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COURSE OF LECTURES

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ACCT. CHURCH. LONDON WALL.

DR. HENRY KATZ

Ed. and Gertrude Cooper

COMPLET IN 15 MINUTS

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9. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1990; 263: 1001-1002.

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SACRED BIOGRAPHY:
OR, THE
HISTORY OF THE PATRIARCHS.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,
THE *Sam. Miller*
History of *Deborah, Ruth, and Hannah.*

BEING A
COURSE OF LECTURES

DELIVERED AT THE
SCOTS CHURCH, LONDON WALL.

BY HENRY HUNTER, D. D.

The First American Edition.

COMPLETE IN SIX VOLUMES.

VOL. IV.

Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.——JOHN viii. 58.

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.——REVELATION i. 8.

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1794.

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LECTURE II

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SACRED



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LECTURE I.

2 TIMOTHY i. 8, 9, 10.

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner : but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God ; who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began ; but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

EVERY dispensation of the Divine Providence seems to be the basis and the preparation of a farther display of wisdom and goodness. The last discovered purpose of the Eternal Mind, is the continuation, the extension and the improvement of that which immediately preceded it ; and the glory hitherto displayed in the ways and works of God, however excellent, is hastening to lose itself in “ a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” yet to be revealed. Periods of immeasurable, incomprehensible duration had flowed, before this fair and majestic frame of nature was

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called into existence. For we read of a purpose of grace formed and given "before the world began," and of "a kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world;" of an election made, and of "eternal life promised, of God who cannot lie, *before* the foundation of the world." Who can tell what systems have preceded that which now exists? We know from scripture that one more glorious is to succeed it. "According to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."* And who can tell what future systems may arise in endless progression? As well might the fluttering insect, which was born in the morning and perishes at night, presume to dive into the ages beyond the flood, or with bold, adventurous wing attempt to soar into the heaven of heavens, and declare the wonders of the world of spirits.

But though system may succeed system, though dispensations change, one thing is immutable, "the gracious purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." One great object was kept in view before the world began, is still kept in view through the whole extent of its duration, and is to be pursued through the endless ages of eternity. Do you need, christian, to be told what it is? The salvation of the world by Christ Jesus. It is a little thing to say, that Abraham saw his day afar off: that of him Moses wrote, Isaiah prophesied, David sung and Paul preached. "These things the angels desire to look into." On this exalted theme the everlasting counsels of peace revolved; to mature them, the powers of heaven and earth were shaken; and to bring them to their consummation, a new creation shall expand infinite space, and a succession of ages that are never, never to expire. Placed at whatever point in this immense sphere, our eyes are still attracted to the glorious Centre, from which all light and life

and

* 2 Pet. iii. 13.

and joy issue, and in whose light every inferior orb revolves and shines.

The epistle of the great apostle of the Gentiles from which I have taken the subject of this Discourse, is addressed to Timothy, whom he styles his “dearly beloved son in the gospel,” and who had been ordained first bishop of the church of the Ephesians. Paul himself was at that time a prisoner at Rome, and totally uncertain respecting the issue of a cause which affected his life, before the imperial court. What mercy, what justice was to be expected from such a prince as Nero—the monster who could fire his country, shed the blood of his virtuous preceptor, and destroy his own mother? But we behold in the prisoner a spirit much exalted above the fear of a tyrant, a mind prepared for the worst that could befall him, and expressing anxiety, not about personal safety, but about the success of the gospel, and the steadfastness of a beloved disciple. He solemnly charges that disciple not to suffer himself to be one moment shaken in the faith, by the persecution to which the cause of Christ had exposed himself, or the ills which he might still be called to endure for the testimony of Jesus: and, to enforce his charge, he suggests a view of the gospel which eclipses all created glory, “still the enemy and the avenger,” plucks from death his sting, and robs the grave of its boasted victory. He represents Timothy and himself as engaged in a cause, which the great God himself, before all worlds, regarded as of superior importance, and made peculiarly his own; which “at sundry times and in divers manners” he disclosed, and which at length, “by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, he made manifest” to all men. Paul glories in the idea of being a worker together with God in this generous design; in his appointment to the office of “a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles,” in the great mystery of godliness; in displaying and dispensing to a guilty, perishing world, the unsearchable

riches of Christ—who had “abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

—In tracing the history of the patriarchs who lived both before and since the flood, from Adam to Abraham, and from Abraham to Moses, we have endeavoured to point out this unity of design, this steadiness of co-operation, this progress of discovery. By whatever name the typical person is designed, patriarch, prophet, high-priest, under the Old Testament dispensation; whatever be the designation of the ministring servant under the New, apostle, evangelist, pastor or elder, the office and the end of the institution is one and the same—to declare the Son of God, the Saviour of men, “for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till 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.”*

Borne down the current of divine revelation, we have arrived with Israel at the mountain that burned with fire, and at awful distance, with trembling eyes, beheld its summit involved in clouds, clothed in terror; and with wonder and joy contemplated the cloud dispersing, the thunder ceasing, the terror done away, and Mount Sinai transformed into Mount Zion. Whatever farther progress we make, in whatever direction we proceed, we shall find this exceeding high mountain still in view; and, whether under the conduct of the leader and commander of Israel, or of the Champion of Christianity, we are equally led by “one” and the same “Spirit” in “one hope” to “one Lord, one faith, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.”†

We shall endeavour to connect our past and following Course of Lectures, by the view here presented to us by the apostle, of the plan of Providence in the redemption of the world; and the execution of it, “by the

* Eph. iv. 13.

† Eph. iv. 5, 6.

the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ." And you will be pleased to observe,

I. It is God's *own purpose*. The contrivance, the discovery, the progress, the accomplishment, all, all is from heaven. In what relates to this world, in what contributes to the sustentation and comfort of a transient life, human sagacity, ingenuity and industry may challenge a little praise. Men soon invented and improved the necessary, useful, and ornamental arts. They soon learned to build cities, to work in brass and iron, to "handle the harp and organ." But their dexterity, address, perseverance and success in the pursuit of perishable interests, form an humiliating contrast with their awkwardness, indolence, inattention and incapacity in their higher, their spiritual and everlasting concerns. Wise in trifles, or to do evil, how to do good they find not. The experiment was permitted to be fully made. It was proved how far the powers of nature could go. Egypt, Assyria, Greece, Rome, improved one upon another; and what was the result? "The world by wisdom knew not God." They became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things."*

To increase our wonder and mortification, when God's purpose of mercy was declared, when his method of salvation was revealed, men were "slow of heart to believe." They "resisted the Holy Spirit;" Christ "came to his own and his own received him not." The disciples themselves understood not, believed not "what the prophets had spoken." No wonder then that the doctrine of the cross was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." Here then is a *purpose*, which not only is not of man's forming, but which man uniformly and violently opposed.

In

* Rom. i. 22, 23.

In other cases, we behold the wisdom of God blending itself with human counsels, directing, subduing them to its determination, and the great God graciously condescending to divide his glory with the creature. But if there be a design more peculiarly *his*, from which he claims undivided praise, which was not, which could not be of man, nor “according to our works,” it is this, the gracious design of “saving them that believe,” by Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

II. This leads us forward to observe, that, as the work of redemption is JEHOVAH’S *own* peculiar purpose, so it is a purpose of *grace*. The thoughts of “the Father of spirits” are unfolded, and they are “thoughts of peace.” Transporting view! Behold the greatest and most glorious of all beings employing himself in devising the means of doing good, of communicating happiness, of relieving the miserable; and forming a scheme of benevolence which extends from eternity to eternity, and comprehends innumerable myriads of rational beings restored, recovered from ignorance, from guilt, from misery, to wisdom, to holiness, to perfect and exalted felicity. Blessed *purpose*! The formation of man, the creation of an universe are only parts of it. Man was formed that he might be redeemed; was sent into this world to be prepared for “heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” The firmament was expanded, adorned, lighted up, to witness the display of “the exceeding riches of the grace of God, in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus;” and every successive opening of the plan of Providence is only a new discovery, a more endearing expression of the love of Christ “which passeth knowledge,” of “the peace of God which passeth all understanding.” Think, O guilty man, think, O my soul, what a *purpose* of *justice*, think what a *purpose* of *wrath* would have been, had “God sent his Son into the world to condemn the world!”—The spirit fails at the dreadful thought. Behold an insulted God descending to con-
found

found the pride and presumption of the builders of Babel; and mark their speedy dispersion. Behold a righteous God descended on a purpose of fiery indignation against polluted Sodom; and consider, in trembling silence, the smoke of her torment ascending up to heaven. Behold a whole world of ungodly men overwhelmed with the waters of a deluge; and learn how dreadful, how inconceivably dreadful a deliberate *purpose* of vengeance is. And, when you have pondered it well, reflect with wonder, gratitude and delight, that “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;” * that Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. Again,

III. This *purpose* of God, this *purpose of grace* was formed, *before the world began*. Human purposes are feeble, fluctuating, unenlightened; obstructed by unforeseen events, they are constrained to change their direction, and to assume a new form. The imperfect work which through many difficulties is at length executed, bears no manner of resemblance to the original design. Man performs what he may, because he cannot effect what he would. He is governed by circumstances over which he has no power. But the distinctions of past and future vanish away from before the eye of God. There can be no difficulty in the way of almighty power, nothing concealed from the view of omniscience. The duration of a world shrinks into a single moment before Him who is “from everlasting to everlasting.” Contingency and chance can have no effect on the counsels of Him “who seeth the end from the beginning,” and saith, “My counsel shall stand, and I will fulfil all my pleasure.”

Christianity as old as the creation! It boasts a much more ancient date. The creation is of yesterday, the world is not yet six thousand years old; but christianity is of the essence of God himself. It bears date

“of

* John iii. 16.

“of old, even from everlasting.” “This pure river of water of life” proceeds out of the throne of God; who dwells in inaccessible light. Imagination wearies itself, thought is lost, in tracing it up to its source. Bless the Lord, O my soul, who from eternity, in the greatness of his might, in the plenitude of his goodness, in the incomprehensibility of his wisdom, condescended to fix the bounds of thy habitation, to arrange the events of thy mortal existence, to prepare thy place in the heavenly mansions; who “before the world began” surveyed with complacency and delight his own benevolent design, his own glorious work, the universe which he was about to speak into being, the bit of clay he was to fashion into a man, the immortal spirit which his breath was to inspire, the needy perishing wretch whom his mercy was to redeem. But

IV. The blessed Author of this gracious, everlasting purpose, has revealed and bestowed it in his own way. He “hath saved us,” “not according to our works,” nor in the way of our own wisdom—it is *given us in Christ Jesus*. From the formation of the merciful plan of salvation to its consummation in glory, the necessity of a Mediator is never for a single moment left out of view. His name, like a sweet perfume, is wafted on the wings of every wind. Survey the world of nature through all its vast extent, and in its minutest particle, and we behold the omnific “WORD by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made that is made.” He also “upholdeth all by the word of his power;” “all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth.” Open the history of redemption at whatever page, and it still unfolds the mercy of God *through Christ Jesus our Lord*. Conducted of the Spirit back to the eternal days of uncreated light, admitted to the deliberations of the councils of peace, we hear the Son of God proclaim, “I am Alpha,” “the beginning.” Carried forward in joyful hope to the day when he shall “make all things new,”

new," the same voice still proclaims, "I am Omega," "the ending," "who was, and is, and is to come." Search the scriptures; consult the prophets; to him they "all give witness." Meditate the promises; "all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God." Examine the record; "this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."* Consider the ministration of angels; the covenant of promise "was ordained by angels in the hand of a *Mediator*." Harken to a voice from the most excellent glory: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear him." All is light and glory; but not a single ray of light is transmitted through any medium but this. All is grace—free, sovereign grace; but there is not one intimation given, not one act of favour conferred, but through the "one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus." To him let every knee bow, to him every tongue confess, of things in earth and things in heaven. What saith the scripture? "He putteth no trust in his saints, and his angels he chargeth with folly." Is not this a plain declaration, that the highest and holiest of created beings are imperfect and dependent; that they stand in need of a Mediator and Advocate in order to their acceptance with a holy God? And is it not for this reason, that, "when he bringeth in the First-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him?"—It being the fundamental law of God's *everlasting kingdom* before the world was, and after it shall be burnt up and pass away, with all that it contains, under patriarchs, prophets and apostles, under the legal and under the evangelical dispensation, under the dominion of grace and in glory, on earth and in heaven, that there should be access to, hope in, and acceptance with God, for men and for angels, only through the Son of his love,

* John v. 23, 24.

love, the eternal Word which made and supports all things.

V. In conformity with this glorious *purpose and grace in Christ Jesus*, what hath been executed? Every thing worthy of a design so grand, every thing worthy of its great "Author," worthy of the glorious "Finisher of our faith." His *appearing* hath made it *manifest*. The clearest-sighted of the prophets, like the blind man only half restored to vision, saw men but as trees walking, but now, under the gospel, the dullest and most despised among believers sees every thing plainly; he sees the eternal purpose of God written in characters which he can read and understand; he compares the model with the structure, and finds the tabernacle erected in the plain, the perfect counterpart of the pattern delivered in the mount—He finds the scriptures fulfilled, the predictions verified, the types explained, realized, justified; all things finished in and by the Lord Christ.

What hath been executed? *He hath abolished death*, that hated, hideous spectre, through fear of whom the fallen posterity of Adam are "subject to bondage." He hath restrained the power, put an end to the dominion, annihilated the existence of the king of terrors. Through sin death gained admission into the world; in sin his empire is founded; by sin he is armed with a mortal sting. By the great propitiation for sin he is banished thence, his reign is terminated, his sting is plucked out. Ask that sickly, pining creature, what it would be to have the disease which is perceptibly preying upon his vitals abolished? Ask that dejected prisoner of despair, what it would be to have his debt discharged, and the writ of his confinement abolished? Ask the wretch condemned, what it would be to have the fatal hand-writing of judgment that is against him abolished? And let the answers you would receive convey, as well as they can, a sense of the obligation under which we lie, to Him who hath done away the deadly plague which
wastes,

wastes, which threatens, which destroys the soul ; to Him, who hath paid the enormous debt “ to the uttermost farthing,” purchased a release, set open the prison doors ; to Him who hath cancelled the awful sentence of a righteous God, “ nailing it to his cross.” He hath *abolished death*, with all the woe that leads to it, all the dreaded woe that is in it, all the more tremendous woe that succeeds : sickness and pain, anguish and old age ; the bitter pang that rends asunder the body and the spirit ; the hell that follows. And by what wonderful means hath all this been effected ? “ through death” he has destroyed “ him that had the power of death.” Into his own snare the deceiver has fallen ; by his own weapons the enemy has been disarmed ; his own triumph hath proved his ruin. “ O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

What hath been executed ? He hath *brought life and immortality to light*. It is more than flattering hope or fond desire ; it is more than the speculation of a philosophic mind, or the presumptuousness of reasoning pride ; it is more than patriarchal confidence, or the dawning light of Mosaic revelation. It is desire warranted, and hope supported by facts ; it is reason justified and confirmed by demonstration ; it is the morning light of promise, advanced to the perfect day of discovery and accomplishment. “ He that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”† “ For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.”‡ This is not the cold peradventure of a sage, saying, “ If in this I err, I willingly err ;” but the blessed assurance of an apostle, saying, “ I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that

* 1 Cor. xv. 55, 56, 57. † Rom. viii. 11. ‡ Thess. iv. 14.

that day.”* “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. 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.”†

—And can it be necessary to inquire who caused this light to arise? Who removed the veil, and disclosed the hidden glories of eternity? What power could tune the human tongue to such raptures, and inspire a mortal breast with such holy and triumphant joy? “God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light.” It is “the revelation of Jesus Christ, who sheweth to his servants things which must shortly come to pass.” “By the *gospel* life and immortality are brought to light;” “Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you the hope of glory.”‡

—Learn hence the folly and danger of all opposition to the plans of eternal Providence. “He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against Him and hath prospered?”§ “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.”|| “If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; left

* 2 Tim. i. 12. † 2 Tim. iv. 6, 7, 8. ‡ Col. i. 26, 27.

§ Job ix. 4.

|| Psal. ii. 2, 3, 4, 6, 8.

lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”^{*} “Verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”[†] “Woe be to him who striveth with his Maker.” Sinner, learn wisdom in time; cease from the ruinous contention; “it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks;” thou art wounding, destroying only thyself. “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”[‡]

—Christians, be of good courage; “in patience possess ye your souls.” God will support and vindicate the cause that is his own. His truth and faithfulness, evinced by the interposition of ages past, are a full security for his care and attention through ages to come. Time, which impairs all things else, gives stability, force and effect to the purposes of Heaven. The dissolution of the frame of nature is the consummation of the work of redemption. As the writings of Moses are an improvement upon the traditional knowledge of the antediluvian world; and as the gospel is an improvement upon the law and the prophets, so, “according to his promise,” we look for a new economy, which shall be an improvement upon, and an extension, confirmation and accomplishment of the gospel dispensation.

—Learn to aspire after the honour and happiness of working together with God in forwarding this gracious design. It is the glory of the most exalted of all beings; and therefore, surely, deservedly claims the employment of the noblest powers of man. What heart would not rejoice in putting forth a helping hand towards rearing this blessed fabric, were it but to drive a pin, or fasten a cord. Remember that carelessness here is highly criminal; that to sit still is not only robbing yourself of the most exquisite pleasure, and declining the highest honour of which your nature

^{*} Acts v. 38, 39.

[†] Matt. v. 18.

[‡] Psal. ii. 12.

ture is capable, but is at the same time the highest insult to your Creator, and the most certain means of incurring his displeasure. Look around you, and observe these myriads of your fellow-creatures, less favoured of Heaven than you are, consider them well, and be to them in the place of God. Extend to them that compassion which the Father of mercies hath extended toward thee.

See, my brothers, they are deformed, diseased in body; they are distressed in their circumstances; they are grieved in mind; alas, they "are dead in trespasses and sins!" Lost to God, lost to all the valuable purposes of existence, better for them they had never been born. But yet they are your brethren; they are susceptible of pleasure and pain like you; the same sun enlightens them; the gospel aims at relieving them as well as you; the same God created and sustains and cares for you both. Have pity upon them; strive to restore them to peace with themselves, to peace with the world, to peace with God. "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."* "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy upon them." Let the *purpose of grace* comprehend them, even them also.

Son of God, who didst restore agility to the lame, sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, the faculty of speech to the dumb, life to the dead, and who givest wisdom to the wise,—thou shalt renovate all things, thou shalt abolish death and point out the path of life! O, I shall bless thee with transports of joy ineffable; in the day when the powers of heaven shall be shaken, and the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the earth with all that it contains shall be consumed! Then thy suffering creatures, delivered from all the ills which oppressed them, shall be clothed upon with a glorious and immortal body, fashioned like to thy glorious body; shall be perfectly conformed to thy blessed

* Mat. xviii. 14.

ed image—the image of the first-born among many brethren! Then the Saviour of the world shall pronounce, not from the expiring agony of the cross, but from the radiance of a throne above the skies, “It is finished!” Then He who “maketh all things new,” shall with complacency contemplate this second glorious creation, and proclaim “all is good, yea, very good!”

History of Moses.

LECTURE II.

EXODUS XXIV. 15—18.

And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount. And the glory of the Lord abode upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days ; and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount, in the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount : and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.

BREAD is not more necessary to the support of human life, than religion is to the happiness of a rational being. Man, in his better, his immortal part, “lives by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” In more than one instance the miracle has been exhibited, of sustaining the body without food, and yet no pain nor inconveniency felt ; but for the soul to exist, and to exist in comfort, undirected by the precepts, unenlightened by the discoveries, unsupported by the consolations of religion, is a miracle not to be performed. It is the more to be lamented that the attempt is so often fatally made, of living “without God in the world ;” of pursuing a happiness that is independent of the great Source of light and joy ; of seeking peace, rest and enjoyment in the neglect or violation of his commandments. Happy
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it is for men, if after having made the fruitless experiment of "seeking the living among the dead," and after having at length discovered that success is vanity, and that disappointment is vexation of spirit, have been persuaded, before it was too late, to draw their felicity from the pure and never-failing sources of faith and a good conscience; happy they, who, reconciled to God through Christ Jesus their Lord, enjoy real tranquillity in life, and well-grounded hope in death.

We tremble as we behold Moses advancing to the summit of the burning mountain to meet God. Who can walk into the midst of a flaming furnace and live? But is it possible to remove from God an instant of time, a hair's breadth of space? No: God is about our path and our bed, is watching our going out and coming in, our lying down and rising up. God is in this place; and, were our eyes opened, we should even now behold his face clothed with the frowns of just displeasure, or beaming with the smiles of paternal love.

Was the law given by "the disposition of angels," arrayed in all their majesty and might? O how benign their aspect, how affectionate their assiduity, how vigilant their care, could we but behold them, while they aid the preaching of the everlasting gospel, while they attend the assemblies of a christian church, and minister to them who are the heirs of salvation! As the awfulness and solemnity of the prophet's condition are not peculiar to him, and to that important occasion, so neither are the privileges which he enjoyed, nor the communion to which he was admitted, peculiar and personal. Christian, you have but to retire into your closet and to shut the door after you, and you are immediately on the top of a higher mountain than Moses climbed, and are near to God as he was in the most precious moments of the most intimate communication. Alone, or in company, we have access at all times to the throne of grace; and we have what

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gave him safety and confidence in drawing nigh unto God—an Advocate with the Father, a great High Priest, a Mediator betwixt God and us.

The great Jehovah, having delivered in every circumstance of magnificence that could excite attention, procure respect, and enforce obedience, that law, whose general nature, tendency and design, together with its relation to the evangelical dispensation, were the subject of a former Lecture, proceeded to regulate their civil polity. But not by an audible voice, in the ears of all the people, as he had done the law of the ten commandments, but in private conference with Moses, to be by him delivered to the people, he delivered those institutions of a civil and political nature, which regarded their social and national capacity. In studying these, the lovers of scripture will rejoice to trace the justest and most comprehensive views of human nature; the noblest and most liberal ideas of legislation, the most perfect equity, the profoundest sagacity, and the most unbounded kindness and benevolence. But it exceeds our strength, and it consists not with our plan, to go into the detail of these excellent statutes. We pursue the history.

The voice from Sinai having, in dreadful glory, proclaimed the conditions of this new covenant, directions are given for the solemn and public ratification of it. This was done that the obligation which was originally, invariably and necessarily binding upon the parties, might acquire additional force from voluntary consent, and from the intervention of august and significant ceremonies. I trust it will be neither unentertaining nor uninstrucive to attend to the description of these ceremonies as they stand upon the sacred record. They are highly interesting whether we consider them as the venerable remains of a very remote antiquity, being no less than three thousand three hundred and forty-three years prior to the present time;* or as the original compact, in the constitution

* A. D. 1792.

constitution of an ancient, important, well-known, and generally interesting national government ; or as forming part of the plan of a divine administration, whose force can never be spent, whose influence on human virtue and happiness can never expire.

God has "spoken once in his holiness," in a sensible manner, has made himself seen, heard and felt by a whole people together. But it is neither consistent with his dignity, nor favourable to man's improvement, that he should always or often make himself known in that manner. He has spoken thus once, that every hearer might have a personal reason for acknowledging and adoring the dread Jehovah, the Fountain of all power, the supreme Author of every establishment. And he speaks thus but seldom, that all men may learn to revere conscience, his vicegerent upon earth, to study his word, the interpreter of his nature and will ; and to respect and "be subject to the powers which be ordained of God, not only for wrath but for conscience sake." Directions are accordingly given to ratify the covenant, not by the whole people in person, but by their representatives. The persons summoned to attend on this great occasion, are ; first, Moses himself, who was to represent the Mediator between the high contracting parties ; then Aaron and his two sons, Nadab and Abihu, who represented the Levitical body, or order of priesthood ; and finally, seventy of the elders of Israel, who were to act in the name of the congregation at large. When we observe the names of Nadab and Abihu in this respectable list, and look forward to their dreadful and untimely end, we are led to a reflection of no small importance in studying the sacred volume ; namely, that the destination of Providence in raising particular persons to eminent, honourable and important stations in civil society, is something extremely different from "the election according to grace." A Cyrus and a Nebuchadnezzar may be the servants of God, to execute his vengeance or his love, without

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knowing

knowing any thing of their Employer ; and their private and personal character may remain unaffected by their public conduct. The man according to God's own heart, in the view of some great object of public utility, has sometimes been found dishonouring God by private vice, and degrading, destroying himself, while he has been materially serving the world. This most serious consideration dictated to the great apostle of the Gentiles that necessary rule of conduct. "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection ; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away."* And it is a loud call to every one who acts in a public capacity, to support and adorn it by private virtue and unaffected piety. While the great God was thus putting honour on these seventy-three persons in the eyes of all the people, he sees it necessary to put and to keep them in mind of their distance and dependence ; "Worship ye afar off : Moses alone shall come near the Lord, but they shall not come nigh."

This message being reported to the people, they express their cheerful and unanimous consent. "All the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do."† Moses upon this reduces into writing the articles of the treaty between God and the people, to be recited aloud in the hearing of all the parties concerned, previous to the solemnities of the ensuing ratification. According to the form observed upon such occasions, rising up early in the morning, he builds an altar under the hill, the emblem of the divine presence, on the one side ; "and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel,"‡ or an heap consisting of twelve large stones, according to the number of the tribes, to represent the people, on the opposite side ; and upon it he offers a burnt-offering, a sacrifice made by fire unto the Lord. The application of the *blood* of the
victim

* 1 Cor. ix. 27.

† Verse 3. ‡ Verse 4.

victim principally challenges our attention in the celebration of this awful rite. It was divided into two equal parts : one half was put into basons, and placed by the twelve pillars of stone ; where in all probability were arranged the seventy elders, the representatives of every tribe standing by the pillar peculiar to their tribe : the other half was sprinkled upon the altar on the other side. Thus, that which constituted the life of the sacrifice was separated, and Moses standing between the divided parts, and having some of the blood now denominated the blood of the covenant, or of the purifying victim, in his hands, rehearsed aloud the words of the covenant in the audience of the people, who were represented by their elders, and then solemnly demanded whether they acceded to the conditions of it.

The form of adjuration employed in such cases, as you heard in a former Lecture,* now in the hands of many of you, was inexpressibly awful and tremendous. “ As the body of this victim is cleft asunder, as the blood of this animal is poured out, so let my body be divided and my blood shed, if I prove unstedfast and perfidious.” Under an engagement of this dreadful import, they consent to the conditions of the treaty, saying, “ All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.”† Whereupon Moses takes of the blood, and sprinkles it upon the people, in the persons of their representatives, as he had before sprinkled it upon the altar, expressing thereby God’s acceptance of their persons and services, and his engagement to fulfil all that the covenant promised on his part. Matters being thus adjusted, and peace established, the burnt sacrifice is succeeded by a peace-offering, and the parties, as friends, sit down to partake of a common repast. This is evidently the meaning of the expression in the end of the eleventh verse : “ Also they saw God, and did eat and drink ;” that is, as in the presence of the most high God, at peace with him, and

* Vol. I. Lecture xiii.

† Verse 7.

and at peace among themselves, they did eat of the same bread and drank of the same cup. It would be easy, were it necessary, to confirm this interpretation by quoting the practice of other nations in later times, undoubtedly borrowed from rites of God's own institution. It would appear from the letter of the narration, that the scene of this sacred feast was a higher region of the mountain than that where the covenant was ratified. He builded the altar *under* the hill, and set up the pillars, as it is ver. 4; and when the solemnities of that inferior station were duly celebrated, the nation whom God had thus chosen is exalted to a superior rank, and admitted to a more intimate union with their Maker. "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God now shines, calling to the heavens from above, and to the earth, Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice."* Purified by blood, the blood of the covenant, they are encouraged to mount higher and higher, to approach nearer and nearer; they are enabled, with enlightened eyes, to discern more clearly, and to look more steadfastly.

Being sprinkled with blood, "*then* went up Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire-stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink."† What a stream of splendid ideas here rushes in upon us! "They saw the God of Israel." They saw Him whose presence is the glory of heaven, the light of whose countenance is the joy of angels and archangels; they saw Him descended to earth, to be the light, glory and joy of his people, to dwell among them, and to be their friend, their father and their God; they saw Him engaging himself by every thing that could affect the senses, kindle the
imagination,

* Ps. l. 5.

† Verses 9, 10, 11.

imagination, or melt the heart, to guide and protect them, to provide for them, to bless them and to do them good. "They saw the God of *Israel*," their fathers' God, their own covenant God, and the God of their seed to the latest generations. They saw God! but, what did they see? That face whose lustre constrains the cherubim to cover their faces with their wings—those eyes, which "as a flame of fire go up and down through the earth," which discern impurity in the heavens and folly in angels—that mouth which spake the universe into existence, and whose lightest word shakes the foundations of the everlasting hills—the hand that wields the thunder, or the feet that walk upon the swift wings of the wind? No: the nobles of Israel had shrunk into nothing before such an awful display of Deity. He needed not to have laid his hand upon them; one glance of those piercing eyes which guard the law, had been sufficient to consume them in a moment. What then did they see? What was *under* his feet; and even that, something which could not be represented, expressed or described; "as it were the body of heaven in his clearness."* Like Paul caught up into the third heaven, but incapable to tell whether in the body or out of the body; caught up into paradise, and listening to the conversation of its blest inhabitants, but what he heard were words unspeakable, "which it is not lawful for a man to utter."† Was it needful to caution such men and such a people against idolatry? What similitude could they employ, who, though they enjoyed the fullest and most satisfying demonstration of Jehovah's presence, felt their understanding confined, their imagination checked, their senses confounded. They are lost in a splendour which at once attracted and repelled; which was only the foundation and external veil where glory resided, the pavement not the ceiling, the habitation not the inhabitant; a splendour resembling the transparency of the gem, which

seems

* Verse 10.

† 2 Cor. xii. 4.

seems to transmit the light, and the solidity of the gem, which no force can penetrate.

Is it too fanciful to suppose, that there is singular beauty in the *colour* of the jewel here specified by the sacred penman, who was an eye-witness of this glorious appearance, and who attempts to convey an idea of what he saw? "Paved work of a sapphire-stone," the happy medium between the fair and dazzling lustre of the diamond, and the dim familiar complexion of the emerald: not the fiery glare of the empyrean; nor the sober verdure of the earth; but the pellucid azure of the crystal sky, which equally corrects and tempers the dazzling power of the noontide sun, and the oppressive gloom of the midnight hour; which possesses light enough to discover the object without distressing the organ, and shade sufficient to relieve without sinking into obscurity?

Not overwhelmed, but cheered and elevated by this moderated display of the divine glory; having seen God and yet living; feeling his hand upon them, yet uncrushed by its weight; the nobles of the children of Israel conclude the services of this eventful day by the banquet of peace and love. *They* must now return to secular employments, and descend from the mountain; but Moses has yet farther manifestations of the will of God to receive, and is commanded to ascend still higher. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written, that thou mayest teach them."* Be our attainments what they will, who is he that "hath attained, or is already perfect?" Our arrival at one eminence is only to see from its summit another, and thence another still rising above us: but in moral and intellectual pursuits, this is a disappointment that mortifies not, an exercise that fatigues not: the joy of heaven is to make progress in the

the contemplation and discovery of perfection that knows no limit, knows no end.

From this higher elevation, Moses is informed that he is to receive the same law in a different form: "I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written: that thou mayest teach them."* As he arises towards heaven, the dispensation of which he was the minister becomes more and more plain and palpable. A matter of such deep importance must not be trusted to the vague and varying traditions of fallible and changing men, but collected into a record that can defy the lapse of time, and preserve unchanging truth and dignity amidst the revolutions of empire and the wreck of nations. This was graciously intended to prevent the necessity of a frequent interposition of Deity, which must at length have diminished its impression by commonness and familiarity. What God therefore at first, with his creative finger, curiously engraved on the heart of man, he audibly pronounced amidst the awful glories of Sinai, and afterwards committed to writing on tables of stone for perpetual preservation. And happy it is for man, that he has not been left, for moral and religious instruction, to the traditions of men, who are ever changing and inconsistent with themselves, or to the flimsy, imperfect, contradictory systems of philosophy and science, falsely so called; but that he is brought to the law and to the testimony, to Moses and the prophets, to the Saviour himself and his apostles, to a bible and a sabbath. Happy it is that every one is furnished with one and the same light to his feet and lamp to his paths, and that all are taught of God from the least to the greatest. But indeed the care of Providence in preserving this precious record, and transmitting it to us unaltered, unimpaired, is a perpetual miracle, a series of revelations, which we are bound to acknowledge with wonder, and to improve with gratitude.

In

* Verse 12.

In the next ascent into the mount, Moses is accompanied, a certain length at least, and no doubt by divine appointment; by Joshua his minister, on whom God began to put honour thus early, in order to exalt him in the eyes of the people whom he was destined one day to command, and to prepare him betimes for the wise and faithful discharge of his high office, by communion with God. As this absence of Moses, from the weighty duties of his charge, was to be of longer continuance than usual, the management of civil affairs, and the administration of justice were committed, in the mean time, to Aaron and Hur, his companions and coadjutors on the mount, when by the lifting and holding up of his hands Amalek was smitten before Israel. Was ever spot of this earthly ball so highly honoured as that barren mountain in the midst of the desert? Persons, not places, possess dignity. The presence of God confers greatness and importance; He can receive none from created, much less from artificial pomp and magnificence. The great God, “dwelleth not in temples made with hands.” “The heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him;” but “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”*

The curiosity of travellers has been excited to visit this scene of wonders. But is there not an intentional obscurity spread over the description, to baffle idle curiosity, and to call us to the spirit and intention of the dispensation, not the external apparatus of it? Wherever there is this book; wherever there is a principle of conscience; wherever there is common reason and understanding, there is the law, there is Sinai, there is God. It is not to make a pilgrimage to the holy sepulchre, to stand on Calvary, to drive infidels

* *Isai. lviii. 15.*

infidels by force of arms out of Jewry, that constitute the faith and piety of the gospel; but to know Christ Jesus and him crucified in “the *power* of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.”*

The appearances of God’s presence and providence vary their aspect, according to the distance at which they are contemplated, and the medium through which we view them. What to the nobles in the mount appeared “as it were a paved work of a sapphire-stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness,”† to the multitude in the plain wore a more threatening and terrible appearance. “The sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire, on the top of the mount; in the eyes of the children of Israel.”‡ Fire at once consumes and refines, leaves to the pure gold all its solidity and value, and lays hold only of the dross. Moses undismayed, because following the command of God, advances into the midst of consuming fire; and so far is nature from being overpowered and destroyed by this keen, piercing element, that it is rather cherished and strengthened by it. Flame supplies the place of food; instead of perishing in a moment, at the end of forty days, without any other means of subsistence, we see the prophet descend in additional glory and renovated vigour; for all creatures are and do that which their Creator wills.

The next seven chapters contain a minute description of that sacred structure and its service, which God intended should be “the shadow of good things to come;” of which every iota and tittle was of divine contrivance and appointment, and undoubtedly had a meaning and significancy which we cannot in every particular find out to perfection. The pattern of it was shewed unto Moses in the mount, and particular directions were given for its construction; in these were employed the forty days mentioned in the close of this chapter; when the history suddenly breaks

off

* Phil. iii. 10.

† Verse 10.

‡ Verse 17.

off to exhibit a scene of a very different nature, which, if God permit, will form the subject of the next Lecture; namely, the unprovoked revolt of Israel to idolatry, the fabrication of the golden calf, and the hasty descent of Moses, to stem that dreadful torrent of guilt and wrath which had begun to flow.

In the ratification of the covenant between God and Israel, we see the stress that was laid upon blood. The blood of the innocent victim must be poured out, and the altar must be sprinkled with blood. The elders of the people must be purified with blood. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission, no friendship, no peace, no access: life must be paid to redeem life. Blood in the sacrifice is the one thing needful, the one thing significant: blood in religious offices is all in all. Blood applied to any other purpose, is contaminating, unhallowed, unwholesome for food, polluting not purifying to the flesh, is a source of corruption and death, not of health and life. The idea of blood, in one view or the other, runs through the whole history of redemption. It occurs not more frequently in the Old Testament than in the New. One great sacrifice has indeed put an end for ever to the future effusion of blood; but it is still symbolically held out as the medium of reconciliation and access to God. "We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace."* We are redeemed, "not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."† "We draw nigh to God through the blood of his Son." When we approach to ratify every one his personal covenant with God at the communion table, we commemorate the death of Christ in the symbols of his body broken, and his blood shed. "This is the blood of the covenant, said Moses, which the Lord hath made with you," and "This is the New Testament

* Eph. i. 7.

† 1 Peter, i. 18, 19.

Testament in my blood, faith Christ, shed for the remission of sins." When we look toward eternal rest, the holy city, the Jerusalem that is above, the new and living way which leads thither, which conducts into the holiest of all, is through the rent vail of the Redeemer's flesh. "His blood be upon us and on our children," exclaimed the Jews, while they were crucifying the Lord of glory. Dreadful imprecation!

O Lord, require not our blood of our own hand, nor of every man at the hand of his brother. O Lord, let this man's blood be upon us and upon our children, not as an oppressive load, as it was on those who with wicked hands impiously shed it, but as an atonement for our sins, as a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour, acceptable unto God; that "being justified by faith, we may have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom also we may have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Amen. Amen.

History of Moses.

LECTURE III.

EXODUS xxxii. 1—4.

