amuse themselves with these matters. My business, whose end is godly edifying, shall be only to explain some few things, relating to the manner and expression, and afterwards to make use of the substance of this vision ; as they, who have recommended it, seem to have thought most profitable, and most apposite to the design of this festival.

1. The vision of *an angel sent to mark the servants of God*, is agreeable to what we read in other places of Scripture, to have been done in favour, and for a distinction to them, whom God saw fit to rescue out of some great and general calamity. Thus we

Exod. xli. find the blood of the passover commanded to be put upon the Israelitish houses,

as a token for the angel, which destroyed the first-born of the Egyptians, to forbear any execution,

Ezek. ix. where this preservative appeared Thus in

Ezekiel's vision, the six slayers, ordered to pass through the city, were strictly enjoined to hold their hand, till one, sent for that purpose, had first set a mark of exemption on the foreheads of them

Ver. 4. that sighed and cried for all the abominations

Ver. 1, 2. done in the midst thereof. And in like manner here, the angel who had the four winds

in his hand, is not allowed to hurt the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, till those servants of God were sealed in their foreheads, whom he had determined to save from this destruction.

It may well be doubted what particular judgment those metaphorical terms of *hurting the earth, and the sea, and the trees* imported. Whether, as some have thought, the vengeance upon Jerusalem and Judea ; or, as others, the barbarous havoc made at the dissolution of the Roman empire ; or, as a third sort, the cruelties exercised nearer our own times upon them who refused to comply with the idolatries and corruption of Antichrist. But still, all acknowledge some dismal calamity to be meant,

from which these *sealed* were to escape; and that the use and end of *sealing* them was to make this mark a defence against that ruin, in which the greater numbers, not so signed, should be miserably swallowed up.

2. A like allusion to former dispensations we may also observe, in the numbering of these *sealed*. The correspondence between *Israel after the flesh*, and *Israel after the Spirit*, between the church of God under the law and under the gospel, hath frequently fallen in the way of our notice before; and from thence the reasonableness of those modes of speech is very obvious, which apply such terms to the latter as in their primary and literal sense are peculiar to the former. As well, therefore, upon this account of the people of God being heretofore divided into tribes, as because the Christian state, which succeeded upon the Jewish, was for some time composed of members proselyted from that religion; the servants of God, *sealed* under the gospel, are distributed here into tribes.

3. Concerning the order in which we find them placed, the conjectures of expositors are neither so clear as to be depended on, nor of moment so great as to deserve any particular disquisition. Thus much, however, may be worth our mention: that Judah, it is very probable, stands in the front; not only because the post of honour was assigned that tribe in the encampments and motions of the whole body of Israel heretofore; but which, indeed, (considering the typical state of the people heretofore,) might be the reason of the preference then given it by God, because such prerogative was due to that tribe of which Christ, the King and universal Lord of God's true people, condescended to be born.

4. It is farther observable, that the order of the tribes throughout is different in this place from that usual in others. For they are sometimes named according to the age of the patriarchs from whom

they sprang; sometimes according to the dignity of the mothers that bore those patriarchs; sometimes according to the situation of their respective settlements in the Holy Land.

Now whatever were the reason of taking another method here, this reflection at least it ministers just ground for: *that*, under the Christian dispensation, there is no respect of persons, no deference paid to wealth, or to nobility of descent, or to a priority of birth, or to any of those other considerations, which set one man above another in the regards of this world; but all who are truly in Christ, be they otherwise *bond or free, high or low, rich or poor*, have equal concern in the distribution of spiritual advantages; and as each shall be careful to distinguish himself by virtue and obedience, he shall not fail to receive proportionably distinguishing marks of the divine grace and bounty.

5. Again, in this catalogue, the tribe usually called Ephraim hath the name of Joseph. That of Dan is wholly passed over; and the number is made complete by taking in Levi. The first might probably be done to leave a note of infamy upon a name known for many ages to have been set up in opposition to Judah, and made the common title of rebels and schismatics, revolters from the government as settled in the line of David, and separatists from the established church at Jerusalem. A name upon so many accounts grown scandalous, may well be exchanged, in a catalogue of Christian confessors, for one which, by the mention of Ephraim's ancestor, naturally brings to mind that innocence and constancy in suffering, and that reward and exaltation consequent to it, wherein the patience and preservation of the *sealed* bore so eminent a resemblance to the virtues and fortunes of Joseph.

Again, in regard the persecutions sustained by these good men were provoked by their inflexible adherence to the one true God, and the purity of his

worship; the tribe of Dan which first apostatized to idolatry, and, from the time of Jereboam, received the calves by which that corruption had been all along continued, was altogether unworthy to be mentioned here as a type of pure and unblemished Christians. Into his place, therefore, Levi is fitly taken; who, though frequently omitted in the Old Testament, because having no inheritance in the partition of the earthly Canaan, was yet, of all others, most proper to represent those heavenly-minded saints, who chose to make the Lord their only *portion*, by *forsaking all*, and *following him*.

6. Once more. From the number of these *sealed*, we are by no means warranted to conclude, that so many, or that no more, were saved out of each tribe of Israel. But, as the manner of reckoning by tribes was shewn to be allusive, so is the number of the sealed in each allusive too: and, as that had a retrospect to the old dispensation, this bears a particular regard to the ministers of the new. The conversions wrought among their own countrymen, might well be represented by many thousands in every tribe; for this was but justice to the wonderful success of their indefatigable labours. And those thousands are more fitly multiplied by twelve; because this was an honour due to the college of the apostles, the principal labourers in this spiritual harvest, and the fathers who begat so glorious a progeny in Christ.

Thus we have another instance of the analogy, frequent in these mystical writers, between the legal and evangelical people of God; such Rev. xxi. 12, as we find expressed in the *walls*, and 13, 14. foundations, and angels, and gates, and dimensions of the New Jerusalem: all these agree in the numbers here made use of; and are abundantly explained by those very significant words, that in the *twelve foundations* of that city-wall were inscribed *the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*. The

number of which noble fraternity, multiplied by itself, produces that sum of Jewish converts here, who, by adhering stedfastly to their doctrine and fellowship, approved themselves the genuine offspring of the apostles.

7. The same method, we observe, is not taken at the *ninth* verse, because there was no like analogy to justify or ground it upon. For the multitude there meant, are most probably the *gentile* converts. A multitude, *which no man could number* indeed : so amazingly present and powerful was the grace of God with them. A race of aliens, whose zeal outran the children of the family : who from the vilest dregs of superstition and idolatry, commenced a church of purity and constancy, of unrepented conduct and unalienable affection to that heavenly Spouse, who disdained not so mean a marriage, even *Jesus Christ*. For as the greatness of their trials proved their fidelity, so the success of their fidelity is intimated by their *palms* and *white robes*. And the reward of their victorious innocence, is particularly set forth from *ver. 13* to the end of this chapter.

8. Interpreters have differed in their opinions concerning the seal, said here to be set on the foreheads of the *hundred and forty-four thousand*. Some have understood it of the sign of the cross, anciently made upon the foreheads of persons baptized. A ceremony, as then used in the primitive, and as still retained in our established church, not only altogether innocent, but highly significant and proper. For it is no other, than a constant admonition and *token*, that the parties receiving it, should from

Office of Baptism. thenceforth *not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified* : and, with allusion to the customs then obtaining among soldiers and servants, to receive the mark of that master, or general, under whose command they were ; this was a listing men to Christ, a mark of

their obligation to *fight manfully under his banner*, and to *continue his faithful soldiers and servants unto their life's end*.

Others, observing the sacrament of baptism at large to be frequently by the ancients styled the *signature of Christ*, apply the expression to that covenant, in a sense somewhat more extended than the former. Meanwhile these constructions come much to one, in regard the latter very probably depends upon the former. For the sign of the cross, used in that sacrament, seems to have given such occasion to the sacrament itself being allusively entitled, *signaculum, character, signum in frontibus*, the mark or signature of the disciples of Christ.

But, as hath been observed under the *first* particular, the seal here intended cannot be reasonably thought that of profession, but is plainly a seal of preservation and protection. This case bears great resemblance to the *Israelites* passover, mentioned before. Their eating the lamb and sprinkling the blood were necessary preliminaries : but the blood itself upon the door, as a testimony of the law being regularly complied with, was that which averted the destroying angel. Thus the seal of Christianity is so far only concerned in the present occasion ; as this seal being kept inviolate, engaged that other seal of divine Providence and favour on their behalf, who kept it so. And the peculiar care, which Almighty God determined should be taken, to rescue such from the common calamity, which overwhelmed others, not under the same distinguishing Providence, is by an elegant figure represented here as a visible character, impressed for a direction to the executioners of divine vengeance, that these were to be spared, as persons exempted from it.

It must be confessed indeed, that the grace and providence of Almighty God never shone forth upon any occasion more illustriously, than in this of establishing and preserving the Christian church. For,

in regard every good action (even those, which have all possible advantages of present pleasure and gain to recommend them) is yet owing, not to any goodness in our nature, but in its true and last result, is the effect of a divine principle, actuating and assisting us ; how mighty must those influences be, which could dispose and persuade, against all the inclinations of nature, not easily to be withstood, nor possible to be extirpated ; and against all temporal interest too, which was not likely, and in lawful cases, not reasonable or fit, to be neglected? How much more than human must that resignation of spirit be, which submitted to incomprehensible articles of faith, and ungrateful rules of practice, upon the mere authority of a crucified Redeemer? Which would be governed by a doctrine accounted foolishness ; and expect rewards from a Master, whose ignominious death was a stumbling-block to his contemporaries and countrymen? To what being, less than omnipotent and unchangeable, can we ascribe that immoveable firmness of mind, which in despite of all temptations to the contrary, did not only live up to, but cheerfully die for, such a religion as this? Which, after a perpetual conflict with the reluctances and infirmities of flesh and blood, esteemed it an honour and an happiness, to put off that very flesh and blood, and give up all the satisfactions of this, to the promises of another, a future and unseen life? But especially, how amazing were those operations of the eternal Comforter, which could inspire the suffering saints of this day so to undergo, and their spectators so to behold, their most exquisite tortures and cruel deaths ; that, not only their brethren should be more confirmed, more ambitious of the honour of the like martyrdom, but that even strangers, even enemies, even their guards and executioners should be thus gained over ; and the number of converts at their dying hour should sometimes exceed those, who had been

made by a long course of preaching and piety, throughout a most laborious and exemplary life?

These are unquestionable facts; but such, as are also unquestionably superior to any reasonings or powers merely human. Nor can we suppose them effected by those ordinary assistances, to which we owe the doing or even thinking any thing that is good. Their measures of grace were plainly proportioned to the trials that called for them: and, as no cause was ever worth enduring so much for; so none was ever, by the supports afforded it, so manifestly proved to be of God. Nothing less than he could have enabled men of sense and soberness, so eagerly to have embraced, so resolutely to have persevered in, such an institution: and he would not have thought Christianity worth such miraculous operations of his Spirit, had it not been his own institution. But,

2. *Secondly*, The providence of God was likewise wonderful, in ordering events so, that the Christian church should be preserved against all the persecutions and attempts to overthrow it, and all the errors and corruptions, which must otherwise have depraved and undermined it: that the joint endeavours of Jews and Gentiles, (agreed in nothing but their enmity to the Christians) should employ so much malice and subtlety, without ever attaining the intended effect: that the multitudes cut off by their cruelty, should be much more than supplied, by successors of equal constancy and zeal; and justify the observation of a large harvest always springing up, after every seed-time of such blood: that, in the ravage and destruction of Jerusa-

Euseb. Hist. III. 5.

lem, so nice a discrimination should be made, as rescued the body of Christians from the fate, which was indeed the punishment too, of the unbelieving Jews: that afterwards, amidst the many violent convulsions which shook, and at last tore in pieces the Roman empire, the church should stand

firm upon her own basis, while all the world was tottering and breaking round about her : that, even when distressed and persecuted within herself, divided by heresies and schisms, clouded with superstition, degenerated in idolatry, bewildered with ignorance and a darkness which might even be felt, and treated by fellow-Christians for refusing their corruptions, with a zeal, as barbarous as it is blind, as unrelenting as Jewish rage or heathen tyranny : that she should then emerge, and recover her primitive lustre, after so long a darkness, and such powerful endeavours to suppress her. These are events, to which the vision now before us is most probably believed to allude ; events not to be expected in the ordinary course of things. No, they are fruits of being sealed to a distinguishing care and protection ; and such experiments of the divine goodness and truth, as will no longer suffer us to doubt, whether they be not pledges of Christ being with his faithful *always, even unto the end of the world.*

But, while we are contemplating the wonders of that good Providence toward the *remnant that escaped* ; far be it from us to suppose it defective in mercy towards them, who fell a sacrifice to the fury of their persecutors. No: God hath provided for those gallant men something better than any temporal deliverance, a place in heaven, in proportion higher and more honourable, as their graces on earth were brighter, and their sufferings more exquisite ; a happiness which does infinitely more than compensate all they did, or could endure for his sake. And, the nearest resemblance they bore to the indignities and pains of their dying Redeemer heretofore, the nearer approaches they now make to his bliss and glory, before the throne on high.

