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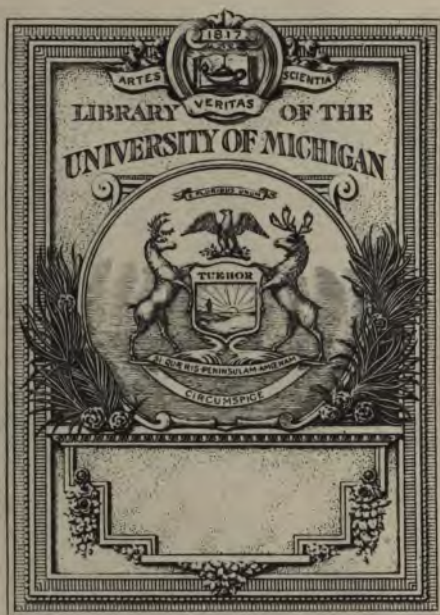
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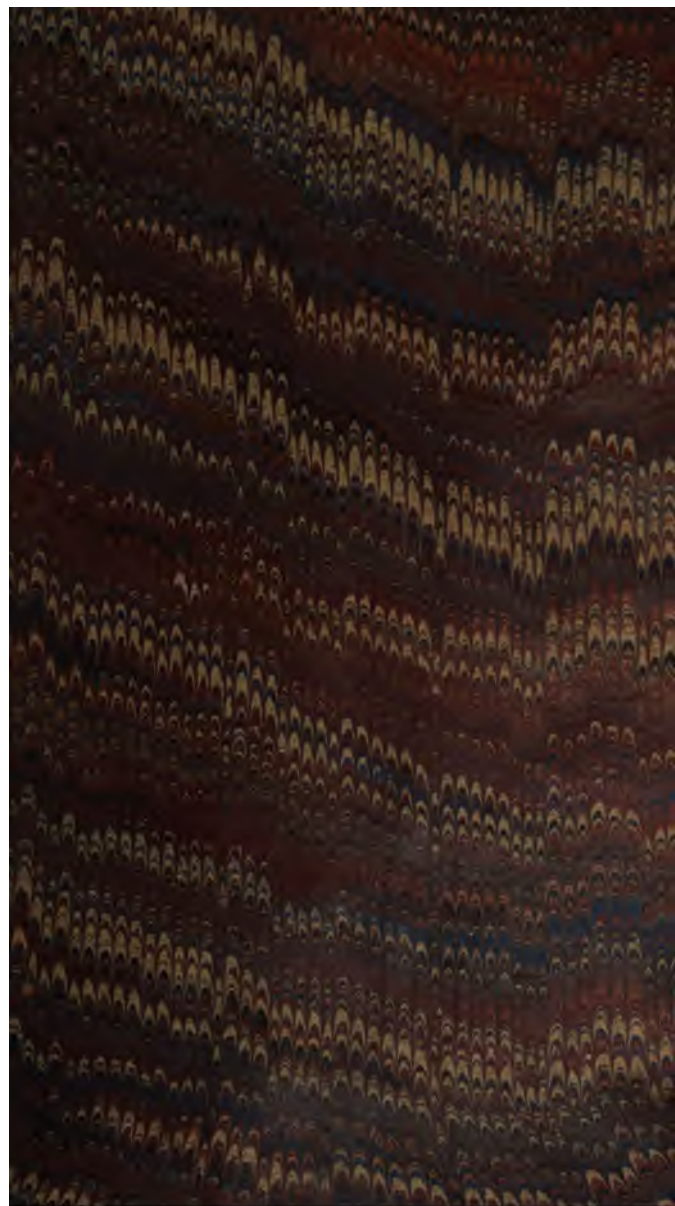
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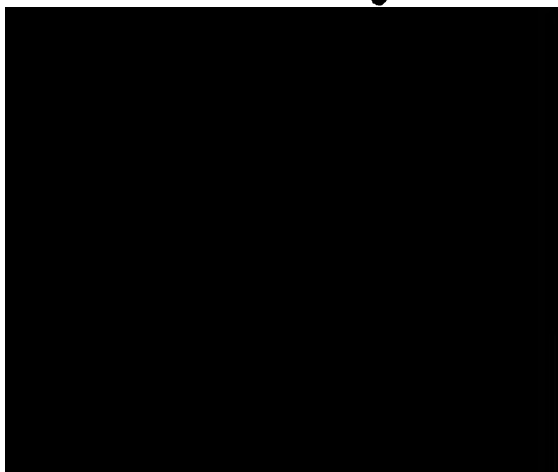


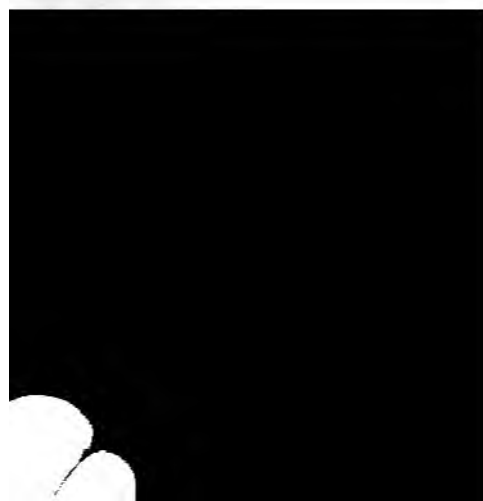


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SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS:

II. A

PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT

OF THE

PRINCIPAL HISTORIES

IN THE

NEW TESTAMENT.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

By THOMAS ROBINSON, M.A.

VICAR of ST. MARY'S, LEICESTER,

AND

Late FELLOW of TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in
time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these
last days spoken unto us by his Son.*

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed.

HEB. I. 1, 2. E. 1.

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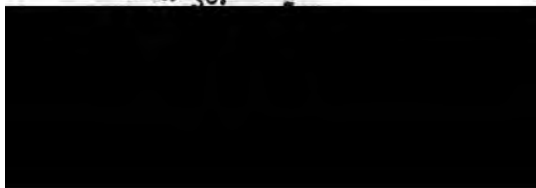
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SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

JOHN THE BAPTIST.

CHAPTER I.

Excellence of the New Testament, which, like the Old, instructs us by examples—Preparation made for Messiah's appearance—John appointed His harbinger—commended by our Lord—his birth miraculous—called by a significant name—prophecy of his father concerning him—his education and early piety—fulfilled ancient predictions—his office—austerity—doctrine of repentance—baptism—reproofs and admonitions—testimony concerning Christ—baptized Jesus—referred all to Him—a pattern to ministers—effects of his preaching—reviled—sent for by Herod, imprisoned—directed his disciples to enquire of Jesus—beheaded—buried.

THE Old and New Testament are closely connected, as parts of the same plan, which mutually confirm and illustrate each other. Both are derived from the same divine original; and therefore there can be no opposition between them. But, without detracting from the authority or excellence of the more ancient scriptures, we may assert, that the New Testament claims our peculiar regard, as containing the clearest and most interesting revelation ever delivered to mankind, and exhibiting the completion of

the great design, which had been in some measure made known from the beginning. Salvation was published to Adam immediately after the fall, and in every succeeding age intimations were given, that redemption should be accomplished. Yet much obscurity rested on all the various dispensations, till it pleased God to disperse the darkness by the full manifestation of his grace through Jesus Christ, and to "bring life and immortality to light through the Gospel *."

In the New Testament, also, we perceive the same mode of instruction adopted as in the Old. Our faith, indeed, is fixed by an express and authoritative declaration of the truth: but it is not taught in the same systematical way as in the generality of human writings. A considerable portion of this little volume is historical; and accordingly, to explain or inculcate the principles of our religion, it refers us to facts and examples. These we shall endeavour fairly to represent; pointing out at the same time the practical improvement of each circumstance as it occurs. Though we shall necessarily be led to insist on evangelical doctrines, for they will offer themselves to our notice, and surely they are too important to be overlooked, yet we shall not lose sight of the original intention, of deducing profitable lessons for the regulation of our conduct from the principal lives and characters which are recorded.

We are now passing from the comparative obscurity of all the preceding ages, to behold the splendour of a perfect day breaking forth in the gospel. Do we not exult, while we hear a heavenly voice addressing us, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee †?" But the Christian dispensation, so bright and excellent, is ushered in by one of an inferior lustre, which

* 2 Tim. i. 10.

† Isa. lx. 1.

prepared the way for it. The revelations of God have gradually increased in their clearness from the beginning. As, in the natural world, we are not surprised by the sudden burst of day, for we have notices of its approach; so the Sun of Righteousness did not arise, till an illustrious harbinger, like the morning star, had announced his appearing.

But who shall be appointed "to go before the face of the Lord?" We might conclude, it must be One of distinguished excellence; and accordingly we find the highest character given of JOHN THE BAPTIST, for whom this honour was reserved. Our Lord styles him "a burning and a shining light *," and declares, "among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist †." Many very eminent persons are exhibited in the Old Testament; but, upon the opening of the new dispensation, the grace of God was more abundantly displayed. John the Baptist stood before all the ancient patriarchs and prophets, as to the dignity of his office, and his spiritual discernment. Many of them had desired to see and hear those things, of which he was witness; but they were not permitted. They spake and wrote much concerning the Saviour, and had large discoveries of his worth and excellence: but John was favoured with more express revelations, understood and described more clearly the nature and benefits of his redemption, and himself beheld his glory. They pointed to him, as to a distant object, the "Messiah that was to come;" John not only proclaimed his immediate approach, but referred the people to him, as already present before them, laying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world ‡!"

Yet the commendation of the Baptist by our Lord, is given with some limitation. Though John

* John v. 35.

† Mat. xi. 11.

‡ John i. 29.

was advanced above all, who preceded him, many are placed in a higher point of elevation. "He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." For as the great mystery of godliness was soon afterwards more fully opened, one of the least abilities and meanest office in the church of Christ (which is often signified by "the kingdom of heaven") might understand more of the plan of salvation, than even this eminent saint. If we extend our views to "the kingdom of heaven" in its most exalted sense, it is still more obvious, that he, who obtains the lowest distinction in the society of the blessed above, will there discover more of the rich and sovereign grace of our God, and possess a larger measure of knowledge, holiness, and glory, than ever John could have done, with all his gifts and attainments, upon earth.

From the consideration of this character, then, we shall see reason to adore the divine mercy toward ourselves, inasmuch as we enjoy a clearer revelation of the Son of God; and, though our place in this world be obscure, and our abilities contemptible, yet, dying in the faith of Christ, we shall soon be admitted to a state of purity, happiness, and honour, of which the most excellent men are not even capable in their present state.

The fourth
year before the
common ac-
count called
anno Domini.

Many remarkable circumstances attended the coming of the Baptist, which fixed the eyes of the public upon him, and excited a general expectation of some great events to be accomplished him. He was introduced by a train of miracles. His parents were too far advanced in years to look for any children in the common course of nature*. An angel from heaven announced his birth, visited the father Zacharias, with the character of the office which his intended son should suf-

* Luke i. 5, &c.

tain. His very name was determined; and it was foretold by the divine messenger, that he should be a person of peculiar holiness and abstinence, "filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb;" and, as the promised forerunner of the Messiah, be the favoured instrument of "turning many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God." Declarations so wonderful Zacharias was backward to credit; and therefore, for a punishment of his unbelief, and a confirmation of the prediction, he was instantly struck speechless. At the appointed time the child was born; and on the eighth day, when the rite of circumcision was performed, Zacharias directed, in obedience to the angel, that he should be called JOHN, which signifies, "The gift, or mercy of the Lord." Immediately the tongue of the pious father was loosed, and, under the abundant and powerful influence of the Holy Ghost, "He spake and praised God." The spirit of prophecy had ceased from the days of Malachi, that is, about four hundred years; but it was revived in Zacharias, who broke forth upon this event into an inspired song, expressing the most ardent gratitude to God for remembering his holy covenant and sending redemption to his people. The venerable priest enlarged upon the nature and excellence of the salvation about to be effected; and then looking on his infant son, he exclaimed, "Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

These surprising circumstances could not fail to attract the notice of the neighbourhood. "All they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, say-

What manner of child shall this be?" and probably they were the more disposed to receive him, when he entered on his public ministry. His education, and deportment from his infancy, were so singular to excite general regard. "The hand of the Lord was with him," not only according to the common course of providence to support, invigorate, and protect him, but to endue him with an extraordinary measure of wisdom, holiness, and zeal, and other special gifts for his ministerial service. "The child grew and waxed strong in spirit."

Shall not we also perceive and admire the merciful interposition of our God, in behalf of his church? He hath been ever mindful of his promise; and at proper season he hath not delayed to raise up suitable instruments for the execution of his purposes. "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings he hath perfected praise *." And this consideration furnishes encouragement, both to parents and children. Shall we not be concerned, and emboldened to pray for them that they also, like John, may be sanctified from the womb? If we see that they possess, not only a vigorous constitution, but wisdom and fervour in the service of God, and that early habits of goodness

," when he entered on his prophetic office, as
re by inauguration, at the age of thirty years.
granted, there was a peculiar austerity and mor-
tification in John's conduct, suited to the purposes of
ministry, which is not enjoined upon all. But if
thead an exemption from such severities, are you
erty to indulge every vain and foolish desire of
hearts, to spend your time and strength in sen-
dulgence, and, by abusing the world, to pro-
the God who made it? Possibly, you may speak
of John's eminent sanctity, because he is removed
the earth, and his example cannot now disturb
but do you not hate those in the present day,
in any measure resemble him, and live in holy
erance and self-denial, "renouncing the pomps
vanities of this wicked world?"

at for what post or employment was this re-
able child designed? He came to fulfil the an-
prophecies, which foretold the appearance of a
ous person, as a harbinger or forerunner of the
iah *. This character the Baptist claimed; and
cular care is taken by the Evangelists to prove,
those scriptures had their completion in him. He
the ELIJAH, whom Malachi described. For
h he assumed not the name of that zealous re-

When kings and great men of the earth are about to travel, they send their messengers before them, that, all due preparations being made, they may meet with a ready reception. Every obstacle, which might prevent their progress, must be removed; the rugged mountains levelled; the deep valleys raised up; the winding path must be rendered straight, and all the rough places smooth. To do this in the moral world; to proclaim the approach of the King of kings; to take out of the way whatever might oppose his admission, ignorance, pride, prejudice, and the love of present things; and to dispose the people to receive him by a representation of his glory, and of the benefits which he bestows; were among the great objects of the Baptist's office.

It were easy to shew, that he came at the very season, which had been foretold. For the sceptre was departing from Judah, the seventy weeks of Daniel were expiring, and many were "waiting for the consolation of Israel," when John appeared to declare, that the promised Deliverer of the Church was at hand, and that "the Lord, whom they sought, would suddenly come to his temple *." The scrip-



precipitate, full of their own importance, eager to be employed, who run and are not sent. He waited in modest retirement till he received his commission. But when "the word of God came to him" (and the revelation, doubtless, carried its own evidence with it), he delayed no longer, but went forth, with the utmost earnestness, to reprove and awaken the careless and impenitent. Every thing in his appearance, his manners, and his doctrine, tended to excite a solemnity and a seriousness in the minds of his audience. He was clothed, as the ancient prophets, with a rough garment, which was composed only of camels hair, and bound about him with a leathern girdle; and he subsisted on such food as the wilderness afforded, "locusts and wild honey." His address also was calculated to strike an awe into the people: for he spake with authority as a messenger from God, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Here we observe the nature and the grand subject of his preaching. He declared, that the Lord God was about to establish in the earth that holy and spiritual kingdom which had been foretold, especially by Daniel *; and that no one could be admitted into it, who did not abhor and forsake his sin, and with a contrite heart return unto the Lord. Without making any exceptions, he considered all persons as in a state of depravity, guilt, and condemnation, who must experience an entire renovation and submit to the grace and government of Jesus, in order to their final salvation. Those also, who professed any deep compunction, he required to conform to the significant rite of baptism, which he administered; thereby publicly acknowledging their pollution, their need of a spiritual washing, and their determination to abandon every evil way.

* Dan. ii. 44. [vii. 14, 27.]

A teacher so remarkable could not but excite general notice; and accordingly we find that immense multitudes of people resorted to him, and were brought under the most serious impressions. Yet he sought not popular applause; for his admonitions were so pointed, his reproofs so severe, that they seemed likely to be offensive in the extreme. Men of all ranks and characters, the most opposite in principle attended on his ministry; but he flattered none. While many of the Pharisees and Sadducees flocked after him (the former of whom were strict in all external observances of religion, the latter licentious and profane), he addressed them in terms of the sharpest reprehension, and described them all as under the same condemnation. Surprised by their appearance, and suspecting their sincerity, he called on them to give decided proofs of their penitence by fruits of righteousness. He warned them, that their relation to Abraham, and their place in the visible Church would avail them nothing; that the last trial was the one afforded them; and that, if this were neglected, their case was desperate, their everlasting destruction unavoidable.

Many of his polite and learned hearers were o

A doubt seemed to be entertained, whether he were not the promised Messiah; but this was soon resolved by the unreserved declarations of John. He testified, that the Saviour, who was about to appear, possessed a dignity immensely superior, and that he considered himself unworthy to perform the meanest offices for so exalted a character. He represented Him as pouring upon his Church the abundant influences of the Holy Ghost, which, resembling fire in its operations and effects, enlivens and purifies the soul. But he warned his audience, that the same illustrious Personage is not to be imposed upon by any vain pretences to piety; for that He will make an awful separation between the righteous and the wicked, and, while he detects the hypocrites, that he will destroy them for ever.

At length when Jesus came forth to public view, and presented himself to be baptized, John pointed him out as the very Christ, of whom he had spoken*. It had been wisely ordered in the providence of God, that these two, though so nearly related, were till that time strangers to each other: for thus all suspicion of a collusion between them was prevented. But then, it should seem, the Baptist received a secret revelation, that the person approaching him was the Messiah; and therefore, under a sense of his own inferiority and defilement, he cried out, "I have need to be baptized of thee; and comest thou to me?" His objection, indeed, was overruled; and, when he had administered the divine ordinance, his testimony concerning Jesus was immediately confirmed by the visible descent of the Holy Ghost, and a voice from heaven declaring his high character.