And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden ear-rings which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people brake off the golden ear-rings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving-tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

THE real instances of human folly and extravagance far exceed the conceptions of the most lively imagination. All history, and every day's experience, justify the mortifying account which the prophet gives of our corrupted nature—"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"* The partiality of self-love, and the charity of a kind disposition, would at times lead us to form a more favourable judgment both of ourselves and of others,
than

* Jer. xvii. 9.

than we deserve. The form of sin, seen in its nakedness, is so hideous, that we shrink from it with horror ; but use familiarizes the spectre ; and we are insensibly led to bear, to be, and to do that which once we abhorred. Could a prophet have foretold one half of the irregularities, the excesses, the enormities of our lives, we should have deemed the prediction a falsehood and an insult ; and, with the resentment of conscious virtue, we should have been ready to exclaim in the words of Hazael, “ Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing ? ” Yet alas ! the event has wofully verified the cruel imputation ; and exhibited the man fallen from his excellency, become the very monster he justly detested ; the man sunk into an object of pity, of scorn, or of detestation to himself and to mankind.

Many practices appear to us absurd and unnatural merely because we are not accustomed to them. Herodotus relates, that Darius, king of Persia, having assembled the Greeks who were under his command, demanded of them what bribe they would take to induce them to eat the dead bodies of their parents, as the Indians did ? Being answered, that it was impossible for them ever to abandon themselves to so great inhumanity, the king, in the presence of the same Greeks, demanded of some Indians what consideration would prevail with them to burn the dead bodies of their parents, as the Greeks did ? The Indians expressing the utmost horror, entreated the king to impose upon them any hardship rather than that. Among the Hottentots, the aged, so long as they are able to do any work, are treated with great tenderness and humanity ; but when they can no longer crawl about, they are thrust out of the society, and put in a solitary hut, there to die of hunger or age, or to be devoured of wild beasts. If you expostulate with them upon the savageness of this custom, they are astonished you should reckon it inhuman : “ Is it not much greater cruelty,” they ask, “ to suffer persons to linger and languish

languish out a miserable old age, and not put an end to their wretchedness, by putting an end to their days ?”

Idolatry is one of those practices, to our apprehension, so foolish and unreasonable, that we wonder how it ever obtained footing in the world ; and with difficulty are we brought to believe the avidity with which whole nations have given into it. The particular circumstances of the Israelites in the wilderness, render their proneness to idol worship peculiarly monstrous and unaccountable. The chain of miracles which accompanied their deliverance from Egypt ; that constant symbol of the divine presence which attended them, the pillar of fire and cloud ; the daily miraculous supply of bread from heaven ; the recent anathema pronounced against the worship of images from the dreadful glory of Mount Sinai ; the scrupulous care employed, if we may use the expression, to exhibit no manner of similitude of the Deity in Horeb, to prevent the possibility of a pretence to use, themselves, or to transmit, to posterity any sensible representation of the invisible God ; all these, superadded to the plainest dictates of common sense and reason, clothe with a blackness and malignity not to be expressed, the strange conduct which is the subject of this chapter.

Moses, foreseeing the length of his absence in the mount, had wisely delegated his power to Aaron and Hur, that the operations of government and the administration of justice might suffer no interruption. God, the great God, was now vouchsafing to employ himself in prescribing a mode, and a ministry of worship for his Israel, which should possess all the pomp and splendour displayed by the nations in the service of their false gods, together with a sacredness and dignity peculiar to itself. He was preparing to gratify their very senses by external shew, as their souls by heavenly wisdom. He was planning a tabernacle, establishing a priesthood, and appointing festivals and sacrifices,

sacrifices, whose magnificence should leave them nothing to regret in the glory which they had seen in Egypt; and, at that very time, they are employing themselves in devising and executing a plan of religious service, equally disrespectful to God and dishonourable to themselves.

Their guilt begins in sinful impatience and presumption. In matters both of life and of religion men greatly err, when they take upon them to carve for themselves. "Vain men would be wise, though man be born like a wild asses colt."* The transition is so sudden that it seems incredible. Not many days are past since they had given the most solemn, explicit and unreserved consent to the whole of the divine law. "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient."† The treaty had been but just ratified by a covenant, a sacrifice, and a feast, with a solemnity not easily to be forgotten. The noise of the mighty thundrings has scarcely ceased; the ineffable glory of the God of Israel is yet present to their eyes; they have not well recovered from the terror inspired by that voice which made heaven and earth to tremble. Yet even thus circumstanced, as one man they fly to the appointment, not of a new leader and commander, though that had been ingratitude without a parallel, but with an impiety the most shocking and confounding, to the creation of a new god. And the very first exercise of the power which was committed unto Aaron for the public good, is to be the leader, the abettor, and an example, in practising the abominations of that country from which they had been so happily delivered.

"And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him."‡

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* Job xi. 12.

† Verse 7.

‡ Verse 1.

There is a sottishness, a madness, as well as a wickedness in certain vices, which, at first sight, we should deem inconsistent with each other. The irrationality of the brute, the frenzy of the lunatic, and the malignity of the demon, here discover themselves at once; and leave us perplexed which we are most to wonder at and deplore. What shall we say of the stupidity which talked of *making* gods, and of following that as a guide which itself could not move, but as it was carried? With what notes of indignation shall we mark our abhorrence of that base ingratitude which could speak contemptuously of such a benefactor as Moses: “*This* Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him?”* With what holy resentment must we execrate the spirit that could deal thus perfidiously, presumptuously, with God?

After we have vented our anger and astonishment upon the conduct of these vile Israelites, let us pause and examine ourselves. Asserted by a strong hand and a stretched-out arm into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, have we never reverted in thought, in desire, in practice, into that very thralldom of sin from which the Son of God came to set us free? Lying under the weight of benefits much more precious, and bound by engagements equally solemn and explicit, have we never swerved from the path of duty, never lost sight of our vows, never failed in our obedience? With so much clearer and fuller discoveries of the being, nature and will of the one living and true God, have we feared and loved him, and only him; have we never bowed the knee to mammon, never worshipped in the house of Rimmon, never kissed the image of Baal? Alas, alas! we hate and condemn some sins merely because they are not our own, while we stand chargeable in the sight of God and man, with equal or greater offences of a different kind; so blinded as not to perceive, so self-deluded as not to feel their enormity. Is

* Verse 1.

Is it not amazing to observe on the part of Aaron no reluctance against this horrid proposal; to hear from his lips no remonstrance? Is it thus he discharges his sacred trust? Is this the man whom Jehovah was, in the mean while, designing to advance, and promoting to the dignity of the priesthood? Many things have been alleged in extenuation of his fault, though nothing can amount to a full vindication of his conduct. The conciseness of the sacred history, it has been said, may have suppressed some of the more favourable circumstances, and exhibited only a general view of the subject. Some of the Rabbins* pretend that his colleague in office, Hur, had lately been massacred in a popular commotion for daring to resist the prevailing frenzy; and that Aaron complied, through fear of similar treatment, after having thus deprecated the divine displeasure; "O Lord, I look up to thee, who knowest the hearts of men, and who dwellest in the heavens: Thou art witness that I act thus contrary to my own will. Lay it not to my charge."

Others explain away great part of the criminality, both of Aaron and of the people, by alleging that all they demanded, and all he gave them, was an external object, where they might deposit the homage which they wished to render to the Supreme God; and thus they interpret the request of the people, "Make us a sensible object of divine worship, which may always be before our eyes, and supply the place of God, when we shall be told of all the wonders he wrought for us in Egypt."† And a learned prelate‡ of our own country labours to prove, that Aaron presented only a hieroglyphic of the strength and power of the Deity, and he produces a few passages from ancient authors to prove, that the ox was an emblem of royal and sovereign authority, and the horns, in particular,

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* In Schemoth Rabba, Sect. xli. fol. 156.

† R. Juda, in Lib. Cozri. Part 1. Sect. xcvi. fol. 47.

‡ Patrick, Bishop of Ely, on Exod. xxxii. 4. page 635.

ticular, a common and well known emblem of strength.

A fourth excuse has been pleaded in behalf of Aaron, founded on the letter of the sacred text. He feigned readiness to comply, according to these apologists,* in hope that the demand of their golden ornaments for the fabrication of the idol, acting upon their love of finery, or of wealth, might bring them to a stand, and break their resolution. But why set up an elaborate defence for a man who stands condemned by his own brother, who had the best means of information ; and for one who himself had nothing, or worse than nothing, to produce in his own behalf, when charged by Moses with his fault ?

These spoils of the Egyptians had not been obtained in the most honourable manner. Israel “borrowed and paid not again ;” and it proves a dreadful snare to them. If they had not carried off the gold, they might perhaps have kept clear of the gods of Egypt. But ill-gotten wealth never was and never can be a blessing ; and unwarrantable devices sooner or later come to entangle the feet of those who use them. Mark, how one rapacious domineering passion swallows up many others. “Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire ?” And yet behold the daughters of Israel cheerfully sacrificing the darling embellishments of their persons to a mistaken principle of religion ! If there be a passion more violent than another, it is the love of gold in the heart of a Hebrew ; but we see one more violent than even that, the delirium of idolatrous superstition.

It is dangerous to have the patterns of evil before our eyes. We soon learn to bear with what we see frequently ; we are insensibly led to approve what we have learned to suffer without being shocked ; and what we heartily approve we are not far from adopting. Israel has sustained greater injuries in Egypt than

* August. Tom. IV. Quæst. xli. in Exod. page 118 : & Theodoret. Tom. I. in Exod. Quæst. lxvi. page 3.

than we are at first aware of, and they have been more deeply hurt in their minds than in their persons. The stripes of an Egyptian task-master are healed by the lenient hand of time : but the wounds inflicted by the impure rites of Egyptian idols, are still festering at the heart, and threaten death.

Aaron is too eager and intent upon his shameful work, to escape the suspicion of being hearty in it. "And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving-tool, after he had made it a molten calf : and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."* All that industry, all that art could do, is employed to confer lustre and value on this worthless object ; and yet he would have it believed, when he is called to account, that the form and fashion of the idol was the effect of accident, not of design : "I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf."† What a pitiful figure does ingenious, industrious wickedness make, when it stands exposed, convicted, self-condemned ! But the framing and erecting of this idol is not the whole extent of Aaron's criminality. I am still more shocked at beholding an attempt to blend with its profane worship, the sacred day, the sacred ceremonies and services of the true God. "And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it ; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To-morrow is a feast to the Lord."‡ What concord hath Christ with Belial ? An attempt to form such an union as this, is more grossly insulting than even avowed neglect or opposition. It freezes the blood to observe a repetition of the same august ceremonies which were lately employed in the mount, for confirming the grand alliance between the great Jehovah and his people, in the settling of this strange league between Israel and a bauble of their own invention. "They rose up early," as men intent upon their purpose ; the altar is reared, the sacrifice is offered up, the peace-offering is provided, the feast

* Verse 4.

† Verse 24.

‡ Verse 5.

feast of friendship is prepared and eaten. "They offered burnt-offerings, and brought peace-offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play."* These last words are supposed by some commentators of note to be descriptive of a scene of extreme lewdness and debauchery. And certain it is, that one of the principal instruments of propagating and supporting idolatry, was the attraction of beauty and wantonness, vilely prostituted to decoy strangers into the homage of the impure and worthless deity of the place. That people must be in a dreadful state indeed, among whom religion, the foundation of good morals, the guard of virtue, is employed as a minister to unhallowed pleasure, and a hand-maid to vice.

The prevalence of evil practices is a lamentable thing, but the establishment of wrong principles is much worse. The wholesomest stream may be accidentally tainted and polluted, and work itself pure again; but if the fountain be poisonous, nothing but death can flow from it. "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."†

—We are now conveyed from this awful scene of pollution in the valley, to a much more awful scene of meditated vengeance on the mount. While Moses was solacing himself in the pleasing prospect of being soon dispatched to the people of his charge with messages of love; while he was rejoicing in the important transaction so lately past, confident that all was now settled between God and his people; the joy of this exalted communication is suddenly interrupted by intelligence of a new, unprovoked and unexpected revolt. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Go, get thee down: for thy people which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed

* Verse 6.

† James i. 15.

sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be the gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."* An offended God refuses any longer to acknowledge as his, a generation of wretches who had rendered themselves so entirely unworthy of his slightest regard. Justice awakes to a recapitulation of the benefits which they had received and the offences which they had committed, and concludes with a resolution totally to consume them. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

In the dialogue which passed upon this occasion, some of the most interesting objects that can be contemplated present themselves to our view. The condescension of divine friendship: As God would not "hide from Abraham the thing which he was about to do;" would take no step towards the destruction of Sodom till that friend of God had been fully heard in its behalf; and could do nothing till Lot was departed; so the same God, rich in mercy, will not arise to vengeance against Israel, till Moses has been consulted and has acquiesced in the sentence. O the wonderful power of faith and prayer! Moses is represented as possessing a constraining power over omnipotence, the anger of Jehovah refuses to burn till his permission is obtained. O the wonderful grace and condescension of the most high God! Thus is justice ever tempered with mercy: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not."†

A proposal is made to Moses, (and what is too hard for the Lord to perform?) which a selfish heart would eagerly have grasped at; "I will make of thee, says God, a great nation." But selfishness in this truly great man was controlled by much nobler and more generous principles; zeal for the honour of God, and compassion for a devoted people.

The intercessory address of Moses is a master-piece of eloquence, and discovers a soul superior to all regards,

* Verses 7, 8.

† Lam. iii. 22.

gards, but such as are worthy of a prophet, a hero, a patriot, and, what is superior to all, the friend of God. "And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt, with great power and with a mighty hand. Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it forever."* The holy man of God is concerned not only that the Judge of all the earth should do right, but that the divine conduct should stand vindicated in the eyes of the heathen. He proposes to himself the same end which Jehovah himself has in view in all that he does—the glory of his great name. He nobly prefers the fulfilling of the ancient covenant with his venerable ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to the establishment of a new covenant with himself and his seed. He is willing to decrease, willing that his family continue obscure, that his head be laid low, provided the Lord be magnified, and Israel saved. This is a greatness of mind which religion alone could inspire. Like a true son of Israel, he wrestles and makes supplication; and as a prince he too has power with God, and prevails, if not to prevent every expression of displeasure, at least to prevent the execution of the general doom. Having obtained this great point, he descends with haste from the mount, bearing in his hand the most precious work of art that skill ever executed. Who does not shudder at the thought of its having been destroyed? "And Moses turned and went down from the

* Verses 11—13.

the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables."* But why should we regret that a piece of curious workmanship, in dumb matter, was destroyed? That loss soon might be and soon was repaired. Alas! we behold a more shocking spectacle every day—a race of thoughtless wretches deliberately, presumptuously defacing God's image, destroying his signature, engraved "not on tables of stone, but on the fleshly tables of the heart;" inflicting on themselves a loss never to be repaired, not in a fit of holy zeal, but in a paroxysm of diabolical frenzy.

Moses might destroy the tablets, but the spirit of the writing he could not disannul. When all sensible monuments are dissolved, the law maintains its adamantine solidity, its uncontaminated purity, its unpliant steadiness, its unbending dignity. The tablets were written on both sides, within and without. Every fragment therefore had some part of the law and testimony written upon it. Thus, in every particle of the human frame, there are self-evident traces of the finger of God—the understanding, the heart, the conscience, the memory; shivers indeed, mutilated, defaced, but capable of being repaired and united.

But I find it impossible to collect into one efficient point of view the sequel of this eventful history, within the limits of one discourse. Here therefore we set up another resting place, and from it take a cursory view of the ground over which we have travelled.

I. What a melancholy view presents itself, of the corruption, the degeneracy and degradation of human nature. Behold a people lost to every noble, generous, manly principle: restrained by no law, awed by no threatening, susceptible of no endearment, influenced

* Verses 15, 16.

fluenced by neither shame nor gratitude ; boldly over-leaping the bounds of reason and religion—and in that people behold “ the carnal mind, which is enmity against God : which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Behold “ the wickedness of man, how great it is in the earth ; and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart, how it is only evil continually.” Think not, however, O man, that thou art surveying a distant prospect, or travelling through a foreign land. Think not that these Israelites are sinners above all the men of the earth. When thou hast thoroughly searched and known thyself, no account of human frailty will appear exaggerated. They framed and worshipped a golden image. How many myriads hourly bend the knee to the same idol, changed only a little in form ! See the temple of mammon, how it is crowded. His votaries, see how much in earnest they are in their devotions. Early and late the incense ascends. Neither Jewish nor Christian sabbath interrupts their attendance or cools their ardour ; while truth, and justice, and mercy, and the love of God are offered a perpetual sacrifice to the insatiate demon, who never says, “ It is enough.” Nor think that gold is the only deity which men adore. On searching into thy own bosom, some lurking imp, of different form, complexion and texture will be found ; hid in close disguise, unknown indeed of men ; but to the eye of God and conscience clearly confessed. Down with it ; it is thy dishonour, and threatens thy ruin.

II. Rejoice with trembling, while you contemplate the affecting prospect which opens of the severity and mercy of the great God—the severity, which by the hand of Levi cut off three thousand of the offenders, in the heat of their offence ; which threatened to exterminate the whole race, and which, in “ the day of visitation, visited their sin upon them”—the mercy which relented, which pitied and spared the guilty, which listened to the voice of intercession, and accepted

ed the atonement. Thou thyself, O sinner, art a monument of both the one and the other. Thy life is forfeited to justice; thou art daily enduring the punishment of thy transgressions; thou standest continually exposed to severer ills than any thou hast yet felt, and far beyond what fear itself can figure. Yet mercy suffers thee to live; there is hope concerning thee: the glad tidings of salvation are in thine ears; "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world!" "Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation!" "Wherefore, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor: it may be" more than "a lengthening of thy tranquillity," it may prevent eternal misery.

III. Behold a greater than Moses is here—an Intercessor more compassionate, more earnest, more powerful: "a Prince with God" who ever prevails; a propitiation ever meritorious and successful; "blood that cleanseth from all sin." "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."* "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared. Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered: and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."† "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by

* 1 John ii. 1, 2.

† Heb. v. 7, 9.

by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?"*

IV. Let us look forward to "that great and notable day of the Lord," when the law which was delivered audibly from Sinai, which Moses with a rash, inconsiderate hand could break in pieces, but was unable to repair, shall be restored in all its purity and perfection; shall be engraved on every heart, and become legible to every eye: when the hidden glory of the legal dispensation shall be unveiled, and the greater glory of the GOSPEL displayed: when the divine image shall be again impressed on the soul of man, in all its beauty and exactness—and, we ourselves, degraded and lost as we are, shall "be raised together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"—and "beholding with open face as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, shall be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear, what we shall be: but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

* Heb. ii. 1, 2, 3.

History of Moses.

LECTURE IV.

EXODUS xxxiii. 8—11.

And it came to pass, when Moses went out unto the tabernacle, that all the people rose up, and stood every man at his tent-door, and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the tabernacle. And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door : and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent-door. And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.

GUILT is the parent of fear and suspicion ; conscious innocence and integrity inspire confidence and tranquillity. “The wicked flee when no man pursueth : but the righteous are bold as a lion.”* Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God, amongst the trees of the garden.”† Moses ascends undaunted to meet the Lord, into the midst of tempest and fire. Behold the height of heaven, how great it is ! What so distant as the Creator and a fallen creature ! But lo, the distance is done away ; and what is so intimately near as a God reconciled, and a fallen creature restored ! Jehovah descending

* Prov. xxviii. 1.

† Gen. iii. 8.

ing in mercy and grace ; the soul arising, upborne on the wings of faith and love, must meet and unite, whether on the mount or in the tabernacle ; in the temple or the closet. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him : and he will shew them his covenant."* We have heard of Abraham, who was called the *friend* of God ; and we behold a communication of the same distinguished honour, to that illustrious son of Abraham who has instructed and blessed mankind by transmitting the history of this sacred friendship to the latest generations of the world. We see it still expressed in the same manner ; on the part of Moses by humble submission, holy zeal and importunity, and child-like freedom and confidence : on the part of God, by the most unreserved communication of his intentions, the most endearing expressions of affection and good will.

The history delivered in the preceding chapter of this book exhibited the blessed communion on the mount, suddenly interrupted, by the dreadful scene of madness and rebellion in the plain beneath. Behold all Israel eating and drinking, dancing and playing, before a dumb idol, the similitude of a brute beast. Behold "a covenant with hell" ratified by the same dread solemnities which had been so recently employed, to join a great nation in alliance with the God of heaven. The law which the plastic hand of Omnipotence had impressed on the soul of man in its very constitution ; the law which he lately had condescended distinctly to pronounce in the trembling ears of all Israel ; that law he had still farther condescended, with exquisite art and skill, by his own finger, to engrave on two tablets of stone, for perpetual preservation. Moses descending in haste, with this precious record in his hand, perceives at a distance the disorder which raged in the camp, and, in a transport of indignation, dashes the tablets on the ground, and breaks them in pieces. The motive was good
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* Psal. xxv. 14.

and commendable, but the action was rash and presumptuous. We find, however, no expression of anger against that rashness; the frailty is lost and overlooked in approbation of the principle which led to it. But had not Moses punishment sufficient for his hasty conduct, in the irreparable loss occasioned by it, to himself and to the world? There was no occasion to chide him; his own conscience must have smitten him sufficiently, as often as he reflected on what, in the moment of impatience, he had done.

Without inflicting a positive chastisement, a righteous God can easily reprove men by making them to feel the native consequences of their own folly, and, of all the infirmities to which our nature is subject, anger most certainly and most severely punishes itself.

The man who is thus animated with zeal for the glory of God, has forgotten what fear is. Aaron, under the influence of the fear of man, yielded to the popular frenzy, and fabricated the golden calf: Moses, inspired with the fear of God, defies and despises the multitude, consumes their idol in the fire, and grinds it to powder. This is that Moses of whom they talked so contemptuously a little while ago. What, not one of the thousands of Israel who worshipped the image of the beast bold enough to protect his Dagon! No: abashed they stand, and feel "how awful goodness is, and see virtue in her own shape how lovely."

A most remarkable circumstance is added to the history of the destruction of the idol, which has greatly exercised the ingenuity, learning and imagination of critics and commentators. Moses took the dust into which he had pounded the calf, and "strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it."* This seems nothing more than an expression of sovereign contempt, poured upon a most worthless object: and a practical demonstration of the absurdity

* Verse 20.

ty of idolatry. And it may, perhaps not unwarrantably, be employed as a reproof of the inordinate love of money, that root of all evil. Gold, as an instrument of commerce, as the means of procuring the things that are needful for the body, as a natural production possessed of very singular qualities, may be lawfully sought after and innocently used; but erected into a deity, valued on its own account, swallowing up every other object, engrossing the whole heart, becomes unprofitable and pernicious, as incapable of gratifying the real appetites of a rational being, as gold in its simple state is incapable of satisfying hunger, or, mingled with water, of allaying thirst.

An imagination perpetually on the stretch to discover evangelical ideas in every iota of the sacred history, has perceived the method of gospel salvation, in this passage of Moses; as if the prophet intended to signify that the Messiah, typified by the water which issued from the rock in Horeb, could alone purify from the guilt of idolatry, and from all other sin.

Moses having executed just vengeance on the idol itself, turns in holy indignation to his weak and guilty brother, who had so readily fallen into and abetted so gross a deviation from all duty and decency. "And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?"*—An anticipated instance of obedience to the apostolic injunction, "Thou shalt not suffer sin upon thy brother, but in any ways reprove him." Justice on the tribunal, knows not a brother in court, but examines the cause. Justice, with the pen of the historian in his hand, knows not blood in recording facts, but declares the truth. Justice, as the minister of God, must stifle the calls of natural affection, and condemn the guilty. And here again Moses becomes a pattern to all judges and magistrates, to every minister of religion, and every relater of events. His own faults, and those of his nearest relations, are told with

* Verse 21.

with the same artless simplicity, as their good qualities and praise-worthy actions. Praise and censure are distributed, with the same candour and impartiality, to his own family and to strangers.

Aaron, formerly an object of condemnation, now sinks into an object of pity; as every man must, in the day when he is called to account, and has no defence to make. "And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people that they are set on mischief. For they said unto me, Make us gods which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf."* Alas, alas! What a profusion of words is guilt constrained to employ in order to cover what it cannot extenuate or excuse. What must it be to behold a guilty world stand self-condemned before the Judge of the quick and the dead! How dreadful must it be, to appear in the number of that guilty crowd, without being able to escape unnoticed in the crowd!

The scene that follows is one of those from which we turn away our eyes in anguish, or which we contemplate in silent horror and astonishment—Thousands of criminals falling at once by the hands of their brethren! The sons of Levi, destined to shed the blood of many victims, to make atonement for the guilty—called to the dreadful ministry of offering up part of the guilty themselves, a sacrifice to justice, to make atonement for the rest! Mark how the courage of one man has roused that of many. A whole tribe has fortitude sufficient to follow in a cause, wherein not one man was found daring enough to profess himself a leader. This is one motive, among many, to aim at being singularly good. Mark the timidity of conscious guilt. Levi was the least numerous of all the

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* Verses 22, 23, 24.

tribes ; but, engaged in the cause of God and truth, the myriads of offending Israelites shrink from their attack, or fall down before them. Mark how dreadful is the brow of justice roused to vengeance. "Consecrate yourselves to-day to the Lord, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother, that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day."* What a night of horror and remorse must have succeeded a day of impiety, madness and slaughter ! What an awful tomorrow, the day of reckoning, to follow that dismal night !

But the case, though dangerous, is not desperate, while there is a Moses to intercede. Has my offended Father so much tenderness left, as to upbraid, to reprove, to chastise me ? His displeasure, though depressing, is not intolerable ; but silent anger, resentment that neglects ; that shuns, that leaves me to myself, is a burthen too heavy for me to bear. If God vouchsafe to speak to me, though in thunder ; to answer me, though from the whirlwind ; there is hope concerning me. But if he say within himself, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone," then I am indeed lost and undone.

The intercession of Moses, in behalf of the people, now assumes a tone peculiarly earnest and affecting. "And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin : and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."† It is hardly credible that, on this passage, a system of piety has been built so refined as to issue in absurdity and contradiction. Moses is here supposed, by interpreters of a certain complexion, to express the utmost readiness to renounce his eternal salvation for what he apprehended to be the greater glory of God, and if it could be the condition of procuring salvation to Israel. Resignation to the divine will, according to them, is im-

perfect,

* Verse 29.

† Verses 31, 32.

perfect, till a man can cheerfully and deliberately prefer his own everlasting damnation to all the joys of heaven, if the higher interests of public good, and the glory of God can be thereby promoted. This, to some visionary minds, may have a specious appearance of a more sublime piety: but it is both unnatural and unscriptural; and therefore is not piety at all. As it has fallen in my way, and as this text in Moses has been connected with a famous passage in the New Testament of similar import, I will take the liberty to speak at some length, and with much plainness, upon the subject; it being a principal object in the plan of these Lectures, to unfold and recommend the religion of the Bible; that is, the religion of good sense, to the neglect of all human systems, and all useless speculations, which have not an obvious foundation in scripture and reason, and which do not obviously tend to promote human virtue and happiness.

Now, we hesitate not a moment to affirm, that the doctrine attempted to be built on the united texts of Moses and of Paul, has not the foundation of the prophet and of the apostle to rest upon; and that it is not calculated to serve any one purpose of religion, wisdom or virtue. The passage in the New Testament alluded to, is that of the great apostle of the Gentiles, and runs thus, "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."* It is too well known to need any proof, that there are in every language, and among all nations of the world, certain modes of expression in common use, which it were unfair to interpret according to the literal import of the words, and which accordingly, if translated into a foreign language, and applied to the modes of thought and expression used in a different age and country, might convey a meaning very different from the original one, perhaps diametrically opposite to it. Is there a man in his senses, who will pretend to as-

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* Rom. ix. 3.

fert that Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, one thousand five hundred and fifty years before Christ, affixed the same idea to these words, "Blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written,"* which a dogmatical maker of systems in France or England in the eighteenth century thinks proper to affix to them? Is it a certain point that the apostle Paul and such an one, mean precisely the same thing, when the former writes "anathema," and the latter, in the phraseology of his own language, thinks fit to render it by the word "accursed?" In truth, both expressions evidently are figurative, and can be fully understood only by appealing to the genius of the original languages, the spirit of the men who use them, and the occasion on which they are employed. Moses, in a moment, explains what he understands by "the book which God had written." For what saith the answer of God to this expostulation? "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book."† And what saith the history? "All that generation died in the wilderness," without being admitted into the land of promise, according to the original destination of Providence, or as it was "written in God's book." Follow Moses to a similar situation on another occasion, and see how he expresses himself; and let the one passage explain the other. The people became discontented with their food at Tabera, and lusted for the provision of Egypt; God was displeased, and threatened to consume them; Moses, grieved in spirit, thus presumes to expostulate. "And Moses said unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? Have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, (as a nursing-father beareth the sucking child) unto the land which thou swearest unto their fathers? Whence should

* Verse 32.

† Verse 33.

should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh that we may eat. I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.”* The expression, “Kill me out of hand,” is plainly equivalent to that used in Exodus, “Blot me out of the book which thou hast written.” What then is the fair meaning and construction of the words of Moses? “Lord, grant the pardon of this people to the prayers of thy servant; who would rather submit to everlasting misery than fail to obtain his request?” Horrid, blasphemous, absurd! No, but nature, piety and patriotism unite in saying as he does, “Lord, if thy decree against this people may not be reversed; if justice demand their utter extermination, let mine eyes be first closed in peace. Subject me not to the cruel mortification of surviving all my nation, and of enduring the insults and scorn of our enemies. In mercy take me first out of the world, where I should only lead a life of sorrow and regret, heavier than death itself.” The word *anathema* used by the apostle is of the same import with the Hebrew word *חֵרֵם*. They both denote a person or thing devoted, separated by a vow or curse, one excommunicated and separated from society. And his meaning is this, “I most solemnly protest; God and my own conscience are my witnesses, that I speak the truth as it is in my heart; the infidelity of my countrymen after the flesh, is a matter of the deepest concern and regret to me; to such a degree, that if it could be the means of curing their prejudices, and bringing them to Christ the Redeemer, I care not in what estimation I might be held in the church. Let me cease to be an apostle, let me be as one cut off from the society of the faithful, for some atrocious crime; let me be vile and contemptible in the eyes of the world; let but the Israel of

* Numb. xi. 11—15.

of God be gathered to the Redeemer, and brought within the bond of the covenant of grace." Moreover, Paul does not directly form even this wish; but conditionally, "I could wish," were it lawful for me to form such a wish, and if the granting it could any way contribute to the accomplishment of a purpose so desirable.

The sentiment, then, of those mystics, has no warrant either in the language or in the spirit of any of the persons whom God has proposed to us as patterns in scripture.

Besides their being unscriptural, what can be more extravagant and unnatural, than those ranting expressions of one of that order? * "Though I were sure of being condemned to hell, I would not cease from my penitential acts, and from depriving myself of all comforts for the love of God. If I am to be cast into hell, O my God stay no longer, make haste, and since thou hast forsaken me, finish thy work, precipitate me into the bottomless pit." Catharine of Sienna thinks fit to express herself thus on the same subject: "Though it were possible to feel all the torments of devils and damned souls, yet should I never call them pains, so much pleasure would the pure love of God make me to find therein." These are evidently the idle speculations of persons too much at their ease, whom one hour of exquisite torment would bring to their senses, and teach a sounder divinity. What is the foundation of our love to God? His love to us; the good which he has done to us, and that which we still expect from him. I feel it impossible for me to love one, whose interest or caprice require that I should be tormented everlastingly. I love the Lord because he hath delivered me from the curse of the law; because he hath saved me from going down to the pit: because he "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." †

Moses

* Angèle de Foligni. Evêque de Meaux Instruct. Pastor. Page 341.

† Eph. ii. 6.

Moses by entreaty obtains a short reprieve for the offenders; but a plain intimation is given that they should not pass wholly unpunished. "In the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them."* The meaning of this threatening is fully explained in the sequel. All that generation of men were blotted out of the book of the living; their carcases fell gradually in the wilderness; they were not permitted to see the good land promised to their fathers; plague upon plague overtook them, till they were consumed for their idolatry; of the worshippers of the golden calf not one entered into Canaan.

God had hitherto condescended to conduct and defend Israel, in that wonderful symbol of his presence, the pillar of cloud and fire. Provoked by their rebellion, their Protector and Guide withdraws from them, and they are left to pursue their march, through paths of their own choosing. The adage says, "Whom God means to destroy, he first infatuates." Had it run more simply, "Whom God means to destroy, he first forsakes," it had been juster and more consonant to the tenor of scripture. When Jehovah has withdrawn as a friend, he is not far off as an enemy. But what must it have been to one who felt like Moses, to be commanded to proceed to the conquest of Canaan, destitute of the presence and support of God, the glory and the strength of Israel? It was like sending a ship into a tempestuous ocean, without ballast, without a mast or sail, without a rudder or compass, to be driven at the mercy of every blast; and laid under the necessity of sinking in the mighty deep. Moses apprehends the full extent of an attempt so perilous, and deprecates it with all the energy of supplication. He apprehends no ill, save one, that of being deserted of God. He trembles at no foe, but their best friend estranged.

The wretched multitude now see their nakedness, and are ashamed. In vain do gold and jewels attempt

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to hide the deformity of a soul that has lost its innocence. They were not more eager, the other day, to contribute their ornaments to the formation of an idol, than they are now to hide them out of sight, as the monuments of their dishonour. "What fruit have they now in those things whereof they are ashamed?" A face of mourning is seen over the whole camp, and every face is clothed with despair. Direction is given to remove the tabernacle without the camp. A few who had continued faithful, adhere to that divine instrument of protection, and follow it. The cloudy pillar, which, during the period of riot, sedition and revolt, had in wrath departed, returned to its destined residence, the tabernacle. In the eyes of astonished Israel, Moses enters undismayed into that mansion of divine glory, proceeds to meet God, as a man to meet his friend; renews the conference in the plain, which had been broken off on the mount. The result is, God graciously relents, being mindful of his covenant, and again undertakes the safe conduct of his people, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest,"* and all again is peace. And thus conclude the controversies between disobedient and gainsaying children, and their tender-hearted, relenting Father. He is not to be "overcome of evil, but overcomes evil with good."

But what is this I hear? Moses soliciting for still farther manifestations of the divine perfections? Who had seen, who had heard, who had felt and enjoyed so much of God as he? And yet still he is importunately entreating, "Lord, shew me thy glory." O my friends, how many things of God do "angels still desire to look into?" There is "a breadth, and length, and depth, and height, in the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." The response of the oracle to this request, is not less extraordinary than the request itself. "And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord

* Chap. xxxiii. 14.

Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock. And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock; and will cover thee with my hand, while I pass by. And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.* This opens a field of meditation too ample to be now entered upon. Let it be reserved for the entire ground of another evening's excursion into the region of scripture: and let us contemplate with wonder the scene which has just passed before our eyes.

—Does the whole story seem to any one incredible? Let the horrid scene which this great metropolis exhibited not many years ago,† arise upon his recollection. Let him think on the frenzy, which, like a mighty torrent, carried every thing before it; which fired the city, overawed the senate, and threatened the dissolution of all regular government. Who can tell the dire effects which desperate enthusiasm, suddenly bursting out and exciting universal terror and consternation, may produce. Had we not seen it with our eyes, we could scarcely have believed, that consequences so momentous should have issued from a source so contemptible. The resolutions and operations of a lawless multitude are truly formidable. Unopposed, they rush on as an overflowing flood; resisted, they melt away; they are scattered like chaff driven by the wind.

—Observe, O man, how the most difficult lessons of religion, patience, and forbearance, and forgiveness, are taught thee by the example of the great Jehovah himself. Darest thou to think of vengeance for a petty, a misconceived, and imaginary offence; when

* Chap. xxxiii. 19—23.

† June, 1780.

when thou beholdest the most glorious of all beings, passing by, blotting out the most heinous, the most unprovoked insults, and when thou hearest him proclaiming his name, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful, and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin?" "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."* "I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you: that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."†

—"Follow on to know the Lord." Expatriate in nature's ample field, and you will find profit and instruction blended with delight. Explore the wonders of eternal Providence, and you will see constant cause to rejoice in the thought that there is a GOD who judgeth and ruleth in the earth. Dive deeper and deeper into those mysteries of grace which "angels desire to look into," and break forth into songs of joy, that "GOD is love." "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."‡ Now "we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."§

Nature now presents in every plant, in every pebble, mysteries that defy the researches of the wisest and most acute; then "the way-faring man, though a fool,"

* Rom. xii. 19, 20, 21.

† Mat. v. 44, 45.

‡ John xvii. 3.

§ 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10.

a fool," shall comprehend systems the vastest, most complex, most abstruse. Providence now exhibits an apparent inconsistency and disorder, which confounds the reasoning pride of man; then, God will fully vindicate his ways to man, obviate every difficulty, resolve every doubt, remove every scruple. In scripture "are some things hard to be understood," in our present state of ignorance and imperfection; then the veil shall be removed, and "we shall see face to face,"—"then shall we know even as also we are known." Then the promised Spirit of wisdom and revelation shall "teach us all things, and bring all things to our remembrance." Then shall he "open" our "understanding," that we may "understand the scriptures." "Amen, even so, come Lord Jesus!"

History of Moses.

LECTURE V.

EXODUS xxxiii. 18.