And this is the constancy, these the crowns of the church triumphant above, which the present festival obliges us to commemorate, no less than the continuance and preservation of a church still militant

below. In both indeed we have an interest and part: for we are all members of one and the same body; differing at present in place and position only, till the common Head shall think fit, in his own time, and by his own methods, to bring us all together; and to reward the trials of them that are coming after with joys like theirs, who are already gone before.

I conclude with suggesting to my reader some few remarks, from the love of God to his saints: a due improvement whereof would be the best and most Christian method of rendering to him, and them, the honours intended to both, by the observation of this festival.

1. *First*, then, the integrity of these *sealed*, and that purity of faith and worship so carefully maintained by them, may be of signal use to us, when attacked with violent temptations to sin. It will represent to us, by their example, the possibility of resisting and overcoming all attempts made upon our virtue, by sincere resolutions and endeavours, backed with that grace, which alone can render them effectual. It will fill us with assured expectation of, and dependance upon, all such necessary strength and assistances from God, provided we hold fast by him, and do not tamely desert his cause; which always is the cause of goodness and strength. It would guard us against the dangerous seducements of numbers, and authority, and examples; and not suffer us to love piety and virtue one whit the less, because not valued by the many, or not countenanced by the great. Quite contrary, it would possess us with a terrible apprehension of vices, that have credit and vogue, and are grown fashionable in the world; when we reflect, that these great champions of faith and holiness attained the honour and privilege of God's *seal*, by an inflexible, even when a persecuted, singularity in the true religion. And this leads us naturally to a

2. *Second* remark resulting from the eminent de-

liverances they were *sealed* to. These should convince us, however improbable discouraging circumstances may sometimes happen to render it, that abiding stedfastly by our duty is the best security, with regard to our present interests ; it often proves so in fact. Nay it always proves so, when God for wise and better purposes, does not see fit to suffer the contrary. For in such cases the justice, the goodness, and the honour of God are concerned, not to forsake those good men in their distress, who made that very distress their choice, and refused to accept any other deliverance in pure love and obedience to him. Such an assurance, that Providence is engaged on our behalf, should, even to private persons be found a firmer support, than any human appearances of safety or success. But there is another case, not subject to the same reserves : and that is the protection of the church in general, notwithstanding all the malice and subtlety of its manifold adversaries and insulters : a very comfortable reflection, to all that love the Lord Jesus and his gospel. Such a one, in truth, as it were heartily to be wished, the dissoluteness of some, the profaneness of others, the industrious propagation of infidelity by a third sort, and which gives success and encouragement to all these, the general lukewarmness and indifference of those, who ought to oppose and suppress them, had not rendered almost the only anchor of our hope. For, never sure could one have expected less, and never yet did religion suffer more, from an uncontrolled licentiousness of striking at the very fundamentals of Christianity, than in our age and country. God in his mercy touch the consciences of those, who take, or who encourage, or who connive at, such liberties. God dispose us all, with a becoming indignation to exercise the powers we have : or, if these be too feeble, to contrive new and more effectual methods, for the suppressing and reforming them ; lest these

crying abominations be visited upon our nation, in judgments suitable to the horror of their guilt. But I return and observe,

3. *Thirdly*, That the sufferings and rewards of those saints, who died in the cause of religion, ought to be a most powerful incitement to our zeal and perseverance. They were men of like passions and infirmities with us, which takes off all pretence of their virtues being impracticable. The promises of divine assistance are the same still, and therefore the like difficulties cannot be invincible. Their examples indeed are left us, and our memories are refreshed with them for this very purpose, that we also should *run with patience the race that is set before us*. Their courage and constancy, their resignation and charity, should be copied by us, as occasion requires. Their sincerity and devotion, the purity of their faith, the innocency of their conversation, their fruitfulness in good works, their contempt of the world, and heavenly-mindedness, should be patterns always before our eyes; because these are virtues, they may, and should be always in our practice. In a word, let us express our thanks to Almighty God for the advantage of such shining examples, and pay all due reverence to their memory, by endeavouring to be like them. For when all is done, the best and most acceptable honour we can possibly do those renowned Christian heroes is, the forming our conduct upon the model of their graces, and aspiring after the weight and the brightness of their crowns.

THE GOSPEL.

ST. MATT. v. 1.

PARAPHRASE.

1. **J**ESUS seeing the multitudes, went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him.

2. And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

3. * They that have the true spirit of poverty. The men of lowly and humble hearts; for this will dispose them to receive my doctrine here, and that will lead them to the glory of heaven hereafter.

3. *Blessed are the * poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

4. † They that sorrow for their sins, for this will work repentance to life and salvation.

4. *Blessed are they that † mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

5. * They that are patient, and slow to anger; for this tranquillity of spirit will make their lives comfortable, and give the truest enjoyment of such a state as God sees fit for them, a state happy here, as well as hereafter.

5. *Blessed are the * meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*

6. † They that desire to be truly good, and, in a just sense of their infirmities and defects, labour as hard to be so, as any whose necessities and appetites of the body are strongest, do after the supplies they feel the present want of. Such desires shall never be in vain.

6. *Blessed are they † which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*

7. * They that pity, and to their power comfort and relieve, the needy and afflicted; that forgive and pray for those who have injured or offended them; that are ready to do any kind and compassionate office whatsoever: God will reward such by the return of his mercy to them.

7. *Blessed are the * merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.*

8. ‡ They that preserve their minds free from the defilements of lust, and all sorts of vicious affections; God will communicate knowledge and grace to such here, and admit them to the beatific vision of himself hereafter.

8. *Blessed are the ‡ pure in heart: for they shall see God.*

9. * They who are orderly and peaceable themselves, and endeavour to preserve and promote peace, both public and private, among others. This disposition renders them like God, and they shall have both the name and privileges of his children.

9. *Blessed are the * peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God.*

10. *Blessed are they which are persecuted for † righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

fast perseverance in their duty. Such shall have large amends made, for all they endure upon such accounts.

11. *Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.*

12. *Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

are in sufferings, so you shall be in the rewards of a heavenly kingdom, like to the prophets and most celebrated saints, should make the reproaches, and malice, and causeless calumnies of your persecutors, matter of great joy to you.

10. † They who suffer for the profession of the true faith, and a steadfast perseverance in their duty. Such shall have large amends

11, 12. And blessed are ye in particular, when such shall be your case for the sake of me and my gospel. This consideration, that as you

COMMENT.

THE scripture read for the Epistle, gave us occasion to consider the peculiar favour of God toward those faithful servants of his, of whom this festival is designed to transmit an honourable remembrance to all posterity. There we saw the distinguishing Providence which guarded them, while militant in this world, and somewhat of that triumphant state, to which they are ascended in a better. The gospel, in order to our more ready attainment of advantages, which we are by this time presumed earnestly to desire, sets before us those good dispositions, which recommend the saints to the care and protection, and exalt them to the dwelling and fruition, of God. For the privileges of good men we have the beloved disciple's authority; for their happiness and the way to it both, we have the word of the Master himself; who at once pronounces such persons *blessed*, and instructs us how they come to be so.

The virtues here mentioned, and the particular blessedness apportioned to each, are a subject too

copious to be now entered upon. I shall therefore satisfy myself with making a few general remarks; *first* upon the beatitudes themselves; and *then*, upon those virtuous actions and good dispositions, which are prescribed, as means proper for attaining them.

1. Under the former head, I would bespeak my reader's attention, in the *first* place, to the fitness of that method, taken by our Lord to inculcate his doctrines, and to give them their due weight with his hearers. He is our supreme lawgiver: and, as such, had an indisputable right to deliver himself in an imperial style. Nor could we have found reason to decline our obedience, had his pleasure been signified to us, without any other enforcement than that of his own authority. But he forebore to do so upon this occasion; and chose a course more suitable to his own character, to the temper of that religion he was about to establish, and to the natural springs of moral actions.

The character he appeared among men in, was that of love and gentleness, of meekness and condescension. From all which the asserting his dominion over mankind would have been as averse and foreign, as it is generally thought agreeable to the state and greatness of earthly princes. They find it necessary to suffer no diminution of their power; and therefore they neglect no awful appearances of it, that may secure the submission of their people. He was a king too, higher than the rest; but the season was not yet come for acting openly in that capacity. And therefore this, like the other glories of the Godhead, was to continue hidden from human eyes, under the veil of a despised, and even less than common man. His life and doctrine, his sufferings and death, his resurrection and return to heaven, his Spirit sent from thence, and the infinite works of wonder done in his name, were by degrees to reveal and make way for the belief of his majesty

and glory. And therefore, in the execution of his prophetic office, upon which he was now lately set out, it sufficed, that he spoke with the authority of a teacher only. And, considering the predictions, that even in this respect concerned him, (such as are referred to particularly at the xiith of this Gospel) he saw it more congruous Ver. 18. 21. to abstain from all marks of a high hand, at the entrance into this discourse; and was content rather to instruct and persuade, than to command.

2. This behaviour did likewise best become the temper of that religion, which our blessed Saviour was about to establish. The apostles frequently take notice of a wide difference between the law and the gospel; as in other respects, so especially upon account of the different passions, which each was designed to work upon. With the Jews, God dealt as with servants; and the chief principle of obedience to that institution was fear. But Christians are treated as children, and the motive proper to their duty is love. Hence the law was promulgated with all the pomp of terror, and enforced with curses and denunciations of vengeance. But it was fit for the gospel to recommend itself by a more generous and engaging style, and to gain upon the hearts of its proselytes by promises of blessedness and rewards. The objects chiefly in view of the former, were the divine attributes of justice and power, whereby a refractory people might be frightened into good manners. Those set before the latter, are infinite mercy and goodness; whereby a free and ingenuous people, obliged beyond all possibility of requital, might yet be shamed into such returns as they were capable of; and powerfully excited to imitate those excellences, to which they were indebted for so glorious hopes and happiness. And therefore their invitations to duty here are like their duty itself: in which there is nothing awful and servile, but all is the effect of filial affection and gratitude

on the one part, all tenderness and paternal indulgence on the other. A duty, not imposed for the ostentation of authority, or the exercise of an arbitrary power, but for the sake and benefit of those who pay it. And therefore so imposed, as to lay the foundation of obedience, in a sense and conviction of the advantages attending it. Upon which account our Lord's method here is admirable; because

3. It is best accommodated to the natural springs of human and moral actions. Happiness is the natural desire of every man; and what God hath given all a desire of, he hath certainly given all a capacity of. This therefore is the common end and view, be the means used for the attainment of it never so different. The general schemes of life are laid, according to their supposed tendency hither, and each action is meant for a step towards this common home. It is not possible to be otherwise, with them that think at all; and therefore the philosophers, in their treatises of morality, constantly set out with an inquiry after the chief good. Most reasonably sure. For, what can be more absurd, than to lay down rules of living, before the point be settled, what purpose men live for? or how shall a competent judgment be made of the fitness of any means, by them, who as yet remain in ignorance or doubt, what end it is which those means ought to serve? thus far then our Lord hath conformed himself to the method of all wise moralists, but with very different success. For we should be highly unjust both to his wisdom and our own profit, did we overlook the advantages of his, above any of their proceedings, in the following respects particularly.