Do we not perceive and admire the meekness and humility of John, who was so careful to assume nothing to himself, and to give all glory to Christ? The

* John i. 15, &c.

many of the Jews in Samaria, at Jerusalem was ex-
pecting the long-expected Messiah to come, and they
sent messengers to enquire the nature of his claims
and the extent of his baptism. To them he replied,
with the strongest assurance, that he pretended
not to be any other than the Forerunner of the Savi-
our, and referred them to Jesus as the Person whom
he came to introduce. Day after day, while Jesus
probably attended upon his preaching, John repeated
his testimony concerning him, and called upon the
surrounding multitudes to regard Him, as the great
propitiatory sacrifice, which alone can expiate our
guilt: "Behold," said he, "the Lamb of God,
which taketh away the sin of the world!"

On another occasion we perceive in him the same
affectionate respect for Jesus, and eager desire to
bring others acquainted with his character. When
Jesus had entered on his ministry, and immense
numbers flocked after him, the disciples of John were
disturbed, lest their master's reputation should suffer*.
But the Baptist immediately corrected their jealousy
and narrowness of spirit, and with an astonishing hu-
mility and zeal, rejoiced that the Saviour should be
exalted, even though his own popularity would be

and a supreme regard to the Redeemer. But the ministers of religion seem more especially concerned to place this eminent pattern before them; for their office requires a nearer resemblance and imitation of him. They also are sent to "prepare the way of the Lord;" that, every obstacle being removed, He may come and reign in the hearts of his sinful creatures. These are like the wilderness, in which are various impediments, forbidding all access. How much is to be done! In a moral sense, the rough and crooked paths must be levelled and made straight. The faithful heralds must "cry aloud and spare not, and shew the people their transgressions," and proclaim unto the end of the world, "Behold, your Salvation cometh." In every different situation, to which they may be appointed, as they have but one object, their language must be the same, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." They must therefore preach the law, explain its extensive demands and tremendous sanctions, in order to convince men of their depravity, guilt, and danger, and of the necessity of an entire renovation. Thus they will labour, like John, to "turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

You admire the zeal, the courage, and the faithfulness of the Baptist; but are you desirous, that your ministers should in any measure copy after him? Are you willing to hear the doctrine, which he constantly delivered, and to be addressed with the same unreserved plainness? Your wishes, indeed, in this case are not to be consulted: "whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear," the ambassadors of Christ must declare, "Except ye repent, ye shall all perish *." Yes; it is indispensably requisite, that the most regular and decent persons should be converted, as well as open and gross offenders. This

* Luke xiii. 3.

mortifies your pride, and alarms your fears; and therefore you are ready to quarrel with those, who bring such unwelcome truths to your ears. You cannot bear to be told of "fleeing from the wrath to come," or of being "burned up with fire unquenchable:" how, then, would you have been reconciled to the preaching of the Baptist?

But it is not enough, that the terrors of the law be denounced; those "who watch for your souls," who testify of Christ, will endeavour to display His glory, grace, and sufficiency, and exhort you to receive him who comes "to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities *." They will direct you to the Cross, and entreat you, if you be under painful convictions of guilt, to "behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Your attendance, approbation, and esteem will be only so far pleasing to them, as they may thereby have the better opportunity of recommending the Saviour to your regard. Instead, therefore, of aiming at popular applause, they will be most solicitous for His exaltation, and will rejoice when He is magnified, whatever may become of them. But, from the same principle, they will also warn you, that content

The most glorious effects may be expected from the ministry, which is exercised, like that of the Baptist, with wisdom, courage, impartiality, and faithfulness. Doubtless, he laboured to good purpose, among the men of that generation, and "many of the children of Israel did he turn to the Lord their God," according to the prophecy *. It appears, too, that his testimony was recollected after his death, in consequence of which, probably, many were disposed to believe on the Saviour †. But it must not be concealed, that his excellence of character did not secure him from contempt and ridicule. Among some, especially of the higher ranks, he was accounted no better than a madman, or a demoniac. "He hath a devil," was the scornful reproach cast upon him ‡. The case is somewhat similar among ourselves; "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness:" the most exemplary conduct in ministers will not silence the gainsayers: and if John were to rise from the dead, and to preach as before, it is not likely that he would meet with any better treatment. Such kind of censures and derision will, indeed, appear of little consequence to those, who are chiefly solicitous to promote the honour of Christ and the salvation of souls. Whatever railing accusations are brought against them, exposed as they may be to violent opposition or "cruel mockings," if they are the instruments of turning any to the Lord, and rescuing them from the wrath to come, they will consider themselves as abundantly repayed, and distinguished with peculiar favour.

We cannot help wishing, that the valuable labours of the Baptist had been greatly prolonged for the benefit of the world. But it pleased God, whose ways are unsearchable, to appoint otherwise. The exercise of his public ministry was short indeed; for he was


* Luke i. 16.

† John x. 41.

‡ Luke vii. 33.

not only soon interrupted in it, but even cut off, as it is supposed, in little more than three years, after he entered upon it. We hasten to consider the close of his life, which was attended with some afflictive circumstances, but not inglorious.

John, we have seen, was held in high estimation among the common people; and this excited the notice, if not the jealousy and displeasure, of the Great. Accordingly he was sent for, perhaps from motives of curiosity, to the court of Herod, the Tetrarch of Galilee, before whom he had an opportunity of bearing a faithful testimony *. This prince was of an infamous character, and was then living in adultery with Herodias, the wife of his own brother Philip: yet he appeared to be much affected by the solemn admonitions of John, listened to him with pleasure, and, in compliance with his expostulations, reformed many parts of his conduct †. A worldly prudence would have suggested, that the preacher must be silent on the particular sins, and especially the incestuous commerce, of the king. But the honest zeal of the Baptist could not refrain; and therefore, without fearing the consequences, he boldly reprov'd him, as for his other offences, so for his criminal connection with that base



was awhile restrained, lest, by the murder of this holy man, who was generally beloved and venerated by the people, he should cause an insurrection among his subjects.

Shall we mourn for the imprisonment of the prophet? We must lament the interruption of his ministry; but there is no doubt, that he was happier in his chains, than his persecutors in the palace. Shall we, then, be afraid of the consequences, to which a faithful discharge of our duty may expose us? No: let us revere our consciences, and dread the displeasure of God more than the frowns of the world. Let us openly avow our attachment to Christ, and our abhorrence of sin; nor dare to give up the truth in compliment to any man. For it were better to go down into a dungeon for righteousness' sake, than to enjoy the favour of princes, with the reproaches of our own minds, and a fear of the divine judgments.

It should seem, that John's disciples had free access to him during his confinement, and that he was solicitous to introduce them to a further acquaintance with the Saviour, to remove their suspicions, or to confirm them in their attachment to Him. On this principle, we apprehend, when he heard of the growing reputation and the miraculous works of Jesus, he sent to him two of his beloved followers (not for his own satisfaction, but theirs) to enquire, whether or no he was the true Messiah *. Our Lord, probably knowing the purpose, gave a full answer to the question, by referring them to the wonders which he performed before them, in proof of his character, and then warned them to beware of entertaining prejudices against Him.—May we learn from John, when we are quitting the world, to bear our testimony for Christ, to rejoice in the advancement of His kingdom, to direct our friends to Him, and labour to establish them in the knowledge and love of his name!

* *Mat. xii. 2—6. Luke vii. 18—23.*

May his memory be dear to us, as it was to them! Whatever reproaches may attend the saints of God, living or dying, may we honour their names, and not be afraid to avow our esteem for them!

You, who hate and persecute the zealous servants of Christ, would have taken part with Herod and his associates. But ah! consider, with whom you would wish to be joined hereafter! Will you not desire to have your portion with them, whom you now despise for their holy singularity? O seek, then, to possess their faith and love, their selfdenial and devotion. "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure:" and you shall soon be, where the Baptist is, adoring your God and Saviour; and you shall there attain a higher degree of sanctity, bliss, and glory, than what distinguished this eminent character upon earth.

We pray, therefore, with our Church,

"Almighty God, by whose providence thy servant John Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of thy Son our Saviour, by preaching of repentance; Make us so to follow his doctrine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching, and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen *."

* Collect for Saint John Baptist's day.


JESUS CHRIST.

CHAP. II.

SECT. I.

Importance of the character of Jesus—to be studied with prayer—and for the increase of holy affections—its originality—proofs of his existence—writers of his history competent and faithful. Consider, as an introduction, I. His pre-existence, II. His Deity, III. His incarnation, IV. Preparations made for him.

WE cannot but feel a suspicion and diffidence of ourselves, while we attempt to delineate the character of the Saviour. So great is its importance in every view; such a divine splendour and glory are cast around it; and so profound are the mysteries



that the veil may be removed from our minds, and that He, "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, may shine into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ *." Read the history of Alexander or Cesar, as you please; but dare not to take up the holy records of the Saviour, to indulge an idle or curious speculation: for every thing here is wonderful, and designed to excite in us the devout affections of gratitude, love, and zeal.

A right apprehension of His character will constrain us to cry out with Simeon, in rapturous adoration, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,—for mine eyes have seen thy salvation †." Every proper view of Him will, also, produce a sanctifying influence. For, "with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord ‡."

The most superficial observer must allow, that the history of Jesus is replete with wonders. Almost every circumstance in it is uncommon, and unparalleled. He was born, He lived, suffered, and died, in a very different way from any other man. This originality of his character is a strong presumption in favour of his religion; because no impostor ever did resemble him, nor is it probable, that such a resemblance would ever be pretended.

It is not our design to produce the many evidences, which might be offered, in support and confirmation of our holy faith. But it may be noted briefly, that the proof of the whole depends on this single fact, that there did really exist such a person as Jesus of Nazareth. And this is established upon stronger testimony, than any other similar fact can be. The declarations of many ancient Pagan writers put it be-

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

† Luke ii. 29, 30.

‡ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

you a doubt; and it is manifest, that the first and bitterest opposers of the gospel never once denied it. It is also more clearly ascertained by the propagation and continuance of Christianity in the world. For whence did this system take its rise; or how could it have been supported; if there had never been such a Teacher as Jesus Christ?

But are the records, which describe his life and character, genuine accounts, and what may safely be relied on? The answer is obvious: the books of the New Testament have a more convincing evidence of their authenticity, than any other writings of the like ancient date. The history of our Lord is transmitted to us by those, who possessed the most certain information upon the subject. The Evangelists, Matthew and John, were disciples and constant attendants of Jesus; Mark and Luke, also, had the best opportunities of being acquainted with his actions and discourses from the apostles themselves; the former it is believed being the companion of Saint Peter, as the latter was of Saint Paul. These published their narrations very soon after the transactions which they relate, and in the midst of enemies; so that their accounts, if false, might and no doubt would have

point out some particulars, the knowledge and of which seem of great importance, in order we may form right conceptions of the life of t. We consider, therefore,

His pre-existence. We do not enquire after condition, in which we were placed, previous to birth; for this, clearly, is our first state. But his rank in human flesh is described by such expressions, as cannot be applied to any mere man, and that he was possessed of a glorious being, prior to nativity. "He was sent into the world," as father's messenger; "He came down from heaven" and took our nature, of his own accord; all are mentioned as instances of his amazing condescension; but such they could not be, if his existence had commenced only at his incarnation. He is of himself as having "glory with the Father, before the world was," and Saint Paul asserts, that he made himself of no reputation," or "emptied himself of his glory," that he might be obedient unto *. And does not this language imply an antecedent state and dignity? Our life was not the effect of our choice; but he is represented as volunteering upon that, which he had in common with us, to fulfil his own gracious purposes: and this consideration lays us under unfeignable obligations.

It was the Redeemer, who appeared and revealed himself to the church in the Old Testament, by the name of **יהוה**, and who is called "the Angel of the Lord," "the Angel of his presence *." He governed the world by his providence, before he took up his abode in it, ordered all things by his wisdom and power. Nay, he was the Creator both of heaven and earth, with all the various inhabitants, visible and invisible; "he spake and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." And do not these things import, that he had an existence, prior to that of every creature? It need not seem strange to search for arguments in support of this truth, if we were not surrounded by those, who allow the Saviour nothing more than the properties of humanity. An error this, which strikes at the foundation of our faith. For if we accede to this sentiment, we must either say, that sin is not offensive to God as to require any expiation therein we should deny his righteous character, the sanctions of his holy law), or else we must abandon our hopes of heaven, since no adequate atonement can have been made by a mere man like ourself.



criticism, explained this meaning. It were easy to produce a multitude of texts which prove the point in the most full and direct manner. But this would lead us too far from our purpose. It must, however, be noted, that if *Logos* be no more than a creature, though of a superior order, or one created to be God merely for his office, the Bible appears too mysterious and difficult to be designed for common people, and of all other books most mysterious and destructive, as being the cause of much misery, in the working of the Son of God.

Suffice it in this place to refer to that sublime description of our Lord's person and dignity, which stands at the beginning of Saint John's Gospel, and is a proper introduction to the life and character of Jesus. It seems to have been the grand design of the Evangelist to vindicate the divine glory of our Redeemer, in opposition to those very errors, which then began to show themselves, and have been only broached afresh by modern heretics. In what terms could he have delivered the doctrine more expressly, than he has done when he asserts, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God *?" It is obvious, that he speaks, not of a mere attribute, but of a real person; for he adds that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us †". He meant, therefore, to describe his beloved Master; and he has evidently applied to him the very same title of "the Word," and "the Word of God" in some other places ‡. Nor is it an unsuitable appellation; for (not to insist on the import of the term *Logos*, as the wisdom, or the intellectual image of God) as our words discover the sentiments of our minds, so he has revealed the divine will, and declared the Father to us.

* John i. 1, &c.

† 14.

‡ 1 John i. 1. Rev. xix. 13.

“He was in the beginning,” not only at the first production of this world, but before the existence of any creature. “He was with God,” in the same state of unlimited happiness and glory, and one with JEHOVAH by an ineffable and mysterious union of nature. Nor was he raised to this exalted rank, by an act of peculiar favour; but he always possessed it, as of his own right, since “he was God,” partaking of the perfections of Deity in all their fulness.—In confirmation of this, the Apostle ascribes the origin of the universe to him: for “all things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” And will it not be allowed, that “he, who built all things, is God *?” Some indeed, have maintained, that in the formation of the world he acted by a delegated power, and not by his own essential Divinity. But how is this consistent with Saint Paul’s account, that “all things were created FOR HIM,” as well as “by him,” and that “by him all things consist †?” In what can he be inferior to Jehovah, who is not only the author, but the final cause, of all? Further, the Evangelist declares, that he had existence in himself as its original

he appeared, both from his words and works, to be One of superior dignity; for he spake and acted, in numerous instances, as Lord of the whole creation. There were some special seasons, when the brightness of the Deity broke forth upon his favoured attendants. These saw some part of the radiance of his majesty, when he was transfigured on the mount: they heard the voice, by which "he received from God the Father honour and glory *:" and they his chosen witnesses have declared that which they saw and heard; "shewing unto us that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto them †." The celestial spirits, also, who could not mistake his real character, were commanded to express their reverence of him. For when the Lord God "bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the Angels of God worship him ‡."

Let us, then, maintain the truth, which is clearly delivered, and fully confirmed to us: nor fear, on the testimony of the Apostles, to receive Jesus as "the Lord of glory §." If even angels bow before him with profound adoration, who are we, that we should refuse to pay our homage to him? Let us enquire, Do we entertain worthy notions of him, or feel a suitable regard towards him? Do we render him the honour, due unto his name? It is possible to assent to his Divinity, in a mere speculative way, while the heart remains insensible to his excellence, and disaf-

* Matt. xvii. 1, &c. 2 Pet. i. 16, 17.

† 1 John i. 1—3.


‡ Heb. i. 6.

§ Many are the publications, in which the Apostolical testimony for the Divinity of Christ is admirably collected and stated. To those, who may not have leisure for the perusal of the works of Dr. Waterland, we might recommend "A short Defence of the Divinity of Christ," published at Leeds, price 3d. "Jones's Catholic Doctrine of the Trinity," &c. If the learned reader wish to see the testimony of the primitive Church, in addition to that of the Apostles, the writings of Bishop Bull, particularly his "Defensio fidei Nicænæ," and "Dr. Horsley's Tracts in controversy with Dr. Priestley," are deserving of his regard.

fects to his service. Accordingly, many call him, "Lord, Lord," who see no beauty in him, that they should desire him, and who do not the things which he says *.

But to form a right judgment of the character of Jesus, we must take a different view, and observe how he gives us access unto himself. The glory of his essential and unveiled Deity would dazzle our sight. But we are encouraged to draw near, while we are assured, that he is IMMANUEL, "God with us," or, God in our nature; "God manifest in the flesh." Hence we consider

III. His incarnation. Various and opposite errors have prevailed, respecting the person of Christ; some denying him Divinity, others humanity. We believe, that they were both truly united in him, and that he was very God, as well as very man. Here, indeed, many objections are raised. Such an assumption of the manhood, it is said, is unintelligible, unnecessary, and impossible. Alas! to what impiety may we be led by our own pride and presumption! There are those, who will not allow any thing to Jehovah, which exceeds their own scanty comprehension, and, without regarding his express declarations, arrogantly determine the only way, in which it is pro-



about the mode of our own being, undertake to say, of what the great and glorious God may be capable? The fact is clearly established: it is declared, that "the Word," who was in the beginning, with God, and was God,—“was made flesh.” He partook of all our infirmities (sin only excepted), being subject to the same sensations, fatigues, pains, and temptations, as any the weakest of our species. He was, therefore, as truly man, as if he had possessed no higher nature. This will be sufficiently manifest, while we describe the various circumstances of his life.