And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

THE greater progress any one has made in science, the deeper must be his conviction of his own ignorance and imperfection ; and the higher our attainments in religion, the stronger is the impression of our infinite distance from God. A little knowledge puffeth up ; but modesty and humility are the constant attendants on profound wisdom. Thoughtless men make light of the name, the house, the day of God ; but angels “ cover their faces with their wings,” when they approach his awful presence. Human friendship admits of freedom and familiarity ; but while the great Jehovah condescends to “ dwell with man upon earth, even with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit ;” he permits us not to forget, that he is “ the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy.” Are we elevated, as on eagle’s wings, up to the eternal throne ? It is only that we may feel the hand which supports our flight, and discern our own darkness by that “ light which is inaccessible and full of glory.” Abraham, the friend of God, in the highest intimacy of that honourable character, loses not for a moment the sense of his distance and dependence ; “ Behold now
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I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes."* "O let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but this once." A voice from heaven reaches his ears, saying, "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."† And that instant we behold him prostrate, with his face to the ground. Moses, the friend of God, to whom Jehovah revealed more of himself than to any other man, is still but in the outer court of the habitation where God dwells. What he knows has only created a thirst for knowledge; what he has seen has but inspired an earnest desire of seeing more and more; and after communications so ample, and communion so sweet, this is still his desire, this his request, "Lord, shew me thy glory."

From the reiterated rebellions and provocations of Israel, this good has resulted—New, endearing, encouraging discoveries have been made of the divine nature, perfections and will. Mankind, to the latest generations, have been instructed to revere that justice which "will by no means clear the guilty," and to triumph in that mercy which "forgiveth iniquity; transgression and sin." The revolt of the people cemented and improved the union between God and their leader.

Joshua, the son of Nun, who was destined to make so distinguished a figure, and to act a part so conspicuous and important in the history of Israel, is represented as trained up from his youth in the service of Moses, and in communion with God. We find him in the mount with his master when he went to receive the written law, while the multitude below were polluting themselves with idols. We find him entering with his master into the tabernacle, when it was removed out of the camp, and the glory of the Lord overshadowed it; and there he remained, while Moses returned to confer with the people. Early habits of acquaintance with God, and employment in his

* Gen. xviii. 27.

† Gen. xv. 1.

his service, are youth's best security and preservative against sin, and the surest foundation of honour and usefulness, of distinction and comfort in advanced age. A man must be formed to command by obeying. "Joshua, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle."* What a severe reproof of that spirit of profligacy and dissipation, that criminal love of pleasure and coldness to intellectual attainments, that irreligion and profanity which characterize youth in general?

It is pleasing to look forward to this good man's latter end, and to observe a career of glory supported and adorned by piety; a youth of seriousness, fidelity and usefulness, ripening into an advanced life of reputation and usefulness; declining into an old age of tranquillity, vigour and joy; and closing in the well-grounded hope of immortality. Joshua was trained for the camp, in the tabernacle and on the mount, and was prepared to be the great general and statesman, by learning first to be the humble saint and faithful minister.

The characters of Moses and of Joshua delightfully illustrate and embellish each other. Moses knew from the beginning that this young man was to be his successor in office; was to finish the work which he had begun; was to have the glory of conquering Canaan, and of establishing Israel there, according to the promises. An ordinary mind would have marked the progress of this growing rival with jealousy; would have attempted to obstruct his advancement; would have repined at the preference given him, to the neglect of his own family. But every selfish, every domestic consideration gives way to the rising merits of Joshua, and to the choice and appointment of Heaven. It was equally natural, on the other hand, for a young man like Joshua, who knew that he was destined to rule, to surpass his master, to reach the highest summit of human grandeur; it was natural for such an one

to become impatient of authority, to be weary of restraint, to be eager to bring himself forward, and make himself conspicuous: but the son of Nun discovers true magnanimity in cheerfully yielding the subjection becoming an inferior; in observing Moses and learning of him; in patiently waiting for the time and manner which Providence should choose of exalting him to honour. Moses treats him, and speaks of him, as of a favourite son, rising into eminence and distinction; he behaves to Moses as to a beloved parent, crowned with years and honour, which he hopes to see him long enjoy. These are lessons not taught in the school of the world, where natural affection, decency and discretion are daily sacrificed on the altar of pride, selfishness, avarice and ambition.

Moses has, by importunity, prevailed that the usual symbol of the divine presence should continue to lead and protect Israel, by the way in which they went to the promised land. In answer to the prayer of faith it is thus promised, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."* His Spirit is now therefore tranquillized with respect to the people of his charge. God is yet again "for them, and who can be against them?" But his personal acquaintance with God seems only beginning. As if he had seen nothing of the divine glory in the bush at Horeb, which burned, but was not consumed; as if the awful glories of Sinai had been nothing: as if God had not spoken to him in the tabernacle of the congregation, face to face, "as a man to his friend;" he continues to entreat, "Lord, shew me thy glory!" My friends, if you can rest satisfied with what you know of God, it is a melancholy proof that you know him not. Eternity is too short, the capacity of an angel too limited, "to find out the Almighty unto perfection."

What a field of discovery does the vast frame of NATURE present! Supposing, O man, thy duration sufficiently extended, thy understanding sufficiently enlarged,

* Verse 14.

larged, and opportunity afforded thee, equal to thy utmost wish, when couldest thou have made a complete survey of the little globe wherein we dwell; when couldest thou have explored the innumerable secret wonders of the hoary deep; when examined the precious contents of the everlasting hills; when discovered the nature and properties of air and fire? Supposing the mighty task performed; supposing the untried regions of the air, the untrodden paths of the sea, the deep and the high places of the earth rendered accessible to thy approach, laid fully open to thy view—and lo, the race of knowledge is but beginning. Behold another orb at hand, presenting a new world of wonders: an orb possessing an inconceivably greater extent than our earth, containing an infinitely greater variety of objects, answering a much nobler end in the scale of being; and after that, another; and another still, in endless succession. Suppose the whole planetary system, in order, to have passed under review, the mind rests not there; the wonders of divine power and wisdom end not then; the soul wings its way to other systems, lighted by other suns, and finds itself but entering on the glorious career.

Were the whole expanse of nature explored, the MORAL government of God over all these spheres and all that they contain, expands the same vast field afresh to the astonished eye, and invites to a second excursion. When that is performed, REDEEMING LOVE, ALMIGHTY GRACE display the ample theatre a third time, and lead us by the hand through the “nations of them that are saved,” and point out the successive triumphs of sovereign goodness. As if it were possible to see an end of all this glorious perfection, scripture announces the dissolution of all these things, as a space too small for the soul to expatiate in, as an object too mean for its contemplation; and promises a new and more glorious system of things, suited to its endless duration and exalted powers, “new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

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And what is it, even then, that men behold? The works of God, not God himself; the writing, not the hand that writes; the palace that is inhabited, not the divine inhabitant; the emanation, not the essence of his glory. Every gracious spirit, then, will with Moses be "following on to know the Lord;" still and ever inquiring, still and ever imploring, "Lord, shew me thy glory."

The answer of God to this request is not less remarkable than the request itself. Moses prayed, saying, "Lord, shew me thy glory." Alas, like the disciple on the mount of transfiguration, "he knew not what he said." To have been answered according to the letter of his desire, had been fatal to him; for what created eye can behold the glory of God and live? But a gracious God returns an answer suitable to the condition of his servant, "And he said, I will make all my GOODNESS pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy."* This is the glory of God to man, the riches of his grace, the glory of his goodness, the wonders of his love.

In a display of the most striking imagery, God points out to Moses what was weak, ignorant and presumptuous in his petition, and commends what is pious, dutiful and affectionate. "And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock. And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock; and I will cover thee with my hand, while I pass by. And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen."† Expressions plainly importing, that by creatures such as we are, the great Jehovah can be seen and known only from those tokens of his presence which he leaves behind him. He comes
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* Verse 19.

† Verse 20—23.

upon us, as it were, imperceptibly, unveils his glory for a moment, in his word, in his ordinances, but his hand is upon our eyes. As he departs, he permits us to look up, and to know, by infallible marks, that he has been with us. Thus, Jacob's vision at Bethel was over, before he was aware into what glorious company he had been introduced. "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not."* Thus at Peniel he wrestled apparently with a man; but in departing, his divine antagonist, by a touch, convinced him who he was; and he discovers, that he had seen "the visions of the Almighty," after he had withdrawn. And thus, the glorified Redeemer talked with the two disciples by the way as they went to Emmaus, and opened unto them the scriptures, while their heart burned within them, but their eyes were held that they did not know him. At length, while he brake bread and blessed it, "their eyes were opened, and they knew him." Is God in this place? We see him not; we cannot see him and live; but by this we shall know it hereafter—Has his word been made quick and powerful to any soul? Has the dignity and importance of communion with him been felt? Is a man departing with a deeper and more humbling sense of his own unworthiness and guilt; and penetrated with a more lively apprehension of the mercy of God through a Saviour? Is sin rendered more odious, and holiness more amiable in the eyes of any one? Is the heart glowing with desire to know more of God, to love him more, and serve him better? Is the spirit of a man pressing "toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus?"† Then of a truth God is in this place; and a day spent thus in his courts, is better than a thousand.

But how is the language of this concluding passage of the chapter to be reconciled with that in the eleventh verse? "The Lord spake unto Moses face to face;

* Genesis xxviii. 16.

† Phill. iii. 14.

face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." The expression, "to see the face," is evidently taken in two different senses. In the 11th verse, it signifies to be regarded with favour or approbation, as it is in the 4th Psalm, verse 6. "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us;" that is, shew thyself gracious unto us, for we prize thy loving kindness far above every earthly blessing: but in the 20th and 23d verse, "to see the face of God," imports the knowledge of his nature or essence, which to a creature is impossible. Here even a Moses is in darkness, through an excess of light: into this angels desire to look, but instantly shrink back, and shut their trembling eyes. But "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him;"* and "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth."† Such was the care employed by Him who knows what is in man, to prevent the possibility of idolatry, and to expose the folly of it. Even Moses shall not be trusted with any thing like a representation of Deity; and what so absurd as to frame a similitude of what never was, never can be seen?

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," says the apostle James; and what a notable instance have we of the truth of this in the passage before us! Moses rises in his demands, as he succeeds by supplicating, and he still prevails. First, he pleads that the presence of God, the light and glory of Israel, might not be withdrawn, as was threatened, but might accompany and lead them to their destined habitation. And lo! God grants his request, with an assurance of peculiar regard and affection to himself, "Thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name."‡ Upon this he presumes to ask some new, some special manifestation of the divine glory, for his own satisfaction and comfort. This too

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* John i. 18.

† John i. 14.

‡ Verse 17.

he obtains, in a promise that the goodness of God, *all* his goodness should be made to pass before him. Emboldened by this success, he cannot rest till he has obtained for the people a remission of their offence. And he said, "If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go amongst us, (for it is a stiff-necked people) and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance."* And behold he carries this point also, and the covenant is renewed between God and Israel. Let us see that our requests be proper to be granted, and we have them already, before we make them. Let us be solicitous to obtain spiritual blessings in the first place, and the temporal good things which we prized not, asked not, may perhaps come unexpected, unsought. "Give thy servant," said Solomon, "an understanding heart, that I may discern between good and bad." "And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life, neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment: behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wife and an understanding heart, so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee, all thy days."†

To enjoy this heavenly vision of *all* God's goodness, as it passed by, Moses must again ascend the mount, and draw nigh unto God. He was going up as to meet a friend; but that almighty friend must protect him from himself, as from his most formidable enemy. "While my glory passeth by, I will put thee in a cleft of the rock; and will cover thee with my hand, while I pass by."‡ An inspired apostle tells us that

* Chap. xxxiv. 9. † 1 Kings iii. 10—13. ‡ Verse 22.

that "this rock was Christ."* And it sheds a pleasing light on the subject. What afforded safety to Moses in the tremendous hour, when the glory of God appeared? A cleft of that rock from whence the living stream issued forth for the refreshment of God's heritage when it was weary, and which was the type of that wonderful "*Man*" who is an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."† Did Moses flee thither for shelter, did he foresee his danger, and provide a covering for his defenceless head? No, the refuge was of God's providing. "I will put thee in a cleft of the rock." Not human sagacity, but divine mercy discovers, and prepares a retreat for the miserable. Observe the solid foundation on which that man is established who rests on the word of God; "thou shalt stand upon a rock." Remove the promise of him who is faithful, of him who is true, and we immediately sink into an horrible pit, and stick fast in the miry clay; but "Behold," says God, "I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste."‡

Moses is now directed to make all needful preparation for this important visit. In his haste he had thrown the two tables, which contained the law, on the ground, and had broken them in pieces under the mount: but no act of man can disannul the law of God. The loss, though great, was not irreparable. But God will not entirely repair it, that Moses may have somewhat to regret in the effects of his impatience. The former two tables were wholly of God—the substance, the form, the writing, the subject; but the last must partake of human ignorance and imperfection. The choice of the stone, and the hewing it into form, are of Moses; the writing and the words are still of God. And these were the tables which were laid up in the ark of the testimony for preservation,

* 1 Cor. x. 4. † Isaiah xxxii. 2. ‡ Isaiah xxviii. 16.

tion, and were transmitted to posterity. And it is thus that the precious things of God are still conveyed to men. The casket is human, the jewel which it contains is divine. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."* And thus, though a merciful God expresses not displeasure at our rashness and folly, they become in the end their own punishment.

Moses is commanded to be ready in the morning. The operations of human state loiter and linger, and seek to acquire importance from expectation and delay; but the movements of Deity prevent the dawning, and derive all their importance from themselves. Unless prayer be followed out by vigour and exertion, men pray in vain. One hour lost in slumber had rendered ten thousand petitions fruitless and ineffectual: but Moses, like a man in earnest, like a man who knew the value of what he had so ardently desired, is ready betimes; he is at the appointed place at the appointed hour; with the tablets prepared to receive the impress of God. He carried them with him, a dead, vacant, useless lump of stone; he brings them back turned into spirit and life, clothed with meaning, speaking to the eye, to the heart, to the conscience; for if God breathe on dry bones, they instantly live, and stand up a great army.

If we can conceive a situation more awfully solemn than another, it was that of Moses on this occasion. Consider the stillness of the morning, the elevation of the mountain, the pleasing gloom of solitude, the expected display of a glory which he could not behold but as it departed. Every circumstance is great and affecting, but altogether suitable to the glory that followed: for "the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord."† At the inauguration of kings it is customary to proclaim their name and titles, and to bid defiance to every challenger or usurper of their rights.

This

* 2 Cor. iv. 7.

† Chap. xxxiv. 5.

This is the mere pride of state, the mere insolence of possession. But the names of God are his nature, peculiar to himself, inapplicable, incommunicable to any other. And mark how the tide of mercy flows and swells till it has overcome every barrier; from "the soles of the feet to the ancles, from the ancles to the knees, till it becomes a river, wherein a man may swim;" and from an overflowing river converted into a boundless ocean, without bottom, without shore. "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin."* While justice is confined in one steady, deep, awful stream, threatening destruction only to the impenitent and unbelieving; expressed in these awful words, "and that will by no means clear the guilty."

This was the commencement of an interview "which lasted forty days and forty nights," and which contained a repetition of the instructions formerly given respecting the tabernacle and its service. But this merits a separate and distinct consideration; as likewise does the alteration of the external appearance of Moses, on coming down from the mount; of which we mean to discourse next Lord's day. "Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone, while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come nigh him."†

* Chap. xxxiv. 6, 7.

† Chap. xxxiv. 29, 30.

History of Moses.

LECTURE VI.

EXODUS XXXIV. 29, 30.

And it came to pass when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (with the two tables of testimony in Moses's hand, when he came down from the mount) that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone, while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come nigh him.

THE sun, the great light of the natural world, communicates to all bodies a portion of his own splendour, and thereby confers upon them whatever lustre they possess. In his absence, all things assume the same dismal sallow hue. The verdure of the meadow; the varied glory of the garden; the brightness of the moon's resplendent orb; the sweet attractions of "the human face divine," pronounce in so many different forms of expression, "The light of yonder celestial globe has arisen upon me: if I have any beauty or loveliness, with him it comes, and with him it departs." The whole order and system of nature is designed to be a constant witness to the God of grace—"the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world." If there be in angels any beauty of holiness, any fervour of love, any elevation of wisdom, any excellency of strength; if there be in man any bowels of mercies, any kindness of affection,
any

any gentleness of spirit, any endearment of charity, any humbleness of mind, any meekness, patience, long-suffering, it is a glory reflected from "the Father of lights." It neither exists nor can be seen, but as it is supplied and discovered by the eternal Source of light and joy. Say to that tulip, at the gloomy solstice of the year, or at the dusky midnight hour, "Array thyself in all those beautiful tints of thine wherewith thou charmest the eye of every beholder;" it hears thee not, it exhibits no colour but one. But with the return of the vernal breeze, and the genial influence of the sun, and the moment the dawning has arisen upon it, unbidden, unobserved, it puts on its beautiful garments, and stands instantly clothed in all the freshness of the spring. Why is that face clouded with sorrow, why grovels that spirit in the dust, why lacks that heart the glow of benevolence, the meltings of sympathy? The genial current of the soul is frozen up, it is the dreary winter season of grace. The sun, the Sun of righteousness has withdrawn; but, lo, after a little while, the winter is past, cheerful spring returns, the voice of joy and gladness is heard, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."*

We naturally assume the tone of those with whom we frequently converse, and whom we dearly love. "He who walketh with wise men shall become wise; but the companion of fools shall be destroyed." At the social, friendly banquet, the eye sparkles with delight, the heart expands, the brow is smoothed, the tongue is inspired by the law of kindness; every look is the reception or communication of pleasure. In the house of mourning, we speedily feel ourselves in unison with the afflicted; our eyes stand corrected, our words are few, our heads droop. In the cell of melancholy, the blood runs cold, the features relax, our powers of thought and reflection are suspended, with those of the moping wretches whose misery we deplore,

* Isaiah lx. 1.

deplorable. What wonder then if Moses descending from the mount, after forty days familiar intercourse with "the Lord God, merciful and gracious," had not the appearance of an ordinary man; that he had acquired a lustre not his own! "He was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread nor drink water."*

What a sublime idea does this suggest of communion with God! What created enjoyment has not lost its relish in a much shorter space! What powers of unassisted nature could have so long sustained the want of aliment! No one thing in a more humiliating manner teaches us our frailty and dependence, than the constant necessity of recurring to the grosser elements for support. Man, the lord of this lower world, must, with the subject tribes, and in a much greater proportion than many of them, pass a very considerable portion of his existence in a state of unconsciousness and insensibility during the hours of sleep: he must purchase with the suspension of his reason, during a third part of his being, the exercise of it during the other two. The happiness of an immortal being is, oftener than once in a day, subjected to a little bread that perisheth; the spirit, however willing, quickly feels the oppressive weight of a body frail and infirm. But behold the triumph of the spirit over the flesh; or rather, the power and grace of God, which, vouchsafing in general to employ means, call upon us diligently to use them; but which, sometimes neglecting these, and conveying immediate supplies and support, lead us at once to Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

Moses descends, not with impaired, but with recruited strength; strength, which, to the end of life, never more abated: not with a sunk, darkened, extinguished eye; but an eye, which, having seen God, never afterwards became dim: not with a visage pale and emaciated from a fast of forty days; but with a

countenance

* Chap. xxxiv. 28.

countenance that dazzled the eyes of every beholder. What a glorious creature is the friend of God! "Lo, O Lord, they that are far from thee shall perish, but it is good for me to draw nigh unto God." When Moses descended before, he was clothed in just resentment and displeasure; he came a minister of vengeance, and all Israel trembled as he frowned; he now returns with the covenant renewed, the tables of the law restored, a messenger of peace, and yet the lustre of his appearance is intolerable. What must the great JEHOVAH be in his own glory, when reflected, imparted glory—glory communicated to a creature, thus intimidates and astonishes! How dreadful the glory of wrath and fiery indignation, when the glory of infinite goodness we are not able stedfastly to behold!

Moses descended the first time, with the tables in their original state, altogether of God; and in his haste he effaced and destroyed them: but we read of no attempt to collect the scattered fragments, and to re-unite them. Superstition might have made an improper use of what could not be distinctly read, and, of consequence, but partially understood; and true piety will seek some surer rule of faith and conduct, some more powerful assistant in devotion, than the scattered shivers of even a sapphire from the throne of God. It has been woefully demonstrated to be an easy matter to mar the work of God. Adam defaced the divine image in his own person, by one wilful transgression. Moses cancelled the hand writing of ordinances, in one rash moment: and every thoughtless transgressor is pulling down, in his own person, a fabric of God's rearing. But all the powers of nature united, are incapable of rebuilding that temple, of renewing that writing, of restoring that image. He who in the beginning "commanded light to shine out of darkness," alone can relumine the extinguished life of God in the soul. The hand which at first created man out of "dust of the ground," alone can form

form of the dead in trespasses and sins, "a new creature in Christ Jesus unto good works." And what was afterwards laid up in the holy place, and preserved while the tabernacle remained? Not that which came pure and perfect from the hands of the Creator, but that which God, by an act of grace and the intervention of a Mediator, recovered. Thus "the general assembly and church of the first-born written in heaven," is not composed of men that never "left their first estate," but of "just men *made* perfect;" not of creatures like Adam, in a state of innocence, but of creatures redeemed by the blood of the Son of God; "justified by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," and sanctified by the Spirit of the living God. Let us not, then, regret the loss of an earthly paradise, nor the destruction of the image of a changeable, though perfect creature, while, through grace, we may regain the paradise of God, and be fashioned in body and in spirit like unto our glorious Redeemer.

Moses has acquired a glory, on the mount, which he is not conscious of. "He wist not that the skin of his face shone, while he talked with him."* The choicest of God's gifts, and humility is one of the most precious, come not with observation, announce not their approach, are not first visible to the possessor. But it is impossible to converse much with God, without appearing more glorious in the eyes of men. Has a man been in the mount with God? He needeth not to sound a trumpet before him, to proclaim from whence he has come; he has but to shew himself, and the evidence of it will appear. That man has been in the mount with God. What are the signs of it? Is he ostentatious, self-sufficient? Is he eager to talk of his attainments, to exhibit the shining of his face, to abash and confound a less favoured brother? He is not like Moses, he has not been with the God of Moses, his pretensions are vain. That man has been in the mount with God. How does it appear? Is he gloomy

* Verse 29.

gloomy and fullen, harsh and uncharitable? Is his tongue filled with anathemas? Flashes his eye destruction on mankind? He is a liar and an impostor, believe him not; he is not come down from the God of the law, from the God of the gospel, from the relenting Father of Israel, from the compassionate Father of the human race: No, he has been conversing with, he has ascended from the malignant enemy of God and man: by his spirit you may know who he is.

Pretenders are at as much pains to display the lustre of their outside, as Moses was to conceal his. By this then you shall try and know yourselves, and form your judgment of others. Does a man issue forth from his closet, return from the temple, retire from the Lord's table, with his temper sweetened, his heart enlarged, with the law of kindness on his tongue, with the tear of compassion, or the lustre of benevolence in his eye? Is he, like Moses, more attentive to the condition, necessities and instruction of others, than earnest to blaze abroad his own excellencies, in order to obtain reputation for himself? How gloriously does such an one shine in the eyes of men: but that is nothing, how gloriously does he shine in the eyes of God! And that is true glory which God sees to be such.

"The face of Moses shone and they were afraid to come nigh him."* Of what importance is it to inquire, at what particular moment, and through what particular medium, this singular appearance was produced? Is it not sufficient for me, that I see the fruit hastening to its maturity, though the commencement and progress of vegetation escape me? I look up and "behold the face of the sun," and draw comfort from his beams, though the discriminating instant of darkness and the dawning was too fine for my perception. Let me be able to say, with the man restored to sight, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see,"† and I shall leave to others a minute inquiry in-

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* Verse 30.

† John ix. 25.

to the process of the cure. Shew me a man shining in the beauty of holiness; a man really changed in heart and in life, and I will not trouble him to tell me, what perhaps he does not know, and therefore cannot declare,—at what place, by means of what preacher, or by what dispensation of Providence, the important change passed upon him.

A truly good man is among the first to discover, to acknowledge and to correct his own errors and imperfections; but humility spreads the veil which conceals his good qualities first over his own eyes, and he is among the last to discern the splendour which confounds others. What a powerful charm is there in undissembled goodness, when the wicked themselves are constrained to venerate and to approve it, even while it condemns them.

Besides the instance in the text, scripture has furnished us with at least another, and a most illustrious one, in the history of Stephen, the first martyr to christianity, after its divine Author. An enraged multitude, blood-thirsty accusers and a partial tribunal feel themselves awed into a temporary reverence; their fury stands suspended while they behold him. “All that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”* But there is a greater than even this upon record. The band which broke into the garden, with their officers, under the commission of the chief priests, and headed by the traitor, to apprehend Jesus of Nazareth, were so struck with an inexpressible something in his presence and address, “that they went backward and fell to the ground.”†

But what made Israel to shrink from the presence of their gracious leader, intercessor and friend? What could render the presence of his affectionate brother formidable to Aaron? That which drove the first transgressor to “hide himself from the presence of the Lord God.” It is conscience that makes cowards of all

* Acts vi. 15.

† John xviii. 6.

all men ; it is conscience that converts the rustling of a leaf, the shaking of a bulrush, into a spectre from the grave, or a flaming minister from heaven to execute vengeance. Under the awful terrors of divine glory, they had lately entreated, saying, “ Let Moses speak to us, and we will hear ;” but now, even the look of Moses, though he say nothing, is too much for a guilty people to bear. Alas, how little do men reflect, when engaged in criminal pursuits, that the pleasures of sin in which they riot, are one day to become hideous ghosts to disturb their repose, to scare the imagination, to harrow up the soul, to accuse them at the tribunal of God, to be their tormentors forever.

Moses, conscious of good will to all, exulting in the thought of having procured pardon and reconciliation for them, but unconscious of the change which had passed upon his own person, observes with concern and surprise that every one avoided him. At length he discovers the brightness of his own countenance reflected from their guilty, blushing foreheads ; and by words of kindness encourages them to return, whom the terror of his looks had dismayed and put to flight. We then find him, with the condescension of true goodness, accommodating himself to the circumstances of the people whom he was appointed to instruct. Intercourse with Heaven has raised *him* to a higher pitch of exaltation ; guilt and fear have degraded *them* : but love levels the mountains, and fills up the vallies of separation. The interposition of a veil reduces him to their standard, because the confidence of innocence raised them not to his. The law of God must be taught to the people, though the teacher is become more glorious. This is a plain and striking lesson to all who undertake to instruct others. It is a wretched ambition merely to shine. The great aim of a teacher should be to communicate knowledge ; and he shews himself to be possessed of most, who knows best how to convey it to others. He is the truly rich man, who, by the prop-

er use of his wealth, assists in making many rich ; not he who possesses a vast hoard which he knows not how to enjoy ; nor he who makes an ostentatious display of riches, merely to insult his poorer neighbour. And he who speaks three words in a known language, to the edification of the hearer, has more real learning than the babbler of ten thousand, in a language which no one understands.

“Till he had done speaking,” then, “Moses put a veil on his face ;”^{*} so that the sound of his voice might be heard, while the terrifying lustre of his face was obscured. But this was not merely an incidental circumstance, arising out of the occasion, and done away with it ; but was designed, in providence, to be a symbolical representation of the whole Mosaic dispensation ; which was nothing else but the gospel under a veil. That this is not a fanciful conjecture, we appeal to the great apostle of the Gentiles, who has removed the veil, and discovered the hidden glory which lies under it, and thus writes, “Not that *we*,” meaning the apostles of the Lord Jesus under the New Testament, “not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves : but our sufficiency is of God. Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament, not of the the letter, but of the spirit : for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses, for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away, how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious ? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious, had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. Seeing then

^{*} Verse 33.

then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech. And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished. But their minds were blinded; for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away, in the reading of the Old Testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.”*

From the days of Moses down to those of Paul, and by Paul himself, in the days of his ignorance, Moses was heard and read with the veil over his face; was understood in the letter, not in the spirit; and even after the veil was done away in Christ, who is “the end of the law for righteousness;” after the types were explained, the predictions accomplished, and the great prophet of the Jews had brought all his glory, and laid it at the feet of the great Apostle and High Priest of our profession, still the people who had the best means of information, who had the power of comparing spiritual things with spiritual, read them, and continue to read them to this day, under the power of passion and prejudice. And he who sees in Moses, and the other writings of the Old Testament, nothing but the histories of certain events long since past, and confined in their operation and effect to a particular district; nothing but the religious usages and ceremonies practised by a particular people, that man looks with a bandage upon his eyes, understands not what he reads, and therefore cannot profit.

There is a gracious intimation in the passage we have just now quoted, that a period is approaching when Israel too shall turn unto the Lord; when the veil shall be taken away, and Moses, in whom they trusted, shall be seen without a covering; and “if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the

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world,

* 2 Cor. iii. 5—16.

world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?"*

What glorious views of God, of his providence, of his grace, does the gospel disclose! The Gentile nations behold their admission into the family of God, and their privileges, as his children, in the promises which were made to Abraham and his seed. And the Jews will in time discover the intention and design of their political and religious establishment, in the nature, duration and extent of the Redeemer's kingdom: when "Israel also shall be saved:" as it is written, "There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."†

Human frailty rendered the interposition of a veil necessary between Moses and the people; because "they could not look stedfastly to the end of that which is abolished;" but when Moses went into the tabernacle, to converse with God, a veil to cover his face being unnecessary, it was laid aside.

It is natural to hold out our most favourable appearance to men, to catch at their good opinion, to secure their approbation; but we see in Moses a mind intent only upon usefulness. He joyfully gives up a little fame, for the sake of doing much good. If the church of God be enlightened, what is it to him that he himself is a little obscured? His lustre is to illuminate Israel. Vain glory always defeats the purpose which it had formed; humility as certainly gains the point at which it aimed not. Who does not esteem Moses, modestly shrouded in a veil, infinitely more than all the loquacious boasters and exhibitors of themselves that ever existed? Moses, in talking with the people, employed a veil, not as a mask to insinuate a false idea of what he was not, but to conceal the real excellency which he had; unlike the hypocrisy and disguise of the world; and, to use disguise with God he knew would be impious, profane and unavailing. We find him changing his appearance, as the

* Rom. xi. 15.

† Rom. xi. 26.

the occasion required. This was not, in him, versatility and address, a cunning accommodation to circumstances for selfish ends; but the compliance of wisdom and necessity, in order to be more extensively useful. Thus Paul "became all things to all men, that he might gain some." And, for the same reason, a greater than Moses, a greater than Paul, disdained not the festivity of a marriage solemnity; refused not the invitation of one ruler, nor rejected the visit of another; abhorred not to eat with publicans and sinners, if by any means the ignorant might be instructed, the proud and selfish checked and reproved, the modest encouraged, and the mourner comforted.

At the first descent of Moses from the mount, we see the glory of a man zealous for God: at his second, the glory of a man owned and honoured of God; "the skin of his face shining." But at his appearance many days afterwards on Tabor, we behold a saint, from the world of bliss, altogether glorious. Such is the blessed effect of being with God and "seeing him as he is," not for forty days only, but during a series of ages. And what must it then be, to "be ever with the Lord," to glorify God, and to be glorified of him "in body and spirit which are the Lord's?" And why was Moses again exhibited on the mount of transfiguration? Wherefore again displayed in glory? Again to put a veil upon his face, to empty himself, and to deposit his glory at the feet of Him in whose light and likeness he shone—To talk with Jesus "concerning the decease he should accomplish at Jerusalem."

The Jewish Rabbins pretend to account for the unabated vigour, the unfading lustre of the latter years of the life of Moses, from these very circumstances. The eye, say they, which had endured the sight of God, could not become dim: the natural strength which supported a fast of forty days, could not sink under any future decay.

—Christian, consider Moses, the man of God, invested with lustre which dazzled the eye of every beholder, and which length of time could not impair, and reflect, to what a height of glory communion with God can raise a fallen creature; and aspire after a participation of that grace which adorned him. The glory of his person was a rare and singular attainment; but that of his spirit may be imitated and attained by all. His piety, resignation and obedience; his meekness, gentleness and compassion, present amiable patterns, and they are the ornaments suited to your present state. It is given but to a favoured few to exhibit heroic virtue, to perform splendid actions, to acquire extensive reputation; but none is excluded from the honour of simple modest worth, of habitual beneficence, of honest fame. And those are the most valuable and solid acquisitions, which “are in the sight of God of great price.”

—Steady and persevering intercourse with Heaven will infallibly transform the whole man into the image of God. The very exterior will be meliorated and improved, and the world itself will “take knowledge” of the disciple who “has been with Jesus.” The exercises of the closet will be seen and felt in the serenity of the countenance, the kindness of the eye, the melody of the voice, the affability and graciousness of the whole deportment. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”*

—The time is at hand when the glory which irradiated the face of Moses shall be imparted to the whole company of the redeemed; when the name of God and the Lamb shall shine in every forehead. Behold, and wonder, behold, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God, “A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.”† “They that be wise, shall shine as the

* Mat. v. 16.

† Rev. xii. 1.

the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.”*

“The Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”†

* Daniel xii. 3.

† Psalm lxxxiv. 11.

History of Moses.

LECTURE VII.

EXODUS XXXIX. 42, 43.

According to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so the children of Israel made all the work. And Moses did look upon all the work, and behold, they had done it as the Lord had commanded, even so had they done it: And Moses blessed them.

IF reason were to maintain its full dominion in man, were the senses perpetually under the control of the mind, a motive to religion would be continually supplied from the natural impulse of a grateful and affectionate heart. The vast universe would become one great temple; every pebble, every plant, every star would be a witness for God; and the heaven-born spirit would arise on the wing of every bird, of every breeze of air, to its glorious Author. But man, degraded by sin, blinded by passion, involved in error; man, impaired in understanding, grovelling in affection, in captivity to sense, needs to be frequently admonished of his obligation to, and dependence upon God, his Creator and Preserver. He needs forms, and seasons, and places of worship; the heart must be approached through the channels of sense; and our acquaintance with the Father of spirits must be preserved, by means of things seen and temporal. Hence a sabbath, a tabernacle, a temple; sacrifices, sacraments, sermons,

sermons, are the institution of Heaven ; are the ordinances of Him “ who knows what is in man,” and what is necessary to man.

It is easy to conceive what the world would be, destitute of the modes and offices of religion, when we consider what men are, with the advantage of “ line upon line, precept upon precept,” revelation upon revelation. The religious ceremonies and services in use among ancient nations, whatever were their origin, become respectable in our eyes, merely from their antiquity : but when to antiquity is superadded *divine authority* ; when we behold the great JEHOVAH condescending to describe and to appoint the rites of his own worship, to exhibit a model of all the instruments to be employed in his service, we feel something more than respect ; we are filled with veneration : we break out into the exclamation of Solomon, “ Will God indeed dwell with men upon the earth ?”

Moses had now finally descended from the mount, furnished with complete instructions for settling the civil government and the religious polity of the nation which God “ chose, to place his name there.” Under the direction of men divinely inspired for the work, he addresses himself to the execution of the plan which God himself had vouchsafed to delineate. From the liberality and zeal of the people, materials are speedily and amply supplied. Through the skill and assiduity of the artists, the business is speedily and successfully dispatched : and, on the first anniversary of the departure out of Egypt, the tabernacle is ready to be reared up.

It is not my design to attempt a minute description of that sacred structure, and of its furniture. But I find it impossible to pass them by entirely, as I apprehend a few remarks of a practical nature, fall directly within the design of these exercises, and may, by the divine blessing, render the awful monuments of religion in the wilderness, instructive and useful in gospel times.

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The name and the nature of the tabernacle were, perhaps, intended to be emblematical of the whole dispensation, of which it was a leading instrument. A tent; or tabernacle, is a temporary and portable habitation, suited to a state of journeying or warfare; and this, in particular, was to be the guide to Canaan, to give the signal of motion and of rest; to lead the way to victory and peace: and when full possession was at length given, the tabernacle transferred its transitory glory, to the stationary glory of the temple; or rather was consolidated into one glory with it. Thus, all the positive institutions of religion are designed to be our monitors, guides and comforters in the wilderness; to introduce us into the promised land; and then the objects of faith shall become objects of vision, and the redeemed of the Lord shall worship together in that temple, from which there is no more going out.

Jehovah declared himself not only the spiritual Head of the Israelitish church and nation, but also their temporal Sovereign; the supreme Head and Governor of their political economy. As such, he gave commandment to pitch a tent for the leader and commander of his people, from whence orders were expected and issued; over which the royal standard was seen perpetually hovering in the dreadful glory of a pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night. And the final fulfilling of the scriptures is the gathering into one, to the standard of the Redeemer, "a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,"* when at the sounding of the seventh angel, there shall be "great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."†

From the contemplation of a tabernacle constructed of parts that might be separated, and joined together again, as occasion required, we are led to contemplate

* Rev. vii. 9.

† Chap. xi. 15.

plate the “city of our solemnities,” Jerusalem that is above, “a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down, not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby.”*

The fabric in the wilderness was not a design of human skill, nor fashioned according to models seen in Egypt, but planned of infinite wisdom, erected, to a single pin, according to a pattern shewn to Moses on the mount. In things which relate to the management of this world, a latitude is given to the exercise of human prudence and discretion; but in what regards the immediate worship and service of God, men are tied up to an iota and a tittle, “Thus saith the Lord.” The work of God is perfect, his law is perfect, his word is perfect, none can with safety add thereto, or diminish from it. A holy and a jealous God has fenced himself and his ordinances as with a wall of fire, which presumption attempts to break through at its peril. “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book: if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”† When we consider the dreadful import of these words, who but must tremble to think on the rash, the irreverent, the profane use that is daily made of the name and the book of God. Is it thus ye requite your Maker, foolish creatures and unwise? “He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?”‡

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* Isaiah xxxiii. 20, 21.

† Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

‡ Job. ix. 4.

The tabernacle consisted of three several apartments one within another—The court, the holy place, and the most holy place, or the holy of holies. The temple of Solomon was built upon the same plan. And the earlier christian churches preserved something of a resemblance to it. For they consisted, first, of a spacious porch, where the penitents who implored the prayers of the faithful, the catechumens, the Gentiles, the Jews, and the heretics, were stopped short. The second compartment was the *Navos*, the nave, or body of the temple, where the faithful assembled, and performed their devotions; and the third was the *Byssa*, or choir, into which ecclesiastics only were admitted, and in which were placed the altar, the throne of the bishop, and the stalls of the clergy.

Some learned men have given it as their opinion, that the Grecians borrowed their noble and beautiful style of architecture, from the perfect Hebrew models described in the sacred volume; that it was transmitted by them to the Romans; from whom it has descended to all the provinces of their great empire, and continues to be the ornament and the glory of the modern world. Indeed it seems to be something more than human invention and art, that, through the lapse of so many ages, so many revolutions of empire, so many changes of taste and opinion, the same arrangement and proportions should excite universal admiration, and yield universal delight; and that the slightest deviation from the principles of that noble art should instantly be observed, and universally offend the eye. Does it not seem as if he who formed the eye, had also deigned to design the model of what would fill and please it?

The court, then, was rather the large space of ground in which the tabernacle was erected, than any part of the tabernacle. Its form was an oblong, whose length was double its breadth, being an hundred cubits by fifty, that is, according to the most approved calculation, an hundred and fifty feet by seventy-five. It

was

was encompassed on all sides by curtains of fine twined linen, fixed to fifty-six pillars of Shittim, that is, as the seventy interpret it, incorruptible wood, filleted with silver, of the height of five cubits, or seven feet and a half. The gate or passage into the court was a hanging of twenty cubits, curiously embroidered, and supported by four pillars of the same materials and workmanship. On all which particulars, I shall detain you to make this only remark: when we see the great God condescending to give directions concerning the formation and use of the most minute implements pertaining to sanctuary service, of pins, rings, loops and hooks, man is taught to consider nothing as beneath his notice which can affect his own credit, usefulness and comfort, or the fame, virtue and happiness of his neighbour. "Let all things be done by us decently and in order." Be it the glory of a fabulous Jupiter, that it is beneath his dignity, and inconsistent with his higher occupations, to attend to small matters. It is the glory of the living and true God, the Maker and Preserver of all things, it is the excellency of his administration, the beauty of his providence, that "the hairs of our head are numbered of him." "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father."*

On entering the court, the objects which first presented themselves were, on the one hand the altar of burnt-offering, and on the other, the laver for the priests to wash in. The materials and form of these two instruments of divine worship, have afforded to the learned and ingenious, many curious subjects of speculation, some of which might perhaps amuse, but could not greatly edify you. As the whole service of the tabernacle was typical, and presented the "shadow of good things to come," it will not I trust be deemed a mere flight of imagination to suppose, that by the altar of burnt-offerings, and the use to which it was devoted,

* Matth. x. 29.

ed, the great atonement, the means of pardon and acceptance with God were shadowed forth; and that by the laver and its use, on the other hand, was represented the purity which becomes all who approach to a pure and holy God. In their nearness to, and union with each other, they exhibit that which brings the guilty near unto God, and that which fits them for communion with God. Justification freely by the grace of God, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;" and sanctification by the Spirit of God, whereby we are prepared to be "partakers of the inheritance of saints in light." An altar without a laver were to encourage the offender to "continue in sin, because grace abounds;" a laver without an altar would be to inspire a vain confidence in an external and imperfect righteousness, to the neglect of that which is of God by faith, and which purifieth the heart. In conjunction, they represent man's happiest state and highest glory, sin forgiven, and nature renewed.

"The holy place," which was properly the tabernacle, presented itself at the upper end of the court. Its dimensions are not laid down by Moses. Those who take it for granted that the tabernacle was a miniature representation of the temple, from the measurement of that great edifice as described in the first book of Kings, make the length of the holy place of the tabernacle to be twenty cubits or thirty feet. It was separated from the court by a curtain, within which none but the priests were permitted to enter, and where they officiated at the altar of the Lord, in the order of their course. Josephus affirms, that when the priests ministered in the holy place, the separating veil was drawn up, so that they could be seen of the people. Philo, with greater appearance of truth, maintains the contrary opinion. It is clear from a passage in the gospel according to Luke, that the priest who officiated in the holy place of the second temple, was out of the sight of the people; for it is said of Zacharias,

rias,

rias, when he was offering incense in the holy place, “the whole multitude was praying without;” that they waited for him, and “ marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple,”* and they discovered not the cause of it till he made it known to them by signs.

Though we are not informed of the exact dimensions of the “holy place,” we know that it was a covered tent, with one fold of various materials upon another. First, ten curtains of equal size, of blue, purple, scarlet, and fine twined linen; embroidered with cherubims; and coupled together with loops of blue and taches of gold. Above these were extended eleven curtains of goats hair, hung together by taches of brass. These again were covered with rams skins dyed red; and over all there was a covering of badgers skins, probably as a protection from the injuries of the air and weather. The intention and meaning of this multiplied and variegated ceiling we pretend not to explain. Was it intended to represent the impenetrable recesses of the Eternal Mind; to check the folly and sinfulness of an over curious inquiry into mysteries which are intentionally concealed; and to teach men to make a wise and temperate use of known and revealed truth? Was it not sufficient to every pious Israelite, that the altar of burnt-offering and the laver of purification were under the open canopy of heaven, seen of all, accessible to all? And by this circumstance, did not even the law teach the open and unlimited extent of salvation by the great Atonement? Religion forbid, and the structure prevented, the body of the people from entering within the veil, or penetrating into the mysteries concealed under such a covering; one fold past, another, and another, in almost endless succession, opposed itself. Woe be to him who makes a mystery of what God has graciously disclosed; and woe be to him who presumes to pry into what God has intentionally hid

* Luke i. 10, 21.

hid from his eyes. Thus sublimely sings the enraptured British Psalmist.

Chain'd to his throne a volume lies,
 With all the fates of men ;
 With every angel's form and size
 Drawn by th' eternal pen.

His Providence unfolds the book,
 And makes his counsels shine :
 Each opening leaf, and every stroke
 Fulfils some deep design.

Here he exalts neglected worms
 To sceptres and a crown ;
 Anon the following page he turns,
 And treads the monarch down.

Not *Gabriel* asks the reason why,
 Nor God the reason gives ;
 Nor dares the favourite angel pry
 Between the folded leaves.*

The furniture of the holy place is minutely described, and its meaning and use are not obscurely pointed out in many places of the sacred writings. It consisted of three articles, the golden candlestick with seven lamps ; the golden altar of incense ; and the table of shew bread. Each of which might easily furnish matter for a separate discourse ; but we confine ourselves to general ideas, and practical observations.

The first piece of furniture in the holy place was "the golden candlestick to give light;" all whose appurtenances were of pure beaten gold. It was placed on the south side, that is on the left hand as you enter the tabernacle, directly opposite to the table of shew bread. It was a talent in weight ; which is about one thousand five hundred ounces, or one hundred and twenty-five Roman pounds, whose value, according

* WATTS. Horæ Lyricæ.

according to the calculation of the learned bishop of Peterborough, was five thousand and seventy-five pounds fifteen shillings and a fraction, of our money. It is the most generally received opinion, that all, or some of these seven lamps in the candlestick, were kept continually burning : that they were extinguished in turn, to be cleansed and supplied with fresh oil ; and that their parts were made to separate for this very purpose. As the priests alone could enter the holy place, to them of course was committed the whole charge of lighting, trimming, and cleaning the lamps. It is much easier to ask many questions on this subject than to answer one. Why the number of seven lamps in one candlestick ; that number of perfection, as some have called it, and under which so many mysteries are supposed to be concealed ? Why should it burn in a place where no eye was to see its light, or to receive benefit from it, except a solitary priest ? Wherefore this waste of treasure for no apparent equivalent use ? To all such questions it must be replied, " Thus the great Lawgiver would have it." " We know in part, and we prophesy in part. What he doth we know not now, but we shall know hereafter."

From this created, confined, imperfect, self-consuming light, we are led to contemplate that pure, eternal, undecaying LIGHT which communicates, of its own splendour, whatever glory any creature possesses. " We are led to Him who is the true light of the world."

We silently turn from the tabernacle in the wilderness to adore Him who in the beginning said, " Let there be light : and there was light." We are conducted in the visions of God, to contemplate the splendour of the christian churches, and behold " the Son of Man, walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." We are hurried forward to the last awful hour of dissolving nature, when " the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light,

light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." We are transported to that celestial city, which "has no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

Without encroaching on your time and patience, or running over the subjects with indecent and unprofitable haste, it were impossible to convey any proper and useful idea of the remaining utensils of this venerable structure, and the still more venerable recess inclosed within it, styled "*the most holy place.*" The description of these therefore, with the history of the august ceremonies of setting up the tabernacle, and the relation of the whole to the "better things to come," of which they were the shadows, shall be postponed to another Lecture, which will conclude the second book of this Sacred History, and another annual revolution of our own frail, transitory life.— "Teach us," O God, "so to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."* Vouchsafe to dwell with us in thy word and ordinances; let "Christ dwell in our hearts by faith," and raise us one after another to dwell with thee in the holiest of all, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

* Psalm xc. 12.

History of Moses.

LECTURE VIII.

EXODUS xl. 17, 34—38.

And it came to pass in the first month, in the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was reared up. Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not, till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.

EVERY production of human power and skill bears this inscription, "I am made to perish." Man himself, the moment he begins to breathe begins to die, and his noblest, most durable, and most glorious works are no sooner completed, than they begin to fall to decay. In vain we look for the monuments of ancient grandeur and magnificence; they have either wholly vanished away, or present to the eye scattered fragments, or tottering ruins, ready to dash themselves upon the ground. Where is now that city and tower which raised its proud head to heaven, in defiance

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ance of the waters of a second deluge? Neither the solid and costly materials of which it was composed, the sacred purposes to which it was applied, nor the awful glory which once presided over and resided in it, have preserved from decay and loss, the tabernacle of the congregation, the work of divinely inspired Bezaleel and Aholiab. Of the magnificent structure on mount Zion, the wonder and glory of the whole earth, not one stone remaineth upon another.

All that was formal and instrumental in the ancient dispensation seems to have been, by the special appointment of Providence, destroyed and annihilated, that the spirit of it alone might remain. The tabernacle, and temple, and their service exist only in description; and in those simpler and more spiritual ordinances to which they have given place. And the institutions which now remain, are only preparing the way for a more august, more splendid, and more durable manifestation of the divine glory. The legal economy introduced that of grace by the gospel, and then passed away. The dispensation of grace, in like manner, is now performing its work, fulfilling its day, announcing, unfolding, introducing the kingdom of glory; and "when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."

The satisfaction of Moses, when the whole work of the tabernacle and of its furniture was completed, is more easily to be conceived than expressed. To see the pattern shewed him in the mount exactly copied, the design of the great Jehovah perfectly fulfilled, must have filled the good man's mind with delight ineffable. With a holy joy, similar to this, must every lover of the gospel observe the exact coincidence between "the shadows of good things to come," and "the very image of the things;" between the predictions concerning the Saviour of the world, and their accomplishment; between the promises made unto the fathers, and the blessings enjoyed by their children. And what will it be, christians, in that world

world of bliss, which is the end of our faith, and the grand object of our hope; what will it be, to find the entire coincidence between the descriptions contained in this book, of future and heavenly glory, and the things described; between the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel, and the glorious realities of our Father's house above; between the spirit which christianity now teaches and inspires, in order to dignify and bless mankind, and the spirit which all the redeemed shall feel, enjoy, and express, when raised to the dignity of being kings and priests unto God?

In the preceding Lecture we endeavoured to lead your attention to the form, use and end of the tabernacle erected in the wilderness, and of the several parts of its sacred furniture. The outward court, under the open canopy of heaven, containing "the brazen altar of burnt-offering," on which incessantly burned the consecrated fire for offering up the daily sacrifice; and close by it the laver of brass for the priests to wash in." We conducted you with trembling feet into the "holy place," concealed in front from every profane eye, by a veil which it was death to draw aside; and from above, by covering upon covering, which no eye could penetrate. In this sacred recess were placed "the golden candlestick to give light, the golden altar of incense, and the table of shew-bread." Having spoken briefly of the first of these, we now proceed to recommend to your notice the other two.

The "altar of incense" was made of Shittim or incorruptible wood, overlaid with pure gold, of a cubit square, and its height double that dimension, with a golden horn arising at each angle, and the top encompassed with a golden border or crown. It had two rings of gold immediately under the border, to which were fitted two staves of the same wood, also overlaid with gold, for the conveniency of transporting it from place to place, as occasion required.

Its use was to burn, at stated times, a sacred perfume of a certain quality and composition, which it was unlawful to compound, or apply to any other use, or in any other place. It is clear from many parts of scripture, that the smোক of the sweet incense which ascended from this altar, was intended to represent prayer or intercession. "Let my prayer," says the Psalmist, "be set forth before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." *

While the priest, invisible to every eye, was employed in burning incense in the holy place, the multitude were praying without. This leads us directly to consider the great "Apostle and High Priest of our profession, who has for us entered, not into the holy place made with hands, which was the figure of the true, but into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for us." Though the veil be let down that we cannot behold Him, the eye of faith penetrates it, sees Him who is invisible; sees Him lifting up holy and unwearied hands in our behalf; sees the Prince with God prevailing. The veil was drawn aside, and discovered to the ravished eyes of the beloved disciple, an angel coming, and standing at the altar, having a golden censer: and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smোক of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God, out of the angel's hands." † The solitary perfume of secret prayer, the combined incense of family worship, the mingled odours of public devotion, the prayers of all saints derive an activity, a force, an elevation from the merit and mediation of the Redeemer, which raise them to the throne of God, where, being accepted through the Beloved, they descend again in showers of blessings on the believer's head.

Behold

* Psalm cxli. 2.

† Rev. viii. 3, 4.

Behold the altar which sanctifies the gift, the ladder whose foundation is on the earth, but its summit reacheth heaven, along which the ministring spirits to the heirs of salvation convey the vows, the praises, the holy desires of the faithful, up to their Father and their God; and re-convey the gifts and graces of their heavenly Father to his children upon earth. The approach to the golden altar of incense was by way of the brazen altar of burnt-offering: the new and living way that conducts "into the holiest of all," is through the rent veil of the Redeemer's flesh. Jesus having suffered the things which were appointed, entered into his glory. As by the altar of burnt-offering, so by the laver of purification, the holy place was approachable; for "without holiness no man shall see God;" and "every one that nameth the name of Christ must depart from iniquity."

The horns at the corners of the altar have been considered as emblematical of strength, and being tipped with the blood of the atoning victim, are conceived to represent the power of God, and the grace that is in Christ Jesus, united in the work of man's redemption.

The quadrangular figure of the altar, and the equality of its sides, may point out the impartial regards of the great Father of all, under the dispensation to which that given by Moses conducted, to men of every nation under heaven, and they prefigure the day when, according to the words of the Saviour himself, "men should come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."*

The materials of the altar, Shittim-wood overlaid with pure gold, by a bold imagination have been supposed a figure, of the two-fold nature of Christ: the purity, solidity, impassableness of the one, encompassing, supporting, securing the fragility of the other, defending it at all points, and bestowing upon it a value,

* Mat. viii. 11.

value, strength and duration which it possessed not before.

Finally, the staves fitted to the rings, and perpetually in their place for the conveniency of motion, have been, with what propriety you will judge, construed into an emblem of the transitory nature of the whole dispensation, which looked continually forward to something better than itself; which forever warned the comers thereunto of their pilgrimage state, saying, "Arise ye and depart, for this is not your rest." And it is remarkable, that after Israel was come to his rest in the land of promise, and the holy furniture of the tabernacle was lodged for perpetuity in the temple at Jerusalem, this memorial of motion and change still offered itself to view: the altar, the table, the ark, had the instrument of removing them always in its place, and, in concert with every part of the system of nature and providence, call upon men with a loud and distinct voice, saying, "Seek ye another country, that is an heavenly." But we proceed.

The third and last piece of furniture in this solemn repository was "the table of shew-bread," of the same materials with the altar, but of different dimensions, two cubits in length, by one of breadth, and one and a half in height: and, like it, furnished with staves fitted to four rings for the purpose of conveyance. Its use was to hold the shew-bread, consisting of twelve cakes, according to the number of the twelve tribes, of the finest flour, prepared according to a special prescription, in two piles of six each, to be renewed every sabbath day, and that which was removed to become the property of, and to be eaten in the holy place by the priests, the sons of Levi, who ministered at the altar. Now upon the very first sight of it, this ordinance, besides those circumstances which it possessed in common with others, seems designed to be a perpetual acknowledgment, on the part of man, of the care and kindness of a gracious Providence, which gives to men the rich enjoyment of the principal

principal support of human life, bread, and with it, all the inferior accommodations and comforts which render it desirable. It was, on the other hand, the security and pledge which God vouchsafed to give to his church and people, that bread should continually be given them : that while Israel owned and acknowledged God in the way of piety and devotedness to his service, he would own and acknowledge them, by an unwearied and effectual attention to their necessary demands and reasonable wishes.

A common table is the badge of familiarity and friendship, is the sweetest emblem of domestic union and happiness ; of paternal concern, of filial tenderness, of brotherly love.

The “shew-bread” was appropriated to persons of a sacred profession, to sacred seasons, and a holy place ; unless when the greatness of the occasion superseded the strictness of the letter, and the law of mercy took precedence of the law of sacrifice. O how much more extended the grace of the gospel ! David alone and his company, and that only once, on a necessitous occasion, was admitted to the privileges of a son of Levi, to a participation of the consecrated bread ; but “behold ;” says the great Head of the christian church, “I stand at the door, and knock : if *any man* hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”* What an honour was it to these Levites to be received and treated as the guests of the great Jehovah ! But it is not once to be compared with the unspeakable felicity and honour of receiving and entertaining the King of glory. And such felicity is the portion of the meanest of the saints : thus shall it be done to the man, however poor or despised among his equals, whom He by whom kings reign delighteth to honour : for “behold the tabernacle of God is with men.”† The twelve tribes, represented by so many cakes of bread, presented without ceasing before God

* Rev. iii. 20.

† Rev. xxi. 3.

in the holy place, were without ceasing admonished of their common relation to one another, and their constant security under their heavenly Father's watchful eye, and the shelter of his expanded wings. "Can a woman forget her sucking-child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee."*

The renewal of the cakes every returning sabbath, different yet the same, removed yet remaining, the old applied to one use, the new to another, may not unfitly represent that bread of life which our heavenly Father's love has provided for the fare of our christian sabbaths—the very food which our forefathers lived upon; not another gospel, but that which was from the beginning; but served up for our use, by men possessed of different gifts, "according as God hath distributed to every man the proportion of faith:" and it is the happiness and the praise of every scribe who "is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, to be like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."†

Once more, might not this table of the Lord, perpetually covered, perpetually furnished, be intended as a figure of that table, which the eternal wisdom of the Father has prepared and provided with "the bread which came down from heaven, to give life to the world?" And from thence, by an easy and natural transition, the eye ascends to our Father's house above, in which "there are many mansions," and where "there is bread enough and to spare;" and O how happy is that man who "shall eat bread in the kingdom of God."

Such was the holy place and its furniture; the uses to which it was applied, and the spiritual objects which it presents to our view.

With reverence we draw nigh to the last solemn recess of this venerable structure, called "*the ark*," by way

* Isa. xlix. 15.

† Mat. xiii. 52.

way of eminence and distinction ; sometimes, “ the ark of the covenant ;” the ark of the “ testimony ;” the ark of “ his strength ;” the ark “ whose name is called by the name of the God of Israel.” We shall pass by those circumstances which were in common to it, with the other implements of the worldly sanctuary, the holy places made with hands ; and point out a few of those which were peculiar to itself. It was a close chest of two cubits and a half long, one and a half broad, and one and a half in height : of the self-same materials with the rest. The covering was denominated the mercy-seat ; from the two ends of which arose two figures of cherubims, of beaten or solid gold with their faces turned, and their wings extended towards each other ; looking down together towards the mercy-seat, and concealing it from the eye. For any one to touch this with so much as a finger, or to presume to look into it, except those who were divinely appointed for the purpose, was instant and certain death, as the dreadful punishment of Uzzah and of the men of Bethshemesh awfully evinced. Its contents were the two tables of testimony, the golden pot with manna, the memorial of Israel’s miraculous supply in the wilderness, and Aaron’s rod that budded. Its principal use was to point out a way in the pathless wilderness for Israel to march in. From between the cherubims the divine oracles were delivered, at first to Moses by a voice ; for God conversed with him as a man with his friend ; and afterwards to the high priest, who consulted by Urim and Thummim, which is supposed to have been a supernatural declaration of the divine will, by means of rays of glory darted from the most holy place, upon the breast-plate which was studded with twelve gems. But the nature and manner of this consultation and response, now are, and likely to remain so, a secret to mankind.

Besides marking out the way, and directing the several encampments in the wilderness, we shall meet in the course of this history with a special interposition
of

of it in many noted particular cases. By it the waters of Jordan were divided afunder, and opened a passage for Israel into the promised land. Before it the proud walls of Jericho were levelled with the ground, after having been encompassed by it for seven days: its presence confounded Dagon, and plagued the Philistines. Treated with respect, or approached carelessly and presumptuously, it became a protection and a source of blessing to one family; a terror and a curse to another. The king of Israel reckoned it the glory of his house, and the protection of his kingdom; and had it conveyed with all suitable solemnity to the place prepared for it. And, finally, it completed the splendour and magnificence of the sacred edifice on Mount Zion, the joy and wonder of the whole earth. And the divine presence, of which it was the symbol, constitutes the safety, strength and happiness of every living temple which the Holy Ghost hath reared. Let my heart, O God, be an altar, from whence the sweet incense of gratitude, love and praise may continually ascend. "Arise, O Lord, into this thy rest; thou and the ark of thy strength. Let thy priest be clothed with righteousness; let me with all thy saints shout for joy. Turn not away the face of thine anointed."

The conjectures of the learned on the subject of the cherubim, are various, many of them fanciful, and for the most part unsatisfactory. The most obvious and most generally received opinion is, that they were emblematical representations of the angelic or heavenly host: and the attributes here assigned to them, their attitude, and their employment in the tabernacle service, correspond exactly to the idea given us in other parts of scripture of those flaming ministers who stand continually before God, execute his pleasure, adore his divine perfections, minister to the heirs of salvation.

The ark may be considered as the throne of God. The cherubim encompassed that throne, as the attendants

ants in earthly courts surround the throne and person of their prince. This is the precise idea suggested by the prophet Isaiah, of the nature and office of these blessed spirits, in the sixth chapter of his prophecy. "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory."* Thus also Daniel represents the same glorious object; "The Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him; thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him."† Micah saw in vision, "the Eternal sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing before him, and on the right hand and the left." "The chariots of God," says the psalmist, "are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place."‡ And in several other passages he addresses the Deity as *sitting*, and *dwelling* among the cherubim.§

The cherubim had their faces turned one toward another. This might be intended to represent the perfect union of sentiment and co-operation which subsists among these sons of light. In other places of scripture, we hear their voices in concert, raising one song of praise, as in the passage just now quoted from Isaiah, and Revelations, chapter fourth: "They rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."|| "Thou art worthy,

* Verse 1—3.

† Chap. vii. 9, 10.

‡ Psal. lxxviii. 17.

§ Psal. lxxx. 1. Psal. xcix. 1.

|| Verse 8.

worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."* These glorious beings, differing in degree, infinite in number, have nevertheless but one heart, one desire, one will, one aim,—to praise and serve Him who is the author of their being, and the source of all their happiness.

The cherubim are represented as furnished with wings. This denotes the alacrity, promptitude and instantaneousness with which angels obey the divine will. Thus, the angel who appeared to Zacharias at the hour of incense, "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God:" and hence, elsewhere, in scripture, the activity of angels is compared to the velocity of the wind, and the rapid irresistible force of fire. "He rode upon a cherub, and did fly; yea he did fly upon the wings of the wind." "He maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire." "Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure."†

Once more; the faces of the cherubim were not only turned one to another, but bended together toward the mercy-seat, and their looks were attentively fixed upon the ark. This expresses the holy admiration, with which angels are filled, of those mysteries of redemption which the ark prefigured. To this remarkable circumstance the apostle Peter alludes in his first epistle, when speaking of salvation through "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow," he adds, "which things the angels desire to look into." The words literally translated import, "which things, angels stoop down to contemplate." It conveys a beautiful and striking idea of the gospel dispensation. Angels are exalted to the height of glory and felicity. They behold God face to face, and drink of the river of pleasure at its very source. They

* Rev. iv. 11.

† Psal. ciii. 20, 21.

They see his uncreated splendour shining before their eyes. They see his goodness in the blessings which they enjoy. They see his justice in the punishment of angels "which left their first estate." They see his wisdom in the government of this vast universe. In a word, every thing that is capable of filling the enlarged comprehension, of satisfying the inquiring spirit, is set before these pure and exalted intelligences. Nevertheless, amidst so many objects of wonder and delight, in the midst of all this felicity and glory, angels desire to be more and more acquainted with "the things which belong to our peace." They discover a God rich in mercy to men upon earth; as wonderful, as incomprehensible as a God abundant in loving kindness to angels in heaven: and forgetting, if it be lawful to say so, the lustre and happiness of the church triumphant, descend and mingle with the church militant, and find fuel to divine love, find materials for pleasing, advancing, endless investigation, in the work of redemption by Jesus Christ. "These things the angels," from the heights of heaven, "bend down" with humble earnestness, with holy desire "to look into."

I conclude with quoting a passage of the Rabbi Maimonides* on the subject. "God commanded Moses," says he, "to make two cherubim, in order to impress upon the human mind the doctrine of the existence of angels. Had there been but one cherub placed over the mercy-seat, the Israelites might have fallen into a grievous error, they might have imagined, with idolatrous nations, that it was the image of God himself, which they were required to worship under that form. Or they might have been led to believe, on the other hand, that there was but one angel. But the command given to make two cherubim, joined to this declaration, *O Israel, the Lord your God is one Jehovah*, settles both articles beyond the power of disputation. It proves that there is an angelic order,

* More Nevoch. part III. chap. xlv.

der, and that it consists of more than one : it prevents our confounding the idea of God with that of angel ; seeing there is but one God who created the cherubim, and created more than one.”

—In this sacred repository were laid up, for perpetual preservation, the awful monuments of the Sinai covenant, of the church established in the wilderness ; the memorials of mercies past, the pledges of good things to come—“ the tables of the covenant,” the incorruptible manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded : signifying to all future generations, the permanency and immutability of the divine law, the unremitting care and attention of the divine providence, the dignity and stability of the Levitical priesthood. But the whole economy, and every instrument of it, in process of time passed away. All was at length carried to Babylon. But the dissolution of the empire which dared to violate their sacredness, was involved in their violation and dissolution. Read the history of it, Dan. v.* “ Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar whiles he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels, which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, that the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God, which was at Jerusalem ; and the king and his princes, his wives and his concubines drank in them. They drunk wine, and praised the gods of gold, and silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone. In the same hour came forth fingers of a man’s hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king’s palace ; and the king saw part of the hand that wrote. Then the king’s countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed,

* Verse 1—6.

ed, and his knees smote one against another." Read the writing, with the interpretation of it. "This is the writing that was written, MENE MENE, TEKEL UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing; MENE, God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL, thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES, thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."* Read the issue. "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom."†

Such was the wonderful structure erected to the honour of God, and by his special direction, in the wilderness of Sinai. It was begun and perfected within the compass of little more than six months. Every thing was executed according to the pattern shewed to Moses in the mount. At length it was set up in all its splendour, with a mixture of holy joy and godly fear: and the divine Inhabitant took solemn possession in the eyes of all Israel. "A cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle."

"Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum: we have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man. Who hath obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old, is ready to vanish away."‡

* Verse 25—28.

† Verse 30, 31.

‡ Heb. viii. 1, 2, 6, 13.

History of Aaron.

LECTURE IX.

NUMBERS XX. 23—29.

And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto Mount Hor: and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there. And Moses did as the Lord commanded: and they went up into Mount Hor, in the sight of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron died there in the top of the mount. And Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.

THE lives of most men, from the womb to the grave, pass away unobserved, unregarded, unknown. When their course is finished, the whole history of it shrinks into two little articles; on such a day they were born, and after so many days they died. Of those who emerge out of the general obscurity, some begin their public career at an advanced period of life, and

and of course it consists of a few shining, interesting, important events, and is confined within the compass of a very few fleeting years. While the progress of a little selected band, whom an indulgent Providence has vouchsafed signally to nobilitate, and whom the historic pencil is fond to delineate, is distinguished from the cradle to the tomb, by an uninterrupted series of splendid incidents, exemplary virtues, and brilliant actions.

The characters of men are mixed like their fortunes. The most perfect instruction, for the generality of mankind, which history furnishes, is perhaps supplied from the exhibition of mixed, that is, of imperfect characters. Unvarying scenes of fraud, violence and blood; the representation of undeviating, unrelenting, unblushing profligacy, must, of necessity, create disgust, or diminish the horror of vice. The real annals of mankind present no model of pure and perfect virtue, but one; and from its singularity, it cannot, in all respects, serve as a pattern for imitation. We contemplate it at an awful distance; we feel ourselves every moment condemned by it: we turn from the divine excellency, which covers our faces with shame, and casts us down to the ground, toward the mercy which has sealed our pardon, and the grace which raises us up again.

The fanciful representations of perfect virtue, which are supplied from the stores of fiction, can but amuse at most; edify they cannot. They want truth, they want nature, they come not home to the bosoms of ordinary men. I might more easily ape the state of a king, than imitate the affectedly sublime virtue of the heroes of romance. Many of the persons whose profession it is to retail those ideal virtues, are notoriously among the most abandoned and profligate of our race. Those examples, therefore, are to be considered as the most useful, as I flatter myself they are more frequent, which exhibit a mixture in which goodness predominates, and finally prevails; in which virtue is seen

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wading through difficulties, struggling with temptation, recovering from error, gathering strength from weakness, learning wisdom from experience, sustaining itself by dependence upon God; seeking refuge from its own frailty and imperfection in divine compassion, and crowned, at length, with victory over all opposition, and the smiles of approving Heaven.

Of this sort, is the history and character which the pen of inspiration, which the pencil of a brother has drawn, for the instruction of this evening.

Aaron, the first high priest of the Hebrew nation, and the only brother of Moses, their celebrated legislator, was born in the year of the world two thousand three hundred and seventy: before Christ one thousand six hundred and thirty-four: and before the birth of his brother three years. It is probable he came into the world before the edict of the king of Egypt was published, which commanded all the Israelitish male children to be put to death. For that edict seems to have been directed by a special interposition of Providence, precisely to mark, and eminently to signalize, the first appearance of the great prophet of the Jews. Exposed to no special danger in infancy, the subject of no interesting memoir in early life, distinguished by no memorable talents or exploits in manhood, we see him far declined into the vale of years before we see him at all; and, for all our knowledge of him, earlier or later, we are indebted to the labours of his younger brother. Another, among a cloud of witnesses, to prove that the birth-right of nature, and the destination of Providence, are intended to confer distinctions of a very different kind. Moses has shone forty years in the court of Pharaoh, has formed an alliance by marriage with a foreign prince, and cultivated the virtues, and prosecuted the employments of private life for forty years more, before his elder brother is heard of. And when he is at length brought upon the scene, at the advanced age of eighty-three, it is to occupy an inferior

rior department to his brother, and the elder is yet again designed to serve the younger.

His first introduction, however, to our acquaintance, places him in a most interesting, respectable, and honourable point of view. We behold a venerable man, fourscore and upwards, agitated with public cares, and moved with fraternal tenderness and affection, on his way through the wilderness, in quest of his long absent brother. In these our days of speedy conveyance and communication from pole to pole, from the east to the west, by land, by water, through the air, we can form but a slender idea of the anxiety of friends, removed but a few leagues distance from one another, and their consequent ignorance of each other's situation. Proportionally sweet must have been the delight of meeting together, after long separation. Scripture has described this, as it does every thing else, in its own inimitable manner. "Aaron thy brother, behold he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart."* Behold the interview of two brothers, not the result of previous concert, not the effect of human sagacity, not the fortuitous coincidence of blind, blundering, accidental circumstances; but planned and conducted of Heaven, and effected by Him "who worketh all things after the counsel of his will," and for a great and noble purpose.

The occasion of Aaron's first appearance in the sacred drama, is not less memorable. Moses having received the divine commission to proceed to the deliverance of his nation from Egyptian bondage, repeatedly excuses himself from undertaking that honourable employment, particularly on the footing of his deficiency in the arts of eloquence and persuasion. Did this arise from timidity in Moses? was it a false modesty and humility? or did he indeed labour under a defect of this kind? If the last, can we avoid reflecting on the wonderful equality with which nature distrib-

utes her gifts? In conception who so sublime, in composition who so elegant, in narration who so simple, in written language who so perspicuous, so forcible, so impressive as Moses? Can it be true, then, what he says of himself, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue."* Who is so favoured of nature and Providence, as to possess every talent, every blessing? Who so hardly dealt with, as to be left destitute of all? The praise of eloquence certainly belongs to Aaron; for it is bestowed by him, who is best able to estimate his own gifts. "Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well."† But O how different the nature, the importance, the effect, the duration of one talent compared to another! The tongue which overawed Pharaoh, which astonished all Egypt, and charmed the listening ear of Israel, speedily became mute; and of its powerful charm, not a single trace remains behind: while the productions of Moses's pen, exist and shall exist till nature expire, to instruct, delight, and bless mankind.

The various instruments which Heaven employs are ever suited to their seasons, occasions and ends. The interview between the brothers takes place according as infinite wisdom had contrived it; and it behoved, on many accounts, to be a pleasant one. Two wise and good men, so nearly related, so fondly attached to each other, after a separation so tedious, to meet again in health, to confer together on matters of such high moment, to enter under the assured protection of Heaven, upon the noblest and most generous enterprize that can engage great and lofty spirits, the deliverance of their country! What a field for the exercise of private friendship, of natural affection, of public spirit! On Aaron, according to the divine appointment, fell that most grateful of all tasks, to announce to the wretched the period of their misery,

"to

* Verse 10.

† Verse 14.

“to proclaim liberty to the captives,” the truth and faithfulness of God to the desponding and dejected, and the possession of Canaan to the slaves of Pharaoh.

Eloquence has an enchanting power, even over those who have no interest in the subject of it. How potent, then, the enchantment of the heaven-taught eloquence of Aaron the Levite! What grace must have been poured into his lips, when delivering the message of love from the great “I AM,” the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to their hapless offspring, assuring them, that the time to favour them was now come, that his covenant was sure! With what ravished ears must the elders of Israel have listened to such tidings, flowing from such lips! Happy Aaron, thus accomplished, thus commissioned, thus prospered! Happy people, thus remembered, thus addressed, thus persuaded! But wherefore envy his honour, or their happiness? A greater than Aaron is with us; even He who says of himself, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound:”* We announce to you, that Jesus, “in whom all fulness was pleased to dwell,” whom admiring multitudes worshipped, saying, “never man spake like this man!” whose all-commanding voice checked the boisterous elements, put demons to flight, and pierced the ear of death.

Christians, we come not to you with the eloquence of an Aaron; but we bear a message infinitely more important than his. Our “speech and preaching is not with enticing words of man’s wisdom:”† O that it might be “in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”‡ He proclaimed freedom from fetters of iron, and the oppression of an

* *Isai. lxi. 1.*

† *1 Cor. ii. 4.*

‡ *1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.*

an earthly tyrant: we proclaim liberty from the bondage of sin; from everlasting chains under darkness; from the cruel tyranny of the devil; from the dreadful curse of God's violated law, which arms Satan with his tremendous power, digs the vast recesses of the unfathomable abyss, and feeds the inextinguishable flame of the fiery lake. He published a covenant of a temporary effect, which conveyed temporal advantages, which was clogged with hard and hazardous conditions, which has passed away. We publish a covenant, "ordered in all things and sure," whose stability depends not on our fidelity, which possesses a commanding influence on eternity, which proposes everlasting benefits, which makes provision for human frailty, which outruns our utmost wishes, composes our justest apprehensions, transcends our highest hopes. The message of Aaron issued in the prospect, yet distant, of a land flowing with milk and honey, of a pure air, and a fruitful soil; but infested with enemies, influenced by, and exposed to inclement seasons, and liable to forfeiture. But our preaching, men and brethren, looks beyond time, and the flaming boundaries of this great universe: it holds out the distant, but not uncertain, prospect of a celestial paradise, stored with every delight that is suited to the nature of a rational and immortal being: which is exposed to no hostile incursion, to no elementary strife; and whose eternal possession is ensured by the almighty power of God, and the purchase of a Saviour's blood.

Aaron preached, alas! to men who could not enter in because of unbelief, and the tongue itself which announced Canaan to others, was silenced before Jordan divided. Avert, merciful Father, avert the dreadful omen. Let not the preacher, let none of the hearers of this night, be missing in the day when thou bringest home thy redeemed ones to thy heavenly rest.