First, As he had delivered men out of those mazes of uncertainty and error, in which the philosophers had left them bewildered, concerning their chief good. The chief *present* good I mean; for the collections of nature; unassisted by revelation, ne-

ver undertook positively to determine concerning any other state ; much less to lay that down, as a maxim and foundation, able to bear the weight of whole systems built upon it. Now in this very first principle, the variety of opinions was as great as that of sects. And, what was like to become of them at last, who in their pursuit of happiness, followed guides, so far from knowing the way, that they were not yet agreed about the place whither they should go ? Thus far then our blessed Saviour hath brought us forward ; that we are plainly taught to abandon and despise those mistaken seducers, who proposed any thing sordid and sensual as their end ; and imagined the utmost attainable to here, to consist, either in the gratification, or the stupefaction of our passions. He plainly gives on the side of those more exalted spirits, who rightly judged our present happiness to consist in minds rightly disposed, and in virtuous actions suitable to such dispositions.

2. But here again our Lord hath exceeded all that went before him, in correcting their mistakes, and leaving us right notions of the best and most profitable virtues. For even they, who placed happiness in virtue before, never chose such instances as these : justice and temperance, prudence and fortitude, and all that flattered our natural vanity by a seeming greatness of soul, were readily admitted into their schemes. But poverty of spirit, and meekness, mercifulness and peaceableness, were paradoxes, till now unknown to the inquirers after happiness. Least of all could it have entered into any of their heads, that persecution, upon any account whatsoever, renders a man blessed. Some indeed had the hardiness to assert, that it did not make a good man miserable. But few in comparison were content to go thus far ; and none ever came up near our Lord's assertion : none could, by reason of a most material defect in theirs, which is now supplied by the Christian philosophy, and by that only. For,

3. We have the advantage, not of a present only, but of a future blessedness also, revealed, and promised to the virtues here enjoined. They, who taught, that happiness consisted in virtue, made the nearest approach to truth ; but then this notion obliged them to advance in speculation doctrines, instantly refuted by practice and experience. The composition of human nature was not duly regarded ; the unavoidable frailties and sufferings of spirits, confined to such bodies as ours, scornfully overlooked, and consequently, the systems of the stoics, and others, became impracticable and unsatisfactory ; because propounding encouragements insufficient for human nature, and supposing men more abstracted and refined than they are, or can be, in the present state of things.

It is therefore the inestimable privilege of Christians, and we ought to acknowledge it with thankfulness, that to us, to us alone, is given the prospect of a compensation, equal, far superior indeed, to the difficulties of our duty. And Christ could never have been heard with the success these doctrines have since found, had not a *comfort* been promised to the *mourners*, an *inheritance* to the *meek*, a *sight of God* to the *pure*, and a *kingdom of heaven* to the *poor in spirit* and *persecuted*, with which all other masters of morality were altogether unacquainted.

As therefore the instances and degrees of duty here prescribed, are in great measure new, so are the motives to them in great measure new also. The present conveniences, to which these virtues have a natural tendency, are of great weight, though not enough in all cases. But, when those present conveniences are shewn to be but small, in comparison of the infinite reward hereafter, prepared for the practice of them ; the choice of many mortifications and sufferings, which otherwise would hardly, if at all, have been so justified, does then become not only reasonable, but necessary. For when our legislator stoops to our desires, meets our most eager

wishes, and shews us how to be, what every man designs and longs to be, we can have no excuse for not complying. This is a condescending appeal to nature and inclination; and renders all disobedience unaccountable and absurd, by representing our duty and our happiness, as one and the same thing. Till therefore we are able, (which we shall never be) to prove a repugnancy between these two, let not our lives reproach us with acting in contradiction to rules and maxims, which in speculation and argument we cannot elude the force of.

II. Concerning the dispositions prescribed here for the attainment of true blessedness, I observe,

First, That most of them are what we call *moral*, and many of them *social*, virtues. The former will be a warning to my reader what men of skill those are, and how far endued with the spirit of Christ, who upon all occasions disparage moral virtues as mean and legal, and beneath the dignity of spiritualized Christians; who blame us for not preaching Jesus Christ and his gospel, when we preach what Jesus Christ himself preached and practised; who slanderously misrepresent this established church as derogating from faith and grace, because her ministers urge upon their people those good works which our Saviour says, in this very chapter, ought so to shine as to be *seen of men*; which St. James demands as the necessary evidence of a true and living *faith*; which St. Paul declares to be the *fruits of the Spirit*; and which, if a man *do not*, St. John pronounces him to be, *not of God, but of the devil*. How dangerous is the delusion of those poor souls who give themselves up to the guidance of such teachers? How safe and comfortable that communion, whose guides, in this regard, bear no reproach but what falls upon the apostles, and their blessed Master himself! For so long as

Matt. v. 16.

Jam. ii. 14, &c.

Galat. v. 22.

Ephes. v. 9.

1 John iii. 10.

their epistles are allowed, we shall never be convicted for thus detracting from grace and faith ; and so long as his sermon on the mount stands upon record, this will vindicate our endeavours to bring our flocks to heaven, by taking the way that Christ first led them in.

But I likewise observed that many of them are *social* virtues ; such as mankind are benefitted and endeared to each other by. Of this kind are humility, and meekness, and mercy, and peaceableness ; (and if, as some have done, we shall interpret the sixth *verse* of justice in our dealings, we may add righteousness also.) Now it is plain God could not have expressed a greater friendliness for the common good of the world, and the comforts of society ; than by first enjoining the virtues that promote these excellent ends ; and then providing such ample compensation in another world for habits and practices, which *self* will be always opposing in this world. So plainly is he the best Christian who is the greatest benefactor to order, and peace, and love ; and so much more precious is an active charity than an idle and unprofitable, though never so rapturous contemplation, in his eyes who prefers *mercy before sacrifice*, and who is ever doing good to all his creatures.

2. I observe of these virtues, *secondly*, That they are plain and easy marks to judge of our blessedness by. Many of them are such as will render themselves conspicuous to other people ; but it is impossible for any of them not to be discernible to a careful examiner of his own breast : and this is an inquiry which deserves all our care ; for since all of us cannot but desire to be happy, and since we must be so or otherwise, according as we excel or are defective in these good qualities ; who, that is so, would want the satisfaction of knowing it ? Who that is not, would not gladly be awakened by such a sense of his misery as might effectually en-

gage his utmost endeavours to become so? The spirit and temper of a Christian, as here described, does indeed differ greatly from that of the world; and this difference is another argument for our circumspection, without which men are too apt to flatter their own consciences, because like unto, or not worse than the generality of them they live among. But, alas! this fallacy, if indulged, will ruin all; for it is not custom, or common opinion, but the rules and measures of the gospel by which this most concerning point must be determined. And let all the world say, or act, as they please, it is not more certain that the persons thus qualified shall, than it is that none but they (ordinarily speaking) shall ever partake of the blessedness here promised.

3. *Lastly*, When this inquiry is made, we must not content ourselves with a partial return to it, or imagine that one or a few of these qualities will entitle us to happiness, if they be manifestly not accompanied by the rest; for, without entering into any niceties about the number, the order, or the necessary connexion of the virtues here enjoined, it is evident from the whole tenor of Scripture, that God requires, in every one of us, all the dispositions of mind here mentioned, and looks that each should exert its proper acts as fit occasions offer. The *merciful* shall obtain no *mercy* from God, if he be impure; nor shall the *pure see God*, if he be not *peaceable*. In short, they are all bound upon us by the same authority, and all must go to the composition of a perfect Christian. Even the preparation to undergo persecution for righteousness and Christ's sake is necessary, though God never brings us into circumstances of reducing that readiness into act. But persecution alone had never exalted the martyrs and confessors of this day, had not their other virtues, like so many jewels, adorned and added lustre to that crown they now wear in heaven: the brightness whereof we justly praise God

for; and do best express our thanks, by aspiring after it in the way they have gone before us. Which may he give us grace to do, for his blessed Son's sake, the Captain of their and our salvation, Christ Jesus. To whom, &c.

The Fifth Day of November.

THE EPISTLE.

Rom. xiii. 1. The same with the Fourth Sunday after Epiph.

THE GOSPEL.

PARAPHRASE.

51. Upon the near approach of the season, which he knew was determined for his leaving the world, Jesus began his journey to the place where he was to suffer, with all the marks of undaunted resolution.

ST. LUKE IX. 51.

51. *AND it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,*

52. *And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him.*

53. *And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.*

54. *And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did.*

55. * You are not sensible how contrary so vindictive a zeal is

to the temper of that religion, which I am now forming you to;

56. And indeed to my example also; whose design of appearing in the

world, is not to do hurt to men, but good, even in their worldly interests and capacities.

55. *But he turned, and rebuked them, and said,* Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.*

56. *For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.*

COMMENT.

OF the separation between the Jews and the Samaritans, in matters of religion, the influence this had to obstruct their civil intercourse, and the extravagant heights to which their quarrels were carried,

Gosp. xiii. Sund.
after Trinity.

I have already had occasion to give my reader some account. The subject then before us, was a generous good man, whose behaviour to a Jew in distress proved him to have got above the common prejudices of his countrymen. Those very prejudices, whence that deportment to our blessed Lord proceeded, which are taken notice of in this day's gospel, as provoking the indignation of two apostles to a high degree. So high, that we find it rebuked here by their Master, as too fierce and revengeful in its nature, too horrid and destructive in its effects, to be allowed in any who call themselves his disciples, and consequently profess to make his doctrine and example the rule and standard of their temper, and their actions.

When we shall have considered, 1. The ground of that offence taken here by these Samaritans; 2. The occasion of the apostles proposal thereupon, and 3. The argument made use of by our Saviour for rejecting it; my reader will not only see this passage in its true light, but very easily account for the making it a part of the service, appointed for this day of joy and thanksgiving.

1. As to the *first* of these; it does by no means appear, that the inhabitants of Samaria were thus inhospitable at all times, and to all the Jews; indeed it seems much more probable, that there was something in the season, and something in the person too, which, now particularly, might dispose them so to be.

The evangelist is here relating, how our Lord left the parts of Galilee, which had, for two years

and an half of his ministry, been the chief scene of his miracles and preaching. He is now removing into Judea, with an intent to employ the six months next before his passion, in that country, where those greater dangers awaited him, which, at the passover following, ended in his apprehension and death. From the certain prospect hereof it is, that St. Luke is thought to have intimated his immoveable resolution and constancy, by that expression of Ver. 51. *stedfastly setting his face to go to Jerusalem.*

Now this journey is the same with that mentioned at the viith of St. John, when he followed his relations privately to the *feast of tabernacles*. The schismatics in Samaria had their solemn feasts likewise, though not exactly at the same times: and of that instituted in imitation of, but withal in opposition to, this particular feast of tabernacles, the Scriptures give an account, as old as the first breach made in the reign of Jeroboam. The travelling therefore through their country, with a declared purpose of solemnizing this festival at Jerusalem, was looked upon as an affront to their way of worship. For it argued our Lord's judgment in this case to be, that Jerusalem was the only place, where these feasts could be regularly celebrated; and consequently, that the keeping them in Mount Gerizzim and the temple there, was a presumptuous innovation, directly contrary to the will and law of God.

All this is the more observable, because our Lord did certainly pass this way at other times, and yet no notice is taken of the like refusals to entertain him. Nor do we find that his brethren, who at this time went upon the same occasion, were put to any difficulties. Very likely they were not: but the different character of the persons seem to have caused this different sort of treatment. The opinions and practices of common men might be thought not worth regard. But it

would be of mighty consequence, for a person so eminent as Jesus, to declare against them. And, since his going to worship at Jerusalem on this solemn occasion, would in all common acceptation bear this meaning: they contrived to prevent, as much as in them lay, the influences it was feared that supposed indignity might have, by revenging it with another of not *receiving him*. An expedient, very proper for the purpose they intended it should serve: because such refusal was a constructive disavowing of his authority, and a plain warning to all people that, what esteem soever others might have of this famed man, they themselves took him for no prophet.