We allow, then, that there is a sense, in which the Son is inferior to the Father; for, as his servant, he is sent by him, receives his commission from him, and to him likewise owes his exaltation. But expressions of that kind, which are frequent in the scriptures, by no means contradict the doctrine here maintained; for they are used only with a reference to his manhood, or his mediatorial office, in which it is granted that he was in a state of subjection. The incarnation being admitted, the Bible speaks a consistent language, respecting the Redeemer; whereas, otherwise, it would be at variance with itself.

This humiliation of Jesus is represented as a necessary, or at least a suitable, and expedient, scheme. “In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren*.” In his humanity alone, he was capable of obeying and suffering for us: in this alone, he could sustain the character of “a merciful High-priest,” and be “touched with a feeling of our infirmities.”—Thus the same nature, which sinned, atoned for the transgression, and repaired the breach. Hereby we draw near to God, and God to us: He stoops to us, and we rise to Him: our IMMANUEL joins heaven and earth together. Of how great importance,


* Heb. ii. 17.

and how replete with consolation is the doctrine before us!

It is "the man Christ Jesus," who is proposed as our pattern: for, considered solely in his Divinity, he could not be an example to us. In him, then, Humanity is gloriously exalted; and by an union with, and a resemblance of, him, we shall attain the highest dignity, of which our species is capable. O let us pray, that we may so contemplate his excellence, as to become more and more conformed to his likeness!

We might conclude, that the object was great indeed, for which a person of such eminence condescended to take up his abode on the earth. We shall draw the same conclusion from considering

IV. The preparations made for his appearance. Upon a slight view of the subject, we must suppose, that he was about to carry into execution some scheme of immense magnitude and importance. An expectation of his coming had been raised in the minds of men for four thousand years. His introduction into the world, therefore, was not a sudden event, nor a design formed in haste. Every circumstance had been foreseen and declared, nay, appointed from eter-



and embrace the mercy, which is offered to us through the Saviour, rather than dispute about it. His manifestation in the flesh, no doubt, was seasonable: nay, the scripture asserts, that he died "in due time," and that he came "in the fulness of time *." Some reasons may be assigned, why the great event did not take place sooner:

1. That the necessity of redemption might be more clearly perceived; and that our condition without such an interposition might be proved to be absolutely desperate. The Lord suffered men to walk in the way of their own hearts, in order to evince their extreme and total depravity, the blindness of their understandings, the perverseness of their wills, and their utter inability to restore themselves. For if we possess any wisdom, strength, or goodness, sufficient to effect our own recovery, how strange that no approach was made towards it for four thousand years! A full trial, surely, was allowed; but during all that time the ignorance, degeneracy, and wickedness of the world seemed to increase. It appears, then, from undoubted fact, that, left to ourselves, we should never have obtained reconciliation with God, and that without Christ we are "ready to perish." O let us profit by this sad experience, and learn to value our Saviour the more!

2. That a long series of clear and circumstantial prophecies might be delivered, and fulfilled in him. This was a wise and gracious appointment; for the Gospel has thereby received an abundant strength of evidence. It pleased God, in every age from the beginning, to raise up and inspire faithful men, to proclaim the coming of a Redeemer, and to describe his character and office. Accordingly, they foretold, with an astonishing exactness, his birth, life, and death, and the various incidents relating to them; and

* Rom. v. 6. Gal. iv. 4.

from their united testimony, compared with the Evangelists, we are furnished with incontestable arguments in support of the truth. They “spake, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,” and have left us no reasonable cause to doubt, that JESUS is the CHRIST.

3. That preparations might be made by the divine Providence for his reception, and for the ready propagation of the Gospel. The Lord God, in all his preceding dispensations, had a regard to the intended incarnation of the Saviour. Every thing else was appointed in subserviency to that event, which exceeds, in magnitude and importance, every other circumstance in the history of mankind. Respecting the Jews, this is obvious to all, who examine the sacred records; and from the same authority we learn, that the state of the heathen world, and all their great empires, were so ordered as to make way for “the Prince of peace *.” One dominion gave place to another, by the wise and sovereign disposal of God, till, at the birth of our Lord, the Romans had extended their power to every known part of the earth, and thus opened a communication for spreading the Gospel amongst the most distant nations. At that period, also, an universal tranquillity prevailed, which was

with an express commission to prepare his way, and to proclaim his dignity and grace.

We need not add more. From the concurrence of these various circumstances, we perceive some vast design to be in agitation, to which the attention both of heaven and earth is directed.

The subject before us will furnish us with an interesting application to different characters.

1. You, who love the Saviour, or who feel your need of him, draw near, that you may admire his excellency and perfection. How great is his glory! How astonishing his condescension! How rich, and free, and extensive is his mercy! How firm the Covenant, which he hath sealed with his blood, and confirmed by his oath! Let us join our testimony, and say, that he is "full of grace and truth." Is there not enough in him, to dispel your fears, to encourage and enliven your hopes? And will not the belief of what he has done for you constrain you to devote yourselves to him? You know him not, unless you feel an irresistible force in this argument. Do you esteem the world, then, little and contemptible, in comparison of Christ! O turn away your eyes from beholding vanity! Come, and contemplate his perfect beauty, till you can say, he is to me "the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely *."

2. You, who glory in yourselves and not in the Saviour, who depend not upon his merit but your own, consider what you are doing. What a contempt do you put upon this divine person, and his gracious undertaking! You act, as if all this wondrous plan had been entirely needless. For if your moral qualities and works of righteousness be sufficient to recommend you to the favour of Heaven, then doubtless the incarnation, as well as the death of Christ, was vain. Then the counsels of God have been employed

* Sol. Song v. 10, 16.

about a fruitless design; and his Providence has been contriving and executing an absurd, because an useless, scheme. But this you would not assert. And, if you allow the necessity of such an interposition, how wretched, how desperate must be your case, which required it! Let the conviction have its proper influence! Under a sense of your guilt, bow before the Redeemer, and implore the benefits of his salvation: "Lord save us; we perish *!"

3. You, who are despisers of Christ, or who disregard, at least, the important doctrine of his manifestation in the flesh, consider the grounds of your objections or your inattention to it. We entreat your serious examination of these things; and ask, why you should turn away your ears from them. You are curious to hear what is uncommon and wonderful; eager to read any eventful history of men and empires; and always at leisure to listen to the trifling news of the day. And is there nothing in this subject, which deserves your notice? Or how can you acquit yourselves of the most consummate folly, if you are indifferent about it?

But your neglect of the Saviour arises not so much from weakness of understanding, as from a rooted de-

son *;" and he will be heard, or you shall answer it at your peril. He yet continues to address you in terms of love and mercy: but if you reject or slight his offers, wo be unto you, that the Son of God is come. This aggravates your guilt, and renders your destruction certain and unspeakably tremendous. "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God †."

May we know the day of our visitation; and, exulting in the glory and the grace of Jesus, may we each of us cry out with a holy transport, "Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust and not be afraid; for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song: he also is become my salvation ‡!" Amen.

* Heb. i. 1—3.


† John iii. 18.

‡ Isa. xii. 2.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 2.

The humiliation and glory of Jesus contrasted. I. His miraculous conception—announced to the Virgin Mary, and to Joseph. II. His nativity—at Bethlehem—in a stable—declared by an angel to shepherds—celebrated by a multitude of the heavenly host—enquired after and published by the shepherds. III. His childhood and education—circumcision—presentation in the temple—testimony of Simeon and Anna concerning him—visited by eastern Magi—preserved in Egypt from Herod's cruelty—conducted to Nazareth—soon distinguished for his superior wisdom—at twelve years of age discoursed with the doctors in the temple—dwelt in subjection to his parents at Nazareth.



differently, and have had, not a poor, despised, suffering Redeemer, but, what the Jews wished for, a temporal Messiah, who should possess supreme dominion, dazzle the eyes of every observer, by his pomp and magnificence, and constrain all the nations of the earth to bow with unfeigned subjection to him. It was otherwise appointed by the unerring wisdom of God; and, so far from being offended at the mean appearance of Jesus, we should contemplate with profound adoration the gracious purposes of it.


Yet it is said, "we beheld his glory *." There resided a glory in him, which his spiritual people discovered, and which sometimes broke forth to the confusion of his enemies; a glory far superior to all the grandeur of conquerors and kings. Indeed, there was a wonderful contrast in the various circumstances which attended the Saviour's abode on earth: for the most exalted dignity and the deepest abasement were united in him. Such a Messiah the ancient prophecies describe, and therefore such an one the Jews ought to have expected. They might have learned, that "the holy One of Israel," and the afflicted, suffering Messiah was the same Redeemer. May all our prejudices against him be removed; and, while we hear of his coming in the flesh, may we be disposed to receive him into our hearts, and with loud hosannas welcome his approach, crying, "Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest!"—We consider, for the present,

I. His miraculous conception. This, as well as some other incidents preceding his nativity, demands our regard. We have already seen, that the providence of God had made great preparations for him, and that the various predictions of the inspired writers had raised among the Jews a general expectation of a glorious Deliverer. Those, who studied the sa-

cred oracles, and carefully observed the state of their nation, could not but perceive, that the exact period marked out both by Jacob and Daniel for the appearance of **SHILOH, MESSIAH, THE PRINCE**, must be near at hand *. They were therefore, "looking for redemption in Israel;" and at last they obtained the object of their hope. At the appointed season, "in the fulness of time," the Saviour was announced.

But who was the favoured instrument of bringing him into the world? It had been declared, that he was to be "the Son of David according to the flesh," and therefore that he should be born of some descendant of that king of Israel. But he was likewise to be the Son of God: for he must be "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners †:" and, that the corruption of our fallen nature might not be communicated to him, he must be conceived, and his body produced, in a very different way from any other man. It was accordingly provided in the divine counsels, and foretold by the prophet Isaiah, that "a **VIRGIN** should conceive, and bear a son, and should call his name **IMMANUEL** ‡."

Let Infidels cavil as they please, and strain their ingenuity to invent objections to this scheme, and



rael had aspired to, for ages before *. Both she and her expected husband were placed in a mean situation; but they possessed a peculiar excellency of character, and obtained the notice of heaven. The Lord passed by the mighty, the noble, and the learned of the earth, and poured contempt upon all worldly pagantry, when he submitted to appear in the lowest rank, and to be born of so poor and obscure a person. Yet even upon that occasion, his dignity and glory were displayed. One of the highest order of the celestial spirits, Gabriel, was commissioned to inform the pious Virgin of the counsels of God concerning her, and to declare the name and the office of that illustrious offspring, which she was to produce by a miraculous conception through the energy of the Holy Ghost. "Behold," said he, "thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

Intelligence of this supernatural effect, which immediately took place, was not long afterwards given by a heavenly messenger to Joseph the betrothed husband of Mary †. He had perceived her pregnancy, and, not knowing the cause, could not but suspect her integrity, and therefore wished to break off his engagements with her. To relieve him from his anxiety, the angel explained to him her real situation, encouraged him to receive her as his wife, and directed him to call the child, whom she should bear, by the significant name of JESUS, denoting his office as the SAVIOUR, and the deliverance from sin, which he accomplishes for his people. Thus Joseph became his reputed father; for, agreeably to the divine man-


* Luke i. 26—56.

† Mat. i. 18—25.

date, "he took unto him Mary his wife." But the conception was immaculate; as "he knew her not, till she had brought forth her first-born Son."

Here, then, we contemplate the Son of God, "made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law *." This is "the Seed of the woman," who was appointed to "bruise the serpent's head †." This is "the Seed of Abraham," in whom, it is promised, that "all the families of the earth shall be blessed ‡." This is that illustrious progeny of David, of whom it was declared, that "the throne of his kingdom shall be established for ever §." Peculiar care is taken by the Evangelists, to prove, that in this, as well as every other respect, he fulfilled the ancient predictions. Accordingly, St. Matthew records his genealogy from David and from Abraham, by the side of Joseph his reputed father; and St. Luke traces his origin not only from David, but from Adam, in the line of Mary his real mother §.

Are we suitably affected by the mysterious truth, which we maintain, that Jesus, who was the Lord of David, became his Son †? The conception of the Saviour was the most astonishing event which had



nate by the Holy Ghost, of the Virgin Mary, and was made man *." Let us study the subject, not with the cold indifference of curiosity or speculation, but with humble and devout affections, till we feel the fire of divine love burn within us, constraining us to sing aloud with Mary, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in GOD MY SAVIOUR †." We proceed to consider

II. His nativity. All things, it should seem, were in a state of readiness and preparation for his introduction into the world, excepting one circumstance. An ancient prophecy had determined, that the Messiah should be born in Bethlehem; and Mary dwelt at Nazareth, which was at no small distance from it †." How, then, shall that scripture be fulfilled? The providence of God can easily remove the greatest apparent difficulties, and, in a mysterious way, make all creatures subservient to his own purposes. We do not observe, that Mary contrived or wished to change her residence with a view to the prediction; for, probably, that was not attended to at the time. But the mind of a heathen prince, though he acted only from political motives, was influenced to accomplish this event. The Roman emperor Augustus, became the instrument of performing the divine counsels ‖. For, in consequence of a general enrolment of all the inhabitants of Judea, which he had commanded, they were obliged to repair to the place, where the original inheritance of their families lay. Joseph and Mary, then, in obedience to the edict, went to Bethlehem the city of David, as being his descendants, where their names were to be registered: and, during their continuance in that town, for so it had been ordered by the appointment of Heaven, the proper season of her delivery came.

* Nicene Creed.

† Luke i. 46, 47.

‡ Mic. v. 2. Mat. ii. 5. John vii. 42.


‖ Luke ii. 1, &c.

But

men." Those only will refuse to sing, who despise and reject the offer of reconciliation with Heaven.

What effect, then, should these "good tidings of great joy" produce in your minds? How did the shepherds receive them? They delayed not to enquire after the new-born Saviour; they went with haste to Bethlehem, where they found the report concerning him to be true. The information, also, which had astonished them, they communicated to others; and they gave praise to the God of Israel, who had manifested to them such peculiar mercy.—And shall not you, who hear so frequently of the coming of Jesus Christ, desire to know him? Will you refuse to give an immediate attention to the message of the Gospel? What is there of equal importance? Will you not examine, at least, the intelligence which is brought you? The facts are so well authenticated, that they will bear the most exact scrutiny.

If, like the shepherds, you are convinced of the truth of the report, you will also direct the notice of others to this wonderful event. You will take up your words and say, "We have seen, and do testify, that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." You will bear witness of his work



dent affections of gratitude, love, and zeal, dispose you to recommend him to others, and constrain you to "magnify the God of Israel."

In pursuing the history of Jesus, we consider

III. His childhood and education. We are lost in astonishment, while we contemplate Him, who is "the Lord from heaven," in all the weakness of infancy, requiring a mother's watchful care, and carried in a nurse's arms. He passed through the various stages of human life, and experienced every infirmity, to which we are subject, sin only excepted.

As he was "made of a woman," that he might be obedient to the law*, he submitted to all the Mosaic rites, and accordingly was circumcised on the eighth day. At the appointed time, also, he was presented to the Lord by his parents in the temple at Jerusalem, and even redeemed, as the divine precept required†. He came "to fulfil all righteousness;" and has taught us, by his example, not to despise or neglect the ordinances of God, though, as external observances, they may seem unprofitable and vain.

We have remarked, that the blessed angels joined in concert to celebrate his nativity: and now we shall perceive, that there were not wanting chosen witnesses among the inhabitants of the earth, whose voice should more publicly and more widely proclaim the consecrated infant. When, therefore, he was presented to God according to those ancient prophecies, "The desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory;" and "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple‡;" Simeon, an aged saint, who "waited for the consolation of Israel," through the immediate influence of the Spirit, attended at the solemnity, and made known the event. He embraced the holy infant in his arms, and cried

* Gal. iv. 4.

† Exod. xiii. 2. Num. viii. 16, 17. xviii.

‡ Hag. ii. 7. Mal. iii. 1.

out, with the most devout and lively sentiments of faith, love, and joy, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." He foretold also the different effects of his appearance, observing, that it would excite general opposition, and, though to some it would be the means of a happy restoration, would bring upon many final and aggravated ruin. Another person, likewise, a pious female, far advanced in years, confirmed the testimony. "One Anna, a prophetess, coming in that instant gave thanks unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

How much may we learn from this account! Is it not as necessary for us, as for the ancient Jews, to look for redemption? And shall we not feel and express the most ardent gratitude and joy for the revelation of the Messiah? Though we are not favoured with a sight of his bodily presence, yet, if by faith we behold his glory, we also shall smile at the prospect of death, and be satisfied to close our eyes upon every earthly object. But alas! is not Jesus, according to the prediction, "a sign," which is every where "spoken against?" To how many is he "a stone of stumbling and rock of offence!" Even to this day, by the preaching of his Gospel, "the thoughts of many hearts are revealed;" for therein he affords a test or trial of men's characters and dispositions. The humble penitent is comforted by the declarations of his abundant grace; the sensualist discovers his own vile affections, while he determines that he will not follow Christ; and the Pharisee betrays his pride and hypocrisy, in refusing "to submit to the righteousness of God."

A further honour was put upon the infant Saviour, and his glory displayed in distant lands. A new and miraculous star was lighted up in the heavens; and
 : may be allowed to consider it as an intimation,
 that

that "the star of Jacob" was then rising upon this dark world. Some pious sages in a remote eastern country observed it, and by revelation, as it is reasonable to believe, understood the signal *. Immediately they took their journey, with great pains and expence to themselves, to enquire for, and to worship this illustrious Personage, who was born to reign over the Jews. They were conducted by the guidance of the star, first to Jerusalem, and then to the very house at Bethlehem, where the young child was. There they fell down before him with profound veneration, and presented him with various oblations of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. When, by the divine direction, they had returned to their own land, doubtless they published the advent of the Saviour, according to the information they had received, and prepared the way for the reception of the Gospel amongst their countrymen. These venerable sages, then, were as the first-fruits of the Gentiles, and a token of the future enlargement of the church by the accession of distant nations, who should "soon stretch out their hands unto God †." Thus it had been predicted, "The forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee: the multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah: all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord ‡."