—The events of Aaron's life are so blended with, and dependent upon those of his brother, that they cannot be separated. Many of them have accordingly been

been already adverted to, and shall not therefore now be repeated, our intention being to select those passages of his history, which are more personal and peculiar; which more clearly mark a distinct character; and which represent him invested with an office which was to be hereditary in his family, and typical of the unchangeable priesthood of the Son of God.

In the conclusion of the sixth chapter, Moses interrupts the thread of his narration, to deliver the genealogy of the family of Levi; a matter of no little moment in the settlement of that political and religious economy, which God was about to erect, for the better government of his people Israel. From this it appears, that Aaron and himself were in the fourth generation, in a direct line, from Levi, Jacob's third son; being the sons of Amram, the eldest son of Kohath, the second son of Levi. Hence, they are in the fifth generation from Jacob, in the sixth from Isaac, and the seventh from Abraham. It farther appears, from this genealogical deduction, that Aaron had connected himself with the tribe of Judah, by marrying Elisheba the daughter of Aminadab, and sister to Naashon, who became soon after the head of the prerogative tribe, the progenitor of its long succession of princes, and the root, according to the flesh, of the promised Messiah. By her he had four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. On all which I have only to observe, that as the miseries of Egyptian bondage deterred not Aaron from entering into that state which Providence has established for improving the happiness and mitigating the sorrows of human life, so the God in whom he trusted, rendered this virtuous union productive of a race of high-priests to minister unto the Lord, and to support the honours of their father's name and office, to the latest ages of the Jewish commonwealth.

With what care has Providence watched over, and preserved entire, the royal and sacerdotal line, till the great purposes of Heaven were accomplished, till the descent of the promised seed was ascertained! From
that

that period genealogy was, as it were, broken into ten thousand fragments, the connexion and succession of families were blotted out, as a thing of nought; and a new family was established on different principles, in endless succession, all claiming and holding of this "first born among many brethren."

As Aaron is represented in the possession of the most pleasing powers of speech, to soothe the woes of Israel, so we see him armed with a tongue, sharp as a two-edged sword, to smite and to break the pride of Pharaoh and of Egypt; and bearing a potent rod, endued with power to deliver or to destroy. And in this the world is taught to respect, to revere the weakest, meanest, most contemptible weapon, which the hand of Jehovah vouchsafes to use. Its virtue lies not in itself, but in the arm that wields it. Through the whole of the astonishing transactions which follow, we find an exact order and method observed. Aaron uses not the rod at his own discretion, neither does God communicate his pleasure immediately to him; but the Lord gives the word to Moses, who delivers it to Aaron, who follows the instructions given him. And thus, by an example of the highest authority, we are instructed, in obedience to an injunction given long after under another dispensation, "that all things be done decently and in order."

The next memorable event of Aaron's life, after assisting in the plagues of Egypt and the consequent deliverance of Israel, is his contributing to the defeat of Amalek, by aiding Hur in supporting the weary hands of Moses his brother upon the mount. To the observations already made on this part of the history, I have only to repeat and to urge upon your minds the reflection of the psalmist, "Behold how good a thing it is," in every point of view, "and how pleasant, for brethren to dwell together in unity!"*. By concord the weakest powers grow and stand; through disunion the strongest are dissolved and fall.

Aaron

* Psal. cxxxiii. 1.

Aaron and his two eldest sons, with seventy of the elders of Israel, by divine appointment, accompanied Moses to the lower region of Mount Sinai, when he went up to meet God, in order to receive the civil and religious constitution of the state : and with them, as the federal heads and representatives of the nation, the political union and covenant were ratified and confirmed. And this brings us forward to the eventful period of Aaron's history, his solemn destination to the office of priesthood, his preparation for it, and his investiture in it.

The appointment was of Heaven ; for " no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron : " * and even a king, in later times, who presumed to thrust himself into the priest's office, paid the price of his rashness, by a leprosy which cleaved to him till the day of his death. † " Take thou," says the great Source of all honour and authority, " take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons." ‡ It has been objected to Moses, as a proof of a selfish and worldly spirit, that he employed his authority, to perpetuate a station of the first dignity and emolument, in his own tribe and family, by the appointment of Aaron to the priesthood, and by the entail of it upon his posterity forever. But surely the objectors must have studied the case very superficially. The priesthood, though of high dignity, possessed very slender emoluments, and still less authority. It subjected the possessor of it to much painful attendance, to much laborious and much unpleasant service, considered as a mere secular employment. It was a post, if of distinguished honour, so of high responsibility. But supposing it were as lucrative and honourable as it is alleged, why did not Moses assume it to himself ?

* Heb. v. 4.

† 2 Chron. xxvi. 16—21.

‡ Exod. xxviii. 1.

self? Why did he pass by his own sons? Why not secure the reversion, at least, for his own children and their heirs? When a man has immediate descendants of his own body, he is seldom solicitous about the aggrandisement of more distant relations, especially to the prejudice of his own children. The conduct of Moses, therefore, in the disposal of this high office, on the supposition that he had a choice in the matter, is the reverse of selfish; it is generous and disinterested to the last degree. The dignity of magistracy is, in his own life-time, communicated with Joshua; and, at his death, is wholly transferred to him. The office of high-priest is conferred upon Aaron, and made perpetual to his branch of the family; while the sons and descendants of Moses sink into the rank of private citizens, without the stipulation of so much as a foot of land, extraordinary, in Canaan, in consideration of their father's eminent services. Does this look like avarice and ambition? But the truth is, Moses had no choice at all in the case, and presumed to exercise none. God had declared his will, and that was sufficient to him, and will be so to every good man.

If we attend to some lines in the character, and some steps in the conduct of Aaron, we shall find more just reason of surprise at his appointment to this sacred office. We behold him, at the very era of his appointment, an abettor of idolatry, and even after his instalment in it, we find him meanly and wickedly envying the distinction which was put upon his meek and gentle brother, and, with his sister Miriam, heading a revolt from his just authority. But, alas! were perfect men only to minister before God, the altar must soon be deserted. Were not sinful men to be addressed by sinful men, the world must speedily be destitute of preachers. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."* 10

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* 2 Cor. iv. 7.

The design of Providence, from the beginning, seems to have been, to convince the world that in every hand his work must prosper; that if he interpose, all instruments, the most inadequate, must prove powerful, and shall succeed.

A few remarks on the particulars of Aaron's sacred dress, the services in which he was employed, his solemn consecration to the performance of them, and the subsequent events of his life up to the age of one hundred and twenty-two, together with a cursory view of his typical importance, as the figure of the great High-Priest of our profession, shall, with divine permission, furnish the subject of the next Lecture. We conclude the present with earnestly exhorting you,

—To be instructed by the history of Aaron to begin to live betimes: if not to public observation, utility and importance, at least to the purposes of piety, and to the duties and virtues of the private man and of the citizen. He lived long in obscurity, before he arose into distinction, and was nurtured in the school of affliction, for station and eminence. And it is generally found that those persons fill high and difficult situations most respectably, who arrive at them through painful study, many obstacles and much opposition. It was late, very late in life with him, before he began to appear on the great theatre: let none be thereby deluded into the vain, deceitful hope of living long. The instances of a longevity so vigorous, and so extended, and so distinguished, are too rare to encourage any one to trifle with the season of improvement, to neglect the present hour, to presume on a distant, uncertain futurity. Old age, should you be one of the few who attain it, never can be supported with dignity, nor enjoyed in comfort, if youth be wasted in dissipation, or permitted to rust in ignorance. In order to possess the vivacity and soundness of youth, under the pressure of years, a portion of the reflection, steadiness and composure of age, must be called

called in, to temper and direct the pursuits and enjoyments of early life.

—It is natural to be dazzled with the display of shining talents, and to envy the possessor of them. But these, also, are the portion of only a favoured few. The eloquence of an Aaron is, perhaps, more rarely to be found, than a man of a hundred and twenty-two years old. Covet, then, and cultivate the virtues which are attainable by all, and are in themselves infinitely more valuable than the gifts which are bestowed more sparingly, which do not always prove a blessing to their owner, and are not always accompanied with true goodness, which alone is in the sight of God of great price. Has an indulgent Providence, however, distinguished you by those rarer accomplishments, which lead to fame; to honour, to usefulness? See that you bury them not, pervert them not, abuse them not. Ability, unsupported by worth, by moral excellence, only renders a man more odious and contemptible, as well as more dangerous, more mischievous and criminal. He is responsible both to God and man, for the use or abuse of his superior powers; and to be *conspicuously* criminal and wretched, is a dreadful aggravation of guilt and misery. “Covet earnestly the best gifts:” and yet it were easy to shew unto you “a more excellent way.” If you know it, happy are you if you pursue it.

History of Aaron.

L E C T U R E X.

NUMBERS XX. 23—29.

And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, Aaron shall be gathered unto his people : for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto Mount Hor : and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son : and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there. And Moses did as the Lord commanded : and they went up into Mount Hor, in the sight of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son : and Aaron died there in the top of the mount. And Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.

WHAT subject so interesting to man as his intercourse with God, his Creator, Preserver, and Judge ? And yet on no subject have men fallen into wilder- and more dangerous mistakes. A mad and bold enthusiasm has, at one time, elevated rash and presumptuous spirits to the level of Deity ; and the grossest terms of human familiarity have been employed, in
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addressing that infinitely holy and glorious Being, in whose presence angels veil their faces. A timid and grovelling superstition, on the contrary, has barred to others all access to God; and an affected, over-refined devotion has subverted the interests of true piety. The love of this world has encroached upon, and extinguished the spirit of religion; and a misguided, ill-informed religion has attempted to detach some men from the duties and employments of life.

Men, ever in extremes, have either banished God entirely from their thoughts, or affected a higher degree of reverence for his service, by an avowed neglect of some of the more obvious and more important dictates of his will. Could they but be persuaded to take the holy scriptures for the rule of their conduct in all things, many of these practical errors might be prevented. They would thence be instructed to draw nigh to a holy and righteous God with reverence and confidence, as children to a father; and to rejoice before a merciful and compassionate Saviour with fear and trembling. While the eye of a guilty conscience beheld "cherubims and a flaming sword turning every way, to keep the way of the tree of life," the eye of faith would discern "a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh."*

The whole of divine revelation, and indeed it is the chief end of revelation, represents the great Jehovah as accessible to the guilty and the miserable; but accessible only in a method, and by means, of his own appointment. To the vilest, meanest, most wretched of mankind there is hope towards God, through Christ Jesus the Lord; but to the purest and most perfect of our fallen race, "there is not salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved."† All the stores of divine grace are laid open, all the energy of

* Heb. x. 20.

† Acts iv. 12.

of divine eloquence is employed, to assure and encourage the humble. "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin," "while one denunciation of justice serves to check and repel the impenitent and the proud, "but who will by no means clear the guilty."

The institution of the priesthood under the law, was an explicit and a standing declaration to the same purpose. It consisted of a succession of men, and of a service, ordained of God to be a perpetual memorial to mankind of their apostacy and guilt, and of the means of pardon and reconciliation: of their being by nature and wicked works afar off, but made nigh by the blood of atonement.

Aaron, the first who was called to execute this high office, had already attained his eighty-fourth year, and of course had become venerable in the eyes of men by reason of age. He possessed an insinuating and commanding address; he had acquired a high degree of estimation, from the honourable share that belonged to him, in effecting the deliverance from Egypt; and he was only brother to the illustrious and renowned legislator of Israel. But his noblest and most honourable distinction was his appointment and call from Heaven, to the discharge of the duties of this exalted station. The pen of inspiration, however, always faithful and true, represents him as a man liable to many infirmities. At the waters of Strife he was betrayed into anger, self-conceit and presumption; in the matter of the golden calf, we find him chargeable with timidity and sinful compliance: he stands convicted of unkindness and ingratitude to the best and most affectionate of brothers; of the most daring irreverence and impiety towards God, and of dissimulation bordering on falsehood. And even after his consecration to the priesthood, with shame and sorrow we behold him wickedly giving

*. Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

giving in to the mean and contemptible passions of envy and jealousy ; and, to heighten this base offence, the unoffending, unprovoking object of these passions, was his own nearest relation, and the man to whom he was indebted for all that eminence to which he was himself raised, and which he transmitted to his family. But with all these imperfections on his head, and many others, doubtless, of which it was not the business of this record to convey the memory to us, he was the man whom God was pleased to choose, to minister in the first rank at his altar, and to typify the High-Priest who became us, “ who is holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners.”

As in every thing that related to the construction of the tabernacle and its sacred furniture, Moses was confined to a pattern shewn, and to directions given him in the mount, so also in all things that related to the dress, the services and the attendance of the high-priest and his assistants. And you will please to observe that Moses himself, having been called and consecrated in an extraordinary manner, was constituted the temporary high-priest, to officiate in the consecration of Aaron and his sons. They saw therefore the person of a mediator interposing between themselves and God. They saw an extraordinary priesthood, conjoined to legislative authority, residing in their brother, the man whom God chose, and from whom their honour immediately flowed ; they saw an image of the station they were henceforth to occupy, and the purposes which they were to fulfil towards the whole nation. Moses was between God and them, they were to be between God and the people. He offered sacrifice to make atonement for them, they were to offer sacrifice to make reconciliation for the sins of all Israel. And in this we see a priesthood more ancient and more honourable than that of Aaron, from which it derives its existence, dignity and use, and in which it is now absorbed.

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As nothing is unimportant on this subject, nothing but what has a significancy, though that significancy we are unable in every instance to discover, we find the sacred historian entering into a minute detail and description of the sacerdotal robes, in which, however, it is not our purpose to follow him, as we would rather suggest ideas than repeat words, aim at instruction rather than indulge in speculation, and without pretending to explain every thing, would aim at the praise of inculcating useful truth.

The vestments for the priests are distinguished by the term *holy*: "Thou shalt make the *holy* garments for Aaron." "Thou shalt put upon Aaron the *holy* garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him; that he may minister unto me in the priest's office."* Now this epithet must undoubtedly refer to the nature of that pure and perfect Being in whose worship they were employed; to the sacredness of the character which was invested with them; and to the spotless purity of Him, whose person was hereby prefigured, and whose sanctity, independent of garments of such a texture and quality, consisted in a total freedom from moral pollution, "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." The vestments of the Israelitish high-priest, however splendid, could not but cover much weakness and imperfection. Like the dispensation which enjoined them, they had only "a shadow of good things to come, and could never make the comers thereunto perfect." But even in a moral and religious view, surely they were not without their use. They were a constant and affectionate admonition from God to the persons who wore them; saying, "Be ye holy for I am holy." They were a constant and pathetic admonition to the people; saying, "I will be sanctified in all them that draw nigh unto me." They are an everlasting admonition to the christian world, who are all kings and *priests* unto God, that they are called and engaged "to holiness

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* Exod. xl. 13.

in all manner of conversation." If times, and places, and dress, serve as guards to virtue, if they preserve decency, and prevent vice, do they not answer a valuable and important purpose to mankind? In perfect conformity to this idea, the loftiest and most conspicuous article of the high-priest's dress, was a plate of pure gold, affixed with a blue lace to the fore front of the mitre, having engraved upon it this remarkable inscription, in order to be seen and read of all men: "*Holiness to the Lord.*" Thereby the wearer became "as a city that is set on a hill, which cannot be hid:" and this bright memorial incessantly, though silently, proclaimed to the eye, to the heart, to the conscience, "a holy God, a holy service, a holy minister, a holy people, a holy covenant."

We accordingly observe the strictest attention to external decorum run through the whole of this divine institution. The eye being one of the great avenues to the soul, guilt being the parent of shame, and the dispensations of the divine wisdom and mercy, being adapted to the condition and character of men, as they are, depraved and degraded by sin, not as man was, pure and perfect from the hand of his Creator, the heart and conscience must be addressed through the senses.

The next most observable and significant part of Aaron's dress, was the splendid breast-plate, consisting of twelve several precious stones set in gold, inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes in their order; placed externally upon the seat of the heart, to keep forever alive, a tender concern about the whole Israel of God, to remind Aaron and his sons forever, that they were elevated to this high station, not for their own sakes merely, but to be a public benefit. It aimed at producing a most important effect on three different sorts of persons, and was well calculated for this purpose. It presented unto God, according to his own ordinance, a memorial of his covenant

covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and their seed after them. It taught the high-priest to consider the case of the people as his own, to regard them with impartial, undivided affection, to be watchfully attentive to their temporal, but especially to their spiritual concerns, to wrestle and make supplication in their behalf. It inspired the people with affection and gratitude to the man, whose whole life and labours were devoted to their service, who watched for their souls, who had renounced an earthly portion among his brethren, and all the gainful walks of life, to be subservient to their best interests. It formed a most endearing bond of union between them who were administered unto, and them who ministered. It formed a most endearing bond of union among the tribes themselves. Twelve gems of various complexions, set in two different frames, composed nevertheless but one breast-plate; so twelve tribes constituted but one congregation, one church, one Israel. The loss of any one must have marred and destroyed the whole; tended to diminish its lustre, to impair its strength. It taught them to love as brethren the children of one father, the worshippers of one God. It inspired confidence in the care and protection of that God. They saw their representative bearing upon his heart, into the holy place, their names and their condition. They had the consolation of reflecting that their memorial would ascend to heaven, with the sweet perfume of that incense which he daily burned upon the golden altar. And the whole looked forward to the day, to the office, to the person, to the work of Him, of whom, and of whose body, the church, Isaiah thus speaks in prophetic vision: "But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands ;

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hands; thy walls are continually before me:"* and who thus speaks of himself, "Those that thou gavest me I have kept. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world;"† and of whom the apostle thus speaks, "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."‡ Hence christians are united in still dearer bonds, animated with superior confidence, secured by a firmer and more durable covenant. Hence christian ministers are encouraged with greater boldness, with more ardent importunity, with more assured hope of success, to draw nigh to the throne of grace, as for themselves, so for sinful and wretched creatures of every description.

Under the gospel dispensation every hour is the hour of incense, every believer a minister of the sanctuary, every individual, a name engraven upon the heart of the great "Apostle and High-Priest of our profession," and recorded in "the Lamb's book of life, among the living in Jerusalem."

The other particulars of Aaron's official dress, we shall not now stop to commemorate; partly, because

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* Isa. xlix. 14—16. † John xvii. 12, 11, 21—24.

‡ Rom. viii. 33, 34.

we have not a distinct idea of them, and partly, because through such a thick cloud as time, change of manners, and the general disuse of the sacred language have interposed, it is difficult, if not impossible, to discover their meaning and import, with reference to the evangelical dispensation; in which great part of the beauty, excellency and usefulness of the Mosaic economy consists.

The ceremonies of Aaron's inauguration, were in a high degree solemn and august. They were performed by Moses himself, in the most public manner. Aaron and his sons were conducted to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, in the presence of a public assembly called for the purpose; were stripped of their usual garments, and washed with water. He was then arrayed in the several parts of the sacerdotal habit, in their order. The holy vessels of the sanctuary, and all its sacred utensils, were then, one after another, anointed with the holy oil of consecration; and, last of all, Aaron himself, the living instrument of divine worship, was set apart to his momentous charge, by a copious sprinkling of the same sacred perfume. That the favour of this odorous compound must have been extremely grateful to the sense, is evident from the lofty terms in which David speaks of it, and the subject which he illustrates by it—"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments."*

The sons were then invested with their proper habits, and a three-fold sacrifice was performed: a bullock for a sin-offering; a ram for a burnt-offering; and a second, denominated the ram of consecration. Without going into a minute detail, or pretending to explain the specific difference, use, and end of each, we observe in general, that, by the ceremony of the
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* Psal. cxxxiii. 1, 2.

imposition of Aaron's hands and those of his sons upon the head of the victim, a solemn wish was expressed, that their guilt might be transferred and imputed to the victim, and its blood accepted as a ransom for their forfeited lives. Here, then, was the innocent suffering for the guilty; the substitute, not the criminal himself, bleeding and dying: so that the very form of their consecration taught the necessity of atonement, and pointed to Him whom "it pleased the Lord to bruise, and to put him to grief; and who was wounded for our transgressions, was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."*

The first of the three sacrifices, or the sin-offering, seems to have been intended as a public and explicit acknowledgment of guilt, and the expiation of it. The second, that is, the burnt-offering, was the token of the divine favour towards them, and of his gracious acceptance of their persons and services: and the third, the ram of consecration, part of which was eaten by the priests in the holy place, was the ratification of God's covenant of peace with them, and the emblem of perfect reconciliation and friendship; sitting at one common table being the most express declaration of union and good will among men. God was pleased to exhibit a most unequivocal proof of his being well-pleased with the whole transaction; for when every thing was arranged according to the form prescribed in the mount, fire from the Lord seized and consumed the burnt-offering on the altar. The sin-offering Moses burnt with material fire, without the camp; but the sacred flame from heaven laid hold of the sacrifice of pardon and acceptance. In vain do we look for the marks of grace and favour from above; insensible must we be to the genial, penetrating flames of love, unless our repentings be kindled together. When we have been enabled to do our duty, then may we warrantably expect that God will appear for us.

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* *Isai. liii. 5.*

It does not appear whether this striking interposition had been previously announced to the assembly, or whether it took them by surprise. In either case, it must have made a deep impression on the mind of every beholder. Were they taught to expect it? With what anxiety may we suppose every eye bent on the altar and the sacrifice, waiting the eventful moment which was to evince that God was among them of a truth; but in a way which should inspire reverence as well as joy. Did it overtake them unawares? What sudden consternation, what alarming apprehensions! The expression was perfectly natural in either case; "which, when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces."*

Thus was the first high-priest of the Hebrew nation inducted into his office: Thus explicitly were laid down the principles, form, design and use of the most ancient civil and religious polity in the world. While the first beginnings of religion and government, in every other nation under heaven, lie buried in darkness, confusion and contradiction; aided by light from heaven, we can trace up to its very source, the origin of a nation the most singular in the annals of mankind; raised out of an ancient pair, and "them as good as dead;" repeatedly threatened with utter extinction, during the first ages of their existence; but miraculously preserved in the very jaws of destruction: formed for conquest, eminence and empire, in a desert; raised, after many struggles and revolutions, to a pitch of affluence and grandeur, unparalleled in history; and declining again as fast into contempt and obscurity: but, even in contempt and obscurity, supported, preserved, fenced on every side.— In captivity, undissolved; in the wreck of empire maintained, upheld, rescued, restored! At length, we behold them involved in one mighty ruin, driven from their capital and their country: their temple, the great bond of union, razed from the foundation: and

* Levit. ix. 24.

and themselves henceforward scattered among the nations, during a period of near two thousand years. And yet, by a strange and unaccountable interference of Providence, though hated, despised and persecuted of all men, and evidently under the displeasure of Heaven, we behold them preserved from total annihilation and oblivion; kept distinct from all men; as much a separate people, as in the zenith of their glory, under the reign of David and Solomon; the subjects, perhaps, of a revolution greater and more important than any they have already undergone: reserved, it may be, to be the last grand trophy of the Redeemer's triumph, the concluding evidence of the truth of christianity, the final monument of the riches of free, sovereign grace! And need we ask, who conducted all these movements, whose pleasure was fulfilled by all these events, whose glory shines in all these successive changes, in all these opening prospects? A voice from heaven replies, "I the Lord, wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working; wise in heart, and mighty in strength. I see the end from the beginning; my counsel shall stand."

—When this great mystery shall be finished, the mighty chain extended, the connexion and dependence of link upon link discerned, hell shall be confounded, the inhabitants of the world astonished, angels rejoice, and the praise of God ascend from every tongue.

The solemn service being over, we may suppose Aaron and his family retiring with the complacency of good minds, rejoicing in the honour put upon them, in the eyes of all Israel; in the prospect of a dignity higher than the pomp of kings, which was about to descend to their latest posterity: and, above all, in that open declaration of the divine approbation, the celestial fire that consumed the fat of their sacrifice. But, alas! what condition of humanity admits of certain, unmixed, or lasting felicity? That useful, necessary, awful element, which signally interposed to declare the

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the choice of Heaven, speedily interposes to punish and to afflict that chosen family, and to serve as a warning forever, that "God will be sanctified in all them that draw nigh to him."

The remaining incidents of the high-priest's life, which we have on record, are but few in number, but they are instructive, and interesting, as we hope to make appear, if God shall be pleased to indulge us with another opportunity of this kind.

In reviewing the subject, we observe what it is that constitutes the perfect character of a priest of the most high God; *Holiness to the Lord* on the forehead; uppermost, overlooking all, directing all; and Israel resting upon the heart.

The ministers of religion are, by their office and station, perpetually admonished to shun every appearance of what is mean, selfish or ungenerous. They are appointed of God to aid, instruct and comfort their fellow-creatures; to promote their best interests; to cherish in them the best and noblest principles of their nature: and they are urged to perform this, by the highest considerations which the human mind can feel. Whatever be the dispensation, the spirit of the office and the nature of the service are the same. They stand as mediators between God and men. They bear on their hearts the names, the infirmities, the wants, the distresses, the sorrows, the joys of the people; and carry them with sympathy and affection to the throne of grace: and they return from thence bringing on their lips the "answer of peace." They lose themselves in labours of love; they sink every unworthy aim, every low pursuit, in seeking the glory of God, and the prosperity of the Israel of God. The minister who understands, feels and performs his duty, is one of the most exalted of beings.

Aaron and his sons were consecrated to the service of God, and of the congregation, by the sprinkling of blood applied to the ear, the hand, the foot. Thus their

their whole faculties were claimed by their great Author, and were thus devoted to him : and the symbol of atonement became the seal of their dedication. And thus every christian becomes a priest unto the most high God, redeemed by blood, set apart by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. “ Wash me, Lord, and I shall be clean, sprinkle me, and I shall be whiter than snow : ” “ Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. ” “ Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father ; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. . . Amen. ” *

“ Every high-priest taken from among men, is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins : who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way ; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity : ” † but “ if perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law) what further need was there, that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron ? ” ‡ “ 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. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh ; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God ? ” §

The fire once kindled supernaturally by the celestial flame, was to be kept alive by human care and attention. Miraculous interpositions of Providence are not

* Rev. i. 5, 6. † Heb. v. 1, 2. ‡ Heb. vii. 11. § Heb. ix. 11—14.

not to be expected, as an indulgence to carelessness and sloth. He only who diligently exercises the powers which God has given him, who employs the means which Providence has furnished, and which conscience approves, can with confidence look up to Heaven, and rejoice in hope of divine assistance. Would you that the sacred flame of devotion, of charity, should live in your heart, should glow upon your tongue, resort daily to the altar of God, and preserve its activity by "a live coal" from thence. Then your face shall shine, then your lips shall overflow with the law of kindness, then your hand shall open to the sons of want, then you shall "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

History of Moses.

L E C T U R E XI.

NUMBERS XX. 23—29.

And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel; because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto Mount Hor: and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there. And Moses did as the Lord commanded: and they went up into Mount Hor, in the sight of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there in the top of the mount. And Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.

WERE it not that life and immortality have been brought to light by the gospel, human life must appear in the eye of sober reason, a trifling scene of vanity and impertinence. Wherefore drops that babe into the grave as soon as he is born? Why was the wretched mother torn with anguish to bring him into the world? Was it only to be torn with more cruel anguish, to behold him prematurely snatched out of
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it again? Why is that old offender permitted to live, a burden upon the earth, the derision, hatred, and scorn of mankind? Why does that minion "fret and strut his hour upon the stage," arrayed in the glitter of royalty? Wherefore strides that barbarian from conquest to conquest, from continent to continent? Why pines modest worth in indigence and obscurity, and wherefore, at length, perishes it on a dunghill? These, and a thousand such questions that might be asked, the doctrine of immortality and of a judgment to come, resolves in a moment. "We know but in part, we see in a glass darkly." What the great Lord of nature, providence and grace doth, we know not now, but we shall know hereafter.

The brevity and extension of life, difference of rank, talent, office and condition, variety of fortune and success, acquire an importance not their own by their influence on character and moral conduct, by the changes which they produce on the soul of a man, by their reaching forward into eternity, and by producing effects which no length of duration can ever alter.

Men die, offices pass from hand to hand, dispensations change; but the purposes of Heaven are permanent, the plans of Providence are ever going forward, and while one generation of men removes to that world of spirits from whence no traveller returns, another rises up to contemplate the wonders of that which now is, and to carry on the business of it. Hence wise and good men become not only concerned about their own future and eternal happiness, but about the prosperity and happiness of the world, after they have ceased to see and enjoy it. Hence they cheerfully engage in schemes which they cannot live to execute, and justly soothe their souls to peace, in the prospect of a kind of immortality upon earth. Hence among the other motives to excel in goodness, this has a pleasing and a powerful influence, "the righteous shall

shall be had in everlasting remembrance," "while the memory of the wicked shall rot."

It is as difficult to make the proper estimate of death as of life. Death is an undoubted mark of the divine displeasure against sin, and is inflicted as a punishment upon the guilty. But, like all the punishments of Heaven, it is upon the whole, and in the issue, an unspeakable benefit to good men. The just estimate of death, then, must depend upon what we are, and upon the consequent change which death shall produce in our internal character, or outward condition. It is a light evil to be stripped of priestly robes, the work of man's hands; and to return naked into the earth as we came from it; it is a light thing to feel the earthly house of this tabernacle dissolving, and the head which wore the mitre or the crown sinking into the dust; while the promise of Him who is faithful and true, rears for us "a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;"* while the eye of faith contemplates that "crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give at that day: and not to one only, but unto all them also that love his appearing,"† assured that "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

If ever there was an enviable domestic situation, it was that of Aaron elevated to the priesthood. Think of the honest pride of honourable alliance: and who would not have been proud of such a brother as Moses? Reflect on an office of the highest dignity and respect, procured not by cabal and intrigue, but bestowed by the voluntary appointment of Him who is the source of all honour. A suitable provision likewise made for the support of that dignity, and an external habit annexed to it, that could not fail to attract notice and reverence. The sacred office was entailed upon him and his family forever, and that family built up by four hopeful sons, his coadjutors and successors:

* 2 Cor. v. 1.

† 2 Tim. iv. 8.

successors : and, to crown the whole, these pleasing, flattering circumstances were crowned with an open, unequivocal, indubitable mark of the divine approbation. The fire of heaven caught hold of their burnt-offering, and kindled a flame never to be quenched. But alas, how short-lived was this tranquillity ! The sons of Aaron are hardly consecrated to their office, when the two eldest profane and disgrace it. Celestial fire has scarcely proclaimed the favour and acceptance of God, when with unhallowed fire, which he commanded not, they defile his altar and his service : and thereby call down a second time fire from above, to avenge a holy and righteous God, as before to display the grace of Him who is good and merciful. The notoriety of the late transactions, the sacredness of their character, and the distinguished regard of Heaven expressed toward them, greatly enhance the atrociousness of their guilt, and justify the severity of their punishment.

This tragical event is thus recorded by Moses, whose method it is neither to extenuate, nor to set down aught in malice. “ And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.”* The words are few, but they convey a full and distinct idea of the guilt of the parties : though by attending to the context, we shall have reason to conclude their crime was of a very complex nature. And surely it could be no common transgression which drew down a judgment so dreadful. Bishop Patrick is of opinion that Nadab and Abihu had rendered themselves incapable of doing their duty by intemperance ; that they indulged in the delicacies of the sacrifice to a criminal excess, till they were incapable of putting a difference between holy and unholy, and
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* Lev. x. 1, 2.

between clean and unclean. This conjecture is founded upon the injunction which immediately follows the narration of this dismal story in the ninth and tenth verses. "Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation; lest ye die: it shall be a statute forever, throughout your generations; and that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean." If there be truth in this conjecture, it is a melancholy proof, that the best things are most liable to abuse, that the brutal part of our nature is ever ready to run away with the rational: that as God is continually employing himself in bringing good out of evil, so men are forever perversely employing themselves in bringing evil out of good.

Others have charged upon these two sons of Aaron, the criminality of attempting to enter the most holy place, which was not permitted but to the high-priest; and that only at certain stated times. This charge is established in the following manner. In the passage we have quoted, it is said, that it was *before* the Lord that Nadab and Abihu offered incense with strange fire. Upon comparing this with what is recorded in the sixteenth chapter in the first and second verses, where Moses recapitulates this sad event, we find it added, "The Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place, within the veil before the mercy-seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy-seat." Hence it has been inferred that the two young men, uncalled, unauthorised, presumed to enter that august department of the tabernacle, assuming to themselves privileges that belonged only to the supreme priesthood, which in their father's life time it was unlawful to intermeddle with, and which even he himself durst not at all times exercise. But though neither of these suppositions be improbable, we have no occasion to

go so far for a discovery of their crime, nor to account for the severity with which it was punished. The sin of Nadab and Abihu consisted simply in this, they burnt incense with *strange fire*. Now the meaning of this expression we shall be able easily to collect, by comparing together a few passages that have an obvious connexion, and serve to illustrate and explain each other. First, in Leviticus chapter the ninth, verse twenty-fourth, it is said that "fire from the Lord," that is, either fire immediately descending from heaven, or issuing out of the cloud that covered the tabernacle, consumed the first victims which Aaron offered for a burnt-offering. Again—This sacred fire, once miraculously kindled, was by a special ordinance to be kept forever alive; as we read, Leviticus chapter the sixth, verses twelfth and thirteenth. Thus the vigilance, attention and care of man, was to preserve and continue what Providence had begun. By another ordinance it was enjoined, that the incense to be offered on the day of atonement, should be kindled by a portion of that perpetual fire. This we read in Leviticus chapter the sixteenth, verses eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth. This then was the fire which the Lord commanded to be used; and of course, every other kind of fire, however produced, and though in all other respects adequate to the purpose, was unlawful, forbidden or *strange*. This accordingly constituted the guilt, they took upon them to kindle the incense, which their office obliged them to burn every evening and morning, with a fire different from that which burnt continually on the altar of burnt-offering; every other being *strange fire*, which the Lord commanded not. Now it was certainly fit and necessary that such a crime should be punished in the most exemplary manner. The sanctity of the whole institution was over at once, if the ministers of it might with impunity, in the very setting out, presume to dispense with its most august ceremonies. The rank and station of the offenders was a high aggravation

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of their offence. It was their duty to have set an example of scrupulous regard to the known will of God. They had been admitted to more intimate communion with God than others; had seen more of the terrors of his power, more of the wonders of his grace. Unhappy men! how had they been betrayed into an error so fatal? Ignorance it could not be, the voice of the law was yet sounding in their ears. Dared they to be careless in any thing that related to the service of a holy God? They had seen the exactness of their pious uncle, in forming every thing according to the pattern shewed him in the mount. Was it indeed a wilful and deliberate violation of the law? I fear, I fear it was; and dreadful was the expiation. The unhallowed fire of their own kindling was quickly absorbed in a hotter flame: "they died before the Lord; for there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them."* Neither their sacred character, the sacredness of the place, nor the sacredness of the employment, can protect them from the keen stroke of avenging justice. "Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire."† Unhappy father! what were now thy feelings; bereaved in one sad day of half thy children, of thy first, thy darling hopes: to behold them thus immaturely cut off, taken away in anger! The bitterness of death is not relieved by one consolatory circumstance. What is the loss of children in infancy, and falling by the stroke of nature, compared to this? To heighten the old man's affliction, he is expressly forbidden to mourn, or to assist in the last sad offices of humanity towards his deceased sons. Behold him in mute dejection and distress, ministering in the duties of his charge, attentive to the calls of the living, leaving to others the care of burying the dead. How severely must his own offences now have been brought to his remembrance! He had been guilty of a crime.

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* Lev. x. 2.

† Heb. xii. 28, 29.

of equal or greater magnitude; he had led the way in idolatry, and presided in the worship of a thing of his own fabrication; but justice suffered him to live, to live to see his own sons dying for a crime similar to his own. Alas, what is prolonged life but lengthened anguish!

As the giving of the law was fenced round with fire, and the sanctity of the tabernacle worship guarded by a flaming sword, so the meeker, gentler institution of the gospel, fortified its first beginnings by executing judgment on presumptuous sinners. Severity is the soul of a law, especially when it is notified to those who are obliged to submit to it; indulgence, or the appearance of feebleness, are of the most dangerous consequence, especially in the commencement of a new constitution. One of the heralds of the Saviour of mankind began his ministry by a clap of thunder; the first rays he shot from his eyes were mortal, and the sudden death of two false and perfidious disciples was the seal of his apostleship.* The second coming of the Lord himself is to be "in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."†

Aaron had now arrived at an advanced period of life, and at the possession of an office and rank in life, which rendered him an object of envy to some, and of veneration to others. He had oftener than once been corrected by his own folly, and he was "the man who had seen affliction by the rod of God's anger;" but neither the fire of calamity, nor the frost of age; neither the counsels of experience, nor the sanctity of office, have been able to subdue indwelling corruption; for we immediately find him in a plot, with Miriam his sister, to disturb the peace, diminish the respect, and distress the government of their brother Moses. Their pretence was his marriage with an "Ethiopian woman;" an event which had taken

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place

* Acts v.

† 2 Thess. i. 8.

place forty years before ; an union which had no immorality in it ; which transgressed no law, for the law was not then given ; and against which God himself had not expressed any displeasure ; but had crowned it with the blessing of children, who were justly admitted to rank in Israel.