Thus we may very well account for the Samaritans' churlishness upon the present occasion; though it should be allowed, as I see not why it may not, that our Lord himself might at another time, and that others did at the same time, find better quarter from them. Meanwhile these circumstances do not only explain the reasons of their rough behaviour, but help us toward a right apprehension of the

II. *Second* thing in order; the proposal made by those apostles, whose zeal was provoked by it. To make this they were encouraged by the example of Elias, whose action, here referred to, stands thus. He had foretold the speedy death of a wicked prince, and stopped the messengers, sent in contempt of the God of Israel, to consult an idol of the Philistines at Ekron. The king enraged sends an officer with fifty men, who had no more reverence for the true God, or his messenger, than their great master. They accost him indeed with the title of *man of God*, but that seems to be given him in mockery and scorn. For their design was to apprehend and carry him to Ahaziah; that he, and his mother Jezebel, might have the plea-

Luke ix. 54.

2 Kings i. 2—8.

Ver. 9.

sure of revenge, upon one, whose predictions had so often been a terror, and his preservations a disappointment, to that idolatrous and bloody family.

Ver. 10—12. The prophet, thus insulted, begged of God to assert his own honour, and by fire from heaven to consume those assaulters, as an evidence of his being in reality that *man of God*, which they in derision had styled him. His prayer was heard accordingly, both then, and a second time, upon an equal number; who, not dismayed with the fate of the first detachment, had the hardiness to follow with the same malicious purpose, and to accost Elijah in the same profane drollery. This was the event, upon which the two apostles ground their question, *Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?* Luke ix. 54.

A motion that speaks the highest veneration imaginable for their Master, and the most zealous concern for his honour. The affront was, in both cases, thus far alike, that each was an interpretative denial of a divine authority, delegated to the prophet, respectively concerned. The safety of our Lord's person was not attempted, as Elijah's had been; but the dignity of it was so far superior, as, they conceived, might justly expose any committers of any insolence against him, to a punishment equally severe and miraculous. And of his power, and the readiness of his Father to assert him against any contemners of his miracles and doctrine, they make little doubt, that, without any address of his own, they promised themselves the same success with Elias, provided they might have his leave to put up the same prayer. For they concluded, that God, who was so careful to vindicate his servant, would be much more jealous of the honour of his Son: that

Ver. 30—35. Son, to whom they had so lately seen that very servant pay homage, at his transfiguration in the mount.

Besides this well-meant zeal, countenanced by so great an example, there may yet more be alleged in excuse for these apostles. The Samaritans were confessedly heretics and schismatics; their whole worship was a manifest and most presumptuous violation of the divine law: this rejection of Christ was the utmost mark of their detestation of that law, and of him for observing it: the destruction, which they were supposed to deserve upon these accounts, James and John, though heated with indignation, did not undertake to be instruments and actors in; but only proposed to beg of God, that he would inflict it in such an extraordinary way, as might evidence his displeasure: this request to God they did not presume to make, till they had first consulted our Lord, concerning the fitness of it: and, upon his disliking it, they immediately acquiesced, and patiently took the rebuke of their ignorance and rash resentment.

But now, instead of all or any of these precautions, bold men shall take into their own hands that work of vengeance, which God in Scripture claims as his own peculiar; if they shall attempt the destruction of such as they causelessly brand with the odious imputations of schism and heresy; if, instead of waiting for a commission from Christ, they shall proceed in direct opposition to this and other declarations of his will, in matters of the like nature: if, *lastly*, for the effecting their barbarous designs, they shall enter into measures of treachery and cruelty: measures, not only unknown to Christianity, but breaking in upon all civil obligations, and a contradiction to all common humanity: how far the condition of such men would be distant from that of the apostles now before us, I leave the impartial reader to consider and judge.

One can hardly suppose indeed the power of prejudice itself to be so great, as to mislead men in the latter of these cases; who observe, that the former

(notwithstanding so many circumstances, which extenuate, and make it almost nothing, when compared with the other) is yet disallowed and re-proved, in the manner which comes next to be represented in my

III. *Third particular.* For this consists of the argument chosen by our Saviour, for rejecting the apostles proposal. *He turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.* This argument quite takes off the only colour urged by the apostles. For it imports, that Elias, great and eminent though he were in his day, is not yet a pattern to be followed throughout, in the *days of the Son of Man.* He lived under a dispensation of severity and terror; to which the avenging outrageous injuries, done to God's ministers, by very dreadful and immediate judgments was agreeable enough. But the gospel is a dispensation of compassion and love: an institution good to mankind, in all their interests and capacities. And in regard means must be constantly suited to their ends, nothing could be more incongruous and absurd, than to promote this by methods of rigour and revenge.

What Elias did, the event demonstrated to proceed from an extraordinary impulse of God's Spirit; what these disciples would have done, the disallowance of it as evidently proves to have come from a private instinct of their own; the operations of the Spirit tend now to beneficence and mercy. In uncommon emergencies that require it, God, it is true, hath not been wanting to exert his vindictive power. He asserted the authority of St. Peter, by the sudden death of Ananias and Sapphira; and of St. Paul, by smiting Elymas with blindness. But these are very rare and exempt cases. They must not be drawn into consequence and practice; because it is scarce pos-

sible, either that the like occasions should happen, or that the same assurances of acting in them by the dictates of the Holy Ghost, should be ever obtained again. The apostles, therefore, and the governors of the church, in the ordinary course of their ministry, and private Christians in their demeanour towards each other, are to follow such standing rules, as He, who best understood the temper and design, the interest and the honour of his own religion, hath set a copy of in his behaviour, and left directions for in his doctrine. And what measures his example and his precepts lead to, a very little reflection upon each may suffice to instruct us.

1. His example was in this kind the most perfect that had been, or ever will be set to the world. Nothing appeared in his temper and whole conversation but gentleness and sweetness. His instructions were delivered in the softest and simplest manner: the advantage of receiving, and the sin and danger of rejecting them, were proposed fairly and calmly, without any force, except that of argument: the result of all was an appeal to the reason and the consciences of men; such as left a liberty of choice, and did not labour to compel, but to persuade and win them over to their own good. When any unacceptable things were necessary to be spoken, his care to avoid all exasperations was evident, in the frequent recourse had to parables; a method the least offensive, and that which threw off all the invidious part of application upon the hearers own private reflections. When any severity of reproof, or sharpness of language, mingled with his discourses, these were the effect of charity and great tenderness: partly for awakening the guilty themselves into a sense of those provocations which extorted them, and partly for undeceiving poor well-meaning people, by a discovery of those prejudices and corruptions to which their too popular guides kept them in bondage. The numberless injuries

and affronts, with which he was followed, met usually with no other return, than removing (as here) to another place; withdrawing out of the way of his enemies: restraining their fury from the wickedness it designed, while he consulted the safety of his own person; nay, his last indignities, and torments, and death, gave proof of a meekness invincible, by praying and dying for his enemies and persecutors. And, which brings all home to the point we are upon, he was injured, affronted, hated, persecuted, scourged, and crucified; upon no other account, than that of thinking and teaching in matters of religion differently from those outrageous zealots, who dealt so inhumanly with him.

2. Such were the shining beauties of his life.

Gospel on All-Saints. And for his doctrines; we have lately observed, that the virtues,

which thus adorned his own practice, he began his divine sermon on the mount with recommending, as a rule and model for all his disciples, to form their character upon. The whole body indeed of the Christian precepts is calculated for universal benevolence, and mutual compassion for infirmities, misunderstandings, and misdemeanours. It is the glory and excellence of this religion to advance peace and love, to tie the bands of friendship closer and stronger, and to advance every disposition that can render society more easy and delightful, more useful and engaging. It enlarges our kindness to *those that are without*; corrects our disdain, and forbids all odious distinctions that pretend to countenance our uncharitableness or pride toward any who partake of the same human nature. It knits together *those that are within*, by titles and relations nearer and more endearing than any that either civil or sacred institutions had united men in before. All which deserve to be the more considered, because it is the unhappiness of these later ages, that the heats and animosities, which disturb our parts of the

world, are kindled and kept up, not between them that own Christ, and them that deny him; but between those that are agreed in *naming the name of Christ*; and yet, because they differ in the manner of doing it, will needs be rending, and tearing, and devouring one another. They all profess to know and serve their Lord: but if some refuse to resolve that knowledge into the dictates of an infallible chair, others curse and condemn them, and refuse to allow them not only the privileges of Christians, but even that common faith and fair treatment which belongs to them as men.

What a palpable contradiction are these violent proceedings to those rules, which command all followers of the meek and holy Jesus to *be kindly affectioned one towards another, to love as brethren, to be pitiful, to be courteous, to lay aside all bitterness and wrath, to shew forth out of a good conversation their works with meekness of wisdom; to bear the infirmities of the weak; not to fight or strive, but to be gentle towards all men, patient, in meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves?* How different a conduct is this, from that enjoined by Christ to his apostles, that when *one city persecuted them, they should flee to another?* Who, if their doctrines were not entertained, had no more to do, than to warn the refractory of their danger, and quietly to withdraw. How much otherwise did he himself act in the case now before us? who retired, as a Romish expositor honestly remarks, *to teach the propagators of his gospel, how they ought to behave themselves, when any where repulsed: namely, to take it patiently, and go off some-whither else; and, treading in their Lord's steps, to keep their temper, as becometh saints.*

Rom. xii. 10.

1 Pet. iii. 8.

Ephes. iv. 31.

Jam. iii. 13.

Rom. xv. 1.

2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.

Matt. x. 23.

Luke x. 8—11.

Lucas Brugens.

Had the modern sons of zeal imitated this

pattern, they had saved themselves the reproach of this day's disappointment, and their innocent brethren the just apprehensions, what may be the consequences of a restless principle, which could submit to a design, blacker than can be paralleled in story, and, which watches all opportunities to annoy, embroil, and overturn a truly primitive church. Nay, they had prevented a great deal of reproach, which ignorant and unwary people will naturally cast upon Christianity itself. For how vain must such think the glory it assumes, of making the *wolf and the lamb lie down together*; when they see those, who call themselves only *lambs* of Christ, in a pretended zeal for this very religion, acting the part of treacherous and ravenous *wolves*?

God in his mercy touch the hearts of all, who profess his gospel, with a due sense and detestation of such absurd wickedness; that his name and truth may no longer be blasphemed by the enemies of his Son; that there may no longer be envying or strife, *hurting or destroying, in all his holy Mountain*; but, that the Spirit of knowledge, and meekness, and love, may reign there, and fill the whole earth with the fruits of righteousness and peace.

But if so great a blessing cannot be yet obtained, may the same good God still prove himself our God, by preserving this church and nation, both from partaking in the sins, and suffering by the attempts of our hitherto implacable adversaries. And may we never either forget, or neglect to improve as we ought, the signal mercies of this auspicious day. *For which, to our watchful and most mighty Protector, be ascribed by us, and our posterity, honour and praise, adoration and thanksgiving, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*The Thirtieth Day of January.—King Charles's
Martyrdom.*

THE EPISTLE.

I PETER ii. 13—22.

See Epist. for II. and
III. Sundays after Easter.

THE GOSPEL.

ST. MATT. xxi. 33.

33. **T**HERE was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a wine-press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country.

See the Comment.

34. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

35. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

36. Again, he sent other servants, more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.

37. But, last of all, he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.

38. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir, come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

39. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

40. When the Lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

41. They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

COMMENT.

THE use, proper to be now made of this parable, is, *first*, To explain it so far as shall be neces-

sary; *secondly*, To observe the ends our Lord designed it for; and, *lastly*, To shew, how pertinent a subject it makes for our meditations upon this day.

1. I know not, whether there be in Scripture any allegory more frequent, or more significant, than that, which resembles the church of God to a vine, and a vineyard. Some reasons, which might prefer

this before other comparisons, have
 Gosp. St. Mark's been touched upon already. But for
 Day. our Saviour's use of it here, we need

look no farther than this one; that the meaning of such allusions must needs be obvious and easy, to persons daily conversant in the law and the prophets. Accordingly, we find the application ready made; and that no doubt remained among the audience, either concerning the matter of the reproofs couched in this parable, or the persons to whom those reproofs did of right belong.