Are we not hereby reprov'd for our neglect and contempt of Christ? His manifestation in the flesh is declared among us, if not by a star in the heavens, yet by many credible witnesses; but how few enquire after him? How few are willing to forego their ease and interest; how few, who would not grudge the pains and expence of these wise men, to attain the knowledge of salvation? Why are we not, like them, worshipping at the feet of Jesus? Why do we not

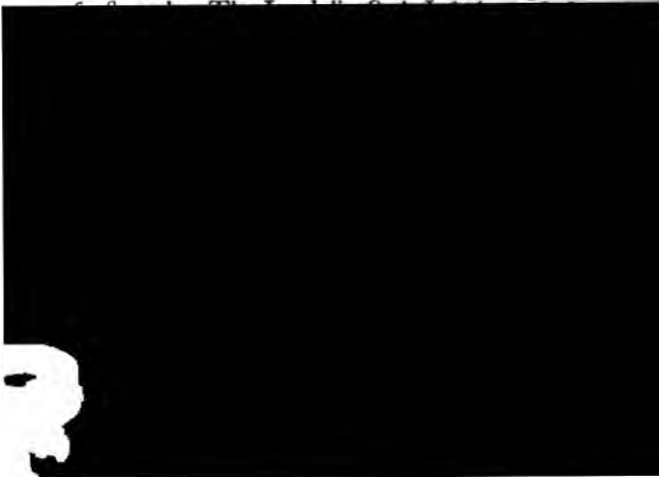
* Mat. ii. 1, &c.

† Psal. lxxiii. 32.

‡ Isa. lx. 5.

offer to him, out of our treasures, some mark of our gratitude and adoration? Why are not all our talents, and all our faculties of body and soul, devoted to him; for he is worthy to receive them, and requires them at our hands?

But, though such honours were done to Jesus in his very infancy, a violent persecution arose against him, and his life was preserved only through the divine interposition. The cruel tyrant Herod, alarmed by the account of the Magi, as if the newborn king for whom they enquired were to possess temporal dominion, came to the horrid resolution of destroying him. At first he pretended veneration, and a desire to worship him; with a view to accomplish his murderous designs. But the Lord God, who knew the hypocrisy of his heart, defeated his intention, by preventing the wise men from carrying him any intelligence. Unwilling to relinquish his purpose, and enraged by the disappointment, with an unparalleled barbarity he commanded all the young children throughout the neighbourhood of Bethlehem to be put to death. Still Jesus was secure, under an invincible defence; nor was it possible that the end of his appearing should be



vered marks of extraordinary abilities; being "strong in spirit, filled with wisdom," and endued with "the grace of God" in an eminent degree. We apprehend, that his uncommon fervour, knowledge, and piety, even in his childhood, excited the admiration of the neighbourhood where he dwelt. We have but little information concerning that period, but the few circumstances, which are recorded, must not be passed over.

When he was twelve years old (and so according to the Jewish custom was considered as subject to the law), he went up to the temple with his pious parents to celebrate the passover; and upon that occasion he shewed the most zealous attachment to the house and service of God. His parents and relations were returning home, while, unknown to them, he still remained at Jerusalem. After a painful search, they found him on the third day amongst the public teachers of religion, listening to their instructions, and requesting their answers to his enquiries; and by his profound understanding in divine things exciting the astonishment of all who were present. When his mother had expressed her wonder at his conduct, as having occasioned them many anxious fears, he replied, with a zeal far beyond his years, "Wist ye not, that I must be about my Father's business?" Yet he did not renounce his obedience to Joseph and Mary, or despise them on account of his own superior rank or abilities; but, with all filial regard and submission to their authority, he went down to dwell with them at Nazareth. There also he continued to exhibit, with his increasing age and stature, an increasing measure of wisdom and excellency of character; for his human nature received gradual communications from the fulness of the Godhead.

Here, then, we have an example, which may be proposed to all; the example of a child, which may reprove and shame the most advanced in life.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 3.

He remained in obscurity till his thirtieth year, when he began his ministry, for which he was prepared I. by his baptism, II. by his fasting, III. by his temptations, in which he was urged, 1. to anger, 2. to carnal passion, 3. to ambition.

As every trifling anecdote of the celebrated Saviour's life is eagerly explored, little error is committed in concerning the greatest character, even the minutest of his world. We might suppose, that curious and presumptuous men to study the history of Jesus Christ, that he not a proper disposition to the contemplation of such a subject, nor that he was to be satisfied in it. The holy Saviour was not to gratify our subtle speculations, but to answer a variety of questions, which were to be proposed.

As we know how many of the private circumstances of the life of the Saviour, and of the confessions of the Saviour, which we have little or no information of, we may suppose that a very large proportion of his life was spent in obscurity. Between his twelfth and his thirtieth year, it is probable, that he was subject to temptations, and that, as he advanced, he increased in wisdom and grace, and gave early signs of an uncommon character. Yet during all that period he was hidden in obscurity, and removed from the notice of the world. He dwelt in Nazareth, a town so mean and so particularly infamous, that the question was asked,

asked in a proverbial manner, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth *?" There he passed for the son of a carpenter, and probably laboured at the same low trade with Joseph his reputed father; for he himself was called "the carpenter †."

Joseph and Mary, together with some others, could not but remember the signal testimonies, which had been delivered concerning him; and, from a view of his whole spirit and deportment, they must have formed great expectations of him. But still he was not generally known or regarded: no public display of his glory had been made, and even many of his relations were disposed to revile him ‡.

What amazing condescension is here! He submitted to this state of poverty, contempt, and labour, and appeared to be of little benefit to the world, till he came to his thirtieth year, which was within three or four years of his death. Shall any of us, then, complain, that we are placed in a low condition, and appointed to a hard and servile employment amongst those who despise and deride us; and therefore, that our sphere of usefulness is very contracted? While we behold Jesus in "the form of a servant," let us be satisfied with our lot; rather, let us be ashamed of harbouring a murmuring thought.

The example of our Lord is a lesson to those, who are aspiring to a public station in the Church, and preparing for the work of the ministry, not to push themselves forward to that holy function, or conclude that their whole life is lost, because they are not called forth to it so soon as they might wish. They may be in danger of being hurried away by an impetuous and intemperate zeal, though actuated, in the main, by the purest motives both towards God and man. The advice to such persons is, Wait till the proper season; attend to, and faithfully discharge, your pre-


* John i. 46.

† Mark vi. 3.

‡ John vii. 5.

maintained on both sides, as to prove an unprofitable and hurtful disputation, concerning the proper mode and subjects of Christian baptism. But we address you, as having been, by this solemnity, devoted to the service of Christ: and we call upon you to remember the obligations, which it has laid you under. By this sacrament you are joined to the armies of the faithful, and are bound "to fight manfully under the banner of Christ against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto your life's end *." The vows of the Lord, then, are upon you. And have you not perfidiously violated these engagements? You should be reminded, that the external rite of baptism, though ever so scripturally administered, will avail you nothing, if you are not "washed from your filthiness," and have not now "the answer of a good conscience toward God †."

We behold a peculiar honour put upon Jesus, at the conclusion of the ordinance. The solemnity was closed, but he remained in prayer; and immediately, while he looked up, the heavens were opened over his head, and the Spirit visibly descended upon him, resembling a dove, perhaps in shape, as well as in its heavenly motion. This was like an inward witness of



to reverence him as "the only begotten of the Father," and to rejoice in his mediation, as perfectly according with the divine will. The three persons of the Godhead were here exhibited, and their entire agreement in the plan of salvation was publicly declared. The Son appeared in human flesh; the Spirit rested like a dove upon him; and the Father, though he assumed not any bodily shape, spake with an audible voice, proclaiming his concurrence with the Redeemer, and approbation of his work of love.

If we also be solicitous to obtain for ourselves a testimony of the favour of Heaven, let us learn from our Lord to expect it in answer to fervent prayer. And we may be the more emboldened to present our supplications in the name of Jesus, since, as we have seen, he is consecrated to and accepted in his mediatorial office. The residue of the Spirit is with him: for "he has received gifts for men." We may rejoice and triumph, that the Father is well-pleased in him, as our Surety, and our Advocate. But are we likewise, as we ought to be, well-pleased with him? Are we not backward even to credit his declarations, though confirmed by such a fulness of evidence, and unwilling to acquiesce in his gracious purposes, for our salvation? Why do we not feel the most ardent affection towards him, and say, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend *?" Can we consider the work of mercy, which he came to perform, the rich benefits; which he bestows, the excellency and perfection of his person and character; and then say, "There is no beauty, that we should desire him †?" This contemptuous disregard and rejection of him would betray an extreme baseness of disposition, which must be utterly inexcusable.

We follow Jesus from the banks of Jordan into the wilderness, and there behold him submitting, for a

* Cant. v. 16.

† Isa. liii. 2.

much less oppressed, and drawn up the more to high and heavenly things. These ends could not be answered in our Lord; but we must be strangely ignorant of ourselves, not to allow, that in these respects we have abundant cause for humiliation and self-denial.—Yet why do we talk of fasting, since most men plead for, and demand, the full gratification of all their sensual appetites? The very mention of mortification is laughed at, as the weakness of enthusiasm and the madness of superstition; while profaneness, intemperance, and riot, almost every where prevail and triumph. Few, therefore, can sincerely join with us in the collect of our church, and say, “O Lord, who for our sake didst fast forty days and forty nights, give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey thy godly motions in righteousness and true holiness, to thy honour and glory!”

Our Lord underwent a far more severe trial in the wilderness, as a necessary preparation for his mediatorial office. This will appear in considering

III. His temptation. It may justly fill us with amazement, to behold the Son of God assaulted, vexed, and harassed by the prince of darkness. But

temptation *." It occurred also, just before he entered on his public work. The Devil directs his venomous darts in an especial manner against those, who are going forth to subvert and destroy his kingdom. Yet even these persons stand in need of temptation, and will derive peculiar benefits from it. They will improve, by that painful discipline, in humility and tenderness of spirit, and learn to administer proper counsel and encouragement to those, who are brought into similar circumstances of distress.

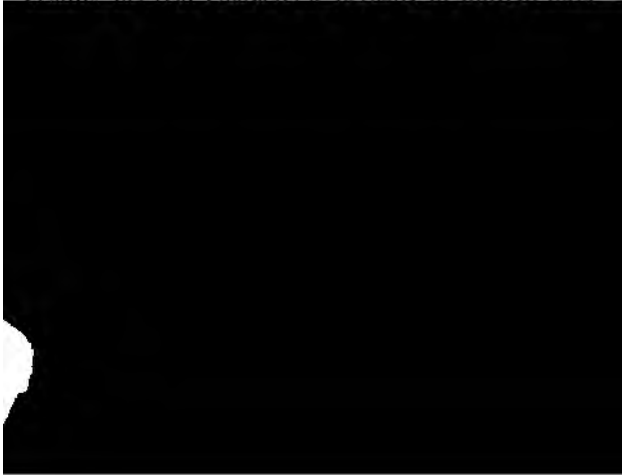
We may also remark the place in which our Lord endured the conflict: it was "the wilderness." No situation, indeed, will secure us from the assaults of our malicious adversary. In vain should we fly to deserts or to cells: we should be still exposed. Even though we be employed in meditation and prayer, as Jesus was, we are liable to an attack. Nay, retirement itself, in some views, may give an additional force to temptation. Perhaps the wilderness was therefore chosen for this singular engagement, in which the Fiend was allowed to exert his utmost rage; for the very horrors of the scene favoured his vile purpose. "Jesus was led up of the Spirit," by the peculiar impulse of the Holy Ghost, with which he was then filled, "to be tempted of the Devil." Confident of his own superior strength, he dreaded not the combat: nor have we any real cause to fear, when called out to the same warfare, if we depend on his mighty arm for protection and support. But let us beware of presumption. Remembering our own weakness and the power of our enemy, let us pray continually, "Lead us not into temptation."

What could be Satan's expectation in making so extraordinary an attack? Perhaps from the conquest he had obtained over the first Adam, he might derive a hope, that the second Adam also would be baffled

and overcome. He determined, at least, to make the desperate trial. His envious and malicious rage would not suffer him to submit, without attempting an opposition: and he resolved to vex, if he could not destroy, his antagonist. Such likewise is his conduct toward all those, who fight against him under the banner of the cross. Their state is safe; and probably he may know it; but for the present they shall all feel the effects of his malevolence.

We shall remark the artfulness and subtilty of this spiritual adversary. It should seem, that he has some way of learning our inward tempers and dispositions, as well as external circumstances, since he generally proposes that object or plan of action, which appears most desirable and convenient to us. How great, then, is the necessity of circumspection and prayer!—Three temptations were offered to our Lord; exactly adapted to his situation; and they afford a specimen of Satan's general devices.

1. Jesus was urged to distrust the divine care. After his long abstinence, he felt the importunate demands of hunger, and yet possessed no natural means of support. Then came this apostate spirit (concealing his real character), perhaps in human form



through a disbelief of the divine faithfulness and love. Let us beware of such an attack, and learn what resistance we should make.

It would have been easy for our Lord to accomplish what Satan proposed; but he would not even seem to distrust the care of Providence; and he has left us an example of a firm reliance upon God in the severest difficulties. He replied, therefore, from the scriptures, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God *." Thus he has taught us, to be more anxious to obtain the divine blessing, than a supply of food, which of itself can administer no nutriment to the body. We should not dare to pursue any unlawful course, or take one step out of the road of duty, for the providing even of necessary support. Let us preserve our dependence upon the God of heaven, who in a thousand ways can give us bread to eat, or even sustain us without it.

2. Jesus was then tempted to presumption. "The Devil taketh him up into the holy city" (in what way we do not enquire, nor is it necessary to know), "and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple." Here again the address was most artful: he would now persuade him, to presume upon his relation to God, in the belief of which he could not be shaken, to make an improper display of it, and to expect protection without a sufficient warrant. "If thou be the Son of God," said he, "cast thyself down from hence; for it is written, He shall give his Angels charge concerning thee to keep thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone †." Satan, we observe, can appeal to scripture, to serve his own purposes. But here he produced a false, because a partial, quotation. He omitted to mention from the original text, "IN ALL

* Deut. viii. 3.

† Psal. xci. 11.

THY WAYS;" for this opposed his design; since it teaches us, that then only we may depend on God for our preservation, when we are in our appointed place. No security is promised to those who are out of the way.

In this instance likewise we behold the admirable wisdom of our Lord, wresting the scripture out of the hands of his adversary, and confounding him with it. He replied, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God *." We are forbidden, then, to prescribe unto God what evidence he shall afford us, or to presume upon his care over us in that line of conduct, which he has not authorized. Yet to this very sin the followers of Christ are generally urged. Indeed, they are in danger from the two opposite extremes. For, if Satan be baffled in one point, he will try another; and therefore it will be an advantage to be apprized of his devices. What? though you be the children of God, and can maintain your hope in him: consider well, where you venture to set your foot. He is not bound by any promise to comply with your vain wishes, or to preserve you, where your proper duty does not call you. Dare not, then, however you may be solicited, to deviate from

ending, therefore, to have the absolute disposal of
 thing in his own hands, he promised to deliver
 the whole power and magnificence to Jesus, on
 tion of receiving an act of adoration from him.
 daring the scheme! how detestable the falshood,
 supported it!

The design of Satan is the same in all his assaults,
 he does not always avow or discover it. "Fall
 , and worship me," is in effect the meaning of
 temptation. And, ah! how frequently does
 succeed! He still continues to offer "the lust of
 eyes and the pride of life;" and these are the
 which thousands seize with eagerness to their
 ruin. "All this," says he, "will I give
 ," and thus he persuades men to barter away
 consciences, and to forsake God and his truth,
 the prospect of worldly advantages. But we
 d remind you, while you listen to such sollicita-
 , that you will probably be disappointed. He,
 whom you hearken, is a deceiver and a liar. It is
 in his power to bestow what he promises, and
 you desire to obtain. Or, if your largest wishes
 be gratified, your possessions would still be poor
 contemptible.

At length the holy resentment of Jesus was roused;
 while he let the tempter know that he under-
 stood his real character, he rejected his proposal with
 rence: "Get thee behind me, Satan; for it is
 en, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and
 only thou shalt serve*." We learn, then, how
 to repel the attacks of our enemy. We must possess
 the most firmness of opposition, and despise every
 of temporal advantage, which might induce us
 to part from our God. We must determine to
 have no reverence or obedience to any but Him; and


* Deut. vi. 13.

then

then we shall be proof against all the enticements of the world.

The conflict was ended, and the victory obtained. Satan departed, yet only "for a season," intending on some other occasion to renew the assault: and immediately a company of holy Angels came to minister to the relief of Jesus, and to rejoice with him on his glorious triumph.

How replete with instruction is this history! It affords a striking representation of the power, the malice, and the subtilty of our adversary, and the nature of that warfare, to which we are called. You, who follow Christ, must expect to be conformed to him in his temptations. An opposition of the very same nature will be made against you. Do not stagger in your minds, when you come into the conflict; nor decline the combat, though most severe, but arm yourselves for it. "Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you *," as he did from Jesus. For this purpose, besides the other parts of the Christian's armour, "take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God †." Study, how you may use this weapon to the best advantage; that you may be able to answer and repel



of victory to his people. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly *." Angels are anxiously observing your conduct. In the view of such witnesses, "stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong †," and soon they will congratulate you, on having obtained a glorious and everlasting conquest.

But are not many unacquainted with this spiritual warfare? If you make no resistance, but willingly comply with the sollicitations of Satan, you may escape some of the difficulties which the Christian soldier meets with. All may seem to be peace with you: but the reason is, the prince of darkness holds his palace in your hearts, and, while you allow him the possession, he will not disturb you. But you are no other than his vassals, "led captive by him at his will." We entreat you to arise, and assert your liberty: for to what tremendous consequences will a continuance in your present bondage lead you! Cry mightily to God, that he would rescue you from it, and thus "deliver you from the power of darkness, and translate you into the kingdom of his dear Son ‡."

* Rom. xvi. 20.

† 1 Cor. xvi. 13.


‡ Col. i. 13.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 4.