The real cause was their envy of the pre-eminence, which their younger brother had obtained over them in all things, civil and sacred. For this, in spite of all their art, breaks out in the malicious whispers which they scatter abroad to blacken their brother's reputation. " Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses ? Hath he not spoken also by us ?"*. If Moses indeed erred by marrying Jethro's daughter, he had severely smarted for it ; for being induced, by an improper compliance with her humour, to neglect the circumcision of his son, he had nearly paid the forfeit of that neglect with his life, by the hand of God himself ; and now his good name is bleeding on Zipporah's account, by the envenomed tongues of his own brother and sister ; and " who can stand before envy ?" Who can think to escape, if Moses remain not unhurt ? This attack upon his fame and comfort gives Moses occasion to deliver his own eulogium ; and I believe it just, for he gives it with that lovely simplicity, which characterises all that he relates of himself or of others. " Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth."† He either had not heard the scandalous speeches which were propagated to his disadvantage by Aaron and Miriam ; or he pitied and neglected them. Who knows what length the mischief might have gone, had it not been heard and avenged by the Protector of injured innocence. " The Lord heard it." Let the slanderer hear this and tremble.

The two brothers and their sister are now summoned to present themselves together at the door of the tabernacle

* Numb. xii. 2.

† Numb. xii. 3.

tabernacle of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord appears : and a voice from that glory pronounces aloud and at full length, the praise of the man who had spoken so modestly of himself, and who had been so wickedly maligned by his own nearest relations. “ And he said, Hear now my words : if there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches ; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold : wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses ?” * In many respects Moses was “ the figure of Him who was to come,” and in both were peculiarly verified the words of Christ, “ a man’s foes shall be they of his own house,” and, “ a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.” † With God to resent is to avenge ; having reprov’d the transgressors he withdraws in anger, and lo, the punishment is already inflicted. “ The cloud departed from off the tabernacle, and behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow : and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and behold she was leprous.” ‡ A shocking example of divine displeasure against one of the most odious of crimes. My fair hearers, let me whisper an advice in your ears. I am no common-place declaimer against your sex ; I honour it, and I wish to improve it ; you must hear me with the greater attention, and mark what I say. You lie under a general imputation, respecting the vices of the tongue ; but general imputations are for the most part ill-founded. I do not mean, however, to insinuate that you are totally innocent, or more so than the other sex : for your affections are eager, and what the heart feels, by the eyes or the tongue you will express ; and that ex-
pression

* Numb. xii. 6, 7, 8. † Matth. xiii. 57. ‡ Numb. xii. 10.

pression is sometimes too strong for either piety or prudence. I mean to caution you, at present, on a particular fault of the tongue, which affects my own profession, which is far from being foreign to the subject, and on which I deem myself both qualified and entitled to advise you.

Women, among other favourite objects, have their favourite systems of religion, and their favourite preachers; and, following the impulse of an honest affection, they are for establishing their favourite object on the ruins of every competitor. What is the consequence? In the event of difference of opinion, or of attachment, one man is unmercifully, unrelentingly run down, and another is, with equal want of reason, magnified and exalted. Women, young women, good young women, think they are only yielding to the impulse of a pious affection, when they applaud or censure this or the other public character. But what are they doing indeed? Blowing up one poor vain idol of straw into self-consequence and importance; and piercing through, on the other hand, an honest heart with anguish unutterable; perhaps robbing a worthy, happy family of its bread, or, what is more, of its peace and comfort. I am no stranger to what is by some termed religious conversation, and I am seriously concerned about the topics of it. It generally turns upon persons, not things. Now, it ought to be just the reverse. Persons always mislead us, for no one is wholly impartial: but truth is eternal and unchangeable. Apply then the test—Does the conversation dwell upon this man or his neighbour, his rival or his enemy—check it, away with it; what have the interests of piety to do in the case? Had he never been born, “the foundation of God” would have stood as it does, without his feeble aid. Call no man master in sacred things, but Christ; and take care that you measure neither orthodoxy, sense nor virtue, by the imperfect, fluctuating standard of
your

your own caprice, affection or understanding. Were similar punishment instantly to follow the vices of the tongue, as in the case of Miriam, I shudder to think how many a fair face now lovely to the sight, must by to-morrow morning stand in need of a veil; but not for the same reason that the face of Moses did on his descending from the mount, to temper its lustre; but to shroud its loathsomeness and deformity. Consider what hath been said, and “set a watch on the door of your lips,” and “keep the heart with all diligence.”

History of Aaron.

LECTURE XII.

NUMBERS XX. 23—29.

And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, Aaron shall be gathered unto his people : for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto Mount Hor : and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son : and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there. And Moses did as the Lord commanded : and they went up into Mount Hor, in the sight of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son ; and Aaron died there in the top of the mount. And Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.

THE love of life is one of the most useful and important principles implanted in human nature ; and death, the necessary end of all men, is an event, mercifully and in wisdom hid from our eyes. Hoping that we may live till to-morrow, we feel ourselves impelled to exert ourselves to-day, to make some provision for it. Not knowing the time of their death,
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men are engaged to act as if they were immortal. And though no wise man would "wish to live always," or can deem it possible, yet the precise period never comes, when we find ourselves so entirely unoccupied with temporal prospects or pursuits, so totally mortified to the world, as to be disposed with cheerfulness to leave it. Hence the business of the world goes on, which would otherwise stand still ; and that God of whose years there can be no end, is carrying on designs of everlasting moment, by frail and short-lived instruments. This man makes a few feeble, dying efforts, and expires. Another comes after him, takes up the instrument which his fellow had laid down, makes his stroke or two, and expires likewise ; and yet by means of efforts so weak, so interrupted, and self-destroying, the purposes of Heaven proceed, the building of God rises ; every loss is instantly repaired, every defect supplied, and no chasm in the chain of Providence is permitted to take place. Hence men are dignified with the title of fellow-workers with God, and the perishing attempts of perishing creatures are employed in maturing the plans of infinite wisdom, and are honoured by the acceptance and approbation of Him who "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." What a motive to diligence, exertion and perseverance !

"I paint for eternity," replied the great artist of antiquity, when reprehended for an over curious, painful and laborious attention, to the more nice and delicate touches of his favourite pieces. What a lesson of encouragement, admonition and reproof to christians ! They are indeed acting for eternity ; not, like the painter, pursuing the empty bubble, reputation, but aiming at "the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls." They are striving continually to bring a new tribute of praise to God, and to promote the everlasting happiness of mankind.

It is truly pitiable to see a poor creature cleaving to life after the relish of it is gone, merely from a fond attachment

attachment to the things of time. It is more lamentable still to behold a miserable wretch shrinking from death, through a well-grounded horror of its consequences. But to desire life from a desire of doing good ; to be willing to continue in the flesh, for the greater good of the church and of the world, argues a great, a noble and disinterested spirit ; it excites our love and admiration. That man is indeed immortal, the daily language of whose conduct is, " Let me perform at least one good action more. I know I am to die ; let my tongue, then, yet once again speak praise to God and instruction to man, before it becomes forever silent. Before the cold hand of death freezes up the genial current at my heart, let it pour out the gentle stream of kindness, sympathy and love. While this arm is able as yet to extend itself, and this hand to expand, let it be extended to protect the oppressed, to support the weak ; let it be expanded to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to relieve the miserable. Ere my eyes close, to open no more, let some one of the wonderful things of God again pass through them, to revive my drooping spirits, to cheer and elevate my sinking soul ; and before I divest myself of my robes of office, never to resume them, let me humbly endeavour to minister to the Lord, and to the spiritual wants of men, in the duties of my station."

Calm and composed as was the death of Aaron, we advance toward it with slowness and reluctance, and therefore with eagerness seize the occasion which scripture affords, of adverting to some farther incidents of his life, before we come to the history of that fatal event.

It was with astonishment and grief, we saw him engaged in a plan of disaffection and sedition against his amiable and excellent brother ; and in wonder mixed with terror, we observed the mingled lenity and severity of the punishment inflicted by God on that impious, unnatural and ungrateful conduct. But the of-
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fence was not expiated when Miriam was struck with leprosy, and Aaron thereby tacitly reprehended ; when Miriam was restored, and Israel permitted to move forwards. Transgressors often flatter themselves that surely the bitterness of death is past, when a righteous God is but awaking to vengeance ; and it is, not seldom found, that between crimes and punishments there is such an apparent affinity, that the criminal cannot but read his guilt in the evil which overtakes him ; and the world is made to “ see,” not only “ the rod,” but “ him that hath appointed it.”

Six years have elapsed, from the sedition of Aaron and Miriam, when a similar conspiracy is formed to discredit the government of Moses, and the priesthood of Aaron, by certain turbulent, envious and ambitious men of their own tribe, in confederacy with some of a similar spirit of the tribe of Reuben. So widely and so suddenly has the malignity of revolt spread itself, that no less than two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown, with their adherents, have been infected by it ; and Aaron has his large share of that obloquy, which he had before so unjustly employed, to weaken the hands, and to blast the reputation of his brother. But ah ! my friends, a leprosy of seven days could not wash away the stain of this transgression ; neither could the blood of one unhappy victim, make atonement for a crime in which so many were involved. The Lord creates “ a new thing,” to mark the severity of his hot displeasure. When Moses had made an end of denouncing the judgment of God, it came to pass that “ the ground clave asunder that was under them : and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them : and they perished from among the congregation. And there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and
fifty

fifty men that offered incense.”* A plague broke out among the people, which, before it was stayed by the interposition of the high-priest himself, offering incense between the living and the dead, had consumed fourteen thousand seven hundred.

What, O Aaron, were now thy feelings, surveying a field of blood so dreadful and so extensive ! What were thy feelings in reflecting that for the very offence which thou thyself hadst committed, Miriam was a leper, and thousands were slain ! Did not thy heart tremble, as the sword of the destroying angel laid heaps upon heaps, whilst thou stoodst in the fearful gap, lest its keen edge should reach thyself ?

It is remarkable that the enormity of the greater crimes which Aaron committed, was exposed by the judgments wherewith God visited similar crimes in others, not in himself ; whereas, for an apparently lighter transgression, his life was irrecoverably forfeited, and he fell under a doom, which no penitence nor supplication could alter or avert. We cannot judge of the malignity of crimes from certain external circumstances. Both in the good which men do, and the evil they commit, God principally regards the heart and intention ; but to discern and to judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart, is a prerogative, which with awful propriety he has reserved to himself.

God has punished the defection of Korah and his abettors in the most open and exemplary manner. Not satisfied with this, because the memory of judgments the most signal and alarming, is apt speedily to be obliterated—such is the thoughtlessness and folly of men ! He was pleased to appoint a lasting memorial of the preference which he had bestowed on Aaron and his family, and to confer a fresh badge of distinction on the man whom he delighted to honour. Moses is directed to take of each of the tribes of Israel a several rod, and to inscribe every one with the name of the prince of that tribe to which it belonged, writing

* Numb. xvi. 31—33, 35.

ing the name of Aaron on the rod of the tribe of Levi. They were to be laid up together over night before the Lord, in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, and previous intimation was given to all concerned, that by the next morning, God would give an explicit and unequivocal declaration of his will, respecting the office of priesthood.

The God whom we adore, would rather make himself known by the wonders which he performs, and the mercies which he dispenses, than by the judgments which he executes. It was fulfilled accordingly. The rods of the eleven other tribes remained as they were deposited ; separated from the parent stock, sapless, withered, and dead ; but the rod of Aaron, as if it had been still a branch united to a living root, and by a progress of vegetation infinitely more rapid than nature knows, in the course of one night, “brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds.”* And lo, a miracle as great as a lifeless twig bringing forth fruit, the fierce and angry spirit which acts of just vengeance had but irritated, is by a miracle of kindness and condescension, mollified, melted, subdued, extinguished : and thus necessary are signs and wonders to silence and persuade murmuring, unbelieving Hebrews, as well as to render inexcusable impenitent Egyptians.

This mark of preference having been openly exhibited, for the conviction and satisfaction of all, commandment is once more given to carry back this wondrous rod, and to deposit it by itself before God, with the other sacred furniture of the most holy place, to serve to latest posterity as one of the precious monuments of the divine favour to their forefathers. It is highly probable, that it always preserved that verdure to which it was thus preternaturally restored ; and is a lively image of the constant preservation of the universe, by that all-powerful Word which spake it into existence at first ; of the continued support of
life,

* Numb. xvii. 8.

life by the merciful visitation of that Spirit who “breathed into man’s nostrils the breath of life ; and man became a living soul.”*

Aaron, thus again distinguished and honoured of Heaven, continues to enjoy the dignity, and to perform the duties of the priesthood for thirty-one years longer ; we doubt not, with credit to himself, and to the satisfaction and advantage of all Israel. But, alas ! he has the mortification of seeing that people gradually and imperceptibly wasting away before his eyes ; he feels himself the dying minister of a dying congregation ; he observes the hand of justice doing that by slow degrees, which it might have accomplished at once, and employing forty years in what it could have made the work of a single moment. At length the stroke of death comes home to his own family, and it may be presumed to his very heart. In the one hundred and twentieth year of his age, and thirty-seventh of his priesthood, Miriam, his sister by nature, his friend by habit and affection, and, sad to think, his companion in offence, is removed to a world of spirits, and he is warned of his own departure, by the loss of one of his nearest and dearest relations. Moses delineates her character with singular conciseness and simplicity. The hand which she had in his preservation, when he was exposed, in early infancy, upon the Nile, procures her an interest in his affection, and in those of his readers, which the blameableness of some parts of her after conduct is unable wholly to destroy. Our censure of her envy and malignity, in more advanced life, is somewhat softened by the recollection of her childish tenderness, attachment, vigilance and address ; and, while we condemn the vehemence of her spirit, and the unruliness of her tongue, the edge of resentment is blunted, when we see her punished there, where a female is most vulnerable, in the fairness of her looks, and the agreeableness of her person, and we heartily join in the prayer
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* Gen. ii. 7.

of Aaron in her behalf : “ Alas, my lord, let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed, when he cometh out of his mother’s womb ;” and in that of Moses himself ; “ Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee.” From thence, to the hour of her death, a period of thirty-seven years, the history is entirely silent concerning her, and this is, perhaps, the highest praise that can be bestowed upon her. The sharp reproof which she had received for presuming to intermeddle in public affairs, had taught her, we are bound in charity to believe, that the post of honour, for a woman, is a private station ; that she is then most distinguished, most respectable, most valuable, when the world knows and talks least about her.

That self-same year the fatal summons is addressed to Aaron also, and one brother is made the messenger of death to the other. The same hand which arrayed him in splendid apparel, and consecrated him to the high and honourable office of priesthood, must strip him again, and anoint him to his burying. The whole progress of this solemn scene is highly pathetic and interesting. Let us attend the funeral procession to the top of Mount Hor, and learn to die to the vanity and glory of this world, and to cleave, with increased ardour, to that gospel, by which “ life and immortality are brought to light,” and to trust in that great High-Priest, who, though he “ was dead, is alive, and lives for evermore,” and giveth “ eternal life to as many as he will.”

Death, the most common of all events, at every season, and in whatever form it comes, is tremendous and affecting ; but the appearance of death, in the scene before us, is altogether singular and uncommon. It is indeed the death of an old man, but not occasioned by any apparent decay of nature, not preceded by long sickness, not hastened on by disease or accident ; but the spirit is surrendered at the command of God, in the fulness of health, in the composure of perfect recollection, without a hesitation of reluctant nature, without

without regret, without a pang. When sentence of death was pronounced upon Moses himself, and for the self-same transgression which shortened the life of Aaron, we find the fondness of nature, and the fervour of religion, repeatedly uniting, to crave a reprieve at least, if not a total remission : but Aaron, when summoned to depart, whether it was from superior fortitude of mind, from the consciousness of greater demerit, or that the historian has charitably drawn a veil over a brother's infirmity, while he frankly exposes his own, prepares instantly and cheerfully for the event.

Were we to follow the impulse of imagination, we might, without overleaping the modesty of nature, represent to you the deep concern wherewith the good man's own family was affected when the award of death was pronounced : the concern of all Israel at the thought of being deprived of the labours, the advices, the example and the prayers of their venerable high-priest ; the concern of Moses in being made the messenger, almost the executioner of death, upon his much beloved brother, associate and friend ; himself too lying under the same condemnation. If, after he received the command to ascend the mountain, that he might die, he was permitted to minister in the priest's office any more, to pour out the blood of the sacrifice, to burn incense upon the altar, to lift up his hands and bless the people, with what holy fervour may we suppose these sacred services performed ! with what devout attention would they be listened unto and waited upon, when both minister and people knew for certain they were to meet no more ! May we not suppose the good man, in strains such as these, taking a last, long farewell of those to whom he had for so many years stood in a relation so tender and so intimate. " The time of my departure, O Israel, is at length come, and I am ready to be offered up. That God who appointed me to serve you in holy things, permits me to wait at his altar no longer. I have fulfill-

ed my day. I have finished my course. I have survived the greatest part of my cotemporaries, but must die at length. I leave you with remorse, because I accuse myself of many failures in point of duty towards you ; I leave you with regret, because I sincerely love you ; I leave you with joy, because I can with confidence commit you to a guardian Providence, even to the God of your fathers, who can easily supply my place, by one wiser, holier and more faithful than me ; and who, I trust, will continue still to rule and to lead you by that best of men, of brothers and of friends. My body leaves you, but my spirit cannot be separated from you ; in death it will cleave unto you ; and when set free from the clogs of sense, it will still hover over you, attend your journeyings, and, finally, rest in peace when Israel rests in the promised land. These forty years have I borne your names engraved on jewels, upon my heart, and I will carry you with me in my heart, to the regions of eternal day. Farewel, my sons ; Eleazar, the heir of my dignity and anxiety, and Ithamar, my youngest hope. Think of the dreadful fate of your elder brothers, and serve the Lord with reverence and godly fear. Think of your father's errors, and learn wisdom. Ponder his approaching dissolution, and learn the nothingness of human grandeur. Call to your remembrance what Providence has done to and for me, and rejoice with trembling. Again I am summoned away ; it is the voice of Moses, of my brother ; it is the voice of God I hear. The Lord bless thee, and keep thee, the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee ; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. I come, my brother, I know whose command thou bearest ; I know that I must obey. But to part with thee is the bitterness of death ; endeared as we are to each other by friendship, as allied by blood—conjoined in office, knit together by habits of affection, united in life, and, blessed reflection, not to be long divided by death.

Thou wilt bury all my unworthiness in the grave; thou hast already buried it in the profounder, silenter tomb of a gentle and forgiving heart. I come, O my God, at thy call; I desire not to live, if thou biddest me to die. Yet I mourn to think that my death is a mark of thy displeasure. But I see the sun shining through the cloud; it is not wholly in anger, thou art summoning me away; thou art graciously putting an end to my painful labours, my anxious thoughts, my imperfect services, to my weaknesses and wanderings; and exalting me to a dignity far beyond what I have hitherto enjoyed. I shall see thee as thou art. I shall serve thee without wearying. I shall offend no more. Henceforth is laid up for me, a diadem for glory and for beauty, a crown of righteousness that fadeth not away. O death, where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory? Arise, let us go hence. Arise, let us ascend to the top of the mountain."

Having, in whatever language, bidden a final adieu to worldly connexions; in the sight of all the people, the high-priest, in all the splendour of his official habit, sad and solemn, climbs up the hill, from which he never was to descend. What were the emotions of Israel in gradually losing sight of their venerable patriarch, to see him no more again forever? What were the feelings of the patriarch in surveying from the summit of the mountain the goodly tents of Jacob, in which he had an earthly concern no longer? Nature casts many "a longing, lingering look behind;" but faith looks forward, and beholds mortality swallowed up of life. Nature regrets a promised land; unseen, unpossessed, unenjoyed, because of unbelief: faith stretches the wing, and aims a bold but not uncertain flight, to a heavenly Canaan, where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are forever at rest."

The spirit fails as we proceed. The death-warrant is again recited. The justice of the sentence is acknowledged, and the prisoner prepares for death. The
golden

golden crown, the mitre, the girdle, the ephod, the breast-plate, are one after another deposited, and human glory is patiently surrendered. As they were severally yielded up by the father, they are severally assumed by the son. Stripped of all that covered the body, the body itself is at length laid down, and the mortal blow is at length struck by Him who saith, "I make alive, and I kill." Aaron dies, but Eleazar lives. The priest expires, but the priesthood is immortal. Three ascend, only two return. What matters it how the poor perishing clay tabernacle were disposed of? About the spirit of the man whom God thus called away, we can be under no anxiety nor apprehension. A general, and I doubt not, an unaffected mourning of thirty days takes place; and all Israel lament when dead, the man whom many had envied, maligned and persecuted through life.

This is one of the many happy consequences and effects of death! It shuts the mouth of scandal; it brings to light, unnoticed or obscured virtues; it draws the veil over blemishes and imperfections.

Let the son of pride, who is rising into splendour, and bears "his blushing honours thick upon him," turn his eyes to the top of yonder mountain, and learn the nothingness of all the glory of man. Is his station higher than that of the high-priest of Israel? Are his vestments more magnificent, is his character more sacred, is his dignity more permanent, flow his honours from a higher source? Behold Aaron laid low: retiring from the world, naked, as naked he came into it; the head which once wore the mitre, levelled with the dust; the tongue which once spoke so well, forever dumb.

The hour of rest nightly admonishes us of the last fatal hour. We strip ourselves of our garments one by one, and lay them down; we are reduced to the image of death; the eye is closed; our faculties are absorbed; the form of the man only remains. And the time is at hand, we know it, when we must put

off this body, as an uneasy, worn-out, useless vestment, fit only for the moth or the dunghill. "Man must say to corruption, Thou art my father; and to the worm, Thou art my sister and mother." "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness of man as the flower of the field."

Our very children are the harbingers of our dissolution. They are the pleasantest, but the plainest monitors. Every step they rise brings us a little lower; as they grow stronger and stronger, we grow weaker and weaker. They wait to assume our name, our place, our robes, our office; they are ready to array themselves in our spoils. The elevation of Eleazar is the fall of Aaron. The public life of the son, is the death of the fire.

Look to that mountain, O man, and reflect that he whom now you hate, envy, oppose, malign, will speedily be changed into a clod of earth, and rendered incapable of feeling or returning thy animosity; and learn to die betimes to these wicked and odious passions. Suppose him laid on the bed of death; stript of those honours, talents, advantages, successes which render him the object of jealousy and malignity to thee. How you are disarmed! Pity and tenderness awake in your breast. You now hate yourself, that ever you could hate your brother. Let the reflection of what may so soon happen, reconcile thee to him now. Mar not thy own comfort, by seeking to disturb his repose. The cold hand of death will speedily extinguish the angry flame.

"They truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore, he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."*

"He need not daily, as those high-priests, to offer up sacrifices,

* Heb. vii. 23, 24, 25.

sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high-priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore."*

* Heb. vii. 27, 28.

History of Balaam.

LECTURE XIII.

2 PETER ii. 15, 16.

These are gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbade the madness of the prophet.

OF all the evil propensities to which human nature is subject, there is no one so general, so insinuating, so corruptive and so obstinate, as the love of money. It begins to operate early, and it continues to the end of life. One of the first lessons which children learn, and one which old men never forget, is, the value of money. The covetous seek and guard it for its own sake, and the prodigal himself must first be avaricious, before he can be profuse. This, of all our passions, is best able to fortify itself by reason, and is the last to yield to the force of reason. It most unremittingly engages the attention, and calls into their fullest exertion all our powers of body and of mind. Ambition and pride, those powerful motives of human conduct, are but ministring servants to avarice. Reputation and power are pursued chiefly as the means of procuring wealth; and all the fierce contentions which have distracted the world, and deluged it with blood, may be traced up to an eager desire to obtain the territory, or the treasure of another. Age, which
blunts

blunts all our other appetites, only whets this ; and after the heart is dead to every other joy, it lives to the dear, the inextinguishable delight of saving and hoarding.

In exact proportion to their incapacity and disinclination to make use of money, is the violence of men's thirst to possess it ; and on the threshold of eternity it cleaves to them, as if life were just beginning. Philosophy combats, satire exposes, religion condemns it in vain : it yields neither to argument, nor ridicule, nor conscience. Like the lean kine in Pharaoh's dream, it devours all that comes near it, and yet continues as hungry and meagre as ever. If a representation of the odiousness, criminality and danger of this vile affection can be of any use, it must be to those whose hearts are not yet hardened, whose consciences are not yet blinded by habits of indulgence in it ; for if it has once gotten possession of the mind, you might as easily reinvigorate feeble age by a discourse on the advantages and joys of youth, or restore a constitution wasted through consumption by an elaborate declamation on the blessing of health. Avarice, with the deaf adder, "will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely."*

We have already had occasion, in the course of these exercises, to trace the character of a selfish man, and to observe the workings of the human mind, under the influence of this base and destructive passion, in the history of Laban the Syrian. There we saw every principle of generosity and gratitude, of truth and justice, of humanity and natural affection, of piety and decency vilely sacrificed to this insatiate idol, which, like the grave, "never says it is enough." We have in the history referred to by the apostle, in the words which I have now read, another striking and instructive instance of the dreadful operation of covetousness, in a mind enlightened by wisdom, awake to all the worthier feelings and propensities of nature, capable

* Psal. lviii. 5.

capable of forming the justest notions of right and wrong, and of conveying these notions in the clearest and strongest expressions ; fully instructed and firmly persuaded respecting his duty ; but actuated by this fatal passion, deliberately deviating from the right path, seducing those whom he durst not curse, degrading the dignity of the prophet, in the venality of the courtier, and shamefully bartering conscience for gain. We shall find, then, the words of Peter a perfect key to the relation of Moses ; and whatever inconsistency shall appear in the conduct of Balaam, whatever fluctuation in opinion ; whatever plausibility of language and sentiment, combined with whatever irresolution in virtue, all is explained by this one discovery of his real character, he “ loved the wages of unrighteousness.” We come to illustrate this position by the history itself.

Forty years almost have elapsed since the miraculous deliverance from Egypt ; and the whole generation which partook of the joy of that deliverance because of their unbelief, is well nigh extinguished. Thousands and ten thousands have dropt into the grave. The individuals which formed the congregation of Israel are lost and forgotten ; but Israel still lives, the care of Providence, the object of favour. The shafts of vengeance have spent themselves, and nothing can now stem that current of promise and destiny, which is carrying God’s favoured people to victory, and the possession of Canaan. Their decampments and progress, therefore, are no longer the lingering and wanderings of a devoted people doomed to die in the wilderness ; but the bold, direct and successful progress of a warlike nation, from conquest to conquest.

A multitude so great, subsisting in a desert so long, in a manner so singular, could not but attract the notice of all the adjacent nations, who must have been anxiously solicitous which way their route was directed, and where they were to attempt a settlement at length.

length. Being arrived at the border of the wilderness, where it is contiguous to the country of the Amorites; not imagining that any part of their inheritance was to be allotted them on this side Jordan; they petition Sihon, the king of the country, to grant them leave to pass peaceably through his territories, to the place of their destination. This he roughly refuses, and, without waiting to see whether Israel meant to attempt a passage by force, he collects his whole strength, advances into the wilderness to attack them, and thereby hastens on his own fate; for his army is smitten with the edge of the sword, and his whole land falls an easy prey to the victor. Og king of Bashan is rash enough to follow his example, provokes his own destruction, is subdued in his turn, and the fertile plains, over which he reigned swell the triumphs of Israel.

Advancing forward to Jordan, they pitch their camp in the plains of Moab. This nation was descended from Lot, the nephew of Abraham, by an incestuous commerce with his elder daughter. They had long before this been reduced into a regular form of civil government, that of monarchy, and were living in the quiet possession of a fruitful country, secured to them by the appointment of Providence, in consideration of their relation to their venerable ancestor: and Israel was expressly prohibited to disturb them, or their brethren and neighbours, the children of Ammon, the posterity of Lot by his younger daughter, in the possession of their inheritance. The report of their victories, however, over Og and Sihon, has roused the attention and the jealousy of Balak king of Moab. Instead of employing the rational policy, of courting alliance and friendship with a people so formidable, and who were neither disposed nor permitted to molest them; or of adopting the manly policy of repelling bold invaders by open war, he has recourse to the mean, timid and contemptible arts of necromancy or divination. For this purpose he sends
messengers

messengers to Balaam, the son of Bosor, a noted inchanter of those times, with large money in their hands, stiled in scripture "the rewards of divination," and "the wages of unrighteousness," and a message to this purpose: "Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me. Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may finite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blestest is blessed, and he whom thou curstest is cursed."* Thus Providence fulfilled the words of the oracle, pronounced in the song of Moses thirty-eight years before, immediately on the passage of the Red Sea; "Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed, the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them: by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone."† Now the person to whom Balak applied on this trying occasion, was a man of a very extraordinary character, and of very singular gifts and abilities. He seems to have united qualities, the most dissimilar and opposite. He exhibits in his language and conduct, a very uncommon combination and contrast of virtues and vices. What can exceed on the one hand, the generosity and disinterestedness which he expressed and put in practice, when repeatedly urged to employ his prophetic sagacity or magical skill against Israel? "If Balak would give me his house-full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more."‡ What can equal on the other, the vile prostitution, for hire, of his great talents in the service of an idolatrous prince, against the people whom he knew to be favoured and protected of Heaven? We see him this day seeking and enjoying the most

* Numb. xxii. 5, 6.

† Exod. xv. 15, 16.

‡ Numb. xxii. 18.

most intimate communication with the living and true God; and to-morrow recurring to the practice of infamous and infernal arts, to accomplish a most detestable and diabolical purpose: proclaiming at one time, in language which the spirit of wisdom and prophecy alone could inspire, the security, glory and happiness of that people whom God delighted to honour; and, with the very next breath, insidiously suggesting counsels, which directly tended to destroy that security, to tarnish that glory, and to dissolve that happiness. In a word, we behold him fully impressed with the importance of a holy life, in order to a peaceful and happy end, and yet living in the commission of the most flagrant enormities, and prematurely cut off, with all his imperfections on his head; cleaving to the last to the mammon of unrighteousness, and yet sufficiently impressed with the loveliness of true goodness to pray in these words, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"*

For the farther clearing up of this very singular character and history, it may be of importance to observe that though the descendants of Abraham for many ages after the death of that patriarch, were distinguished as the peculiar people of God, to whom were committed the lively oracles, and "to whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;"† yet scripture permits us not to consider all divine knowledge as confined to that people, previous to their establishment in Canaan. The dispersion from the wild attempt of Babel, necessarily conveyed in every one of its fragments some knowledge of the nature, will and worship of the God of their fathers; which, though in process of time, obscured by tradition and forgetfulness, and disfigured by human invention, must still have retained somewhat of both its original form and substance.

The

* Numb. xxiii. 10.

† Rom. ix. 4.

The example and instructions of so good a master, and a neighbour so respectable as Abraham himself, could not but have a sensible effect on his numerous domestics, who were of various countries, and upon the princes with whom he came into connexion; and for this very end probably it was, that Providence kept him wandering from place to place. By means of their intercourse with Abraham, we know that Pharaoh and Abimelech attained at least a certain degree of acquaintance with the true God. We find, in like manner, Job, at whatever period he lived, and his three friends, in Arabia, and particularly Elihu of the kindred of Ram, discovering very profound knowledge in divine things; and Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, in the land of Midian, appears evidently to have possessed the same advantage. It is not therefore matter of very great surprise, that Balaam, a stranger and an enemy to the commonwealth of Israel, should enjoy this advantage in common with many of his neighbours, and that he should have made such an indifferent use of it: this alas, being the misery of multitudes, who are favoured with a still clearer light than he was. Neither will it excite wonder, if we find superstitious and idolatrous rites gradually blending with the worship of the great Jehovah. Laban, though not to be set down as wholly given to idolatry, long before the period now under review, had his Teraphim, or household gods, which he highly prized, either as objects of religious veneration, or on account of the precious materials of which they were composed. And this too will in part account for that strange mixture which we find in the character of Balaam, his sudden transition from the acknowledgment of the God of Israel, to a participation in the profane rites employed in the worship of the idols of Balak and Moab.

But, notwithstanding this odious and abominable mixture, we observe in more than one instance, the great God winking at these times of ignorance, and condescending

condescending to make known his will, even to men who were daily insulting him by their abominations, as in the case of Pharaoh and Abimelech already mentioned, as in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, the grossest of idolaters, many ages afterwards, and in the case before us. All this leads to make an obvious and an important distinction, between the extraordinary gifts and the graces of God's Spirit. It is one thing to have a clear, enlightened head, and another, to have an affectionate and obedient heart. It is a blessed union where they meet, but the former without the latter only renders wickedness more conspicuous, and condemnation more just. The charge, alas ! does not stop at wicked, covetous Balaam ; it was matter of complaint down to the days of Micah, and of prophets of a different description. "The heads" of God's people judge "for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money." And our blessed Lord, to level all confidence in the possession of the choicest gifts, assures us, that many shall say to him in the great day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name ? and in thy name have cast out devils ? and in thy name done many wonderful works ? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you : depart from me ye that work iniquity."*

We observe farther, that though God was sometimes pleased to bestow the gift of prophecy upon the unworthy, the prediction, though uttered by unholy lips, was the truth of God, which no weakness, perverseness, nor disinclination of the prophet was able either to alter or suppress. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man : but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."† They spake under an irresistible impulse ; they spake sometimes what they understood not, and what they would have concealed, if they could. Thus Caiaphas, the avowed enemy of our blessed Lord, uttered a notable

* Matt. vii. 22, 23.

† 2 Pet. i. 21.

ble prophecy concerning him, not knowing what he said. Thus Jeremiah, disgusted with the ill success of his preaching, finding the word of the Lord made a reproach and a derision daily, by the thoughtless men of his generation, resolved not to make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. "But," says he, "his word was in mine heart, as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." And Josephus, in perfect consistency with the character of Balaam, as drawn by Moses, puts into his mouth this address to the king of Moab, who upbraided him with breach of agreement, in pronouncing the warmest of benedictions, where he was expressly hired to curse: "Can you imagine, that when prompted by the Spirit of God to disclose futurity, it depends on us to be silent, or to speak out? He makes our voices the vehicles of his will, without permitting us a choice in the matter. I well remember for what purpose the joint entreaties of you and the Midianites have brought me hither. I have undertaken this journey with a fixed determination to favour your earnest wishes: but God is more powerful than the bent of my inclination, which aimed at the gratification of your desires. For when he takes possession of our minds, he occupies them wholly, and leaves us nothing of our own. I had nothing less in my intention, than to trumpet the praises of this mighty host, or to display the blessings which God has in reserve for this favoured race. But being graciously disposed towards them, and determined to exalt them to the highest pinnacle of glory and felicity, He suggested to me the predictions which I could not but utter."*

Sometimes the representation of some dreadful punishment, to be instantly inflicted, if they dared to falsify the oracle committed to them, might serve as a curb to their own natural and unruly propensities; and, sometimes carried wholly out of themselves, they delivered,

* Joseph. Antiq. lib. IV. cap. IV.

delivered, in an extasy, what was committed to them, unconscious of what they said or did. In the prosecution of the history, we shall find Balaam under both these kinds of inspiration ; both awed by fear, and wrapt into the vision of futurity, in a trance.

I only make one observation more, for the clearing up of this remarkable story. It was a generally received opinion among the Gentile nations, that prophets, or diviners, had a power, by means of incantation, to inflict or to remove public calamities ; that they understood the art of decoying from among their enemies, the tutelar deities who presided over them ; in consequence of which, they were easily and certainly discomfited. Homer makes the capture of Troy to depend on the removal of the sacred image of Minerva from its residence in the citadel of that metropolis : and Joshua himself, in the conquest of Canaan, takes advantage of this vulgar prejudice, to encourage his men to proceed to victory ; and to prevent the ill effects of the timid and terrifying report of his colleagues, respecting the strength of the country. “ Rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land ; for they are bread for us : their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us : fear them not.”* It was accordingly usual, on undertaking military expeditions, to nerve the arm, and to whet the sword of the soldier, by the tongue of the priest, and the tremendous forms of religion. They attempted to make the gods parties to their quarrels, and devoted to perdition the nations against whom they waged war. An ancient author has transmitted to us the form of execration employed on such occasions, which, on account of its relation to our subject, perhaps you will have the curiosity to hear. It is a perfect contrast to the blessing which Balaam was obliged, reluctantly, to pronounce upon Israel. The priest destined to this awful employment, after presenting the usual sacrifice, advanced to the head of the army,

* Numb. xiv. 9.

my, and in the presence of the general and principal officers, pronounced aloud, words to this effect. "Almighty Father of gods and men, or if thou wouldst rather be addressed by the name of Jupiter, or if any other appellation be more grateful to thine ear ; pour out, I conjure thee, upon this army," or "this city," according as the case required, "the spirit of terror and dismay : deprive of the sight of their eyes, all those who shall level their blows at us, our legions or troops ; spread darkness over our enemies, over their cities, over their fields, over their armies. Look upon them as a thing accursed : bring them under the hardest conditions that ever an enemy was constrained to undergo. As for me, to destruction I hereby devote them ; my curse I pour upon them, and take this prince, these captains, this people, to be witnesses of it."* This ceremony being performed, and the soldiers inspirited by the sanctions of religion, they advanced to the combat, in confidence of success.

It was for a purpose of this kind, that Balaam was now sent for by the confederated powers of Moab and Midian. How the latter of these two nations had been induced to join in such an embassy, we are not informed. The middle forty years of his life, Moses had spent among that people ; had formed alliance with them, by marrying the daughter of Jethro, one of the princes of the country, with whom he maintained a most friendly correspondence, after he was raised to the command of the armies of Israel. He cannot, therefore, be suspected of forming a hostile design against his ancient hosts and relations ; and it was much more natural for them to form an alliance with a man of Moses's well known wisdom and moderation, and with a people so sensibly favoured of Heaven as Israel was, than with a nation of idolaters, and a prince, who was reduced to employ the poor arts of incantation against his enemies. But, in many cases it happens, that, aiming at an over-refined wisdom and policy,

* Macrob. Saturnal. lib. III. cap. IX.

cy, men prove themselves fools. Jethro was probably by this time dead, and the Midianitish estate was governed by councils, very unlike those which would probably have been suggested by that wise and good man : and a deputation of their princes joins those of Balak, in an application to Balaam, to strengthen their united forces, by laying Israel under a curse.