They presently apprehended the *vineyard* here to
 Ver. 33. signify the Jewish people, considered in
 their spiritual capacity: the *householder*,
 who *planted* and *hedged it about*, to be Almighty
 God: who had blessed them with the communica-
 tions of his revealed will, made this distinction be-
 tween them and the world in common, and by laws
 and ordinances peculiar to themselves, had inclosed
 them as his own possession. The *wine-press*, and
tower, and other suitable conveniences, were no less
 natural representations of all the advantages and op-
 portunities, afforded them for serving him accept-
 ably: and the *letting this vineyard out to husband-*
men, while *himself went into a far country*, imported
 the care of them committed to their governors and
 instructors; by the ordinary course of whose minis-
 try they were to be taught and kept in their duty;
 without expecting such extraordinary marks of
 God's constant presence and immediate direction,
 as appeared at his first forming them into a church.
 It was therefore at the hands of these rulers and

teachers, that the householder expected the fruits ; because the barrenness of a soil so kindly, and so well prepared, could proceed only from their negligence to cultivate it ; and they, in the very nature of their post, were accountable for the product to the Lord of the fee. Meanwhile, these fruits are no other than returns of duty, proportioned to the advantages of knowing and performing it : an awful regard to their laws ; a readiness to repent of their faults and to rectify their errors, when warned of them ; and a sincere desire to improve under any more perfect discoveries of the divine will, which should hereafter be made to them.

Accordingly at the season proper to expect they should be answered, this householder sent servants to make his demands. The virtues and good effects of so gracious a dispensation not appearing, God commissioned his prophets to reprove, exhort and quicken, by denunciations of vengeance and promises of reward, as men should reject or be reformed by their messages : messages, which principally concerned the husbandmen ; because through their carelessness or corruption it was, that *this vineyard brought forth wild grapes: i. e.* that the people degenerated into idolatry and superstition, neglected the substance and took up with the form of godliness, let go the law of their God, and held fast the tradition of their elders.

These servants got little or nothing for their Master, and suffered severely themselves for so unacceptable a message. The prophets, from time to time, (for that's the meaning of the errands so often repeated) instead of making any good impression, were the object of these rulers scorn and hatred. The vices of the people were now grown profitable ; the more these were corrupted, the more they were at the devotion of their masters : and therefore these great men soon rid their hands

Ver. 34.

Ver. 35, 36.

Comp. Mark xii.
7. with Luke xxi.
10, 11.

of the prophets, as often as any of them attempted to preach a return to God, and to the weightier matters of the law: because this was, by consequence, a breaking the yoke of bondage to those who had debauched the manners, purely to get an absolute dominion over the fortunes and persons of their charge.

Ver. 37. After several ineffectual dispatches by messengers of meaner quality, the Lord of the vineyard resolves upon sending his son. This he does from a presumption, that his character would not fail to command respect, and another sort of reception. Hereby we understand God's decree to send his blessed Son, the Messiah; but with this caution, that those words, *They will reverence my son*, (which, in their literal sense, comport very well with the *householder*) be not, with regard to Almighty God, wrested to a sense, implying any ignorance of the event, which this mission afterwards had. He knew and clearly foresaw every circumstance of that contumelious treatment, which his Son found from the husbandmen: he sent him to be crucified and slain by their wicked hands: but by this expression (necessary to preserve the decorum of a parable, but not to be too nicely insisted on in the application) God condescends to be represented as one of us; who usually say those things will be done, which there is all the reason in the world to expect should be done. Or, as St. Chrysostom, he giveth this information, that, notwithstanding any prescience of his, the actions of men, which bring to pass events before-determined by his Providence, are the actors own choice; and that all the guilt or virtue of them, will be placed to their account.

In either of these senses, that passage will consist
Ver. 38. with the deportment of those husbandmen, who immediately conspired the murder of the *heir*, for that very reason, because he was the heir, and that they might thenceforth *seize on his inheritance*. The priests and rulers were sensible,

that none could ever come to them with clearer marks of a divine authority, none more endanger their power and popularity, than the Messiah, Jesus Christ; and therefore, after having long laboured in vain to fix upon him the reproaches of blasphemer, impostor, and mover of sedition; to discredit him, sometimes with one, sometimes with another set of men: they found means to have that innocent and excellent person put to a cruel and ignominious death; and triumphed in that expedient, as an effectual security, for the future exercise of their avarice and ambition, without rebuke or control. Ver. 39.

But see the consequence. The ingratitude and insolence of the husbandmen here represented, constrained the hearers to acknowledge it a most probable and fit thing, for the Lord of the vineyard to dispossess and destroy these wretches; and to provide himself with other husbandmen, more true to their trust, and more sensible of the honour of having it reposed in them. This image, *that is*, of what the Jewish rulers had done, and were about to do, manifests the justice of that punishment which they thus drew upon themselves and their whole nation; when God turned those very measures to their destruction, upon which they chiefly depended for their safety, and the establishment of their usurped dominion over the people's consciences. For he utterly destroyed their city, dispersed their people, and carried his gospel to the gentiles, whose spirit and behaviour proved them more worthy objects of this unexpected mercy. Ver. 40, 41.

2. After so large an explanation of the parable itself, there will need the less to be added upon my *second* head. For by this time I take it to be very evident, that our blessed Lord's design in it was twofold: *first*, To detect the wickedness of the persons concerned in it; and, *secondly*, To foretel the

punishment of that wickedness. A little reflection upon each of these particulars is necessary.

1. The wickedness here mentioned, is withholding the fruits, and abusing the messengers sent to demand them: that is, hindering, or not promoting as they ought, obedience to God and his laws; and persecuting and murdering the prophets and Christ himself, who came to purge out the leaven of their corruptions, and to teach them the way of life more perfectly. But this is an accusation too general, to give us a sufficient character of these men; and therefore it may be proper, from some other passages, to take a more distinct view, *first*, of the vicious dispositions which led them to, and confirmed them in, this crime; and *afterwards*, of the steps, by which they proceeded in it.

Now we find our Lord, in the *twenty-third* of this gospel, and some other passages in the evangelists, charging them home with covetousness and extortion, pride and envy, insatiable thirst of dominion, and insupportable tyranny in the use of it: but, above all, of the vilest and most impudent hypocrisy; by which all their vices passed upon the people, and religion was made the tool of their most villainous designs. Hence they are compared to *whited sepulchres*; said to make *clean the outside of the cup and platter, but within to be full of extortion and excess*: they *enlarged their fringes and phylacteries*, for the sake of gaining more respect at *feasts, the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets*: and the length of their prayers was a *pretence, for devouring widows' houses* with a better grace. When by this mask of sanctity they had established their authority with the common people, they *bound upon them heavy burthens, which themselves would not move with one of their fingers*; they *kept from them the key of knowledge*, and *shut up the kingdom of heaven*; for they neither

xxiii. 5.

6, 7.

14.

25.

27.

Ver. 13.

went in themselves, nor would they suffer them that were entering to go in. To be short, *they compassed sea and land to make though but one proselyte*; and the result of all this wicked industry, was the poisoning him with their own bitter zeal, and *rendering him twofold more the child of hell than themselves*; that is, more implacably averse to the truth, and to all who professed obedience to our blessed Master.

Thus did those treacherous husbandmen, instead of rendering, obstruct the fruits, which the vineyard would otherwise have yielded. And for a better security to their own varnish of holiness, they blackened the messengers of their great Master, and made his Son in particular a monster of impiety, in the eyes of all who are content to see through glasses of their holding. They traduced his whole behaviour; laid snares for him in common conversation; the respects at any time shewed him, were made to serve some treacherous design; if asked to eat with them, the use of that civility was to *catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him*; if complimented with a *Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth*; it is by them, who make this unusual address, in pursuance of a consultation *how they might entangle him in his talk*. At other times they load his doctrine with imposture and blasphemy; his actions and discourse with frenzy and possession; and impute his miracles to a collusion with the devil: in all which instances of calumny and malice, their success with the populace was such, that notwithstanding the sensible daily demonstrations of his power and goodness, notwithstanding the devout and unanimous acknowledgments of mission and Messiahship, (recorded in this very chapter, and always freely made, when from under the influence of their imperious guides) this

Ver. 15.

Luke xi. 54.

Matt. xxii. 15, 16.

Matt. xxi. 8, 9.

most innocent, most beneficent Person, purely for being the heir (the rightful demander of the fruits, and most dangerous obstructor of these usurped and innovating powers) was, by the envy of the rulers, and the implicit concurrence of the stupid multitudes, treated with the utmost indignity; arraigned and tried as a malefactor; sentenced to death, as a seducer, seditious person, and traitor, and publicly executed as a common slave. So manifestly did the event prove at last, that, what popular and specious pretences soever their wickedness might cover itself with, yet the true fruits of the vineyard were no part of their care: but the thought and intent, that lay always at their hearts, was, *Come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.*

2. The other part of our Lord's design in this parable was, I said, to foretel the punishment of the persons concerned in it. Now, that hath been already observed to consist, in dispersing the Jewish people, breaking their polity, and carrying the gospel to the Gentiles. Concerning which I only make these two remarks, and leave the rest to my reader's application.

1. The *first* is, That the very calamity, which the killing of our blessed Saviour was urged as a necessary expedient against, became the consequence of this wicked murder. *If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come, and take away our place and nation.* This was the popular argument for infusing fears and jealousies: and the inference from these, how groundless soever the entertaining of them were, naturally follows, *It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.* But God, whose over-ruling providence frequently traps the *ungodly in the work of his own hands*, ordained that very coming of the Romans, in revenge for

John xi. 48.

Ver. 50.

the innocent blood of his Son. So wretchedly is human policy mistaken, when contriving to secure past wickednesses by subsequent and greater : and so certainly is the ruin of any person or faction portended, when abandoned to such outrageous villainies, as, by *filling up the measure of their iniquities*, preclude them at once from the pardon of God, and from the countenance and compassion of every sober and good man.

2. My other remark concerns the extent of that punishment : which, far from being confined to the immediate actors or contrivers of this murder of God's anointed, involved the whole nation of that age, and hath shed its venom upon the posterity of the Jews, in all succeeding generations, to this very day. So diffusive is the mischief of evil, when done upon a pretence that *good may come* : and so cautious ought the men of honest meaning to be, how they give in to the measures of popular and intriguing persons ; who, when they cry loudest for the public and the people, have frequently confounded both, by irregular methods, meant only to promote a private or a party advantage.

I forbear any tedious enlargement on the occasion of this solemnity, because the parallel lies so fair in view, that no impartial reader can miss it.

The dispositions and designs of our late demagogues, prove the race of the Jewish pharisees far from being extinct with their persons. The measures by them taken, and the horror of this day's blood, make it vain to say, *If they had lived in the days of those their fathers*, that *they would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets*.

The just fate of our regicides, and the dismal confusions consequent to so black a crime, should be an effectual warning, how vain an attempt it is, to reform supposed or real abuses in government, by treason or rebellion.

And the extent of the punishment predicted in

this parable, justifies our lamenting the sin of so guilty a day; and our deprecating the judgment of him, *by whom kings rule*, at this, or yet a much greater distance, from a fact, which, we have reason to fear, may have provoked a long succession of them. And if we act sincerely in these humiliations, we shall be very jealous of hearkening to the insinuations of those pretended patriots, who, by extenuating this horrid act, and vindicating the steps that led to it, warn us to look upon them, as dangerous subverters of government in general, and enemies by principle (if they be men of any principle) to the present happy constitution of this particular church and state.

The Twenty-ninth of May.

THE EPISTLE.

1 PETER ii. 11—17.

The same with the iii. *Sund.* after *Easter*.

THE GOSPEL.

ST. MATT. xxii. 16—22.

See the Comment.

16. **A**ND they sent out unto him their disciples, with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man, for thou regardest not the person of men.

17. Tell us, therefore, what thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?

18. But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?

19. Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.

20. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?