Jesus attended on John's ministry—called certain disciples—went to a marriage-feast at Cana, where he turned water into wine—celebrated the passover at Jerusalem—purged the temple—did not trust himself with some professed converts.

It may be difficult to assign to the various incidents in the history of Jesus their proper time and place; nor is it of any consequence to our plan. We shall touch upon the principal of them, and nearly according to the order, wherein they occurred, as far as that can be ascertained. But we attend not to any critical inquiries, for settling the chronology. Let us be most anxious, while we are studying the character of the Saviour, that we may know him, as



all the wonders he performed, and that fulness of evidence, by which he proved his mission and divinity, he would have been universally despised and rejected, had not an Almighty influence been exerted, by which the hearts of some were inclined to receive and follow him *. He might have commanded the services of more than twelve legions of Angels; and therefore his condescension was the more remarkable, in selecting a few obscure persons for his intimate associates and principal agents.

After his temptation, it should seem that he took up his abode for some time, near to the place where John was baptizing, probably with the view of attending upon his ministry; for it is evident that he appeared among his audience one day after another. Thus he became more publicly known, while John attested the miracle, which had been wrought at his baptism, and repeatedly directed the regard of his hearers to him, declaring his high character and office, as the propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of a guilty world †.

This occurred before Jesus had begun to preach, or had attached so much as a single follower to himself. But such a testimony soon engaged two of John's disciples, Andrew the brother of Peter, and probably John the Evangelist (who frequently forbears to mention his own name) to fix their regard on so extraordinary a person.—In the same manner, many have been induced to seek the acquaintance of the Saviour, through the report of others, especially through the information of those who have truly beheld his glory. Nor do any seek in vain. He observes the first motions of their hearts, when they sincerely turn to him, and affords them the most gracious encouragement. He will even prevent their enquiries, by revealing himself to them; as he d

* Newton's Eccles. Review, p. 60. † John i. 23.

the case before us. He marked the attention of the disciples, who were watching his steps; with great condescension he invited them to accompany him home, and admitted them to a free and delightful intercourse with himself.

And who, that have obtained the knowledge of Jesus, will not burn with a desire to recommend him to the notice and esteem of their friends? Have we not a brother or a sister, whom, through a plain and faithful testimony of our experience, we may introduce to the Saviour? Thus it was, by the declarations and influence of Andrew, that Peter was brought to him, and immediately taken into his service, under a new and significant name. Every visitant met with a kind reception from him; nor will any at this time be rejected, who sincerely apply to him.

But all his disciples do not come to him in the same way. Some, we have observed, owe their knowledge of him, and their first good impressions, to their connections in life; while others are called, not through any previous acquaintance with religious persons, but by an immediate, and, as it were, vi-

that he feels the warmest affections of gratitude, love, and zeal, and hastens to spread the influence around him. Philip was unable to contain the rapturous delight, now produced in his soul, and withing others to be as happy as himself, he took the first opportunity of telling his friend Nathanael, that he had found the promised Messiah.

Here a different character is presented to us. Nathanael, probably, as a sincere worshipper of God, like many others, "waited for the consolation of Israel;" but, though an upright man and under the best impressions, he was still kept back by the strength of popular prejudice. He could not admit, that any good thing, much less so illustrious a person as the Saviour of the world, could arise from the infamous town of Nazareth. He was induced, however, by the mild exhortation and advice of Philip, to examine and judge for himself. On this occasion we admire the compassion and tenderness of Jesus to the weakness and folly of those, who truly desire to know him. Upon Nathanael's first approach, so far from upbraiding him with his ignorant and rash conclusions, he expressed the warmest approbation of his integrity, and proposed him to the notice of others, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" Such a declaration from one, whom he had considered as an entire stranger, could not but astonish Nathanael: and, being referred to a particular place of retirement, where probably he had been engaged in devout meditation and prayer, and where Jesus assured him that his eye was upon him, an irresistible conviction broke in upon his mind. At once he saw his whole heart exposed to view, he felt his doubts and scruples to be removed, and he acknowledged the presence and the glory of the divine Saviour: "Rabbi," said he, "thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel." This honest and bold profession of his faith obtained a gracious acceptance. Jesus replied, "Thou

port, by representing the most temperate convivial meetings as altogether profane, and on this ground refusing to mix with them. Our Lord's example teaches us, not indeed that we may at any time give into intemperance, or indulge a light and dissipated spirit, but that it may be right and expedient on certain occasions to use a greater freedom of conversation and intercourse with our friends, than our general habits or wishes may allow.

There was one circumstance, which added a peculiar lustre to this marriage, as it proved the means of displaying the miraculous power, and confirming the character, of Jesus. Probably, there was no affluence in the family, and, on account of this extraordinary guest, there might be a larger company, than had been expected; so that there was not a sufficiency of wine. The mother of Jesus represented to him the defect, hoping, and perhaps intimating, that he might supply it by his own divine agency. She met with a rebuke, indeed, for seeming to direct him in any supernatural operation, since, where the Godhead was to be exerted, he owed her no obedience, and could not be subjected to her control *. Yet, while he declared that the proper season for his interference

prevent their recourse to him; but no sooner do they discover a real desire to become his disciples, than he meets them with expressions of his kindness, admits them to a familiar intercourse with himself, and "fills them with joy and peace in believing."

Let us, then, make the application to ourselves, and ask, Are we "the called of Jesus Christ?" It is of little consequence, comparatively, by what particular means we have been affected; but are we indeed brought to the knowledge and love of his name? Do we possess that warmth of affection, that ardent zeal for him, which these young converts shewed? Do we, like them, bear witness, "We have found the Messiah?" And are we disposed to "follow the Lamb, whithersoever he goeth?"

Soon after our Lord's arrival in Galilee, he and the few disciples, whom he had now attached to himself, were invited to a marriage; probably the marriage of a relation, since his mother and some other of his kindred were there *. He was not inattentive to the calls of social life, nor wanting in any offices of respect and kindness to those, with whom he was nearly connected. He condescended, therefore, to be present upon that occasion, and to partake of the entertainment. Our church has inferred from this circumstance, that "he adorned and beautified the holy estate of matrimony." Doubtless, he testified his approbation of it: nor do his professed followers prove any real sanctity in themselves, or promote his cause among men, by despising that institution, which is declared to be "honourable in all †." The religion of Jesus does not require that moroseness and entire separation from society, into which some weak, but pious, persons have been led, through the fear of conforming to the world. They have made Christianity appear with a very gloomy and forbidding as-


* John ii. 1, &c.

† Heb. xiii. 4.

conduct, but only betray their own deformity upon a comparison of themselves with his perfect excellence.

The misrepresentation seems to have arisen from that address to the bridegroom; "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now." This, however, describes merely what was usual at entertainments, and has not any necessary reference to that particular occasion; or, admitting that it had, it would not prove, that any of the company then assembled were in a state of intoxication. The word itself, rendered *WELL DRUNK*, does not always mean excess; as it is applied by the best authors to cases, wherein temperance was observed.

This miracle, like all the rest, which Jesus wrought, was designed to promote the most benevolent and useful purposes. That large increase of wine was a recompence to the master of the house for his kindness and hospitality, and might be considered as a token, that they, who receive Jesus and his disciples, shall not lose their reward. It was evidently calculated to display his high character in a more illustrious manner, than had been done before; for he then



rich wine to a refined taste. In general too, he reserves "the good wine" till the last: he communicates much happiness to his people from the first, but the end will be most glorious indeed. With respect, therefore, both to his providence and his grace, we rejoice in his all-sufficient care and power.

Soon afterwards he went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the passover, a festival of peculiar importance among the Jews, at which the attendance of all their males was required. This particular observance does not obtain with us; but are not we under indispensable obligations to wait upon God in the public means which he hath appointed? Let us learn from Jesus, then, to pay an exact and punctual regard to all the sacred ordinances.

Immediately upon his arrival at Jerusalem, he repaired to the temple, where a remarkable transaction occurred. Among other profanations of that holy place, the outward court was grossly violated, probably through the covetousness of the priests; for an open market was held in it, to the disturbance of devout worshippers. The service of God might be urged in excuse for it, as the people were here accommodated with their respective offerings. But Jesus felt a pious indignation at the shameful abuse, and set himself to reform it. "When he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove out of the temple" the profane traders, "and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise." Such an interference of a person, who possessed no human authority, was singular indeed! It amounted to no less than a full declaration of his prophetic character, and of his peculiar relation to God. In this view it will appear proper and consistent, like many of those significant actions of the old prophets, by which as the messeng

of Heaven they instructed and admonished the people *.

So uncommon an exertion could not but excite the public notice. His disciples beheld it with surprise, but they saw in it the completion of an ancient scripture, which they considered as descriptive of that very spirit, by which he was then actuated: "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up †." For, regardless of his own safety, he was concerned only for the glory of God in the due administration of his service. Must we not perceive and admire the power, as well as the zeal, of our Lord in this extraordinary occurrence? For whence was it, that those, who were occupied in the merchandise, submitted without opposition to one, of so low a rank and estimation in life? They must, doubtless, have felt not merely a consciousness of guilt, but a secret and awful dread of their reprobator: and this effect we cannot but ascribe to a supernatural impression upon their minds. By the very same influence, the persons, who afterwards came to apprehend him, notwithstanding their malice and their fierceness, were struck to the ground before him.

Some however among the Jews called him to account for this proceeding, and demanded a proof of his divine commission. The very action, which he had performed, was a strong evidence; but probably they wished to find fault, rather than know the truth. He therefore of giving them any direct answer, he replied, as he usually did to cavillers, in a parabolical manner. "Destroy this temple," said he, "and in three days I will raise it up." This they understood not; but afterwards, in a perverted sense, they made it the ground of a charge against him †. It was meant as a prophecy of his own resurrection, which

xix. xxvii. Ezek. iv. xii. Zech. xi.

† Mark xiv. 58.

is "an infallible proof" of his divine character; and in that view it was recollected by his disciples, to the increase and confirmation of their faith. Thus it frequently happens, that the very same scriptures, and the very same doctrines, which are an offence and a stumbling block to some, are to others the source of joy and consolation. Let us look well, in all our researches, to the dispositions of our hearts.

While we profess to be satisfied, that Jesus should purge the temple at Jerusalem from profane attendants, let us ask, Are we such worshippers, as he will approve? Is there no violation of the house of God among ourselves; no irreverence, which requires reformation? Is that holy place never turned into "a house of merchandise?" Are our minds never employed there, in settling temporal accounts, and in various schemes of trade, as if we were in the midst of a market? What, then, would Jesus say, if he were to appear amongst us? And let us remember, that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him, with whom we have to do *." We should endeavour, therefore, to leave the cares of the world at a distance, "that we may attend upon the Lord without distraction †." "Take these things hence," for they are most unsuitable to his sacred courts.


Jesus, we have seen, publicly asserted his high character at Jerusalem, and he had many adversaries: but did he gain no converts? He spake with an efficacy, which silenced at least, if it did not convince, his opposers: but did any truly receive him? Many were so struck with his miracles, (though these are not recorded) that they acknowledged him to be the Messiah, and professed to believe in his name. But they were such, as our Lord perceived were not to be depended on. There was something unsound, or shamefully defective in them. Either they were

* Heb. iv. 13.

† 1 Cor. vii. 35.

false-hearted, with declarations of faith, love, and zeal, waiting only for an opportunity to betray him to his enemies; or else, if sincere, they possessed not a proper firmness and courage, and dared not to stand forth in defence of his cause. Even a friend, who is afraid or ashamed to espouse your interests, is not entitled to your confidence. You will not think yourselves safe in his hands; and therefore, from a proper regard to your own welfare and security, you will be backward to trust him. Such prudence is indispensably necessary, in religious as well as in temporal concerns. A little experience will teach you not implicitly to rely on every professor. You ought not, indeed, to suspect hypocrisy in all, because you may have found it in some; for a jealous temper is inconsistent with Christian love. But a cautious reserve and circumspection towards many of those, who discover an attachment to the gospel, are highly expedient to protect you from various snares. This you will learn from Jesus, when "he did not commit himself unto them," who are said to have "believed in his name."

We must not overlook the reason assigned for his conduct: "he knew all men, and needed not that any



There is no creature "that is not manifest in his fight." If there be a Judas, a mere pretender to sanctity, "a ravening wolf coming in sheep's clothing," let him tremble at the thought, that the eye of Jesus penetrates through all his disguises. Or, if you want courage publicly to avow your real sentiments of regard for the Gospel, so that you might easily be tempted to betray it; is not this a meanness and inconsistency, of which you ought to be ashamed before him?

The general case is; many among ourselves are called Christians, and say that they believe the scriptures, because by the favour of Providence they were born and educated in a Christian land, and they are content to take up with the religion of their fathers and their country. Is not this the sole reason, why some are not Pagans or Mahometans? But is this the faith, which Jesus will approve? No: he will not be imposed upon by an empty form of words, with which the heart does not accord. We pray, therefore, not only that we may "have a name to live," but possess "the faith of the operation of God," whereby, being vitally united to Christ, and abiding in him, we shall produce the fruits of righteousness, to the glory and praise of God. Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 5.

Jesus, consulted by Nicodemus, declared to him the nature and necessity of regeneration—the operation of the Holy Spirit—the appointed method of deliverance from condemnation—and the different states and characters of those to whom the gospel is sent.

WE have not yet seen any promising appearance of success, upon the first opening of our Lord's ministry at Jerusalem. His strenuous exertions in visiting the temple could not but excite a commotion through the city; and, though his claims were generally regarded, many were at least convinced of his divine mission by the miracles which he wrought. Very few of higher station gave any serious attention to him; as that contemptuous question in


fore to conceal it from public notice, and preserve his reputation, he went in the dark. But even allowing, that he was under a very improper influence of the fear of man, he was not thereby prevented from applying to this divine Instructor for information in the truth. Our Lord, who never rejected or discouraged any sincere enquirer, overlooking or not upbraiding him for his weakness, received him kindly, and without reserve declared to him the most important mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. He constantly spoke with a regard to the circumstances and dispositions of his audience, and opened the Gospel, more or less as they could bear it. Here was no scornful, captious disputant, but an humble, teachable scholar, seeking direction in the way of righteousness. Here, therefore, we shall find, without a few verses, a more clear and explicit representation of the great system of Christianity, than in any other passage, of equal compass, throughout the four Evangelists. It is recorded for our benefit, and every particle of it concerns each of us as much as it did Nicodemus himself. May we, like him, be willing to sit at the feet of Jesus, and hear his words, "which are able to make us wise unto salvation!"

How gracious and condescending was our Redeemer, in giving his time and his company for the instruction of an individual! The salvation of one soul is inconceivably more important than all the momentous affairs of mightiest empires, which employ the councils and the armies of princes. The minister of Christ, therefore, who like his Master is attending to the spiritual welfare even of a single person, has a more honourable post, and a better object in view, than the statesman or the hero, on whom the eyes of thousands are fixed.

The main subjects of the conference with Nicodemus may be reduced to four:

I. The nature and necessity of regeneration. This being the first thing which our Lord insisted on, we conclude that the doctrine lies at the very foundation of Christianity. "We know," said Nicodemus, "that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Such an address, acknowledging that Jesus was a prophet divinely commissioned, implied a desire of receiving instruction from him. Without any preface or apology, the Saviour began to explain the religion which he came to set up, and with peculiar solemnity declared an entire renovation of mind to be universally and indispensably requisite: "Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." As if he had said, "Dost thou believe, I am come from God? Then I, the faithful witness, assert this great truth. Dost thou enquire after the kingdom of God? Be assured, that none can be a member of it, who is not so totally transformed in his inward dispositions, as to become a new creature."

The Jews, and especially the Pharisees, boasted of the privileges of their birth, as the descendants of Abraham, and depended on their ceremonial



We are aware, that much pains are taken, not to deny our Lord's assertion, for that is express, but by subtilty and refinement to explain away its meaning. "To be born again," it is said, is only a strong eastern metaphor, which implies a renunciation of former errors, whether Jewish or Pagan, and a profession of Christianity. Let us try this interpretation by other passages. "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world *." And can such a conquest be ascribed to every one, who is called a Christian? We have continual and lamentable proof to the contrary. Equally absurd is the notion, that baptism constitutes regeneration. This, indeed, is the outward symbol of it; the water, which is applied to the body, fitly representing the operation of the Spirit in cleansing and purifying the soul. But "whosoever is born of God sinneth not †." And is this to be affirmed of every baptized person? Alas! how different is the case!

It is said, then, that "to be born again" is to reform the life, and pay an exact regard to the duties of morality. This, we grant, is highly expedient and necessary, and is an effect which will flow from regeneration, but it may be produced without it. For do not many "make the outside clean, whose inward part is full of wickedness ‡?" But the change, of which we speak, originates within, and is properly a renovation of the heart, in which corrupt and carnal affections are subdued, and holy and spiritual desires and tempers are implanted. It is, therefore, "a new creation," so that the man is, as it were, made over again, not as to his body, which suffers no alteration, but as to the dispositions of the mind: the depravity of his nature is rectified. The language is metaphorical, we allow; and who ever denied it? But some meaning was intended to be conveyed in

* 1 John v. 4.

† v. 28.

‡ Luke xi. 39.

the figure; and certain modern explanations have subtilized it into nothing. If Jesus designed only to inculcate an external reformation of conduct, and a regularity of morals, he used a most dark and intricate manner of expression, which perplexes rather than instructs. On this interpretation the metaphor is absurd, and all the solemnity of our Lord's address is mere trifling; for he has rendered that obscure, which in plain words would have been easily understood. Had this been the sense, Nicodemus would not have wondered; nor would Jesus have spoken of it as a mysterious doctrine.