It is melancholy to think that from the beginning to this day, men have been more eager to bring mischief upon others, than to procure good to themselves. Had these Midianites and Moabites associated together to strengthen their borders, had they invited a prophet to come and confirm their bands of alliance, and encourage the hearts of their soldiery, by pronouncing a blessing upon themselves, they had not been reprehensible ; but such is the corruption and malignity of the human heart, that it not only takes pleasure in the evil that befalls another, where our own interest is concerned, but in the very mischief that is wrought for mischief sake. The great evil is, men engage in transitory pursuits as if they were immortal ; and had they the power, together with the inclination, would prosecute momentary offences with everlasting punishments. What is it to one nation that another great nation be utterly exterminated, provided a favourite scheme of ambition, commerce or revenge be thereby promoted ! When we hear a poor wretch, a common curser and swearer, on the most frivolous occasions, imprecating eternal damnation on his fellow-creature, we are filled with horror ; and yet without surprise, we behold religious sects in their zeal, and mighty empires in their pride and fury, deliberately doing the same thing. What principle so important to individuals and to states, as a principle of true religion ! It is a comforter in affliction, a counsellor in darkness and uncertainty, a refuge in danger and distress, a support in death. What so seductive and mischievous as an erroneous principle of this sort ! “ If the light that is in men be darkness, how great is

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that darkness?" False religion is a wandering fire of the night, hurrying men over a precipice; plunging them in the gulph—pretending to bring a tribute of glory to God by destroying mankind. It is the spirit of the great enemy of God and man, who is a liar and a murderer from the beginning.

It is the perilousness of the times that has tossed Balaam into notice, and consequence, and infamy. In a quieter period, he had floated unnoticed on the surface, and silently increased the paltry gains of his black art, by playing on the credulity of silly women and children. But the old wizard has had the good fortune to attract the notice of princes, and has the opportunity of selling his magical spells at his own price; and he fails not to make the most of his market. With the clue afforded us in scripture, we will attempt in another Lecture, to follow the various turnings and windings of that profoundest, darkest, most intricate of all labyrinths, a carnal, covetous heart. We conclude the present with calling upon you:

I. To remark and to revere the righteous judgment of God, in giving up to strong delusion those who seek and follow delusions. Every deliberate violation of God's law, every victory which a man gains over his own conscience, becomes his punishment, as it is his crime. Let not him who has wilfully deceived himself, in the first instance, pretend to complain, that he has been hurried into mistakes which he never intended, but could not avoid. The *first* wrong step was in his power, but not the *fourth* or the *fifth*. The man needed not, unless he chose, to have set himself a running down a steep place; but, once in motion, it is not in his power to stop when he would. If therefore he plunge into the flood beneath, the fault is in himself, not the laws of motion, which only carried on what his own will had begun. The man who has destroyed his faculties by excess, must not charge his bad memory, his erroneous judgment, or the inconveniencies in which they have involved him, upon nature,

ture, or the God of nature. No, they only establish the work of his own hands. In this view, it is perfectly just that, "to him who hath should more be given, and from him who hath not, even that which he hath should be taken away."

II. Let us rejoice that we have a clear and "sure word of prophecy," to direct and assist us in every doubtful and difficult case; and that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The gift of prophecy was not always a blessing to the possessor; and, as the mere knowledge of future events, it would be the reverse of a blessing. In tender mercy and in loving kindness, God conceals futurity from men. But all that pertains to the acquisition of wisdom, and the attainment of happiness; all that assures us of life and immortality, and makes us meet for the enjoyment of it, the words of this prophecy fully unfold. "The righteousness of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up 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 thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."* To know but this, is more than to "speak with the tongues of men and of angels"—is more than to "have the gift of prophecy, and to understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and to have all faith, so as to be able to remove mountains." "Covet earnestly the best gifts;" but rather cultivate the fruits of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."†

III. While we admire the wisdom and goodness of God, in counteracting the intention of wicked Balaam, and turning the curse in his mouth into a blessing, let

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* Rom. x. 6—9.

† Gal. v. 22, 23.

us bow the knee in gratitude to that great Prophet, who has wholly, and forever, done away the curse; let us give glory to "God, who hath sent his Son Christ Jesus to bless every one of us, in turning us from our iniquities;" and to introduce us into more than an Eden, more than a Canaan, even into the paradise of God; where there is "no more curse"—"where God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."*

IV. While we behold "the madness of the prophet"—a heart hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, let us tremble to think that the seeds of this very sin are implanted deeply in our own nature; that they have even discovered their baleful shoots; that they bring forth fruit unto death. Every plant which our heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be plucked up and rooted out; and this is one of them. Look to it carefully, O man: watch it with a holy jealousy. It is "the root of all evil." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God, abideth forever."†

* Rev. xxi. 4.

† 1 John ii. 15—17.

History of Balaam.

L E C T U R E XIV.

NUMBERS xxii. 21.

*And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass,
and went with the princes of Moab.*

THE eagerness which men discover in pursuing the objects of time and sense, is a melancholy contrast to their coldness and indifference respecting the things of God and eternity. The carnal mind needs but a hint to attach itself to the pursuit of riches, pleasure or honour; and when engaged, no argument is of weight sufficient to dissuade; no danger intimidates, no difficulty discourages. The understanding becomes the dupe of the passions, conscience is led hoodwinked by appetite, and the man is shamefully sunk in the brute. But the alarm must be louder than thunder, which awakens the thoughtless, the sensual and the selfish to serious reflection; and it must be repeated every hour, else they will slumber and sleep again.

Water has in its natural coldness a tendency to congeal; and, once reduced to ice, has no principle in itself to recover from that torpid state. The cause of change must come from without. To dissolve and restore it to its liquid state, the sun must shine, the wind must blow; withdraw the action of air and fire, and it will gradually freeze again. In like manner, without any cause from without, the human body, by a principle of corruption within itself, must speedily dissolve
and

and be destroyed ; and the human mind, by a similar internal principle of moral corruption, degenerates from depravity to depravity, till, lost to shame, fear, remorse, and, at length, to feeling, men come to commit iniquity with greediness, and to glory in their shame. To preserve the body in life, there must be constant supplies of nourishment administered ; and to preserve the soul in health, there must be “ line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.”

It is truly affecting to see men enlightened and persuaded, yet wedded to their lusts ; clearly informed of the right path, but wilfully and deliberately persisting in error ; hardening themselves against God and yet thinking to prosper ; acknowledging God in words, but in works denying him.

These observations are all strikingly exemplified in the character and conduct of Balaam, of which we attempted to give you a general idea in the last Lecture, and to which were added some observations tending to elucidate his singular history. We are now to enter on the particular detail of it, as it is delivered in the sacred record.

The Israelitish nation was now in the last year of their peregrination through the wilderness ; their civil and religious government were fully settled, and the theocracy finally established. They were now approaching the banks of the Jordan ; and by their number, order and discipline, striking terror into all the neighbouring nations. Two kings, their armies and their people, have already fallen before their victorious arms ; and nothing is left to oppose their progress to Canaan, but the river, the boundary itself of the promised land. They pitch their camp quietly in the plains of Moab, expecting the signal from their divine leader and commander to pass over, conquer, and take possession. Their warlike array and recent successes, have alarmed the apprehensions of Balak, king of Moab, as their prosperity and prospects had excited his envy
and

and jealousy. Diffident of his strength, either to repel invasion, if attacked by so powerful an adversary, or to attack them first, and endeavour to obstruct their progress, he enters into an alliance with the people of Midian, for their mutual security and defence. And even then, still doubtful of the force of their united arms, they agree to employ the arts of divination in aid of the sword, and dream of conquering by the power of enchantment, those whom they were afraid to encounter in the field. To such base, such wretched shifts do princes and nations resort, to gratify pride, ambition or revenge. For this purpose, they send a joint embassy to Balaam, the son of Beor, a noted soothsayer in the neighbourhood.

Balak and Moab had degenerated from the faith of Lot, their forefather, and were sunk into idolatry ; it is therefore no wonder to see them of a jealous and hostile spirit towards Israel, their brother. A principle of religion, consisting in the fear and love of God, is the great bond of union among men ; it strengthens the ties of natural affection, and even conciliates friendship between enemies ; but irreligion, or what is worse, an erroneous principle of religion, turns men loose against each other, dissolves society, and fattens the earth with human blood. We cannot help recollecting, alas ! that Abraham and Lot, the uncle and nephew, the progenitors of the two nations, were under the necessity of separating from each other, on account of their increasing wealth ; and we see, many years after they were laid in the dust, the self-same cause, whetting the spirits and the swords of their posterity, and arming them for their mutual destruction. The whole world is a possession too scanty for avarice and ambition ; the success of one seems to be a diminution of the happiness of another ; and even the immense ocean is crimsoned with gore, that one may enjoy sole and sullen empire ; as if that vast space could not accommodate the operations of two tribes

tribes of ants on yonder mole-hill. Blessed world, where envy and strife shall rage no more ; where there is bread enough and to spare, room enough and to spare ; where the felicity of every one is an accession of felicity to every one !

Balaam is described in scripture by his parentage, his country and profession. He was the son of Beor, or Bofor, the difference of which pronounciation is accounted for, from the difference of dialect in the oriental languages. The father exists to us only in his name, and in the history of his son : and happy had it been for that son, to have left behind him nothing too but a mere name, instead of one loaded with infamy and detestation. Pethor, the place of his residence, was a city of Aram, or Mesopotamia, the very country where Abraham himself was born, and where he resided till his seventy-fifth year ; the native country of Rebekah, the wife of Isaac ; the country where Jacob passed a great part of his youthful years ; where he married ; where all his children, except Benjamin, were born, and whence he obtained the name of a Syrian. Pethor was situated on the river Euphrates, called *the* river, by way of eminence or distinction, it being the largest in the country ; and thence, in many passages of scripture, styled the *great* river. The country adjacent, to a vast distance, being plain, it was favourable to the observation of the heavenly bodies ; and accordingly we find the science of astronomy was early cultivated there ; and the pretended science of astrology, that is, the power of foretelling future events, from the appearances and supposed influence of the stars, was speedily grafted upon it. Pride, presumption, and a little knowledge, soon arrogated to themselves a power of controlling these great luminaries, which seem in perpetual motion to encompass our earth, and of suspending or altering their influences ; and ignorance, superstition and credulity easily admitted the insolent claim, and resorted to

to it. This was apparently the profession of Balaam, for in the book of Joshua he is expressly termed "the soothsayer." It was probably to his skill and power as an astrologer, that Balak had recourse for assistance against Israel, and when we come to his prophecy itself, we shall meet with some, and these not obscure, allusions to that art.

The message put into the mouths of these ambassadors, is strongly expressive of terror and consternation. "There is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me." * The dreadful plagues inflicted on Egypt, in effecting Israel's deliverance, had been heard at the distance of Moab; and though forty years have elapsed, they are neither forgotten, nor have lost their impression. Fear ever magnifies its object; "they cover the face of the earth:" the word is, the *eye* or *sight* of the earth; their tents extend so far, that the earth and they seem to have one limit, and they are marshalled so close, that no ground can be seen. Another image, strongly expressive of the same passion, is that in the fourth verse. "Now will this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field." "Lick up," it is the same word which is used 1 Kings, xviii. 38. to express the action of devouring fire. "Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench." † The ox, as he feeds calmly and stately along, employs his tongue only, and the grass perisheth without pushing with the horn, or stamping with the foot, actions that denote strength and exertion, but by the easy motion of a soft and pliant film of flesh, he sweeps away all before him; thus easily and certainly, Balak apprehends, was Israel advancing to his and his people's destruction.

And

* Verse 5.

† 1 Kings, xviii. 38.

And how was this approaching plague to be resisted or averted? "Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people, for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed."* We have here an assemblage of all the baser and more contemptible passions of the human mind, called forth and led on by the predominant one of fear: a low, grovelling superstition, expecting from magical spells, what ought to have been sought for from wisdom and valour: unprovoked violence and cruelty, in seeking the destruction of a people, who were dwelling peaceably by him, and who had given such strong and recent proof of their moderation, in submitting to a tedious and difficult march round the whole land of Edom, rather than offend an unkind brother, who had refused a passage through his land, which they could easily have cut with the sword: and unmanly, abject adulation of a vile wizard, whom he supposed capable of serving his turn. On the other hand, the two great leading passions of Balaam's soul, vanity and covetousness, were likely to be gratified to the full. How would his heart exult, to see a train of princes standing at his gate, and presents, worthy of kings to bestow, poured down at his feet! A prophet indeed, would have known from the beginning, that the application was nugatory, and that it must come to nothing; and an honest man would have rejected it with firmness, and persevered in that rejection. But we see his heart is won from the first moment, and all that follows is a wretched struggle between inclination and conscience, in which the former, at length, carries off the victory.

He receives the messengers with great courtesy, and accommodates them in his house; for even a miser can be hospitable, if he be sure of gaining by it. Abraham's

* Verse 6.

ham's servant, followed by a camel loaded with the good things of Canaan, can easily force open the doors of such a man as Laban, or Balaam. He affects an air of great mystery ; he cannot give his response immediately. Night, the season of incantation and dreams, must intervene ; and, horrible to think, the great and dreadful name of Jehovah is interposed, to sanction and conceal the wicked purposes of a heart hunting after its covetousness ; and he promises to report in the morning the result of his consultation. How faithfully the report was made, the sequel will shew.

It appears, on the face of the history, that God waited not for an application from Balaam, concerning this business, but whether in a dream, a vision, or by a voice, prevented him, with an inquiry concerning the deputation from Moab. In many instances, Jehovah is represented as drawing information from men's own mouths, of what evidently lay revealed to his all-seeing eye, and thus making their folly and wickedness to expose, reprove, and condemn themselves. " And God came unto Balaam, and said, What men are these with thee ?" * This question must have put the prophet into great agitation. Awful is the voice of the Eternal, at whatever season, in whatever form, and on whatever occasion it is heard ! How awful then to a bad man, harbouring an ill design, shutting wilfully his own eyes, and yet flattering himself, and saying, Doth God see, and is there knowledge with the Most High ? That he considered the very question as ominous, and fatal to the cause of his avarice and vain-glory, is evident from the circumstantiality of his answer. It discovers a soul tremblingly alive to the voice of interest : it is minute and particular, as if, by a parade of words, he could deceive his Maker into an approbation of his purpose and desire. What then must have been his chagrin and disappointment,

* Verse 9.

appointment, when a prohibition, so peremptory and positive, in a moment blasted all his prospects of gain and preferment !

“ And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them, thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed.”* The application had two objects in view, permission to go into the land of Moab, and liberty to curse the children of Israel, and both meet with a flat denial. He must not accompany the ambassadors to him who sent them ; neither must he, either at home or abroad, in this place or in that, presume to curse, or in any shape whatever to molest that people. And, as if the sternness of interdiction had not been sufficient, a reason is assigned, “ for they are blessed.” The commandments of God, in general, are so clear, that it is impossible to misunderstand them ; it is not ignorance, but presumption, that ruins mankind.

Balaam, however reluctant, must next morning deliver an account of the night's success ; and we find he does it in a very partial and imperfect manner. When he reported the message of Balak to God, having to do with the great Searcher of hearts, with whom disguise avails nothing, he is accurate and distinct ; but in carrying back the answer of God, having to do with men, who knew no more than he had a mind to communicate to them, he delivers it in terms calculated only to stimulate the eagerness of the king of Moab, by encouraging a hope that something might be extorted, by dint of importunity and perseverance ; or, that perhaps he might be allowed to do that at a distance, which he might not do by a nearer approach. The command was clear and full, “ Thou shalt not go with them ;” but in the mouth of Balaam it is mutilated and perverted : “ the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you.”† This satisfies Balak at once, that the prophet's good will was with

* Verse 12.

† Verse 13.

with him ; that it was not from want of inclination that the messengers returned without him ; and, he justly concludes, that with such a proportion of the man on his side, it would not be difficult to make the rest to follow.

The father of lies himself will speak truth, when it makes for his purpose ; and Satan will quote scripture, if he can but deceive by it ; as in his temptation of our Saviour in the wilderness. But then there is always some material circumstance disguised, perverted or suppressed : and thereby a different meaning is conveyed from what was intended. The word of God, then, is handled deceitfully, not only when it is wrested, and made to speak a language not its own, but when any part of the truth is purposely, artfully and wilfully concealed ; and he “ who shuns to declare the whole counsel of God,” is equally criminal with him who presumes to deliver, as the word of God, what wants the stamp of his authority. Balaam simply relates, that he is not permitted to go ; not a syllable of the prohibition to curse Israel, nor of the reason assigned for that prohibition.

As the message lost much by the way between God and the princes of Moab, from Balaam’s manner of rehearsing it ; so it loses still more between Balaam and their master, from their mutilated and partial report : so that by the time it reaches Balak, an entirely different turn and meaning is given to it. The words of the oracle are, “ Thou shalt not go with them ; thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed :” * rehearsed by Balaam, “ the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you :” † reported by the ambassadors, “ Balaam refuseth to come with us.” ‡ Thus, by the alteration of a few circumstances, even without a direct violation of truth, by passing through a very few hands, a plain proposition is made to contradict itself : and if we add to the easiness of varying facts, by vary-

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* Verse 12.

† Verse 13.

‡ Verse 14.

ing phrases, and modes of expression ; the difference, still more easily made, by the infinite diversity of tones, looks and gesture, we shall not be surpris'd to find, what frequently happens, a man made to say diametrically the reverse of what he did say, and what he intended.

Balak having received this answer as the prophet's, with great colour of reason, considers it as a mere artifice, employed with a view to raise his price and importance ; and he hopes to conquer Balaam's reluctance, by assiduity, perseverance, presents and flattery : for both good and bad men judge of others by themselves : and apprized, it would appear, of Balaam's weak side, ambition and avarice, he dispatches a second embassy, consisting of a greater number of persons, and of still higher rank, with this weighty and importunate address : " Thus saith Balak, the son of Zippor, Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me : for I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me : come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people."* How flattering all this to a worldly, selfish mind ! Balak puts a chart blanche into his hands ; leaves him to name his own terms. All the honour which a king could bestow, all the wealth of Moab is before him ; the very things which his soul lusted after. Blessed Jesus, thou chief of the prophets, even the prince of this world, the chief of tempters, when he came, found nothing in thee ! found no weak side, no vulnerable part. The kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, dazzled not thine eyes : to the loudest calls of nature thou turnedst a deaf ear. The applause of men thou didst despise ; thou soughtest not thine own glory, but the glory of Him that sent thee : thy " meat and drink was to do the will of Him that sent thee."

Balaam had now been at the summit of his wishes, but for a stern, pointed command of God ; which,
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* Verse 16, 17.

like a drawn sword, hung by a single hair over his head. Shocking dilemma! he is goaded on by desires as impetuous as ever took possession of a proud and covetous mind; he is bridled in by a prohibition, as decisive as words could make it. For a moment we are in hope that the good principle has got the ascendant, that the fear, if not the love of God is shed abroad in his heart. Who could speak better? "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more."* It is the very sentiment of chaste and virtuous Joseph, when solicited by temptation of a different sort. But here is the difference:—Joseph fled from temptation, and overcame: Balaam tampered with it, and fell. Even the worst of men feel themselves under a necessity, for their interest's sake, to save appearances; and something must be said, at least, to still the clamours of conscience. Unhappy man! steady, himself, to his own base and wicked purpose, he is weak enough to entertain the hope, that the great, the unchangeable Jehovah may depart from him. Thus deceiving himself, it is no wonder to see him attempting to deceive the king of Moab's messengers into the expectation of a response more favourable to their united wishes. Accordingly, he courteously invites them to lodge with him that night also; if, peradventure, there might be obtained a reversal of the decree.

And now the sable curtain is drawn, and Balaam is left alone, and no eye sees him but the all-seeing eye of God. Without waiting to be consulted, and the prophet, without doubt, was both afraid and ashamed to venture on this second rencounter, God again prevents him, and tacitly, though not directly, charges him with having invited this second application, in the face of a positive and decided answer. Balaam and Balak are both men of this world, and having
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* Verse 18.

one and the same spirit to govern them, they readily understand each other. Balaam evidently courts a second address; and Balak is not slow to pay it. Now, this is the very thing which gives so great and such just offence to a holy God—that two presumptuous, selfish wretches should presume to imagine, that the counsels of Heaven could be shaken, in compliance with their humour or interest. “And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do.”* The word might have been rendered, “*Seeing* the men have come to call thee. Balaam, you have carried, thus far, your point. A more honourable embassy attends you. Your desire is to go: you are unable to withstand the allurements of riches and honour: you know the better course, but will pursue the worse. Well then, fulfil thy desire. I have declared my will; but thou preferrest thine own. I have said, *Go not; curse not*; but the demon of gain, Mammon, says, *go and curse*. Obey him. Go, and take the consequence.” This is clearly the language of the permission given him to accompany the messengers. And can there be a clearer proof of the divine displeasure, than when God yields to men, and gives them their own way? “My people,” says God, “would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me; so I gave them up unto their own heart’s lust, and they walked in their own counsels. O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries.”† The wickedness of the old world at length overcame the patience of God; and he said, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man:” and so they were left to eat and drink, to dance and to play; but then the waters of a deluge were at no great distance: and

* Verse 20.

† Psalm lxxxii. 11—14.

and when God says, concerning a people, or an individual, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone;" short of hell, it is the worst that can befall them.

Balaam flattered himself and the Moabites, with hearing *more* from God; but, as the punishment of abusing the light he had, he hears *less* than before; and the vision is obscured to the man who had wilfully shut his own eyes. He was formerly forbidden either to go, or to curse. He is now, at his peril, allowed to go: but should he be so rash as to proceed on so slender a warrant, he is, at his peril, warned to walk by the instructions which should be given him. How easily men believe, how promptly they obey, when the doctrine tallies with their prejudices; when the precept coincides with their inclinations or their interest. Balaam is weak, I ought to have said, wicked enough, to imagine his way perfectly clear. Having carried, as he thought, one essential point, all the rest, he presumes, will follow of course. Who so quick-sighted as a covetous man pursuing his gain? And yet, who so stupid and dull, as the man whose eyes the god of this world hath blinded? Balaam is up betimes in the morning, equipped for his journey, on his way for the land of Moab. "For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."* And there, for the present, we shall leave him, with this melancholy, mortifying reflection—that a corrupted heart has infinitely greater power to pervert a sound understanding and a well-informed conscience, than an intelligent conscience and a clear head have to reform and purify a corrupted heart. If God permit, we shall continue the history next Lord's day. May grace and wisdom be granted us to make a proper use of it; and to God's holy name be praise. Amen.

* Luke xvi. 8.

History of Balaam.

LECTURE XV.

2 PETER ii. 15, 16.

These are gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness ; but was rebuked for his iniquity : the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbade the madness of the prophet.

THE ordinary powers of nature, if we consider them attentively, are no less wonderful in themselves, and are not less a proof of the power and wisdom of God, than those extraordinary gifts which have been bestowed, and those preternatural powers which have been exercised at particular seasons, and for special purposes ; and which have excited the admiration and astonishment of one part of mankind, and the incredulity of another. That a company of illiterate men should suddenly, and without instruction or study, be endowed with the gift of readily speaking various languages, justly raises our wonder, and conveys to our minds a very lofty idea of that divine intelligence which can communicate such power unto men : but we overlook the wonder equally great, because it is continually occurring, of the common gift of speech, and the conveyance of thought by it ; and the acquisition of language by means of letters and memory. That a dumb ass should speak with man's voice, and the

the dull ass reason, fills us with surprise, because the instance is singular and unparalleled ; but the gradual increase of the human body, the imperceptible expansion of the powers of the human mind, pass for a thing of course ; though the hand of God be conspicuous in the one case as in the other. Nothing is incredible to them who know the scriptures, and the power of God : nothing is incredible to him who attends, with any degree of application, to the operations of his own mind ; and to what, in the ordinary course of human affairs, is every hour pressing upon his observation.

In a crowded assembly, without the utterance of a single sound, by one glance of the eye, the inmost thoughts, the most secret emotions, shall, quick as lightning, be conveyed from soul to soul : and the stranger be unable to intermeddle with, to partake of, the sorrow or the joy. Let the veil of night be spread ever so thick, and the use of sight suspended, as if the eye-ball were extinguished, the vibration of a little film of flesh shall dissipate the gloom, and convey the accents of affection or of woe to the ear and the heart of sympathy. Place the diameter of the globe between my friend and me, by an art subtle as the magic spell, what I know and feel in the frozen regions of the north, shall flee on the swift wings of the wind, and touch his soul under the more clement sky of the opposite hemisphere. Knowing from experience all this to be true, history can record no fact, promise suspend before my eyes no future event too wonderful for me to believe. The omniscience, omnipotence, and infinite goodness of God once admitted, every difficulty vanishes. Is there any thing too hard for the Lord to perform ? No : Then Sarah conceives a son at ninety years old ; the dumb ass reproves the madness of his master ; unlettered fishermen speak with tongues ; the dead shall arise ; all these things shall be dissolved, and “ new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness,”

righteousness," shall be expanded, to endure forever and ever.

Having premised these things, not altogether foreign, we trust, to our subject, we proceed to the farther prosecution of a history, as singular and as instructive, perhaps, as any in scripture.

Balaam having obtained what he was willing to believe the consent of God to his journey into the land of Moab, for we easily believe what we wish, loses not a moment in making preparation for it. He is mounted, and on his journey by the first dawning of the day, as if afraid of prevention, by a revocation of the permission; ill at ease in his mind, but smothering conviction, in the exultation of having princes in his train, and in the prospect of all the riches and honour which confederated kings had to bestow. Scripture gives us the idea of a holy violence offered unto God, with which he is well pleased, and to which he graciously submits to yield; as when it is said, "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Hence the commandment, "to strive to enter in at the strait gate," to wrestle and make supplication, "to pray always, and not to faint." But there is also suggested the idea of an impious, a presumptuous, and a fatal strife and contention with our Maker, in which, woe be to the man that prevails. Such was the violence which worldly-minded Balaam offered: and how could he think to prosper? God, justly displeased at his perseverance in a cause which he knew to be disapproved of Heaven, leaves him not long in uncertainty respecting his will.

The princes of Moab, it would appear, had now left him, and were proceeding with a quicker pace to apprise their master of the prophet's approach; and Balaam remains attended by only two of his own servants, when the angel of the Lord places himself in the way for an adversary against him. We shall find, in the sequel, the person styled the angel of the Lord, as in other places, so here, assuming the character,

ter, and exercising the prerogative of Deity : for he it is that afterwards says, "The word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak." We are to understand, therefore, by this designation, the mighty, the uncreated Angel, by whom God made the worlds, the eternal Word, which was in the beginning, which was with God, and which was God, and which, in the fulness of time, was made flesh, and dwelt among men : "And they beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."* But never, till now, did he appear in the character of an adversary. We find him, on other occasions, appearing to direct the wandering, to protect the weak, and to succour the distressed ; as in the case of Hagar, Lot and Jacob : but the face of the Lord is set against them that do evil. And now behold him in the way to check the progress of pride, violence and covetousness. The great enemy, foe to God and man, is termed, by way of distinction, *the* adversary : but lo ! that awful character is assumed by a very different being—by one, infinitely greater and mightier than him ; whose wrath is infinitely more terrible ; who has power to save and to destroy ; and, if he take upon him that form, it is still in consistency with his gracious characters of good and merciful : it is to humble the proud, to prevent and counteract the causeless curse ; to disappoint malice, and make the purposes of revenge recoil upon itself : it is to support the friendless, to guard the innocent, and to relieve the miserable.

This formidable apparition was observed neither by the prophet nor his servants. Neither the natural vision of the latter, nor the extraordinary and supernatural sagacity of the former, discerned any thing, save empty space, where the dullest of brute animals descried the presence of Him, who makes all nature tremble at his nod ; who "giveth understanding to the prudent, and to him that hath no might increas-

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* John i. 14.

eth strength." Is not this a striking representation of what daily comes to pass in the course of providence? We see men soaring in the clouds, with their eyes and imagination, while with their feet they stumble and fall into the ditch that is before them; possessing every kind of sense, except common sense: pretending to superior refinement, and yet stupid and gross, in the plainest and most essential things. Thus the simplicity of the gospel was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness:" and on this very account, the condescending Saviour of mankind is represented as rejoicing in spirit, and saying, "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. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."* Thus God destroyeth the "wisdom of the wise, and brings to nothing the understanding of the prudent."†

What an object of terror is here represented as obstructing the passage! An angel! The prince of angels, armed with a sword, and that sword drawn in his hand! What was the strength of Egypt, in that dreadful night, when one of his flaming messengers walked through the midst of it, and made all its first-born to bleed to death under his stroke? How easy had it been for that arm, with one stroke of that sword, to have put an end to the life and madness of the prophet! But he chose to employ a meaner instrument, and thereby to vindicate to himself higher praise.

There is a striking progress described in the mode of admonition and reproof, administered to the prophet by the successive actions of the dumb creature. First, "he turned aside out of the way, and went into the field;" a plain intimation to his accustomed rider, that something extraordinary obstructed his path. Thus, in many passages of scripture, the common instincts of the dumbest animals, are employed to expose

* Matt. xi. 25, 26.

† 1 Cor. i. 19.

expose the greater thoughtlessness and folly of rational beings. "Ask, now, the beasts," says Job, "and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these, that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?"* "Hear, O heavens;" says God by Isaiah, "and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."† "Yea, the stork in the heaven," saith God by another prophet, "knoweth her appointed times: and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord."‡ Thus, in the passage before us, a more indirect reproof was given to the eagerness and speed of Balaam, pricked on by the spur of covetousness and ambition, by the action of the ass, in deviating from the right path; and had not the eyes of his understanding been blinded by the wages of unrighteousness, this, without the vision of an angel, might have taught him that the way in which he went was perverse before God. But following only the blind impulse of a carnal mind, he wreaks, in reiterated blows upon the unoffending brute, the resentment which ought to have been levelled against his own rashness and presumption. Who was here most worthy of stripes? Let the adage of the wise man determine. "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back."

Behold the patience and long-suffering of God. The ass, by dint of blows, is forced back again into the road, and the angel himself gives place and retires. Folly and obstinacy seem to have carried off the victory; but alas, how short is the triumph of impiety! If omnipotence

* Job xii. 7—9. † Isai. i. 2, 3. ‡ Jer. viii. 7.

omnipotence yield, it is only to meet the sinner on ground more difficult and dangerous. The heavenly messenger now takes his stand in a place where there was no way to escape, "a wall on this side, and a wall on that," and a flaming sword, wielded by the arm of the great Arch-angel, in front, to oppose. There is no way of safety but in turning back and fleeing for life, and yet he will madly push on to his own destruction. When men are once engaged in a way that is not good, difficulty only stimulates their ardour; they rush on through danger to danger, till they involve themselves in inevitable destruction; according to the fearful progress described by the prophet—"Fear, and the pit, and the snare shall be upon thee, O inhabitant of Moab, saith the Lord. He that fleeth from the fear shall fall into the pit, and he that getteth up out of the pit, shall be taken in the snare: for I will bring upon it, even upon Moab, the year of their visitation, saith the Lord. They that fled stood under the shadow of Heshbon, because of the force: but a fire shall come forth out of Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sion, and shall devour the corner of Moab, and the crown of the head of the tumultuous ones."*

The reproof now becomes more distinct and direct. The wretched animal, urged on by his furious rider, hemmed in with a wall on either side, and opposed in front as with a wall of fire, in making a desperate effort to pass by and advance, thrusts herself close to the wall, and crushes the prophet's foot. Thus slow, thus reluctant, is a merciful God to proceed to judgment. He first warns and threatens; then touches the extremities, if peradventure the sinner will take warning, and turn back; and not till all means have been tried and found ineffectual, is he provoked to strike the deadly blow that reaches the heart.

Mark on the other hand, by what dreadful degrees sinners harden themselves against God, till they be-

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* Jer. xlviii. 43—45.

come lost to feeling. The commission of one sin as naturally leads to another, as every step down a steep place accelerates the speed of that which is to follow; and yet transgressors vainly imagine it is in their power to stop when they please, or to turn against the bias. One of the most fearful symptoms of a reprobate mind, is, when the very means of awakening, convincing and converting, serve as opiates to the conscience, and increase that insensibility which they were meant to cure. If the constitution of the patient be so vitiated as to convert medicine into poison, dissolution cannot be at a great distance. Affliction, that wholesome, though unpalatable potion, never leaves the mind exactly where it found it. A cure is either begun by it, or the distemper is confirmed. The history of Balaam is the illustration of this position. The pain of his foot has only served to whet the asperity of his disposition; and the more he is opposed, the more earnest he is to get forwards. O that the children of light were thus perseverant in a good cause, and not weary of well-doing.

It is astonishing that superstition, if not the fear of God, did not now turn him back. Surely never journey had a more ominous, inauspicious beginning: but the passions by which he was actuated, are among the last to be discouraged; on he drives, and the angel, in patience mixt with displeasure, continues to retreat, till at length the path becomes so narrow, that it was impossible to turn to the right hand or to the left, when the patient brute, wearied and wasted with stripes, and scared with the dreadful vision immediately before her eyes, at last sinks to the earth under her burthen.

This was the third stage of admonition and reproof. God first waves the flaming sword, but cuts not, shakes the rod, but smites not. That being disregarded, he puts forth his hand and smites the heel, but spares the vitals. He then proceeds to block up the way, that the sinner cannot pass; but is constrain-

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ed to fall down before him. Humanity is shocked as we proceed. "The merciful man is merciful to his beast, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." Behold an old, simple, uncomplaining drudge expiring under the angry blows of her unkind master. The very stones of the field are ready to cry out, and to upbraid the hard-hearted, ungrateful wretch with his cruelty. "Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote her with a staff."

In the history of the miracle which follows, a multitude of reflections crowd upon us. In the order and frame of nature, every creature of God has a special use and end; neither is there any schism, deficiency or redundancy, permitted in the great body of the universe. Every thing is in its place; every thing is fulfilling the purpose of its Creator; and therefore nothing ought to be mean or contemptible in our eyes. The great Lord of all exercises a tender concern about the lowliest of the brute creation, provides for them, and resents the cruelty and injustice which are offered them. "He feeds the ravens," "the young lions ask their meat from God," "he careth for oxen," "a sparrow falleth not to the ground without our heavenly Father." And lo, the dull ass findeth compassion and an avenger, when under oppression, from him whom angels worship. Who so lofty as to be beyond his reach, as to defy his power? What so little as to be beneath his notice, or shut out from his pity? There is of consequence a return of attention and tenderness due from the human race to every order of creatures below themselves, and whose services, whatever their faculties may be, Providence permits them to employ either for pleasure or for use. The power and wisdom which stationed every creature in its proper place, and preserves it there, can at pleasure elevate it to a higher, or depress it to a lower sphere; can confer upon it a force unknown before, or deprive it of what it formerly possessed; can break the strength of Egypt, by an army of frogs or flies, or preserve

preserve Daniel unhurt in the midst of the lions ; can catch the serpent in his own craftiness, and teach the dull ass speech and reason.

The cunning of Satan, and the understanding of man, look out for likely, promising and adequate instruments to carry on their designs. The wisdom of God chooses to execute his by such as are apparently weak, unpromising and inadequate. To seduce our first parents, the devil employed the agency of that creature which was the most sagacious of all the beasts of the field. The most stupid, in the hand of the Almighty, was sufficient to confound, and to convict, and to condemn, the proudest and most highly gifted of his race. And the gospel of Christ becometh effectual unto salvation, not through the wisdom of words, but by demonstration of the Spirit ; for “ God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty ; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are : that no flesh should glory in his presence.” *

Finally, for we must make an end of our reflections on the subject—What creature so brutish, as a rational being under the dominion of his lusts ! The novelty of an ass speaking, reasoning, remonstrating, seems to have excited no astonishment in the furious prophet : he is not awakened to one sentiment of compassion, nor of godly fear, by a phenomenon so singular. The only regret he feels, is the want of a deadly instrument to prosecute his resentment to the full. Men most vainly, and in the face of experience, imagine, that such and such means of conviction would certainly work their effect. “ Nay, but if one went from the dead they will repent ;” but the truth is too well confirmed by every day’s experience, to be called in question, that “ if they hear not Moses and the prophets,

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* 1 Cor. i. 27—29.

ets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”* A miracle greater than even opening the ass’s mouth must be performed, before Balaam be persuaded. A heart wedded to gain, is not to be *reasoned* out of its favourite pursuit; and unbelief, do what you will, always finds a strong-hold whereto it can resort, and which it easily renders impregnable. “Shew us a sign from heaven, and we will believe.” Well, the very petulance of incredulity is humoured, the sign is exhibited, Satan is cast out. Surely they will now believe. No such thing. “This man casteth out devils by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.” The eyes of Balaam are blinder, his heart more hard than the tongue of the ass is mute.