21. They say unto him Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar

the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

22. *When they had heard these words they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.*

COMMENT.

THE scripture last insisted on is said, in the chapter next before, to have provoked the pharisees so highly, that they deliberated upon methods, proper for destroying so bold a rebuker as Jesus. The reverence and esteem, justly paid him by the people, rendered open violence as an impracticable and too dangerous expedient.

What therefore they durst not attempt by force, they hope to compass by subtilty. And, considering how free he was in delivering his opinion, they lay a snare to *entangle him in his talk*; (ver. 15.) and had ordered the matter so, as to fancy themselves sure of him. For the more perfect understanding of which wicked project, and of the wisdom of our Lord's evading it, it may not be amiss to trace this matter a little higher, and observe the whole intrigue. Now this will best appear by considering (1.) The quality of the persons sent to attack him; (2.) The state of the question they propounded; And (3.) The occasion of their pretended doubt in it.

1. The persons, who were to undertake our Saviour upon this occasion, are said to be disciples of the pharisees, with the Herodians. By the latter of which are commonly, and most probably, supposed to be meant partisans and favourers of Herod. But what their principle was, as to the matter now in hand, it is not so generally agreed. Some think them enemies to the Roman government; and, that they only watched a favourable opportunity of making Herod's family absolute. Others think them entirely in the interest of the emperor, as Herod himself now was: for, having by his indul-

gence been advanced to the regal state, he acted for and under him, in collecting the customs and public duties. This latter opinion, as it is more commonly entertained, so it is more agreeable to the pharisees design. For had the persons sent here been all of one sentiment, Christ might very easily have satisfied them all. But the address and cunning of the pharisees, seems to have lain chiefly in the management of their messengers. For, by sending men of different judgments, they made it impossible to content both parties: and, what resolution soever he gave, the one, or the other sort, would not fail to take advantage of his answer.

2. How reasonable it was for them to expect this, will presently appear from a state of the question truly taken, which seems to be thus. The government of the Jews had fallen into the hands of the Maccabees; and, in succession, to one of them named Alexander; he left two sons, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus. The younger of these made war upon the elder, and assumed to himself the kingdom. Hyrcanus and his faction, who were not able to resist him, called in the assistance of the Romans. Pompey, at their request, besieges Jerusalem, and had the gates surrendered to him by Hyrcanus's party. But Aristobulus and his adherents fought it out, till at last they were vanquished and overpowered. The Romans, hereupon, put Hyrcanus in the possession of the government; yet so, as to hold it by their favour and permission. This proceeding created great and lasting dissensions among the Jews: some submitting to the Roman power, as thinking they had a fair title, both by conquest and surrender: others objecting, that the surrender was made by a party only, and not the whole body of the people; *that* it was not conquest, but treachery, which brought Jerusalem to their mercy; and consequently, that they were usurpers; and

Hyrcanus and his followers, betrayers of their country. Now, according to what was said before, the Herodians appear to have been for the Roman power, and the pharisees against it. And, since the paying of tribute was, according to their sense, an acknowledgment of the power, this difficulty presses any positive answer to the question. Since, in determining for the payment, Christ must give offence to the pharisees, and in effect renounce those liberties and privileges, which some Jewish doctors insisted upon : and in pronouncing against it, he was sure to incur the Herodians displeasure, and render himself obnoxious to the jurisdiction of the civil sword.

3. That which added yet more to their doubt in this matter, was what Josephus and Eusebius relate, concerning Judas the Gaulonite. He, about the time of the taxation, (in which St. Luke says our Saviour was born,) disquieted the minds of many, and represented the decree of Augustus, as a mark of infamy and servitude, which ought not to be borne. This man is said to have instituted a particular sect ; one of whose tenets was, that no Jew ought to pay tribute ; or to acknowledge any sovereign lord, but God only : that they were his peculiar people, and therefore bound to maintain their liberty ; especially against profane and uncircumcised pretenders, such as the Roman emperors were. So that the paying of tribute to Cæsar, was not at this time the question of mere curiosity, but a matter of moment, with regard to practice ; such as had been warmly disputed, and engaged many on both sides. Nor was it a point of mere bravery, in the esteem of the pharisees, and others of that party, but a scruple of conscience, and a debate of religion, whether this tribute should be paid or no. No, nor yet was this controversy, about submitting to foreign governors, a point first started by Judas, but seems to have been much more ancient ; and

some footsteps of it to be found among, not the Maccabees only, but even those Jews, who so obstinately refused to submit to the Chaldeans, when they besieged Jerusalem.

For further clearing of this matter, I observe, that the tribute-money here does by no means appear to be the same with that, which our Saviour paid for himself and Peter at Capernaum. That was the half shekel, which every man above twenty years old paid to the use of the temple; and which, though first ordained by God at building the tabernacle, (Exod. xxx. 13.) yet did not cease with it, but continued to be yearly collected till the time of Vespasian: and he, Josephus says, transferred it, from the service of the temple at Jerusalem, to that of the capitol of Rome. Now the consequence of this is, that the pharisees might have some pretence to quarrel with census, or tribute-money here; though they without any difficulty paid that, mentioned in the *seventeenth* of this gospel. Our Saviour's submitting to that, would not therefore prejudice him in favour of this: because that was not a tribute to Cæsar, nor of his imposing; but a sum levied for religious uses, and of a date as ancient as Moses. That belonged to them as Jews, and the people of God; this burden spoke them a conquered nation, and under the yoke of the Romans. This therefore was looked upon as a reflection upon that honour and liberty of their country, which they thought it even religious to assert, and, as much as in them lay, to preserve from violence.

The true state of the question being thus explained, let us now proceed to consider, with what address and dexterity our blessed Saviour returned his answer. Which, the *two and twentieth* verse tells us, was so managed, that his enemies, to their great astonishment, found their malicious designs utterly disappointed, and despaired of exposing him

to the just censure of either of the opposite parties. To this purpose he first gives them to understand, that their treachery and falsehood were not hid from his discerning eye; that the formal commendation they gave of his sincerity and courage in declaring the truth, he saw through; and was well aware, that they sought not their own satisfaction, but his mischief. *Jesus, perceiving their wickedness, said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute-money. And they brought unto him a penny. A penny! that is, a Roman coin, current at that time among them in trade; and such as the census, or poll-tax, now under deliberation, was wont to be paid in. Still he determines nothing; but, in marvellous prudence, draws them on by concessions out of their own mouths. He saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar, the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God, the things that are God's.* That is, this signature and stamp does, by our own acknowledgment, speak the money to be Cæsar's: so that, in demanding a part of it back again, he asks for his own. This is not therefore *to give*, so properly as *to restore*; and whatsoever any person hath a title to, you are obliged to render him. You will do well therefore rightly to consider the obligations you lie under, and to discharge them faithfully, in their several kinds; that both your earthly and heavenly King may have what belongs to each, and neither of them be defrauded, upon pretence of not being just to the other.

Which way this answer inclined was sufficiently plain; to any that would impartially consider it. But the terms are so cautious and general, that his accusers took a liberty of interpreting them so, as from hence to form a charge against him before Pilate. For it is most likely they referred to this

very passage, in those words, Luke xxiii. 2. *We have found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar.* And this sense they then fastened upon the place, notwithstanding the natural and common acceptation of it be directly contrary. And indeed the force of it seems to lie principally in these *three* particulars :

First, That as God had his rights, so had Cæsar likewise his.

Secondly, How Cæsar's right evidenced itself, and whence it was to be gathered.

Thirdly, That these rights are distinct. They do not, in their own nature interfere ; and therefore men must take care not to confound them, but discharge their debt and duty to both. In all which I would fain hope it needless to add, that what this passage intends of Cæsar in particular, must in proportion be understood of all kings and civil governors in general.

1. *First*, We are plainly taught from hence, that as God had his right, so had Cæsar also his. "That God hath a right over us and all ours, is a truth so manifest, that every one, who considers him as a Creator, and himself as a creature, cannot any longer dispute it. For natural reason will draw this inference, that he, who is the Maker, must of necessity be the Lord and proprietor of all things. Nor was there any occasion of proving this to the pharisees ; since the very taking of God's right for granted, and understanding that in too strict a sense, was the very foundation of their refusing tribute to Cæsar. They imagined his property in them so incommunicable, that no person upon earth, who was not in the true religion, could have a just pretence to challenge any part of what was theirs. For we are to observe, that the marks of submission refused to Cæsar, the Jews were not so weak, or so capricious, as to deny to a king of their own country and their own persuasion. They allowed such to rule

from and under God ; but since he had singled this people out from the whole world, and distinguished them by the knowledge of himself and the truth, they could not suffer themselves to think, that a stranger to the true faith could ever have this trust committed to him by God. When their fortune therefore reduced them to live under any such, they thought their power usurpation, and themselves at liberty to dispense with the acknowledgments of their obedience to them. Thus what was most willingly paid to a David, or a Josiah, or a Judas the Maccabee, or to their own high-priests, when the administration of the civil government was lodged in them, the same was disputed, and by many thought unlawful to be paid to Cæsar. Notwithstanding all which, our Saviour, having from their own confession extorted thus much, that the money they then used bore the image of Cæsar, grounds his rule here upon that, and argues in effect thus : if the coin you use be confessedly Cæsars, then somewhat you acknowledge is his. Now whatever is so, must be rendered to him ; whether in point of tribute, or in any other instance of the pre-eminences and rights due to sovereignty.

That government itself is the institution and ordinance of God, St. Paul hath assured us most expressly in the thirteenth to the Romans ; where he makes this an argument, for every *soul's being subject to the higher powers ; because there is no power but of God, and the powers that be are ordained of God.* And reason indeed will tell us, that this argument alone can bear the weight, laid upon it there by the apostle. For no other can oblige all souls to subjection, but he only, whose all souls are. And whatever convenience men might find in submitting, yet, unless rulers were *God's* ministers, there could never be any lasting and necessary tie of obedience. Upon any other foot, people might be subject for interest ; but their being *appointed of*

God is the only consideration that can engage us to be subject for *conscience sake*. Because God only can bind, and is lord of the conscience: for conscience can of right submit to no commands but his, as they are issued, either immediately from himself, or else from those that act and hold under him.

So much therefore as God hath given to governors, so much, and no more, is their due. And we cannot suppose, that so wise a being would institute a thing of such consequence to the world, as government is, without appropriating to it all those perquisites, which are needful to its maintenance and support. Whatever then appears of necessity to this purpose, all that we may fairly conclude belongs to them, who are invested with it. For example:—Men, it is evident, must be restrained from rapine, and violence, and fraud, and whatsoever else their own partial and extravagant desires would be apt to put them upon, to the prejudice of peace, society, and order. But a bare sense of duty, is not sufficient to render any laws of justice and equity effectual. Consequently, some enforcement must unavoidably be given to these laws; such as may prove a terror to offenders, by mulcts, and punishments, and bodily pains, and make men honest in their own defence. Now the power of executing and inflicting these, is what we commonly call the civil sword: a power so essential to the good of mankind, that no regular society hath ever been without it. And accordingly the apostle reckons this, as one of the particular appointments of God; *he is the minister of God to thee for good; but, if thou do that which is evil, be afraid, for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil*, ver. 4.