But if we give the metaphor its full force, there is a beautiful consistency and grandeur in the passage. The Jewish ruler was puzzled, and betrayed his ignorance of spiritual things by the foolish questions he proposed. But many acute and learned men have likewise discovered great absurdity, by their objections to the truth here advanced; and even among such the renovation of the soul has been made a subject of profane scorn and ridicule. Jesus, however, replied only by repeating his former assertion, and declaring the necessity of receiving from the Holy

Why should I be disturbed about the matter, since my conduct is regular, my dealings fair, and my tempers amiable? You forget surely, that we all spring from the same corrupt original. The necessity of regeneration arises not from the peculiar circumstances, in which some men may be placed, or the degree of guilt they may have contracted, but from the degeneracy of our nature; which we all equally partake of, though different persons may discover it in different ways. Whether or no you can explain the mode, in which the effects of the fall are transmitted to us, whether or no it may accord with "philosophy and vain deceit," it is implied in our Lord's declaration, that, upon our first entrance into the world, we bring with us a carnal principle, which is opposite to God; and surely the universal condition of the human race is enough to prove, that there is not one, who does not feel a strong propensity to evil. This being granted, it follows at once, "We must be born again."

Without such a renewal of the mind, we shall remain in a state of alienation from God; and therefore we can have no part in the Messiah's kingdom of grace. For, that being a kingdom of righteousness, those only, who are changed into the divine likeness, can relish its holy and spiritual precepts. Neither can we enter into the kingdom of glory, so long as we continue under the influence of "the flesh," which is "enmity against God." We are thereby unfitted for maintaining any communion with God: he cannot admit us into his presence with such a disposition; nor can heaven itself afford us any enjoyment of happiness.

Of how great importance is it, then, to enquire, Am I born again? Are my tempers and affections sanctified? Let us not be satisfied with an external decency of behaviour, and an honourable conduct among men, which, though highly beneficial to

ject is mysterious; for there is a secret in it, which God hath thought proper to conceal from us; which, therefore, it is not needful, or perhaps possible, for us to know. Is this urged as an objection? Recollect, that the doctrine was represented to Nicodemus in this very light: for our Lord taught him to expect the same difficulties in grace, which occur in creation. "Marvel not, that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth, where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth." Thus the Spirit acts upon the human mind, in a sovereign and unintelligible manner: for we cannot direct or control his influence, and, though we clearly discern his effects, it would baffle all our understandings to trace out and explain the methods and the reasons of his operations. The subject may appear to be involved in so many and great difficulties, that our faith may stagger, and we may cry out with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" But if we sincerely desire instruction, he, who condescended to the ignorance and prejudices of that "master of Israel," will have compassion on our weakness, and "guide

ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven." He declared himself, then, to be in heaven, at the very moment he was conversing with Nicodemus upon earth. And if we admit this account, why not admit, what is not more unintelligible, the influence of the Spirit in regenerating and sanctifying the soul?

Jesus, having asserted his own authority as a divine and infallible witness of the things of God, proceeded to inform the Jewish ruler of the important benefits resulting from his mission: and hence we learn

III. The deliverance of sinners from condemnation through his gracious interposition. This doctrine should be considered in connection with that already established; for it is a part of the same glorious plan; and the one is as interesting to us as the other. The foundation of both is laid in man's fallen condition: for, if that could be disproved, the whole system would be shaken, and fall to the ground together. We are aware, that it is an offensive truth, but we are compelled by the strongest conviction to maintain, that "we were by nature the children of wrath *;" and it is clearly implied in our Lord's address to Nicodemus. For, while he opened the grand scheme of divine mercy, he evidently argued upon the supposition, that we are in a state of ruin, obnoxious to justice. Thus, when he asserted, "that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have eternal life;" did he not plainly intimate, that all, considered only in themselves, without the remedy proposed, are liable to perish for ever? From the very grace, offered through the Saviour, we infer, that the whole human species, without excepting a single instance, stand in need of redemption, and that there is such depravity in their nature, as without restraint

* Eph. ii. 3.

would infallibly lead them to final destruction. "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that through him the world might be saved." Now, would there have been the peculiar mercy of forbearing to execute the sentence of wrath, if we had not deserved it? or, of preventing the misery, into which we are not likely to fall? Let us enter deeply into this important truth, without which the Gospel will be no more to us than an entertaining story, which may furnish amusement, but will not procure our salvation. Are we affected, as we ought to be, with a conviction of our guilt and danger? What plea can we offer in arrest of judgment? Let us thankfully accept the proposal of deliverance, and urge with our offended God the mediation of his own Son.

The dispensation of grace is here fully opened to Nicodemus. God is represented as looking down in compassion on our ruined race, and, through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, effecting redemption. He interposed to rescue us, not through any view of merit in us, or the expectation of receiving a recompence; but we are taught to ascribe it to his own sovereign, free, and abundant mercy. "God so

by an act of indemnity, but in consideration of an adequate satisfaction. The righteous character of God is preserved and displayed, while his justice demands a sacrifice, and the Saviour undertakes to answer that demand. "Without shedding of blood is no remission *;" but "it is not possible, that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins †;" and therefore Jesus appeared for the very purpose of submitting to the death of the cross, that he might thereby "obtain eternal redemption for us." Thus he declared to Nicodemus, with a reference to the peculiar nature of his sufferings, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." His death, then, was not, as some vainly talk, an accidental matter; for he himself predicted it, and spake of it as the appointed means of procuring our pardon and salvation. It was the end of his incarnation, and the object which he kept in view, during the whole of his abode on earth.

We rejoice, that he hath made a full atonement by his blood, and therefore we can encourage every trembling penitent to "look unto him and be saved;" because he is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world ‡." If the Lord God should deal with you according to the strictness of his righteous law, your condemnation would be just and unavoidable. But the Gospel proclaims mercy to all, without exception, who feel and deplore their own wretchedness. Refuse not the gracious tender, for "whoever believeth—shall not perish, but have everlasting life." To suppose, that your application to Jesus will not succeed, is to cast a foul reproach upon him, as if he meant not what he said, or could not make good his own assurances. Give an unreserved credit to his word, and plead his name in a confi-

* Heb. ix. 22.

† 1. 4.

‡ Isa. xlv. 22. John i. 29.

dent expectation of obtaining reconciliation with your God.

Let us not trifle in a business of unspeakable importance, but remember that life and death are set before us. Let us therefore impartially examine ourselves, while we consider

IV. The different states and characters of those who receive, and of those who reject, the Saviour. Our Lord insisted on this subject in very solemn terms, at the close of the conference, probably that he might leave an awful impression upon the mind of Nicodemus, and that from him the other members of the Sanhedrim might be warned of their danger, if they should continue in unbelief. The ministers of Christ, in like manner, should admonish their hearers, and draw the same line of distinction between them.

Such as fix their entire regard on Jesus, and derive all their expectations of pardon and salvation from him, while they "abhor themselves and repent in dust and ashes," are immediately received into the divine favour, however numerous or aggravated their iniquities have been. The sentence of the law, to which they would otherwise have been exposed, has now lost all its force against them: the Lord himself looks on them

How different the case of unbelievers! Possibly, they may assume certain specious appearances of virtue, and pretend a high regard to morality; yet, not being impressed with any deep conviction of sin, they have no true value for the Saviour, and refuse him the submission which he requires. On that ground, they are liable to perish eternally. Since faith in the Son of God is the only appointed means of deliverance from condemnation, all, who are destitute of this principle, whatever else they may plead, remain under the sentence of death. Indeed, without any consideration of their contempt and rejection of the Gospel, as transgressors of the divine law they have incurred the threatened penalty: and who shall acquit them? Jesus Christ "was manifested to take away our sins;" but they can receive no benefit from that grace, which they despise. Nay, this very circumstance aggravates their guilt, and not only ensures their punishment, but will increase their misery for ever. "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." Unbelief, therefore, is an offence peculiarly heinous and more destructive than any other, as it effectually bars the door of mercy.

Various objections are urged against this representation. It is said, that, while faith is insisted on, as the only point of distinction, the grand criterion by which the states of men will be finally determined, we derogate from the holiness and justice of God, as if he paid no regard to their moral characters. We reply, that none possess any moral excellence in themselves, previous to their acceptance with God on the terms of the Gospel. But the grace of God produces a difference; and such a difference, as proves that he acts agreeably to his own perfections, both when he saves, and when he condemns. This is the description here given by our Lord himself.

Sinners

while many of the learned Doctors and devout Pharisees at Jerusalem perished in unbelief. We adore the mysterious dispensation, and acknowledge it to be wise and holy. "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight *." Our Lord himself declared to many, who were highly esteemed amongst men, "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you †." Let us beware, then, how we despise any, of the lowest character. "There are last, which shall be first ‡." Without reflecting on others, let us give diligence for ourselves, "to make our calling and election sure §."

Nor let the great duties of Christianity be forgotten or neglected, in an angry contention for some of its outward observances. We are called to "worship God in spirit and in truth." Let us unite, then, in this one grand concern, and lay aside our disputes about inferior matters even in religion. If others will maintain warm and furious debates concerning places or modes of worship, let us "exercise ourselves unto godliness." For, however attentive we may be to forms and ceremonies, so long as we do not love as brethren, and serve God with inward ardour of devotion, we have not known Jesus or

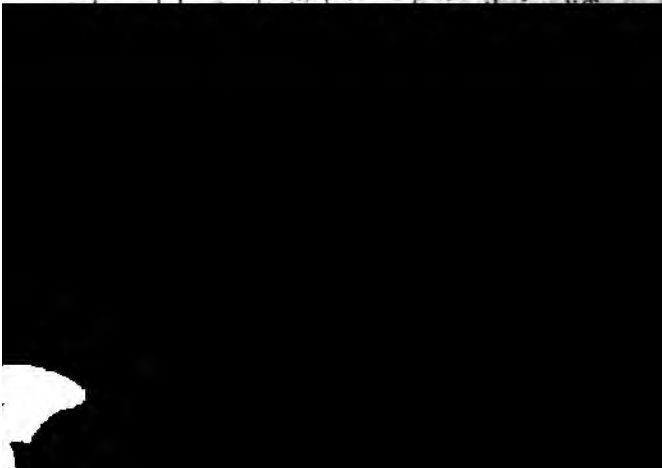
only on the grand object of his life, the saving of immortal souls, discovered no inclination to eat, but spoke of receiving a better entertainment, than what they were acquainted with. His meaning was misapprehended, as if he referred to nothing more than common food; for even the disciples were slow in their conception of spiritual things. To correct their mistake, he then declared more explicitly, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." Foreseeing that he should have a multitude of converts among the Samaritans, he rejoiced, and called on them also to exult in the prospect, encouraging them to labour in the work of the ministry, from the expectation of an abundant and a glorious harvest, which would issue in eternal life.

If we, like Jesus, are intent on the duties of our respective offices, we may be disposed, perhaps, on certain occasions, to neglect ourselves. It is not, indeed, incumbent on us to refuse our food, but the cause of God ought to be much dearer to us than our own necessary refreshment. Whatever be our vocation, an employment is assigned us by the providence of God, to which, therefore, we should attend, not with indifference, as if it were a secondary matter, but with the same eagerness and delight, which we feel in gratifying our senses, or ministering to the support of our bodies. But do not many live, merely that they may eat and drink; "whose God is their belly?" How few enquire, what is the will of God; what is the proper work, which he would have them to finish? Though we may know our duty, do we not betray an aversion to it, or weariness in it? Not so the sensualist, when furnished with the object suited to his appetite.

Much of our Lord's address to his disciples is particularly applicable to ministers, who are "labourers in God's husbandry," appointed of him to sow, and reap, and gather in the harvest. Though their most

strenuous exertions cannot ensure success, still they must be diligent and unwearied in cultivating the field, committed to them, ever looking unto him, "who giveth the increase." Nay, should no present fruit appear, it ought not to be concluded, that all their pains are ineffectual. Others may "enter into their labours," and discover the benefit in succeeding generations. The final harvest approaches, when they shall receive their respective wages, according to their fidelity, and they will exult, not only in their own salvation, but in seeing those, who, through their ministry, were rescued from sin and misery, and conducted to eternal glory. Then, what anthems of praise, what grateful acclamations will be heard from every mouth, while "he that soweth, and he that reapeth, shall rejoice together!"

They, who are anxious to save immortal souls, will be glad to observe the eagerness of the people, like that of the Samaritans, in their flocking after Christ; and, when multitudes are crowding to the house of God, they cannot help saying, Surely, this is like the white appearance of the fields, before the harvest. May their prayers and expectations be



ner; especially as that of many others may result from it! You, who are acquainted with Jesus, will recommend him to the notice and esteem of every one, with whom you are connected. You will persuade them to go with you to those ordinances, where he has discovered himself to you, and be ready to say, "Come, and see." Perhaps, they may be influenced from your report, to hear and examine, and may "obtain like precious faith with you."

Multitudes of the Samaritans, having credited the testimony of the woman, came forth from the city; and anxiously desirous to be confirmed in their dependence on the Saviour, by a personal intercourse with him, they solicited his continuance among them. Never did he refuse to gratify the wishes of such, as truly sought him, or to improve an opportunity of usefulness. He therefore yielded to their request, and abode two days, preaching among them with acceptance and success. So effectual was his word, that, though he appears not to have wrought any miracles there in attestation of his doctrine, many were convinced of his high character, and professed a sincere subjection to him.

We enquire, then, whether you have discovered the same eagerness, which the Samaritans did, to cultivate an acquaintance with Jesus. By the ministry of his servants in the Gospel, he himself draws near to you: but have you entreated his presence and continuance among you? We read of those, who besought him to depart out of their coasts: and something of a similar spirit is manifested among ourselves. But if you cordially desire him, he will not merely visit you in a transient manner; he will make his abode with you. Many have borne witness concerning him, and, like the woman, invited you to come and see for yourselves. Have you credited their report? Or on what testimony is your faith built? Does it rest entirely on the accounts of oth-

While the character of Jesus is exhibited, and indubitable proofs are brought, of his ability and readiness "to save unto the uttermost," is there one among us, who does not need, or desire, his assistance? Oh, the fatal blindness, and wretched stupidity of men! They neglect and despise the Saviour, to their own everlasting destruction. But you, whom affliction weighs down, or convictions of guilt terrify, behold the merciful Redeemer, and say, "Lord Jesus, to whom else can we apply? Thou only canst relieve us." He is still the same; and, though at a distance, he can instantly remove your complaints. His bodily presence is not necessary: He can speak the word, and your health shall be restored, your peace of mind established. Only believe his own gracious declarations: Go your way, expecting what he hath promised, and, according to your faith, so shall it be done unto you.



JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 7.

Jesus returned to Galilee—preached at Nazareth—miraculously escaped—dwelt at Capernaum—wrought various miracles—rose early—took a circuit round Galilee—called four disciples, after a miraculous draught of fishes.

AN inhabitant like this, the world never saw either before or since. Every view of him, during his abode on earth, not only furnishes instruction, but excites amazement. Each part of his life is a proof of his own assertion, and a striking comment on what he said, “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work*.” While we observe his activity, may we feel the force of his example, as an incentive to diligence! And as we perceive with what strength of evidence his high character and divine mission were displayed, may our faith and hope in him abound more and more!

Wherever he travelled, he appeared as no common person: both the doctrines he delivered, and the miracles he wrought, proved incontestably, that he was more than an ordinary prophet, and no less than the Saviour of the world, “God over all, blessed for ever.”

“ He returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee * :” being anointed to his office by the Holy Ghost, by the same unction he was directed, assisted, and comforted in the execution of it. “ The power of the Spirit” so accompanied his ministrations, as to carry a forcible conviction to the minds of others. “ There went a fame of him through all the region round about : and he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.” We shall not wonder, that he engaged the general attention of the neighbourhood, if we take a view of his conduct, and the circumstances which occurred, during his first circuit round Galilee.

“ He came to Nazareth,” which had been the place of his education, and his principal residence till he entered on his public ministry. He had declined going thither for some time after his visit at Jerusalem, and turned aside to the other parts of Galilee, on account of the prejudices, which his townsmen entertained against him. He himself testified, that “ a prophet hath no honour in his own country :”—those, who have known him in his childhood, or lived with him on terms of intimacy, in a lower situation, are seldom disposed to pay him reverence or atten-




his Gospel to be deterred from declaring the truth, though they have to combat with very strong prejudices. Necessity is laid upon them, and they must deliver their message, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.

Upon his arrival at Nazareth, "he went, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the Sabbath day." At Jerusalem only, in the temple, sacrifices were offered, and the Mosaic rites observed. But in almost every town and village synagogues were erected, like our parish churches, for public worship, for prayer and praise, for reading and expounding the scriptures. To them our Lord resorted, whenever he had opportunity; so that he may be proposed as a pattern of a diligent attendance on religious institutions. But do all his professed followers copy after him? Is it their custom, their habitual practice, to frequent the house of God? Is there any excuse to be urged for their neglect of it, which will bear examination? If Jesus thought it right to be a constant worshipper in Jewish assemblies, who shall despise or turn away from Christian ordinances? Who shall say, that he has no need of prayer and the word of God, since Jesus himself paid such regard to them?

One particular person presided over each of these places, called "the Ruler," who directed the service, and had a power of appointing any man, seriously disposed and properly qualified, to officiate in it. Accordingly, upon the appearance of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth, he was desired to read; and what was probably a lesson for the day, furnished him with a suitable text for his first sermon among them. The attention of the congregation was fixed upon him, while they heard him repeat those remarkable words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor: he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of
sight

sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord*." The passage confessedly described the office of their expected Messiah; and, while they were anxious to know what application he would make of it, he solemnly declared that it was fulfilled in himself.

The completion of the prophecy affords strong consolation to us. We are to regard Jesus, as he is here exhibited, the anointed of God, sent from above, bringing with him the gracious offers of pardon for the guilty, peace for the miserable, and salvation for those, "who are ready to perish." In this representation the sinful, depraved, and helpless condition of man is clearly implied; and the blessings of redemption are freely proposed to the acceptance of all, who feel and lament the melancholy truth. If we pride ourselves on any fancied goodness or ability of our own, we grossly mistake our case, we overlook the grand peculiarities of the Gospel, nor can we receive those important benefits, which Jesus came to bestow. He gives wisdom to the ignorant, righteousness to the guilty, sanctification to the impure, and redemption to the miserable captive. But he



the dread of God's displeasure, you cry out, "Thy rebuke hath broken my heart:" Jesus is commissioned to administer suitable and adequate relief. He will "bind up your wounds, pouring in oil and wine:" and he will continue his kind attentions to you, till the cure be perfected. It is his peculiar office "to heal the broken-hearted."