At length, God vouchsafes to effect that by a second miracle, which had been obvious to a tender conscience, much more to a prophetic eye, without any miracle at all; and the angel stands confessed to the sight of the soothsayer, clothed in all his terror. And now violence, ambition and covetousness stand for a while suspended, swallowed up of fear at this alarming sight. His eyes are no sooner opened to see with whom he had to contend, than he shuts them again in consternation and astonishment; “he bowed his head and fell flat on his face.” What a miserable figure a haughty man makes when caught in the snare! How vain the expectation of fleeing from God, or of opposing him with success! How dreadful it is to meet as an adversary, Him whose counsels we have slighted as a friend! Balaam has now the unspeakable mortification of discovering that he owed the preservation of his life to the slender sagacity and discernment of the poor brute whom he had treated so unmercifully: and he is again assured, without reserve or disguise, that the design of this journey was highly odious and offensive to God. “Behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me. And the ass

* Luke xvi. 31.

als saw me, and turned from me these three times : unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive.”*

But though intimidated and confounded, his heart still cleaves to “the wages of unrighteousness.” Disapprobation could not be expressed in clearer and stronger words, than had all along been employed, “thou shalt not go, thou shalt not curse,” “I went out to withstand thee : thy way is perverse before me,” and yet he has the assurance to make it a matter of doubt whether God were displeased with him or not. A conscience not quite callous, a heart not totally hardened like his, would have sought instantly to retreat, thankful that his presumption had not already cost him his life ; but he cannot give up the hope of getting forward. “If it displease thee, I will get me back again.”† “If it displease thee.” Could he doubt it ? What kind of assurance would he have had ? And yet, wonderful to be told, the angel continues once more to give way ; and Balaam has still the hardness to proceed ; and the issue proves the truth of the wise man’s assertion : “He that being often reprov’d hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”‡

The history now hastens on to the meeting of Balaam and Balak ; the one eager to prevail over his enemies, by the power of enchantment ; the other to possess himself of the riches and honours of Moab. The one lays aside the state of a king, and advances to his utmost border, out of respect to his expected guest. The other, with more speed than became a prophet, hastens to partake of the prince’s repast, little scrupulous whether the bill of fare consisted of things offered unto idols or not. But happily for Israel, God, their protector, had put a hook in his nose and a bridle in his jaws. He himself feels and acknowledges it, however reluctantly. “And Balaam
said

* Verse 32, 33.

† Verse 34.

‡ Prov. xxix. 1.

said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee : have I now any power at all to say any thing? The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.”*

The prophecy itself, one of the most beautiful passages in the sacred history, though uttered by profane lips ; and the power of God therein exemplified, in making the wrath of man to praise him, will furnish useful matter for another discourse. Let what has been said, be improved as a solemn warning to observe, regard and submit to the admonitions of God’s word and providence. Woe be to that man who sees no angel standing in the way of a sinful career, till the angel of death stop him with his fatal dart. Let the checks of conscience be listened to. Has the hand, or the foot, been bruised, retreat in time. There is a lion in the way. He that proves too strong for his Maker, by a bold perseverance in an evil course, is only hastening forward his own destruction. The same person is the kindest friend, and the most formidable adversary.

God can find an instrument to punish, in the meanest and most contemptible creature ; therefore despise none, abuse none. Be not weary in well-doing. Take an example from Balaam, in respect of perseverance ; but choose an honefter and worthier object of pursuit. Honour God with your superior reason and use of speech. Behold an ass wise, and a prophet mad : blush at thy own folly, and be humble.

Let us go, as has been already suggested, and learn wisdom from the brute creation. “ The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib :” be instructed to acknowledge the hand that feeds thee : learn attachment to thy Protector, learn gratitude to thy Benefactor, repay kindness with kindness. Learn industry from the bee. “ Go to the ant, thou sluggard ; consider her ways, and be wise : which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long

* Verse 33.

long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?"* "The hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." "There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise. The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; the conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; the spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings palaces."† May God open our eyes, and dispose our minds to receive instruction from every thing around us; and preserve us from opposing his will; and make his way-straight before our face.

* Prov. vi. 6—9.

† Prov. xxx. 24—28.

History of Balaam.

LECTURE XVI.

NUMBERS xxiii. 10.

Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.

HUMAN conduct, as far as it is governed by the spirit of this world, exhibits a wretched and contemptible, but a dangerous and fatal opposition to the will of God. Men would be happy in their own way; but whether they succeed in their pursuits, or whether they fail, they find themselves miserable in the end. God is conducting us, if we would but be conducted, to real and substantial happiness, but it is through a narrow gate, and along a path in many places strewed with thorns. The prosperous successes of vanity and wickedness, like a sweet poison, may afford a transient pleasure in the moment of swallowing: but lasting and unutterable anguish immediately succeeds. The bowels are torn with pain insupportable, and the man dies, dies forever, for the indulgence and gratification of one poor instant of time. But the sacrifices we are enabled to make to God, and to the testimony of a good conscience, are like a nauseous medicine, which by means of a short-lived disgust, rectifies the constitution, sweetens the blood, confirms health, and prolongs a happy existence. The grievousness of affliction

tion in due season “yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby.”

In whatever way men choose to live, and very different are the roads which they take, they have but one idea, one wish, one prayer, in the prospect of death and eternity. When a man finds himself on the brink of the world of spirits, it will afford him but slender consolation, to reflect that he has lived long enough to amass a fortune, to enjoy a banquet, to attain a post of honour, to acquire a name. And he will feel as little pain and mortification, on the other hand, in recollecting that he has passed life in obscurity, that he has struggled with poverty, that he has endured unmerited reproach. But this is the folly and the misery of man; we eagerly imbibe and follow the spirit of this world while we live; and fondly dream of assuming, in one propitious instant, the spirit of heaven, when we come to die. We think of passing our thirty or forty years with the gay, the giddy, and the vain; as if that could be a preparation for an eternity with God, and angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. Our understanding and conscience are on the side of wisdom and piety; our passions and habits, and alas! they are more powerful, are of the party of dissipation and vice. “The fool says in his heart, there is no God;” and men reputed wise, live as if there were none.

The unhappy man, whose character is farther unfolded to us in the text, exhibits a most affecting example of this strange inconsistency and self-delusion. Who so enlightened as Balaam, “which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty?” Who so blind as the covetous prophet, who “loved the wages of unrighteousness,” whose eyes the god of this world blinded? Hear him speak; the manna of heavenly eloquence falls from his lips: behold him act, and lo, a fiend from hell spreading snares and destruction. Under the control of God, not Moses himself thinks more affectionately, expresses affection more ardently towards Israel, than Balaam. Under

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the impulse of his own passions, not Satan could plot more malignantly nor more effectually. As the prophet of God, who so warm a friend? As the counsellor of Balak, who so dreadful an adversary? In the prospect of death, who more devout? In life, who so profligate? In judgment and opinion, who so clear and sound? In practice, who so prostitute and abandoned?

In the face of a prohibition, the clearest and fullest that words could convey, through the difficulties and dangers of a journey the most eventful upon record, Balaam is now arrived at Balak's metropolis, *Kirjath-buzoth*, the city of streets. Greetings, such as may be supposed to pass between wicked and selfish men, being over, the sacrifice is offered up, and the banquet is prepared, according to the state of a king, and the sacredness and importance of his guest. The evening being passed in festivity, they retire to rest; and, early on the morrow, Balaam permits himself to be conducted by the Moabitish prince into the "high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost parts of the people." Here the cloven foot appears at once. Balaam was too intelligent to believe that Baal was any thing; that his sacrifices or high places were any thing: but Balak's gold being, indeed, the god whom he himself worshipped, it is to him a matter of the last indifference before what idol the superstitious monarch bowed down. Reason and religion say, "What concord can there be between God and Belial; between him that believeth, and an infidel? Ye cannot serve God and mammon." But avarice will attempt any thing, submit to any thing, commit any thing; will adore the God of Israel, or bend at the altar of Baal, just as it serves the occasion. Balaam even volunteers in the service of the idol; feeds the superstition of Balak, which it was his duty to have corrected; and, as if there had been something potent and mysterious in the number, directs *seven* altars to be erected, and a bullock and a ram to be prepared for a sacrifice upon each of the seven.

Behold how soon the reproof of a speaking, reasoning

ing brute, the terrors of the opposing angel, and the admonitions of the heavenly vision, are disregarded and forgotten! Balak is deliberately suffered to remain the dupe of his own credulity: he is fed with the vain hope of triumph, in a way by which it could not be achieved; and an attempt is impiously made to aid him in an enterprise which Heaven had repeatedly condemned; and, dreadful to think, this is done under all the awful forms of a religious service; and a purpose too vile to be avowed, even to men, is presumptuously obtruded upon the great Jehovah, as if his determinations were to fluctuate with the vile interests and caprices of mortals. "The sacrifice of the wicked," saith the wise man, "is an abomination, how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind." The religion of God is, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." But the leading article of Balaam's creed is, "Gain is godliness:" hence he attempts to sanction cursing and cruelty, under the solemn ordinances of the blessed God.

We have observed formerly, without pretending to assign a reason for it, that the number *seven* is, through the whole of divine revelation, connected with many important ideas, institutions and events, in cases depending on the sovereign authority of the great God. This leads us to conclude, that it has a meaning and design, the knowledge of which is either lost to the world, or never has yet been revealed to man. It cannot be for nothing that it presents itself so often, and in so many forms, upon the sacred page. That God rested the seventh day from all his work, and sanctified it—that on the solemn day of the atonement, under the law, the blood of the sin-offering was sprinkled before and upon the mercy-seat seven times—that the altar of burnt-offering was consecrated by being anointed seven times with the holy oil—that the consecration of Aaron to the priesthood consisted of a service of seven days—that the leper was to be sprinkled, in order to purification, seven times; and after a separation of seven days, be admitted to his

rank as a citizen—that every seventh year was ordained a year of rest, to the land of promise; and that a revolution of seven times seven years brought on the jubilee, or universal release—that seven priests, bearing so many trumpets, were commanded to begin the conquest of Canaan, by seven days encompassing Jericho; and that, upon the seventh circuit, and at the seventh blowing of the trumpet, the walls of that city should fall to the ground—that the like number of priests should be employed to precede and announce the removal of the ark, when David brought it home; and, not to multiply instances without end—that the Lamb, which John saw in vision in the midst of the throne, should be represented as having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God, sent out into all the earth—that the book in the right hand of Him who sat upon the throne, should be sealed with seven seals—that in these, and so many more cases, which the careful reader of the scriptures need not have pointed out to him, the Spirit of God should see meet to press upon our minds, with such peculiar emphasis, this number of perfection, as it has been called both by Jews and Heathens, though we cannot account for it, leads to this pleasing conclusion—That there are in the word of God, many precious mines of knowledge, yet undiscovered; endless mysteries of wisdom, goodness and love, yet to be unveiled; depths of mercy, which the capacity of angels has not yet fathomed; heights of grace, to which the seraphim's wing hath not soared. Is it imagination, merely, to suppose that the felicity of saints in bliss may consist in diving deeper and deeper into the plan of redemption; in tracing its progress, its history, to its consummation; in reading this wonderful book, with the veil removed from our eyes; to find in it all the stores of natural, moral and divine truth; in forever learning, ever beginning to learn “the love of Christ which passeth knowledge?” I will indulge the dear, the delightful hope, that the period will come, when, taught of that Spirit, who is promised to “take of the things
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of Christ and shew them unto us," I shall discover, in this blest volume, ten thousand excellencies to which I am now blind; ten thousand truths, of which I have at present no perception; ten thousand beauties I am now incapable of relishing. But to return.

It is no great wonder to find a man of so mixed a character as Balaam, employing altars and victims, according to a number and quality long before sanctified by the appointment of the true God. For all the rites of idolatry may easily be traced up to divine institutions. But what signifies the form, when the spirit and meaning is lost? Chemosh was the peculiar idol of the Moabites, as we learn from chap. xxi. 29. for *Baal*, that is, *lord*, was a general term, descriptive of the whole tribe of deities, and applied by every particular nation to its respective patron; yet we find Balak easily persuaded by Balaam to offer sacrifice to Jehovah. For they that have false notions of Deity, cannot be very difficult in their choice of a god; and Balak probably was so weak as to imagine, that by this piece of flattery and respect, the God of the Israelites might be decoyed from them, withdraw his protection, and give them up to the sword of their enemies.

Balaam, now the sacrifice was set on fire, directs the king to stand by it, in solemn expectation of its success; he himself withdraws to an "high place," or, he went *solitary*; probably to some adjoining clift of the rock, favourable either to meditation, or the practice of his enchantments; for observation of any preternatural signs that might be given, or for a clearer prospect of the camp to be devoted. Nothing astonishes me more than the boldness of this retreat. An ill conscience seeks concealment from the eye of God in noise and a crowd. To what a pitch of insensibility has this man attained, who has the dreadful courage to go forth to meet an offended God in solitude! "And God met Balaam." In what manner we are not told, neither is it of any importance to know; but it is of importance to observe that "God's ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts." In-

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sulted in the same manner, what man but would have felt resentment, and have returned insult for insult ! In nothing, Father of Mercies ! is thy glorious superiority more conspicuous than in thy gentleness and patience. God is not a man, that he should be ruffled and discomposed, nor the son of man, that he should oppose vehemence to vehemence. The wrath of man provokes him not, the haste of man urges him not, the tardiness of man delays him not, the flattery of man sways him not.

Balaam has the confidence to advance a plea of merit for the service which he had performed, in erecting so many altars, and offering so many victims ; but he has not the assurance to avow the motive, nor directly to prefer the request to which it plainly led. Without paying the least regard to the one or to the other, God, the great God, puts the word he would have spoken into Balaam's mouth, and sends him back to pronounce it aloud in the ear of Balak, and his attendants. I see, with an honest satisfaction, the disappointed, mortified enchanter, returning with downcast eyes, fullen and slow from the solemn meeting : his schemes of malignity checked and prohibited, all his prospects of ambition and avarice forever blasted ; cursing in his heart that inflexibility of purpose which he durst neither attempt to alter or oppose. I see the expecting monarch in the midst of his seven altars, all eye to watch the moment of the prophet's return ; eagerly anticipating his message from his looks, and all ear to hear it delivered in articulate sounds.

The emotions which filled the hearts of both, are to be conceived, not described, when the reluctant tongue of Balaam thus pronounced the immutable decree of the Holy Oracle, while the assembled princes of Moab listened with sorrow and disappointment. " Balak, the king of Moab, hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed ? Or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied ? For from the top of the
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the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him : lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?" *

The first reflection that naturally presents itself, on hearing these words, is one that has frequently occurred in the course of these exercises, and which it is impossible to repeat too often :—How wonderful, how tremendous, how irresistible the power of God, which has thus all matter, all spirit, at its disposal ! which can make the dumb ass speak what naturally he cannot, and the mad prophet to utter what wickedly and perversely he would not : and “ out of the mouths of babes and sucklings perfecteth praise.” Mark how God brings to nought the counsel of the heathen ; writes vanity upon the counsels of princes, and “ maketh diviners mad.” Thus said Balak ; thus did the king of Moab ; how poor and contemptible, compared to “ Thus saith the Lord.” “ The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil : my lust shall be satisfied upon them ; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them ; they sank as lead in the mighty waters. Who is like unto thee, O Lord, amongst the gods ! who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders !” † Mark how the slow and reluctant prophecy of Balaam accords with the predictions of former times, and the history of periods yet to come. “ Look up now,” says God to Abraham, “ toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them : and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.” ‡ And lo, the promise is more than fulfilled : it is infinitely exceeded by the accomplishment. “ Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel ?” Look forward to the days of Solomon, when the glory of Israel was in its zenith, when the descendants of the men in the plains of Moab were multiplied as the sand on the sea shore ; and thence rise higher still, to a
greater

* Chap. xxiii. 7—10. † Exod. xv. 9—11. ‡ Gen. xv. 5.

greater promise, to a better covenant, to the spiritual seed of faithful Abraham, increased to "a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands ;"* encamped not in a fertile terrestrial plain, but expatiating through the vast regions of eternal day, and possessing, not a land flowing with milk and honey, but the pure and sublime delights of the paradise of God. How I envy Balaam the prospect from the top of the rock ! A rich campaign country, skirted by the silver Jordan, meeting the distant horizon ; the tents of Israel spread out like the trees in the forest, and covering an innumerable multitude ; a whole nation of men beloved of God, and destined to conquest ; the spacious tabernacle, the habitation of the Most High, expanded in the midst, and the cloud of glory, the unequivocal proof of the presence of the great King, resting upon it. How many objects to delight the eye, to swell the imagination, to elevate the soul ! No wonder the tongue of envy was charmed from its purpose. But alas ! the heart of malice and covetousness remains unchanged ; a chest full of gold had been to Balaam a sight more enchanting. Place him in heaven, like Mammon, his father, according to the description of our great poet, his attention had been fixed but on one object.

“ Mammon, the least erected spirit that fell
 From heaven ; for even in heaven, his looks and
 thoughts
 Were always downward bent, admiring more
 The riches of heaven’s pavement, trodden gold,
 Than aught divine or holy else enjoyed
 In vision beatific.”

The beautiful view beneath, therefore, was to Balaam what the conjugal bliss of our first parents in paradise was to Satan, according to the same great poet ;

* Rev. vii. 9.

poet ; who, beholding their pure and innocent affection, “ turned aside for envy,” and exclaimed :

“ Sight hateful, sight tormenting ! Thus these two,
Imparadis’d in one another’s arms,
The happier Eden, shall enjoy their fill
Of blifs on blifs, while I to hell am thrust ;
Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,
Still unfulfilled, with pain of longing pines.”

It was a spirit and a situation not unlike to this, which suggested to the wicked prophet the words of the text ; “ Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his !” * Unhappy Balaam ! he descried from the top of the rocks goodly tents, in which he had no part nor lot ; he discerned the happy estate of the righteous, but chose to be a partaker with the ungodly ; he admired and envied the happy end of the people of God, but felt his own end approaching without hope ; he saw and approved the beauty and loveliness of virtue ; he persisted to the last, pursuing and cleaving to the wages of unrighteousness.

But what, I beseech you, could dictate this wish to Balaam ? What but a strong and irresistible persuasion of the immortality of the soul, and an approaching unalterable state of rewards and punishments ? What but a consciousness of having acted wrong, and the dreadful knowledge of his being accountable to a holy and righteous God ? And is it really possible for reasonable creatures to fall into such gross absurdity and contradiction ? And can there exist such characters in the world ? Let us bring the case home to ourselves. It is too evident to need a proof, that many indulge themselves in very unwarrantable practices, whose religious principles, notwithstanding, are exceedingly sound and just. Try them on the side of soundness in sentiment and opinion, and they talk and reason like angels from heaven : consider how they live, they are mere men of this world. They find a salvo
for

* Verse 10.

for conscience, by making a sort of composition with their Maker, as some men find a salvo for their integrity, by putting off their good-natured creditors with a certain proportion of their debt, when they are either unwilling or unable to pay the whole. And, with equal insolence and presumption, the one vainly imagines that his Creator and Lord, the other that his credulous friend, may think themselves sufficiently satisfied with such partial payments as they think fit to render. Such of God's commands they will cheerfully obey; but as to others, why, they will make all the atonement in their power—the proud, the ambitious, the covetous, the dissolute, each in a way that shall not clash with his favourite pursuit. One will give his time, another his diligence, a third his money to God, just according as it is the article upon which he himself puts least value, and the conscious deficiency he attempts feebly to eke out, by faint hopes and half resolves, that some time or another he will exhibit a more uniform and thorough obedience to the will of God.

When the command is clear and express, to question and reason on the subject is rebellion. By this the allegiance of man in a state of innocence was assailed; and, listening to this, he staggered and fell: “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” When temptation of this sort is once listened to, men will gradually come to doubt of every thing, and learn to explain away every thing. Deliberation and doubt in the face of “Thus saith the Lord,” are dishonesty and impiety: and to attempt to get rid of one uneasy text of scripture, is a direct attack on the validity of the whole.

When we see a man so intelligent as Balaam, duped by his passions into a train of folly and wickedness so gross and palpable, let us look well to ourselves. The absurdities into which we fall, escape our own notice; but a discerning by-stander sees them, smiles at them, perhaps makes his advantage of them. If we are conscious of the influence of any very powerful propensity, or aversion, it is a just ground of suspicion, that we
may

may be tempted to act unworthily ; and it is a powerful admonition to watch our hearts narrowly on the side of that infirmity " which doth more easily beset us."

We see in the dying struggles of Balaam's conscience, a deep, a rooted concern about futurity : a concern which no one, let him say what he will, has been able to overcome. His ardent wish, " Let me die the death of the righteous," is the involuntary homage which vice pays to piety. Think what way, live what way men will, they have but one thought, one conviction, one prayer, when they come to die. After the pleasure or the advantage of a wicked action is over, who would not gladly get clear of the guilt of it ? But this is the misery ; the profit and pleasure quickly pass away, the guilt and pain are immortal. Could a lazy wish or two supply the place of virtue, all would be well : the conscience would go to rest, the " strong man armed would keep the house." But the very wishes of indolence and impiety betray their own flimsiness ; and Balaam feels his own prayer falling back with an oppressive weight on his guilty head. Let us be instructed to mend it a little, and say with Paul, " None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord : whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."* " To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Lord help us so to live, as to be raised above the fear of death. Let me fall asleep in the bosom of my heavenly Father, and I shall awake in perfect peace.

Happy, unspeakably happy, they, who in reviewing life, and in the prospect of death, can with holy joy and confidence adopt these words of the apostle, and say, " I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith : 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."†

* Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

† 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

History of Balaam.

LECTURE XVII.

REVELATION ii. 14.

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

THE mystery of iniquity, which the human heart is daily bringing to light, is as strange and incomprehensible as any thing in the frame of nature, or in the conduct of Providence. In the first stages of a sinful career, a spectator could not conceive, the man himself cannot believe the desperate wickedness to which he may in time be brought. The latter end is so very unlike the beginning, that it becomes matter of astonishment how the same person could possibly be so much changed, and by what steps the man was gradually transformed into the devil. Scripture represents to us a man shrinking with horror from a prophetic display of his own character, and an anticipated view of his own conduct—"What, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?"* He viewed it then, through the calm medium of reason, humanity, and conscience; and justly reprobated, what passion and opportunity afterwards prompted him to act, without pity or remorse.

The progress of sin is like that of certain diseases, whose first symptoms give no alarm; to which a vigorous constitution bids a bold defiance, and treats with neglect; but which, through that neglect, silently fix upon

* 2 Kings viii. 13.

upon some of the nobler parts, prey unseen, unobserved upon the vitals, and the man finds himself dying, before he apprehended any danger. It was but a slight cold, a tickling cough, a small difficulty of breathing; but it imperceptibly becomes an intolerable oppression, an universal weakness, an extenuating hectic, under which nature fails; the nails bend inwards, the hairs fall off, the legs swell, the eyes sink, and the cold hand of death stops the languid current at the fountain. Thus the giddy fallies of youth, the mistakes of inconsideration, the errors of inexperience, through neglect, presumption and indulgence, become, before men are aware, habits of vice, constitutional maladies, by which manhood is dishonoured, old age becomes pitiable, and death is rendered dreadful beyond expression. These considerations clearly justify and enforce the advice of the apostle: "Exhort one another daily while it is called to-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."*

If there be a history and a character, which, more powerfully than another, press this exhortation upon the conscience, it is the history and character of Balaam, the son of Bofor, "who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." We have traced his progress from Aram to Moab, and found him pertinaciously adhering to an impious purpose, with an understanding clearly informed as to his duty, and a conscience perfectly awake to his situation. It is unpleasant, but God grant it may not be unprofitable, to attend him through the remainder of his wicked and abominable course.

Balak, chagrined and disappointed to hear the eulogy of Israel from those lips which he had hired to curse them, weakly hopes to change the counsels of Heaven, by changing the place of his own view: and Balaam wickedly humours his fondness and credulity. The Moabitish prince ascribes the rapturous expres-

sions

* Heb. iii. 13.

sions of the prophet, to the full and distinct prospect which he had of the camp of Israel, and therefore proposes to view it from a new station, whence its extremity only was visible, in the hope that a partial survey of that glory might encourage him to blast it with a curse. He conducts him accordingly into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and another preparatory sacrifice is offered up of seven bullocks and seven rams, upon as many different altars; and the hardened wretch has the impious boldness of retiring a second time to meet God on this ungracious errand. An answer is now put into his mouth, which levels a mortal blow at the hopes of his wicked employer, and the wrath of man serves but the more illustriously to praise God. Who but must shudder to hear such words as these falling from such a tongue? "Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn. Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought! Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion; and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain."* "Happy is that people that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord."†

The time would fail to go into a particular detail of the events which justify this noble prediction. But we should do it infinite injustice to restrict its meaning

* Numb. xxiii. 18—24.

† Psal. cxliv. 15.

ing to one particular nation, to transitory purposes, or to temporal events. It is gloriously descriptive of the unchangeable faithfulness, the undeviating truth, the almighty protection, the immoveable love of God to his people. It speaks the blessedness of the man "whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. The blessedness of the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."* It exposes the impotence of Satan, and of all the enemies of their salvation. It exhibits the final triumph of the church of God, through the great Captain of their salvation, who unites in his person, among other wonderful extremes, the character of "the Lamb slain, to take away the sins of the world," and of the "Lion of the tribe of Judah," the great Lion who lifteth up himself, "and shall not lie down, until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain." And, it prefigures their last joyful encampment in the heavenly plains, where the shout of a king shall be forever heard among them, and the glory of the Lord arise upon them, to set no more.

This decisive answer seems for a moment to have quashed the hopes of Balak, and he is now disposed to compound with the prophet for total silence. "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all."† But O, the obstinate perseverance of the carnal mind in a sinful course! After all he had seen and heard, he returns a third time to the charge, and dreams of another station, a repeated sacrifice, and an altered purpose. How mortifying to think that good men are so much sooner weary of well-doing, so much more easily discouraged from the pursuit of duty. But though Balaam gave directions for the building of new altars, he can no longer be the dupe of his own sinful wishes and magical arts, and therefore dares not to have recourse to them again. Such is the awful, such the glorious power of God! Magicians may for a little while amuse themselves, and deceive others, by their enchantments; but Aaron's rod

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* Psal. xxxii. 1, 2.

† Verse 25.

at length swallows up those of Egyptian wizards ; and Balaam is at length constrained to resign his fruitless arts, and to acknowledge the finger of God from the top of Peor, where Baal was worshipped. He again surveys the tents of Israel, where Jehovah resided, and charmed, by the prospect, from his malevolent design, seems to give cordially in to the views of that Spirit who spake by his mouth. “ And when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he went not as at other times to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lift up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents, according to their tribes ; and the Spirit of God came upon him. And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor, hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said : he hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open : How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel ! As the vallies are they spread forth, as gardens by the river’s side, as the trees of lign-aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brought him forth out of Egypt, he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn : he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones and pierce them through with his arrows. He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion : who shall stir him up ? Blessed is he that blesteth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee.”*

Our chief object at present being to illustrate the character of Balaam, and to improve it, we are to consider his prophecy chiefly in that view, abstracted from the great and glorious truths which it contains. And we observe, first, that it behoved him now to be convinced by so many successive and corresponding revelations,

* Chap. xxiv. 1—9.

elations, of the steady, determined purpose of Heaven, in favour of Israel. In spite of all his subterfuges, after all his turnings and windings, he finds himself still brought back to the same point; a language is forced upon his tongue which his heart rejected, a glory is spread before his eyes, which excited only envy and sorrow: and this renders his after conduct more unaccountable, odious and criminal. Indeed it is a complicated transgression, containing so many circumstances of aggravation, that we should be tempted to doubt its existence, did not melancholy experience too frequently confirm the possibility of it.

We observe, secondly, that truth is not injured by being conveyed through an impure channel, and therefore ought not to be rejected on that account. Indeed it rather confers a higher lustre upon it, just as hypocrisy pays the most honourable compliment to true religion, by assuming its sacred habit and form. The word of God shall not fail of its effect, though Balaam, or though Satan speak it. It may do good to others, while he who bears it is injured, not benefited. And surely, when we hear such divine sentences coming from such unhallowed lips, a holy jealousy will be kindled, a holy watchfulness inculcated on all who bring the messages of God to others; as the great apostle of the Gentiles felt and expressed, when he says, "I keep under my body; and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast away."*

We are led, thirdly, to observe and to lament how rarely fine talents and ample means of doing good are in the possession of an honest, benevolent and sanctified heart! The elevation of genius too seldom aims its flight to the feet of the Father of lights, "from whom cometh down every good gift and every perfect;" and affluence is frequently abused, to increase that misery which it was given to relieve. But then,

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surely,

* 1 Cor. ix. 27.

surely, men are likest God, when enlargement of understanding, and plenitude of power, obey the calls of goodness, and strive to diffuse more widely the gifts of an indulgent Providence; and that benevolence is the most exalted, which aims at the highest good, and seeks to promote interests that are immortal. What then must be the malignity of that heart which, in Balaam, perverted the soundest understanding, disfigured and mislaid the finest abilities? How dark and dismal that unfeeling passion, which scrupled not to devote a whole nation, for the sake of a little silver and gold! How greatly do men err in the estimation which they make both of their own qualities and those of others! Those of the head are the objects of universal admiration, the subject of universal praise; those of the heart are lightly esteemed, and do not always escape censure. But apply the balance of the sanctuary, and what a reverse! A little humility outweighs a great deal of learning; faith as a grain of mustard seed preponderates against a mountain of gold; and charity, though with the simplicity of a child, brings down the scale, against the wit of men, and the eloquence of angels. By all means covet earnestly the best gifts, though they fall to the lot of but a few; but rather cultivate the more precious graces which God conferreth liberally on all that ask him. Whatever you solicit, whatever you receive, see that you have the blessing which sweetens, which sanctifies, which ennobles, which improves it.

Finally, we may observe the dreadful misery of that man whose heart and head are at variance; whom inclination drags one way, and conscience another; who lives with a drawn sword continually hanging over his head by a single hair; forever doing what he is constrained forever to condemn; and reluctantly ready to execute the judgment of God upon himself. What dismal and unpleasant progress must he make, who sees an angel in arms opposing him at every step, and

and whose way is hedged about on every side with thorns of his own planting !

Balak can now refrain no longer, but smiting together his hands, in a rage exclaims, "I called thee to curse mine enemies, and behold thou hast altogether blessed them these three times : therefore now flee thou to thy place : I thought to promote thee unto great honour, but lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honour."* An expostulation of no pleasant complexion ensues ; for what is the friendship of bad men, but a commerce of interest, a confederacy that aims only at self, and it concludes on the part of Balaam with a prediction clearer, fuller, and more pointed than ever, of Israel's glory and Moab's downfall : "And he took up his parable and said, Balaam, the son of Beor, hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said : he hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open : I shall see him, but not now : I shall behold him, but not nigh : there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies, and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city. And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable and said, Amalek was the first of the nations, but his latter end shall be that he perish forever. And he looked on the Kenites, and took up his parable, and said, Strong is thy dwelling-place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock ; nevertheless, the Kenite shall be wasted until Asshur shall carry thee away captive. And he took up his parable, and said, Alas, who shall live when God doeth this !"†

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* Verse 10, 11.

† Chap. xxiv. 15—23.

The burthen of this prophecy has evidently a two-fold object, the one improving upon, rising above and extending beyond the other. Its primary and nearer object, David, God's anointed king, to crush the power of the enemy, and Moab in particular, and to perfect the conquest of the promised land. Its secondary and more remote one, though first in point of importance, "Jesus, the root and offspring of David." In the one, Balak saw the death of all his earthly hopes, the approaching dominion of a hated power, established on the ruins of his own country. In the other, Balaam beheld the ruin of all his prospects beyond the grave; a light that should shine but to conduct him to the place of punishment; a Star that should arise to shed the mildest influence on others, but only to breathe pestilence and death upon himself; a Ruler who should exercise universal dominion, but who, while he presided over his willing and obedient subjects in mercy and loving-kindness, should rule rebels like him with a rod of iron. Indeed if Balaam had any pre-sentiment of a Saviour when he uttered this prophecy, as is highly probable, his character is the most detestable, and his condition the most deplorable that can be imagined. Unhappy man, with one breath preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ to a guilty world, and with the next, teaching the arts of seduction to ensnare the innocent. In words exulting in the greatest blessing which God had to bestow upon mankind, but dreadfully conscious to himself that he had wilfully rejected the counsel of God against himself. With all the weight and importance of the soul and eternity before his eyes, but this world steadfastly enthroned in his heart; a prophet, yet a reprobate, descending to the grave with the blood of thousands upon his head.

The twenty-fifth chapter of Numbers contains the history of the stumbling-block which "Balaam taught Balak to cast before the children of Israel—to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication,"

tion,"* and of its dreadful success. As a prophet he could not hurt Israel; but as a politician, he unhappily prevails. He was well aware where their strength lay; and unfortunately, it appears, he had likewise discovered their weak side. Their God could not be prevailed on to withdraw his protection; but may not they be persuaded or allured to change their allegiance? This will do the work of Satan equally well. Israel was now at ease, with the promised land under their eye, and part of it already in their possession. They were flushed with recent victory, assured of divine protection, and thereby confident of farther success. A situation full of danger; for then, when our mountain seems to us to stand most strong, we are most easily liable to be moved, cast down, destroyed. Balaam accordingly, deep read as he was in the book of human nature, suggests to Balak the diabolical counsel of attempting to decoy the people into idolatry by means of female insinuation and address. The experiment is made, and fatally succeeds. And it is this counsel which stamps the character of Balaam with infamy indelible; as it exhibits a dissolution of moral principle, to be equalled only by him who is a murderer from the beginning.

Think what it is to advise a father to expose his daughter to prostitution: think what it is to devise and to encompass the death of one fellow-creature, who has never offended us: think of the malice which aims its deadly shaft, not at the body, but at the soul: think of the presumption which flies directly in the face of the great and terrible Jehovah, and defies his power: and then think of a vile wretch, recommending the prostitution of a whole nation: in cold blood plotting the destruction of myriads; and what is worse, infinitely worse than any temporal evil, remorselessly involving them in guilt which threatened eternal ruin: and all this under the character of a prophet, whose office bound him to call the people

* Rev. ii. 14.

people away from their wickedness, and to save perishing souls from death; and all for what? "For so much trash as may be grasped thus." Base passion, what canst thou not make us do? "Surely the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

The history of Israel's seduction, in consequence of Balaam's horrid advice, falls not within our present design, and we are forbid by decency to pursue it. The guilt of this fatal defection cost no less than twenty-four thousand lives of them who died of the plague, besides those who suffered by the hands of justice. So horrid are the sacrifices which pride, ambition and covetousness, are daily offering up! So dreadful the havoc which ungoverned passion makes amongst the works of God!—But short is the triumph of the most successful villany: remorse embitters the enjoyment of it, and justice hastens to bring it to a period.

In the very first attack made upon Midian, we find Balaam in arms, supporting his pernicious counsel by the sword; but it cannot prosper: Midian is discomfited on the first onset, and the hoary traitor falls unpitied in the field, leaving behind him a name to be detested and despised of all generations, while one iota or one tittle of this book of God remains.

We shall have attended, however, to the history of this singular man in vain, unless we learn from it the infinite danger of being under the dominion of any one ungovernable passion; and unless we are persuaded to watch over, to resist, and to subdue, "the sin which doth so easily beset us." Of little avail is it that our vice is not the vice which governed, ensnared and ruined Balaam, if it alienate the heart from God, dissolve the obligations of religion, disorder the understanding, and lull the conscience asleep. One disease for another, one vice for another, is but a miserable exchange. If the patient must die, it will not alleviate one pang, that he perishes by the fever rather

rather than the hydropsy, the consumption, or any other distemper.

The unrestrained dominion of any one sinful appetite must become fatal at length. Covetousness, pride, lust, envy, malice, revenge, are the mortal distempers of the soul, which, perhaps insensibly, but most certainly, are impairing its beauty, and wasting its strength. "Lust," whatever be its particular name, "having conceived, bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Instead, therefore, of amusing or perplexing himself with inquiries into the general symptoms of disease, it concerns every man to study his own particular case; to watch against "the sin which doth so easily beset him;" to keep himself from *his* iniquity; to discover, and to rectify the disorder of his own constitution, "the plague of his own heart." That where he is naturally, or by habit, weak, he may become strong, "through the grace that is in Christ."

Let us be instructed to value qualities, whether natural or acquired, not from their currency and estimation in the world, but from their appearance in the sight of God. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."* "By Him actions are weighed." By his judgment we must stand or fall. Has Heaven blessed thee, O man, with extraordinary gifts? Let it be a motive to humility, not a source of pride. It is a trust of which thou must render an account; and "to whom men have committed much, of him will they require the more." If he who buries his one talent in the ground be criminal, what shall become of that man who dissipates and destroys ten in riotous living?

There is but one road to a happy end—a holy life. There is but one ground of hope, in death, to a guilty creature—the mercy of God through a Redeemer. Abraham saw the Saviour's day afar off, believed and rejoiced.

* Isa. lv. 9.

rejoiced. Balaam saw it afar off, persisted in impenitence and unbelief, and died without hope. On the one, "the Star of Jacob" darted a mild and healthful influence, which cheered the path of life, and dispelled the horrors of the grave. On the other it shot a baleful fire which drunk up the spirits, blasted present enjoyment, and increased the gloom of futurity.— Arise, O Star of Jacob, arise upon my head with healing in thy wings! Let me walk in thy light; let me "hasten to the brightness of thy rising!" Christian, "arise, shine: for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."* "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."†

* 1 John iii. 2.

† Col. iii. 3, 4.

END OF VOLUME IV.