The public necessities of the people are, or ought to be, their governor's chief care: and a care they

are so great, as to devour his time and his rest. The defending them from insults and invasions from abroad; the keeping them composed and easy, and dispensing justice at home; these are matters of vast consequence, and trouble, and expense. Now, in regard the benefit of these is public, it is very reasonable the public should sustain and provide for the charge of their own security. And this comes home to the case before us. The same St. Paul urges the commission of God, and the equity of bearing this part of the burden too. For, since we are the object of their constant care, we ought to supply, nay to reward that care. Ver. 6. *For this cause pay ye tribute also, for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.* The same is to be said of fear and reverence, and due respect: all which conduce, and indeed are needful, to the defence and security of our governors. And they are therefore summed up together briefly in the seventh verse, *Render therefore to all their dues. Tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.*

Once more :—Because it is not possible for the greatest human prudence to make laws so perfect as shall provide against every inconveniency, and suit the circumstances of every particular person within its jurisdiction; and since those laws, when wisely made, yet cannot be always so nicely administered, but that some personal hardships will follow upon the execution of them, it is also necessary to tie up the hands of froward and angry men from revenge, and seditious insurrections, upon such provocations. Hence, therefore, they are called upon to consider whose yoke it is they wear; and how guilty those false pretenders to liberty are, who peevishly kick, or cast it off, every time it pinches them; for no throne can be stable, no prince secure, no society durable, upon those terms. The con-

trary methods of meekness, and patience, and quiet submission, and enduring private wrongs and oppressions, rather than to destroy the public peace and order settled by God, are therefore strictly pressed at the *second* verse of that chapter, under the severest penalties. *Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; but they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation.*

In the meanwhile, when the gift and appointment of God are so often mentioned, this is not to be interpreted of any miraculous or personal designation from above; for though there be some instances of this kind among Jews, yet they were an exception to all mankind besides. That the original causes of politic societies, were the confusions which arose from multiplied families, and numerous branches; the corruption of nature, which incited men to injure, and defraud; and spoil one another; and the consent of submitting to one common head, who should govern and judge between them, though it hath never yet been fully proved, might however be granted, without allowing those wild consequences, for the sake whereof so many popular modellers of government are fond of laying its foundation there; for, even this way, it is most probable, that kingly government was the first of all others, as nearest resembling that domestic and paternal one which, from the increase and irregularity of men, was become useless and insufficient. The difference of places, and tempers, and other circumstances in the people; the abuse of power to tyranny and insufferable oppression; the decay and failure of families, and other such considerations, wherein the prince is concerned, seem to have been the causes why, in process of time, neither all parts of the world had the same form of government, nor the same countries always continued in the same. But still, in all these cases, where men are supposed to have parted with their original liberty at first; where they came upon

terms for their better safety, and more equal distribution of justice afterwards; where they have devised more convenient constitutions, those several constitutions are God's ordinances. Their wholesome laws have his sanction; he bestows that power over their lives and persons which themselves never had; he decrees how, and by whom his own world shall be ruled, but he uses men as his instruments in executing this decree. Whether men, therefore, are ruled by one or by many, still it is God that rules them. Whether they who rule attain the government by lineal descent, or by popular election, or by conquest, or by surrender, or by compact and treaty, still it is God that gives it; and the several constitutions of several countries, the victories, and successes, and events, which his providence affords, are but so many several ways of giving it. Thus we are positively told in Scripture, that *he setteth up one, and pulleth down another; that he ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will; that he changeth the times and the seasons, he removeth kings and setteth up kings; that for the transgression of a land the princes thereof are many, and strangers are made to have dominion over them*—and the like. So it was frequently with the Jews; so it was, particularly at this very time, in the case of Cæsar, whose right to receive tribute was the question now depending; and it is of some importance to observe what my

Psalm lxxv. 7.

Dan. ii. 21.

iv. 25.

Prov. xxviii. 2.

Ezek. xi. 9.

xxviii. 7.

2. *Second* particular proposes: which is, How Cæsar's right to some things among the Jews evidences itself to us; and whence we may gather it, according to our Saviour's reasoning.

Now, for the asserting of this, he goes not about to unravel all the niceties of Cæsar's title, either to the empire of Rome, or to that over Judea. He disputes not the invitation of Hyrcanus, the sedition made by his faction, or the conquest of Aristobulus

and his followers, who kept the city as long as they could, and fought it out against Pompey's army; and yet he knew all these might be objected by dissenting persons of the Pharisees party. But all the foundation he thought necessary to proceed upon; is this, of Cæsar's image and superscription upon the current coin of the country; and the main stress and strength of that argument, so far as I apprehend it, lies in this.

Mankind, when they cemented into societies, soon found the necessity of traffic with one another, that so each might be furnished with what he had not within himself. This was at first carried on by way of truck and bartering of goods; but, because it was not easy to fix a valuable consideration upon commodities, which would be sure to rise and fall in exchange, according as the person dealt with had more or less occasion for them; upon this, and some other accounts, they found it convenient to pitch upon a common standard, which should answer all things, and that is, what we call money. Now, since even this was liable to deceit, by mixing, adulterating, and counterfeiting, or by otherwise diminishing the metal, it was farther contrived, that some certain marks should be impressed upon it, whereby every man might know, that he was not imposed upon, in the worth and the quantity, of what he received. And because this testimony was of great and public consequence, nothing less than the public faith was thought a sufficient assurance. Hence, generally speaking, the supreme governor hath always been entrusted with the valuation and coinage of money. Hence the present ruler's impress hath been fixed upon it; and does, as it were, speak it to be worth what it pretends to. Hence, without some notorious defect, the subjects, within their respective dominions, are not only content, but bound, to accept it as such, in payments. Hence, *lastly*, the embasing, diminishing, or coun-

terfeiting, of such money, hath been very justly punished, by most laws, with great severities, and by ours with death : it being construed treason, thus to abuse the stamp, and usurp a prerogative peculiar to the chief magistrate. * Since then the case of coin was thus in Judea ; since the Jews accepted and trafficed with Cæsar's money, and held it current in all payments with them ; nay since, upon some occasions, they were obliged to use this, and the Jewish shekels would not pass (as in that of their tribute particularly) ; this was a constructive acknowledg^ment of Cæsar's being in possession of them, and that he was their supreme lord at that time : besides, he indulged them the exercise of their religion, and the enjoyment of their civil rights ; he fought their battles, and protected them against the common enemy, the Arabians, and Parthians, and the like. And therefore, as well in consideration of the benefits they received from him, as because he was, (by the providence of God, which in a peculiar manner disposes of kingdoms,) their sovereign at that time, something was here declared to be his due ; that is, the tribute, and such other acknowledgments, as belong to the state and dignity of that post. Thus our Saviour then advised the Jews ; thus we are told the primitive Christians behaved themselves ; and, if I am mistaken, either in matter of fact, or in the reason of the thing, I will shew, that I err at least after the authority of judicious and excellent persons. To which end, my reader hath two observations upon this passage in the margin ; and with them, the close of my second particular. † *This law we plainly see the an-*

* Quemadmodum Cæsaris nummum esse Imago Cæsaris docebat, ita potestatem ejus, et quid illi deberetur, nummus cum imagine præfractos, neque minus tamen servientes, vel docebat, vel docere debuerat. *Heinsii Exercitat. in ver. 19.*

† *Grot. in V. 16.* Atque hanc legem videmus sibi præscripsisse

*cient Christians did set to themselves, to pay faith and allegiance to any person whatsoever in possession of the government ; and not to take any party, or person; who, under specious pretences, were for making alterations. And upon the 20th verse ; *The very money, which had its valuation from Cæsar's edict, and carried his face and name upon it, was an evidence, that Cæsar was at that time actually possessed of the supreme power over Judea ; and that the Jews, who used that money, acknowledged so much. It might indeed be objected, that the Romans ruled over the Jews, and Cæsar over the Romans ; in fact, but that they had no right to do so. But Christ shews, that this objection signifies nothing to the matter in hand. For, since peace cannot be secured without forces, nor forces had without pay, nor pay without taxes or tribute ; it follows, that tribute ought to be paid to the person actually governing, so long as he continues to govern ; in consideration of the common safety and protection, which are secured by the present possessor of the government, whoever that possessor be.*

I am sensible, what hath been objected to fix such a meaning in our blessed Lord ; and how injurious a doctrine it is represented to rightful princes, in distress from rebellious and usurping powers. But waving other arguments for the reasonableness of

Christianos veteres, ut cuivis imperium nacto, fidem atque obedientiam præstarent, neque ulli sub speciosis nominibus res novanti accederent.

* Ipse igitur nummus pretium habens ex edicto Cæsaris, Cæsarisque nomen et vultum præferens, testabatur Cæsarem summum in Judæam Imperium re ipsa obtinere, idque à Judæis nummo illo utentibus agnoscî. Objici poterat, ipso quidem facto Romanos Judæis, et Cæsarem Romanis imperasse, at nullo jure. Sed Christus ostendit, hoc ad propositam quæstionem nihil pertinere. Nam, cum nec quies gentium sine armis, nec arma sine stipendiis, nec stipendia sine tributis haberi possint ; sequitur, ei, qui imperat, tantisper dum imperat, pendenda tributa ; ut pretium communis tutelæ, quam præstat nobis, quisquis est publici Imperii possessor.

thus understanding and inferring from this passage, it shall suffice to say at present : that, supposing subjects to act conscientiously, and upon the principles here laid down, no rightful governor can ever be dispossessed. And sure, it were a most unequal reasoning, to charge upon the interpretation of any scripture those hardships, which can never happen, till men have acted in direct opposition to the text so interpreted.

III. I shall detain my reader very little upon the third observation, That these rights of God and Cæsar are distinct. There is a debt of duty to both, and the discharge of each is enjoined by our Lord; when to *Render therefore unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's*, he adds, *And unto God the things that are God's*. The same reason indeed enforces both, for we have God's image and superscription too. He hath stamped his own character and likeness upon our souls, and reserved to himself the property of these. Whatever claim our governors may have to the temporal and outward possessions, the liberties, the estates, the bodies of their subjects, they derive it from above. But the original Lord of all we have, or are, hath not communicated a power over our minds; nor could they, in the nature of the thing, lie under any jurisdiction, but his own. Hence 'tis our blessed Lord's advice, *not to fear men, who, after they have killed the body, have no more that they can do; but to serve and fear him, who, after he hath killed can destroy both body and soul in hell*. And he esteems himself well served, with regard to the matter now before us, when we pay all fidelity and obedience in temporal causes, to the persons by him set over us; provided care be taken that he still reign supreme; and, that those things, wherein religion and our consciences are properly concerned, be kept inviolate.

Acts v. 29. That *We must obey God rather than man*, is an express limitation, both of the chief magistrate's power, and of the subject's compliance, left us by an authority not to be disputed. Farther than this the Scripture hath not gone, so far as I can perceive. And the ministers of Christ, who publish other schemes of liberty, seem to exceed the bounds of their rule, and to be out of the business of their function. For the gospel no where projects new constitutions, but consults the public peace of those already in being, by enjoining order and unity, meekness and submission. It forbids rulers to invade, and it equally forbids subjects to encroach. It allows all liberty, that is Christian and lawful; but it wisely forbears to determine the utmost point of that liberty: the Spirit, by whom it was dictated, well knowing the corruption and pride of men's hearts, and how prone they always are to turn liberty into licentiousness. It therefore contents itself with commanding in general terms an active obedience, where that can be paid without sin; and, where that cannot be paid, it commands such submissions, as are due to powers, instituted and *ordained*, not by the people, but *by God* himself. It calls indeed the governors an *ordination of man*; with regard to the benefits of human society promoted by them, and to the next immediate instruments of their establishment, and to those civil constitutions and laws, whence the measures of their administration are taken. But it no where says, or warrants us to say, that men are the source and original cause of those powers; or that, in case of mal-administration, subjects have right to revenge or reform abuses, by such outrageous wickedness and impious rebellion, as the solemnities of this day commemorate our most happy deliverance from.

May the sincerity of these praises for a mercy so

valuable to us, and our posterity, be manifested in loyal principles and godly lives. And may we of the present generation in particular, instead of indulging nice and dangerous, but now sure most unnecessary speculations, how far we may disobey or oppose our governors, act like men truly sensible, that, besides the ties of conscience, it is our felicity to be most strongly bound by those of gratitude. So shall our excellent QUEEN receive that cheerful obedience, which is a debt to her most pious, and gentle administration; a fit tribute of thanks for that, among other glorious effects, in which this day of joy hath been fruitful; and an insurance of future blessings, which our God, even the God of order and peace, shall give to a people willing and dutiful to him in the first place, and then to the prince, whom he sets over them, for his sake.

THE EIGHTH DAY OF MARCH,

*Being the Day, on which her Majesty Queen
ANNE began her Reign.*

THE EPISTLE.

1 ST. PETER ii. 11—17.

THE GOSPEL:

ST. MATT. xxii. 16—22.