Do you fear, that the sentence of condemnation is gone forth against you, and that you are detained as "prisoners" in the hands of divine justice? Such, indeed, is your natural state; nor is there any escape possible, but by the gracious interposition of Jesus. He grants "deliverance to the captives," cancels the sentence, and proclaims a full forgiveness. Or, do you bewail your spiritual bondage, under the oppression of those enemies, to whom you have long been subject, and who are too strong for you? On this account also, we would direct your regard to Jesus, who alone can rescue you from this miserable servitude. He calls upon you to assert your freedom: for "he says to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves *."

You are distressed, perhaps, by your extreme ignorance in divine things, and lament that all appears darkness and confusion to your minds. It may be, that you had conceived highly of your own discernment; but now you are free to confess, that you are spiritually "blind." It is a happy change. While you said, "We see," you would have spurned at the proposal of any one, to open your eyes. Now you cannot but welcome the Saviour, who "recovers the sight;" and exhorts you to "anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see †."

Yet, after various struggles and painful conflicts, your distress may probably increase, if no sensible deliverance be wrought for you; and every attempt to

* Isa. xlix. 9.

† Rev. iii. 18.

gain your liberty may make your chains the more galling and insupportable. You are, therefore, fitly described, as being "bruised" with your fetters. But, though you are heavily oppressed, and unable to extricate yourselves, your case is not desperate. Jesus appears with a powerful arm, which shall be exerted in your behalf. He not only gives you permission to go forth, but he himself will "break your bands in sunder," release you from the bondage of the world, the flesh, and the Devil, and "make you free indeed *."

Should the desponding fear arise, We have sinned so long and so presumptuously, that mercy cannot now be extended to us; the time of grace may be expired: this great Prophet of our God will quiet your apprehensions, while he "preaches the acceptable year of the Lord." In his name we can assure you, that, if you return to your offended God, you shall all find a favourable reception. He waits to pardon and to bless you. This is the happy season, prefigured by the ancient jubilee: the proclamation of the Gospel, like the joyful sound of the trumpet among the Israelites, declares, that your debt is cancelled, the appointed hour of your enlargement is

cavil at the meanness of his birth and extraction. He knew what was in their hearts, and addressed himself, probably, with a particular reference to their very thoughts concerning him. He gave them to understand, that he was aware of their objections to his family and education, and that he expected they would demand from him the same miraculous operations, as he had wrought at Capernaum. But he warned them not to reject the evidence, offered to themselves, while he maintained, that God, as a sovereign Arbitrator, is not accountable to any one; and that he has a right to dispense his favours, as he pleases. Accordingly, many perish, who are placed in the most advantageous circumstances; and mercy is extended to others at a distance, whom we should not have thought of. Thus he observed to them, that a poor Gentile widow was relieved by Elijah, while many widows in Israel were left to suffer all the severities of the famine:—a stranger and an enemy to Israel was cured of his leprosy by Elisha, though the same dreadful disease continued to prey upon many others, in the very country and under the immediate notice of the prophet. He intimated, then, that the grace of the Gospel might be sent to some remote kingdom, even among the heathens, and that they themselves might never experience the blessing, but be destroyed through their unbelief.

This was more than they could bear: “they were filled with wrath:” and the violence of their conduct soon discovered the enmity of their hearts. Without regard to the day, the place, or the service, they rose up in the utmost confusion; and, with murderous rage having thrust him out of their city, they were on the very point of casting him down from a high precipice. But his hour was not yet come: schemes could prevail to take away his life, & he was pleased to resign it: and the power was exerted, to comfort

their prisoner escaped out of their hands, before they were aware.

Ah! foolish people and unwise, who so rashly rejected the Saviour! We might be constrained to weep over their sad case: but it will become us rather to be anxiously concerned for ourselves. What reception does Jesus meet with amongst us? His Gospel excites the admiration of many, who know no more of it than the Nazarenes. They soon begin to cavil, and urge a variety of objections. It is in vain to answer: nay, perhaps, the most temperate reply may increase their violence; nor would it be surprising, if the ministers of Christ, like their Lord and Master, should be driven away with contempt and abhorrence. Ah! what availed it to live at Nazareth, to be near to Jesus, to observe his holy conduct, and hear his gracious words? Or what avails it now, to be placed within the notice of the most excellent persons, and under the most lively ordinances of religion? Even in such circumstances, you may feel a vehement hatred of the truth. But beware: whilst you endeavour to get rid of that, which gives you pain, you are rejecting your best mercies, and

work, but vigorously pursued it in another. The same line of conduct he prescribed to his Apostles; "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another *." Thus, also, should his ministers in every age be zealous, diligent, and persevering in their exertions for the benefit of souls. Instead of being discouraged by opposition, they should renew their endeavours; and, though prevented from doing it among certain persons, whose welfare they anxiously desire, in different situations they may be more successful.

What reception, then, did our Lord meet with at Capernaum? There were the most favourable and promising appearances: "They were astonished at his doctrine; for his word was with power." It is probable, that much and important good was effected: for we are told, that upon this occasion was fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them, which sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up †." Happy, happy people, who gladly received, what others contemptuously rejected;—who knew the time of their visitation, and upon whom "the Sun of righteousness" shone with such abundant splendour! Let us bless God, that our land also, which was once "the region and shadow of death," hath seen a great light, and that we now enjoy the meridian lustre of a Gospel day. Let us not be satisfied, however, to live in a Christian country, but be solicitous to experience the saving efficacy of divine truth, which is preached and professed among us. For this purpose, let us seriously attend to the doctrine of Christ. Though we have not his personal ministry, he still speaks to us by his faithful servants; and we are not afraid to assert, that in numerous instances, how weak and unworthy soever the instrument may

* Mat. x. 23.

† Mat. iv. 16. Isa. ix. 1, 2.

be, "his word is with power." O for the sacred influence of the Spirit, to apply it with energy to our hearts!

If we accompany our Lord, we shall perceive him displaying his high character by the various miracles, which he performed in that neighbourhood. He denied to the men of Nazareth, on account of their violent prejudices, those clear and strong evidences, which he afforded to the inhabitants of Capernaum. This, indeed, is agreeable to his usual procedure. To humble and sincere enquirers, he is pleased to give advantages and opportunities for attaining divine knowledge, which he justly and wisely withholds from others. Let us be faithful according to the light we have; and he will establish us more and more in the belief and love of the truth.

While Jesus was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum, a poor unhappy creature, under the influence of an evil spirit, miserably tormented, cried out aloud in the assembly, "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." This was a striking confession, perhaps unwillingly made by the Devil through an impression of terror, or else intended to bring the character of Christ into suspicion, as if he were really confederate with wicked demons, and so to lay a foundation for that objection, "He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils *."

To shew that he wanted not a testimony of such a kind, he rejected it with abhorrence, commanding the evil spirit to be silent and to come out of the man. Immediately at his word, the wretched sufferer, after being violently convulsed, was perfectly restored. No wonder, that a general amazement took place, when Jesus appeared so decidedly superior to the

* Mat. ix. 34.

powers of darkness, and that the fame of so singular a character was spread abroad through all the country.

The case of those, who were possessed, has been the subject of much enquiry and no little controversy. Many would explain away the influence of Satan, and even deny his very being, and therefore they represent this possession as nothing more than a common disease. But the descriptions, given in the New Testament, seem utterly inconsistent with such an interpretation; as the evil spirits were spoken to, and returned answers, distinct from the persons themselves, and several circumstances attending them can never be accounted for by any natural disorder whatever. Surely, there will be no inconsistency in allowing, according to the literal sense of the scriptures, that the devils were permitted to exercise an extraordinary power over the human body in many instances. Though we read or hear not of such cases in other periods of history, they might be suffered at that time, in order that the character of Christ, as our great Deliverer, and his complete victory and triumph over the prince of darkness, might be more clearly exhibited.

We perceive the malice of Satan, who is disposed to make use of every method, to harass and torment us; and we are thankful, that his rage is restrained. But, though he practise not such acts of violence, as formerly, upon the animal frame, does he therefore exert no influence, which is to be dreaded? Alas! he has yet so strong an ascendancy over the minds of men, that many "are taken captive by him at his will *." With a destructive efficacy, "he now worketh in the children of disobedience †." But we behold with love and admiration the divine Redeemer enter the lists against him, and obtain a complete

* 2 Tim. ii. 26.

† Eph. ii. 2.

conquest. He can bind "the strong man," and let the oppressed go free. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil *:" and, during the abode of Jesus upon earth, full scope was given for determining the conflict. We may, therefore, safely commit ourselves to the care of our exalted Leader, who delivers his people "from the power of darkness," and promises, "The prince of this world shall be cast out †." But let us not be satisfied with confessing, "Thou art the Holy One of God." This did the unclean spirit; and this may we also do, while confederate with Satan. Our system of faith, possibly, may be orthodox, and our hearts, at the same time, be filled with impure desires, and enslaved to vile affections. But the Gospel needs no such advocates; nor will Jesus accept our praises, or own us for his friends, whatever testimony we may bear for him in such a state.

Common diseases, likewise, were instantly removed by a touch or a word from him. The mother of Peter's wife being dangerously sick, the case was represented to him; nor was the application vain. With tender compassion he relieved the distress of the family, commanding the fever to depart, which threatened her life; and the cure was so perfect, that she was immediately able to wait upon the company. We regard him still as the great restorer of health; and his agency should be acknowledged in the efficacy of what are called natural means. Physicians and medicines should not be despised or neglected; but our dependence must be placed upon Him, and our supplications directed to Him, in every time of trouble.

case was too hard for him, nor was any humble
for his help ever rejected. "When the sun
ing, all they that had any sick with divers dis-

eases brought them unto him: and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them." This was done on the close of the same day, in which he had been preaching at Capernaum, when the Sabbath, according to their computation, was ended: for they professed such a high regard for that sacred season, that they thought it unlawful to carry, or even to heal, their sick, till the evening. Then also, in various other instances, he triumphed over the malice and power of Satan. For he cast out many devils, who all proclaimed him to be the Messiah: but he rejected their testimony, as before, that he might not seem to be acting in concert with them.

After the Sabbath had been thus spent, probably with much bodily fatigue, he rose very early the next morning, "a great while before day*," for the purposes of retirement, contemplation, and prayer. Blessed Jesus! how does thy example reprove our sloth and sensual indulgence! We allow the necessity of secret devotion; but how many excuses do we urge for the neglect of it! Our time is supposed to be so much wanted for other avocations, that we can find little or no leisure for this. But our Lord has taught us to deny ourselves the gratification of sleep, and rise early, that we may secure an opportunity of waiting upon God, and thus draw down from him renewed supplies of grace from day to day. Those, who are engaged in public life, have especial need of this caution: for a constant hurry of business, even in religious concerns, may distract and enervate the mind, unless its strength be repaired by frequent retirement.

But, though privacy should be ever so delightful to us, we must be content to have it interrupted. When the work of God calls us away, we must go with cheerfulness and vigour. "The people sought

* Mark i. 35,

him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them." It might have been agreeable to himself, to fix his abode amongst persons so much attached to him. But he resisted their solicitations; and, with eager desire to promote the end of his ministry, he said, "I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also; for therefore am I sent." Accompanied, then, by certain disciples, he took a circuit throughout Galilee, publishing the glad tidings of salvation, and confirming his doctrine by miraculous operations. In the course of that journey astonishing cures were performed, and such a general admiration excited, that immense multitudes from various and distant places resorted to him*. This was a pleasing sight: but we may fear, that, with respect to many, they saw, and heard, and wondered, without any real benefit to themselves. It is so now. Great numbers are drawn together by the faithful preaching of the Gospel; amongst whom there are those, who seem deeply affected by the things which are spoken; and yet, notwithstanding their professed approbation and zeal, we have no reason to conclude, that they feel the saving efficacy of the truth.

It has been observed, that our Lord was attended by certain disciples, and an account is given us, at the commencement of this journey, of the manner in which four of them, viz. Peter and Andrew, James and John, were called to this attendance†. The two former, at least, had been attached to his service before, though not such constant followers, as to forsake their common employments. But now, as he travelled much, their presence and assistance upon all occasions became more necessary; and it was decided, that, by accompanying him throughout his journey, they themselves should be gradually prepared

for the work. They were all of one occupation, and that not of high estimation in the world, being plain fishermen. Jesus sought not his Apostles out of the palaces of kings, or the schools of philosophers: but, while he chose the poor and the unlearned, it more evidently appeared, that "the excellency of the power" in their preaching "was of God, and not of men."

When he addressed himself to them, he found them diligently engaged in their business: and we also are taught to expect his favourable notice, though our time and attention be much taken up with the lowliest offices of life. The people in Galilee with great eagerness pressed after him to hear his instructions, not merely in the synagogues, but wherever he went. On one occasion, therefore, we perceive him delivering his doctrines to them by the sea shore, and out of Peter's vessel.

When this was done, that he might encourage Peter and his three companions the more cheerfully to follow him, by affording them a sort of typical representation of the wonderful effects, which should be produced by their ministry, he desired them to launch into the deep, and let down their nets. Peter replied, that they had laboured all night in vain, but that animated by his direction they would make another attempt. He, that gave the word, commanded success, and proved that he was Lord of the whole creation; for, through his influence, an immense multitude of fishes were brought to the net and taken up, so as to fill them all with amazement. The presence of the God of nature was acknowledged; and Peter in particular, overwhelmed with confusion and terror, under a sense of his unworthiness and unfitness to stand before such an exalted Personage, cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." The Saviour, however, instantly dispersed his fears, and then explained the miracle, as exhibiting an event of *far greater consequence*, the success of

he remaining Jews that time he should "catch men."

Now they could not believe or perceive themselves worthy to be chosen for what had they to dread? They were full of amazement, they forsook their worldly occupations and conversations, no longer anxious about their sons, their kindred, or their friends; and, at his appointment, they all became his constant followers. Now did their Lord diminish the hopes, which he gave them. "When these sanctified Jews were converted to their ministry on the day of Pentecost, they preached more of a *kingdom* than of a *church* man;" and a far more stupendous miracle was wrought, than this draught of fishes.

SHALL NOT THE KING crucify and abuse the divine power of Jesus? Shall he us obey. "Depart from me, O Lord!" But answer. "Come, Lord, to my help, for I am a *king* man. Come, and subdue, as well as pardon mine iniquity, that I perish not, as I deserve!"—But are we willing to follow Christ? And do we resolve to sacrifice all, though not exactly as the Apostles did, yet fully and deliberately to give up and to suffer, whatever he may require? Otherwise, we cannot be his disciples. O may that same energy, which so disposed their minds, be exerted upon us! Especially, may the ministers of Christ, in our day, *obey his call!* May they be furnished for their office, by an abundant measure of faith, love, and zeal, and so taught to cast the net of the Gospel, that they also may catch men, in bringing them to the knowledge and the service of their divine Master! Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 8.

The first part of our Lord's sermon on the mount, containing the eight beatitudes.

IF we consider, what manner of person Jesus was, how uncommon the works he performed, and the instructions he delivered, we shall not be surprised, that immense multitudes flocked to him from every quarter. We shall rather wonder, that they were not more deeply affected by what they saw and heard, and that so few in comparison became sincere converts and disciples. During his abode in Galilee, when he perceived himself surrounded by a numerous assembly, with generous compassion for their souls he seized the opportunity, to preach a sermon of peculiar extent and importance, in which he declared, more publicly and expressly than he had done before, the purposes of his coming, and explained more clearly the spiritual nature of his kingdom *. "He went up into a mountain," probably that his voice might reach to a greater distance, and, according to the custom of the Jewish teachers, he sat down, as at other times, according to the same custom, he stood up to read. His disciples were his near attendants, and to them in a more immediate manner he directed some parts of his discourse, whilst many things concerned the multitudes at large. With peculiar solemnity

* Mat. v. 1, &c.

nity "he opened his mouth, and taught them" with such wisdom and majesty as astonished them all.

This sermon of our Lord upon the mount is a rich and invaluable treasure, containing instructions of the highest moment. We do not say, that it is an explicit and entire declaration of the Gospel method of salvation; for the season was not then come for the wondrous plan to be as fully disclosed, as it afterwards was. During the continuance of Jesus upon earth, before he had finished the mystery of redemption by the sacrifice of himself, he thought it not proper to insist, very minutely or very publicly, on the nature and reasons of his death, or on the spiritual benefits to be received through faith in his blood. On these subjects, indeed, he was not wholly silent, but he left them to be further opened to the Apostles themselves by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, that they might communicate them to the world, after the grand event had taken place. We are, therefore, to look for a more perfect summary and clearer account of evangelical doctrines in the apostolical writings, than in the history of our Lord's life.—Some, indeed, have asserted, that nothing more need be preached to the people, than what the sermon on the mount con-

view he endeavoured to correct the false notions they had imbibed concerning his kingdom, and to impress upon their minds a deeper sense of spiritual and eternal things. He spoke, therefore, in such a manner, as to display the dignity of his own character, and to shew the necessity of their submission to him. For he pronounced benedictions, as being invested with supreme authority, interpreted the divine law, not as a common expounder, but as the sovereign Law-giver, with "I SAY UNTO YOU," and represented the grand decisions of the universal judgment as depending upon himself, everlasting life or everlasting misery being awarded to the sons of men according to his irreversible sentence.

May we listen with reverence and profound attention to this glorious Prophet, and, while we meditate on his word, may we learn his will, and bow with unfeigned subjection to his command!

In the first part of his sermon, he appears like the great High Priest, blessing his people. He speaks, not as from mount Sinai with thunderings and lightnings, but with invitations and promises of mercy. He had been already preaching, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand;" and of this his followers entertained very gross conceptions, expecting that he would erect a temporal dominion with outward pomp and splendour, and exalt them to places of power and dignity. But now he strikes at the root of their errors, shewing them that his kingdom is of a spiritual nature: and, after describing the tempers and blessedness of those, who are the true members of it, contrary to their preconceived ideas, he represents it as indispensably necessary, that they should be distinguished by a peculiar holiness.