THE scriptures for this occasion, being likewise appointed on the twenty-ninth of May, nothing remains, but to refer my reader thither; and earnestly to beg the concurrence of his prayers, that God would long continue this joyful solemnity to us.

THE END.

A

THREEFOLD TABLE.

The *First*, of Scriptures commented upon.

The *Second*, of texts occasionally illustrated.

The *Third*, of some principal matters concerned in the comments themselves.

The reader will please to take notice, that in the First and Second Table the chapters referred to are marked by small numeral letters, and the verses by figures; but, in the Third, numerals denote the volume, and figures the page,

Also, that when any figures are joined by —, the same subject continues to be treated of, from the former to the latter page so connected; as iii. 453—9, is third volume, from page 453 to 459.

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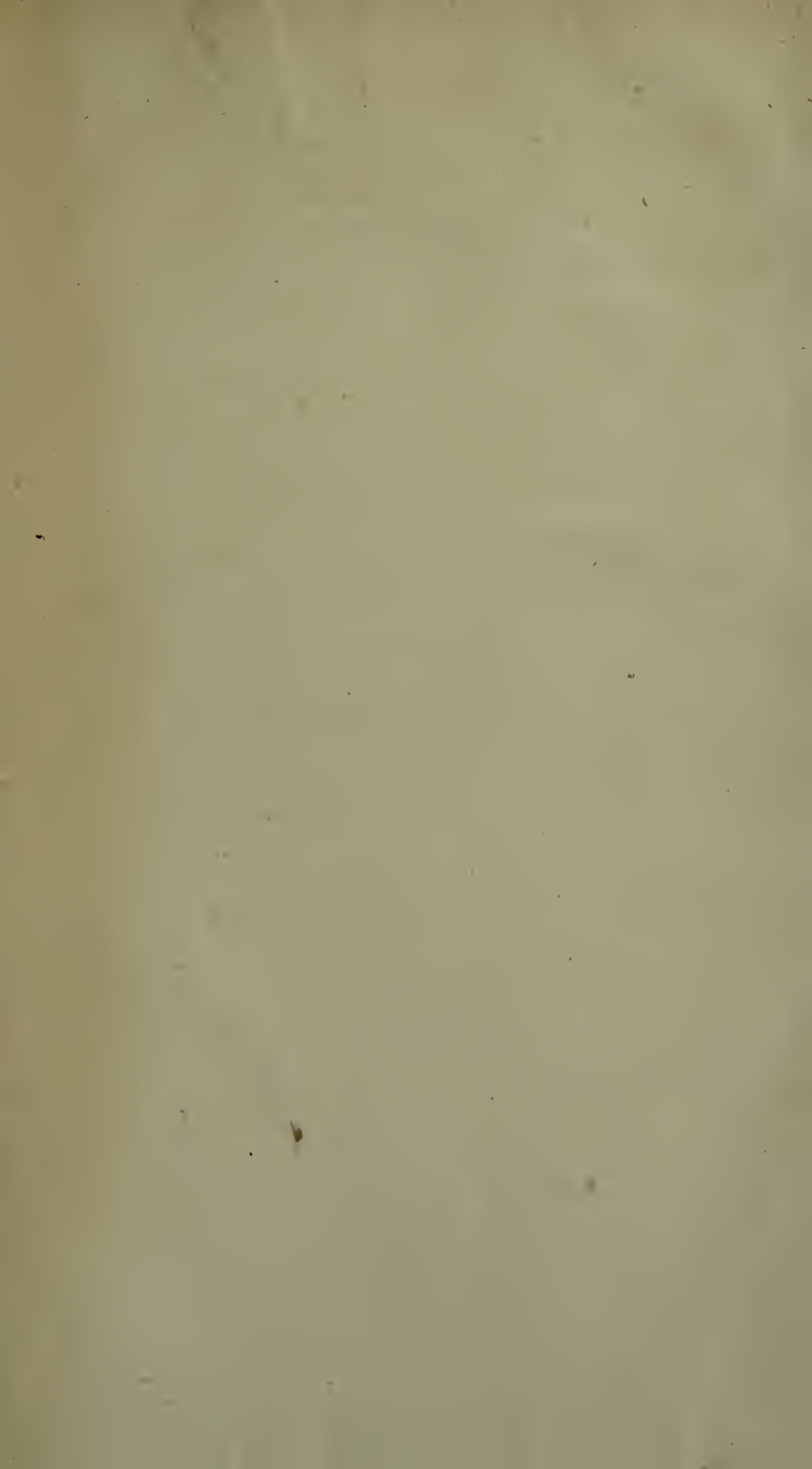
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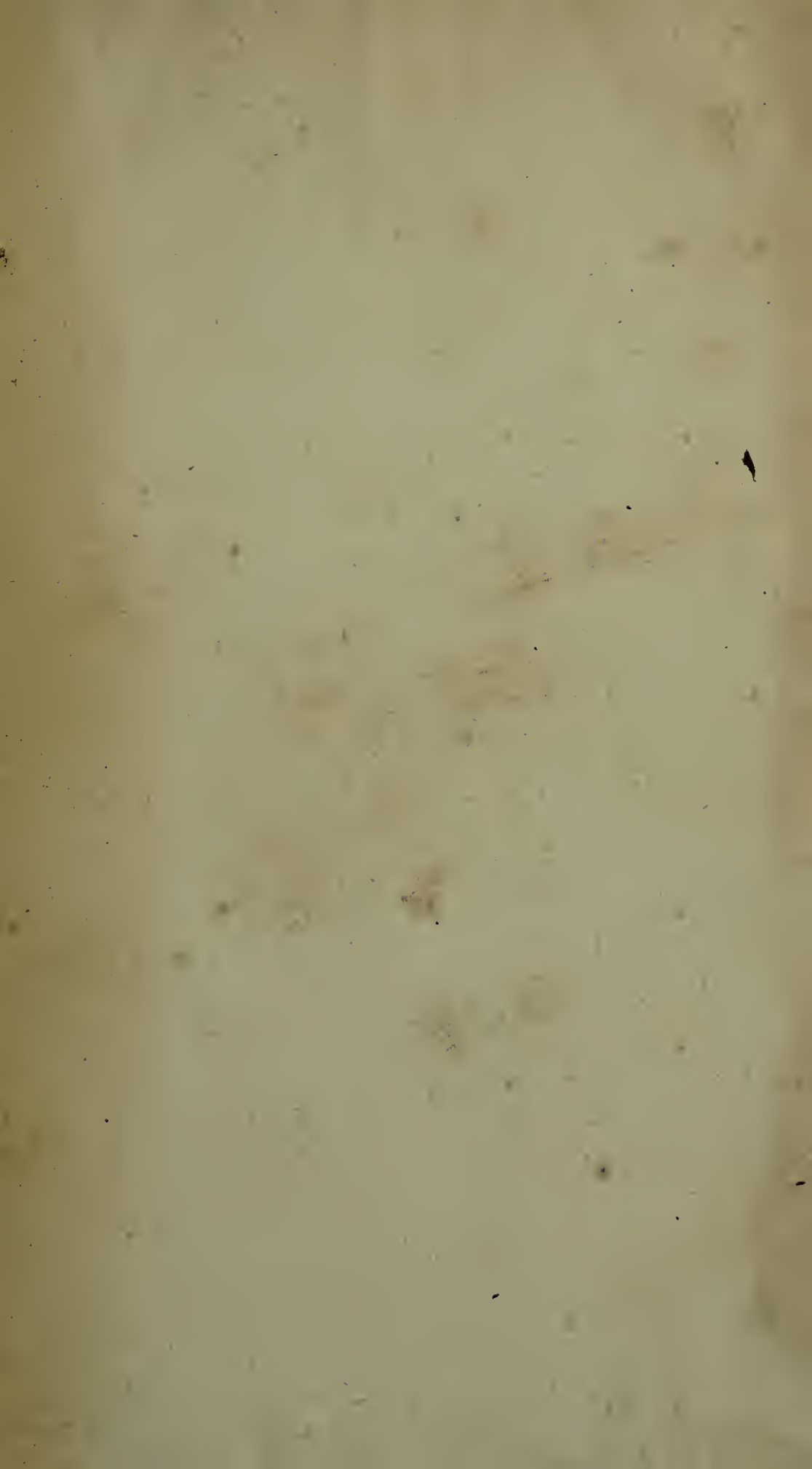
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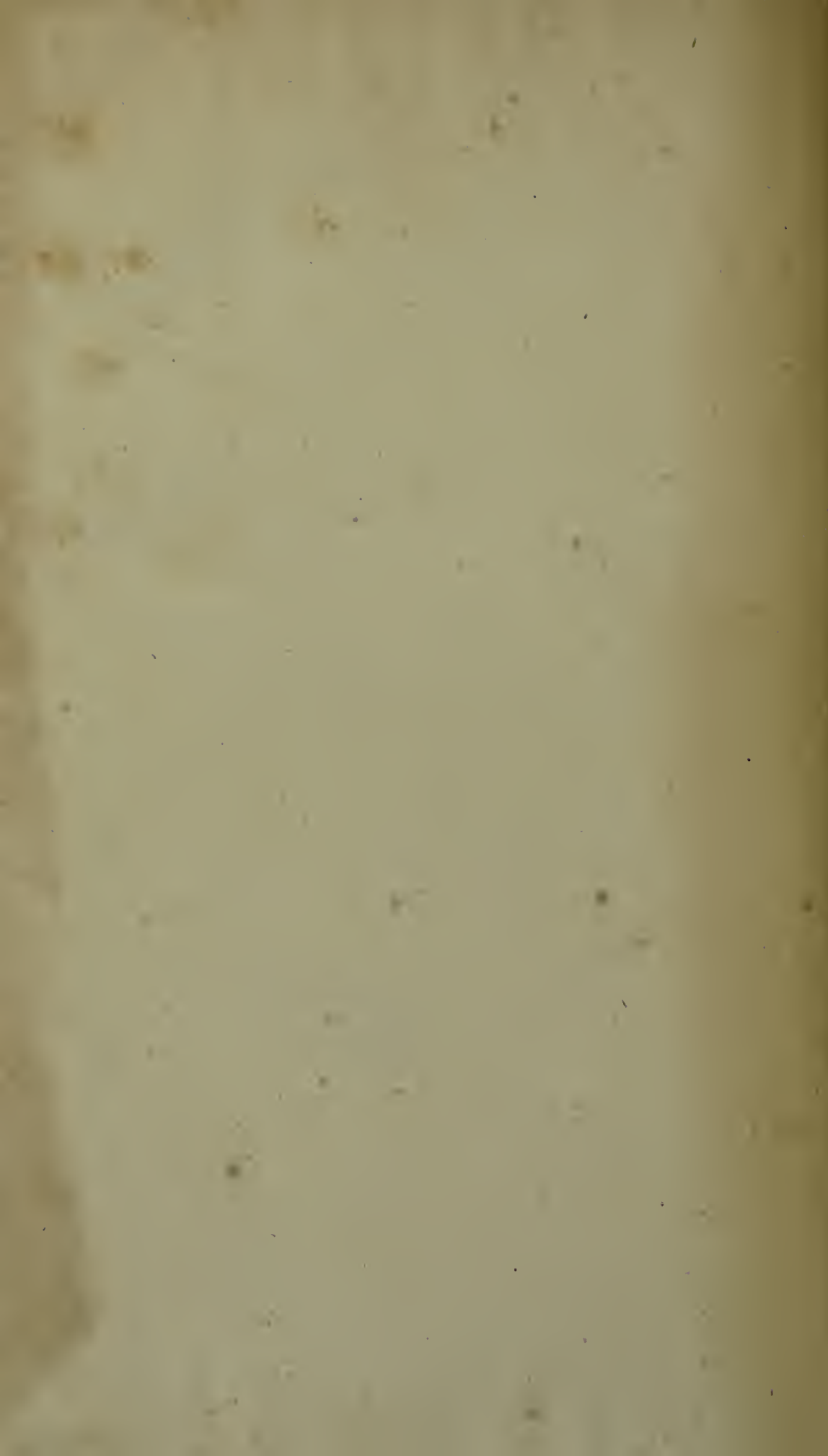
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