Here are eight different parts of the Christian character delineated; to each of which a promise is annexed, and on each a blessing pronounced. These are not to be separated, as if the Christian might

possess no more than one of them; for they are united in the man of God, and the combination of the whole constitutes his excellency. There is also a beautiful connection between them, and one may be considered as leading to another.

1. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Though the Lord pays no regard to us for our outward condition, since "he accepteth no man's person," yet those, who are "rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom," are generally found among "the poor of this world *;" and it must be allowed, that their situation exposes them to the fewest temptations. But "the haughtiness of men" of every rank, whether poor or rich, "shall be bowed down †:" for those only can receive the salvation of the Gospel, who are sensible of their spiritual indigence. They feel and confess, that they are destitute of every thing truly valuable before God; and, having no possessions to boast of, they are willing to come as needy supplicants, that they may be relieved out of the inexhaustible fulness of Jesus. A knowledge of themselves has taught them, that they have neither wisdom, righteousness, nor strength, and, under such a conviction, they may conclude against themselves as unfit objects for the notice of a holy God. But Jesus speaks to their case, and declares, not only that they may hope for mercy, but that they have already obtained an earnest of it. These "are blessed." The world may pity and despise them; but thus saith the Lord, who dwelleth in heaven, "To these men will I look ‡:" nay, he has begun to manifest his favour to them. The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of heaven." Of such only the Church of Christ below consist, and from the Church above replenished. None others are ever united to Jesus, and partake of his grace; these alone shall reign with him for ever: he hath

* James

† Isa. li. 26;

‡ lvi. 2.

reserved

reserved for them "a crown of glory," and a "kingdom that cannot be moved."

2. "Blessed are they that mourn." Unfeigned and deep distress cannot but follow from a real poverty of spirit. Those, therefore, who know themselves, will be "mourners in Zion." How many causes of sorrow do they discover! Their tears flow down for the sake of others, when they behold the sin and misery, which are in the world. But, being in the first place concerned for themselves, they weep before God with sincere contrition, not so much for the present inconveniences or future dangers, to which their iniquities may expose them, as for the heinousness of their conduct against that great and gracious Being, who has the strongest claims upon them for their gratitude, love, and service. They may be derided for their dejection of mind, as if they were lost to all happiness: but it is otherwise; "They, that sow in tears, shall reap in joy *." It is a peculiar mercy to be brought into this very state: for now it appears, that the Lord hath a tender regard to them. He "hath begun a good work in them," the effect of which, though painful for the present, will be "quietness and assurance for ever †." The lips of truth declare, "they shall be comforted." Perhaps they fear, "they shall lie down in sorrow;" but, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, "the Comforter," they shall receive strong consolation. Through a discovery of the power and grace of Jesus, they shall be "filled with all joy and peace in believing:" and soon shall every tear be wiped from their eyes, when they shall be admitted to complete and uninterrupted happiness in heaven.

3. "Blessed are the meek." Wherever there is a proper apprehension of the nature of sin, a total renovation takes place in the affections of the mind.

* Psal. cxxvi. 5.

† Isa. xxxii. 17.

"The lofty looks of man are humbled," and the fierceness of his temper is restrained. Such is the origin of true spiritual meekness, which will produce an humble deportment towards God and man. Those, who are partakers of this grace, will bow down with submission to the sovereign will of God, without murmuring or cavilling at his appointments or commands, and, sensible of their own ignorance, will implore and obey his guidance. With respect to their fellow creatures, they will not be forward or assuming, but "take the lowest room;"—not peevish or self-willed, but kind and gentle;—not easily provoked, or implacable under injuries, but they will return good for evil, blessing for cursing. The world in general are so opposite, that these persons may, probably, be scorned as men of mean and little minds, destitute of all proper firmness and dignity. But the grace of God is upon them, for he hath implanted this disposition in them, and he will testify his approbation of it. They are happy; and none others have any true enjoyment; for all those affections, contrary to meekness, such as pride, anger, cruelty, and revenge, embitter the spirit and invariably produce misery. But "the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight

eternal; and these they covet with something of the same vehemency, with which those long for supplies of meat and drink, who are suffering the extremities of hunger and thirst. In preference to every other object, they desire to possess "the righteousness of God;" that righteousness, which will answer the demands of his law, and that also, by which alone they can serve him with acceptance here, and be fitted for the complete and everlasting fruition of him in heaven. From a conviction of their guilt and depravity they perceive their inability to justify themselves; and then, with the utmost importunity they enquire, "How shall man be just with God?" They feel likewise their want of conformity, in their hearts and lives, to the will of God; nor can they be satisfied, without attaining a measure of that conformity. While they contend with their own corrupt affections, they pant after a total renovation of the soul, and pray most fervently, to be "holy in all manner of conversation."

Happy indeed is the man, in whom desires like these are excited! They are not the wishes of sensualists or worldlings, but of them only, whom God hath blessed; and he will give them more grace. They shall not be disappointed, but abundantly gratified by a ready communication of those benefits, which they so ardently covet: "they shall be filled." The Lord "satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness *." They shall be completely justified through the righteousness of their Redeemer, in which they may stand with confidence before God; and, being sanctified by the Spirit, they shall persevere in righteousness and true holiness. They are, therefore, encouraged to indulge a delightful expectation: "Let the heart of them rejoice, that seek the Lord †."

* Psal. cvii. 9.

† cv. 3.

5. "Blessed are the merciful." Such, as have been now described, will not confine their attention to themselves; but, having "tasted that the Lord is gracious," they will feel compassion for their fellow-creatures, and shew mercy according to their abilities and opportunities. There will be various occasions for the exercise of this temper, owing to the ignorance, sin, and misery, which have overspread the world. They will, therefore, consult the happiness and welfare of all around them, and, under the strong influence of Christian benevolence, will endeavour to please and to profit them. Accordingly, they will give "the soft answer," which "turneth away wrath;" and "in their tongues will be the law of kindness," because the law of love governs their hearts. This will also be evinced by their actions, as well as professions. They will cheerfully relieve the necessitous, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick. Nor will their compassionate regard be confined to the body; but, with generous concern for the souls of men, they will desire to warn the careless and instruct the ignorant, if so be they may bring them into the way of righteousness and peace.

These alone possess real tenderness and liberality of mind; and it must be generally allowed, that such persons are the most happy in themselves, an ornament to religion, and a blessing to society, where they live. But these are of a heavenly extraction, born from above. The merciful temper, here described, is so contrary to the natural selfishness and cruelty of the human heart, as to form a strong evidence of divine grace. These, then, are they, who are truly "blessed;" and "they shall obtain mercy." This is the character of all, whom God hath reconciled to himself; by such marks they are to be known and distinguished: and it is an unwarrantable presumption to imagine ourselves in the favour of Hea-

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ven, without this influence of the Spirit, disposing us to shew favour to our fellow-creatures upon earth.

6. "Blessed are the pure in heart." The Lord is a God of purity, who "desires truth in the inward parts," and is not to be imposed on by any external display or pretences of piety. But ah! "how abominable and filthy is man *!" He has "yielded his members servants to uncleanness," his "mind and conscience is defiled," his "heart desperately wicked †." We must, therefore, not merely be reformed, as to gross immoralities, but "renewed in the spirit of our mind ‡." The subjects of Christ's kingdom are "born again," their principles are changed, their tempers are sanctified. They renounce all iniquity, not in appearance or profession only, but with a cordial desire and determination never more to return to it. They cheerfully "yield themselves unto God," and he is pleased to make their hearts his own habitation through the Spirit. These, then, are "the blessed of the Lord:" for, however they must deny themselves many sensual gratifications, the Lord God hath bestowed upon them nobler enjoyments. They are separated from the world: but he hath consecrated and united them to himself; and it ought to suffice them, that "they shall see God." Even here, he will manifest his grace and glory to them, and "lift up the light of his countenance upon them." And can any earthly delights be compared with their happiness, when they are favoured with his visits, and the discoveries of his love? Yet this is only an earnest of their future felicity. Soon shall the vail, which now in a great measure hides from them the brightness of his face, be entirely removed; and, when they are admitted to that beatific vision, they shall be transformed into his righteous image. "We shall be like

* Job xv. 16.

† Rom. vi. 19, Tit. i. 15. Jer. xvii. 9.

‡ Eph. iv. 23.

him; for we shall see him, as he is:"—"and so shall we ever be with the Lord *."

7. "Blessed are the peace-makers." In such a world as this, various contentions may be expected, which will prove and evidence our characters and dispositions. Amidst warm and angry debates, the men of grace will be distinguished by their labouring for peace. They "study to be quiet," and to promote harmony in their families and neighbourhood, willing rather to sacrifice their own interest, than bitterly to strive for it. Having much forgiven them, they refuse not to forgive an offending brother, though it were "seventy times seven;" but eagerly embrace him, and renew their assurances of kindness to him. It grieves them to observe discord among others, and, as far as their influence will extend, they will endeavour to repair the breach, and effect a reconciliation. This is indeed a happy temper, and we need not fear to pronounce the possessors of it "blessed," not only as enjoying a sweet tranquillity of mind, but as having in themselves an evidence of the divine favour. For, by their resemblance of him, who is the God of peace and love, they prove their relation to him, and shall be taken notice of under the honourable distinction of his children. They are "born of God," who has put his Spirit upon them; and as children, they are heirs; heirs of the kingdom, where all will be united in bonds of strictest union for ever and ever.

Will not a character so excellent meet with universal esteem and respect among men? No: quite otherwise. As "the friendship of the world is enmity with God †," all, who bear his image, must look for contempt and hatred from those, who are in a state of opposition to him. But we add, according to our Lord's declaration,

* 1 John iii. 2. 1 Thess. iv. 17.

† James iv. 4.

8. "Blessed

8. "Blessed are they, which are persecuted for righteousness' sake." The saints of God are a constant reproof to the wicked, who, from that very circumstance, are often extremely mortified, and frequently enraged. Hence it generally happens, that the more eminently holy, zealous, and useful any persons are, the more malignity and violence they meet with. But, while they suffer for their attachment to the Saviour, in the cause of truth and righteousness, let them take up their cross with faith and patience, nor lament their case as severe and calamitous. He, who has separated them to himself from the midst of an evil world, as his own peculiar people, will support and comfort them; and, whatever temporal losses they may sustain in his service, he will bestow upon them an abundant recompence. They may, possibly, be excluded from earthly possessions, but they shall inherit the kingdom of everlasting glory.

The character, last mentioned, so exactly described our Lord's disciples, who stood by him, and whom it was necessary to encourage in the prospect of their approaching sufferings, that he made a particular application of it to them. While he pronounced his benediction upon them, he taught them to expect scorn, opposition, and infamy, for their adherence to him, even though they were ever so circumspect in their conduct. But he called upon them to maintain a holy confidence and joy, and to exult in the lively hope of the glorious reward, which awaited them, remembering that all the Patriarchs and Prophets of old had trodden the very same path, and endured the cross before them.

Let the disciples of Jesus in every age be reminded, that they also should look for similar treatment from the world, and that it will become them to be equanimous and vigorous in the service of their Lord

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Be solicitous, therefore, to be rescued out of y
present wretched situation, and cry with importun
" O Lord, remember us with the favour that t
bearest unto thy people ; O visit us with thy salvatio
that we may see the good of thy chosen, that we r
rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that we r
glory with thine inheritance * 1" Amen.

* Psal. cvi. 4. 5.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 9.

The second part of our Lord's sermon on the mount, in which he expands certain precepts of the moral law.

THE multitudes, who flocked around the Saviour, were, probably, very eager to know, what new doctrine he would preach, or averse to receive him from an apprehension that he undervalued and meant to subvert the goodly system, which the Old Testament established, and of which they boasted. To give them, therefore, the necessary information concerning himself, and to remove their prejudices, he solemnly asserted, that he came not to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfil *.

Since the Lord God changeth not, one revelation cannot be repugnant to another. Yet there may be in one age a more full and express declaration of the divine will, than in the preceding: and the former communications might be intended to prepare the way for a clearer manifestation of the same truths. Thus, in fact, the increase of sacred light has resembled the gradual approach of day. The great plan of redemption was intimated to Adam upon his fall, and in succeeding generations fresh and brighter discoveries of it were afforded to the Church, under the Mosaic dispensation, and by various prophets, till the appearing of Jesus Christ, to whom, as in our

* Matt. v. 17, &c.

pected. Patriarchs and Prophets looked forward to his incarnation, and paved the way for him; and now, since he has come, and accomplished every thing predicted of him, nothing more is wanted, either to discover the will of God or to make reconciliation for us. What thanks, and love, and homage, do we owe for our distinguished privilege under the Gospel! And what returns are due to Him, who has perfected for ever the great work of our salvation.

Our Lord proceeded in his sermon to manifest the authority and full extent of the law, declaring, that God will not recede from his righteous demands, and consequently, that either God's law must be paid, or punishment inflicted. Willing, therefore, to transgress the least of these precepts, and therefore to want to do the same, as if they were not binding, would render us unfit for a place in the Kingdom, and to be distinguished in that society, we must have an universal submission to them, though they may seem ever to trifling, and enforce no laws, except upon others.

While Jesus inculcated the necessity of so strict obedience, it is probable that the people regarded him as speaking on the Scribes and Pharisees, whom they held in great veneration for their professions of holiness. He rebuked, therefore, affronted them to their own disadvantage, requiring his disciples to go much farther than those, whom they considered as the most advanced persons of religion, and asserting, that whereas they could have no place in heaven. But it was proper to rebuke these vain pretenders, to break the current and superstitious, and to warn their deluded followers, no longer to be led by them. For the very thing which was most opposite to the temper of Christ and his disciples, was much of their attachment to the Jewish law, in reality, they could not bear the law in its ritual sense, in which it ought to be understood, but by the most subtle interpretations, they explained
and

away much of its meaning. Jesus, however, has instructed us, contrary to their glosses, that it enjoins perfect holiness, in the dispositions of the mind, as well as the practice of the life. Their righteousness was merely external; for all their works were done "to be seen of men;" but we are taught to seek for inward purity, and not to be satisfied with regularity of manners, or a shew of piety. They were influenced even in their religious duties, by base principles, "for a pretence making long prayers," and boasting of their own works, as if the happiness of heaven were no more than a just recompence of their services. But we are warned of the sin and danger of trusting to ourselves, whatever our attainments may be, and of the necessity of a better obedience than our own, to procure our justification before God.

From a general declaration, our Lord descended to a particular exposition of the spiritual nature of the law, in certain precepts, which had been shamefully perverted; guarding the people against their erroneous teachers, and requiring their attention and submission to himself.

1. He insisted on the extensive meaning of the sixth commandment. This was understood, as if it had forbidden nothing more than the actual commission of wilful murder. But Jesus, the great Lawgiver, instructs us, that it condemns whatever may lead to such violence, and, therefore, that all senseless anger or desire of revenge, and all opprobrious language, arising from this vehemence of passion, will justly expose us to the divine vengeance. ^{ordinance} It was vain to worship God, or exult in his ordinances, so long as we were under the influence of malignant passions. We must lay aside our animosities, and make restitution for injuries committed, "compass God's altar;" for the most costly

costly sacrifices and professions of the warmest devotion will not compensate the want of brotherly love. Common prudence, also, as well as religion, requires, that contentions be dropped and a reconciliation effected, as soon as may be. If you are threatened with a suit by one, whom you have offended, how much better is it by a speedy accommodation, to repair the breach, than obstinately to persist in the contest, till matters are brought to an extremity, and rigorous justice must have its course! If it be thus in human affairs, how much more is it your interest and duty, without a moment's delay, to seek peace with the Lord God Almighty, whom you have provoked; lest, being summoned to his bar, you be cast in the trial, and sentenced to the infernal prison, from which there can be no release!

Such was the substance of our Lord's address: and shall we not allow the suitableness of it to ourselves? Or shall we boast, like the Pharisees, that, because we have not shed the blood of a fellow-creature, the sixth commandment has no charge against us? Are we free from all violence of temper? Or have our tongues never betrayed the vindictive desires of our hearts? Are we now at peace? Or have we, at least, anxiously sought for it? And when we lift up our hands in prayer, is it "without wrath?" We may thank God, that so many powerful restraints are laid upon the sinful affections of men; or else every part of the world would present us with scenes of horrible confusion. But, though our fury may be repressed, so as not to break forth to the disturbance of society, God may behold much iniquity within us. For it is possible, that, where a calmness and benevolence of spirit are pretended, much rancour may remain in the heart: and, in God's account, "who-soever hateth his brother is a murderer*."

* 1 John iii. 15.

2. He opened the spiritual and extensive nature of the seventh commandment. Here also, as in the preceding instance, the prohibition had been confined to merely external acts; and he only was deemed an adulterer, who had been guilty of the grossest uncleanness. But Jesus teaches us, that inward impurity brings us under the divine condemnation, that a lustful desire and a wanton eye are forbidden in the full sense of the law, no less than the absolute violation of the marriage bed. And will any person say, I have never felt any such irregular motions in my heart: my eye hath never wandered in a lascivious manner? Let us remember, that we are always open to the inspection of that God, who "searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins," and that he hath noted down all our secret imaginations, looks, and wishes. Let us not presume to justify ourselves before him.

If we would avoid the sin of lewdness, we must resist every secret propensity to it, and subdue the corrupt affections of the flesh. This must be done at any pains or expence, as Jesus has instructed us: the inordinate desire must be abandoned, though it may seem as dear to us as a right eye, or profitable as a right hand, and though it may cost us as much to part with it, as to cut off the most tender and useful member of the body. For, as in chirurgery, a gangrene must be stopped, or else death ensues: so here, the most favourite passion must be given up: there is no room for hesitation: it must be done, or else everlasting destruction in the torments of hell must be the consequence.

Our Lord was naturally led from the exposition of the seventh commandment to condemn the prevailing practice of divorcing their wives, as fancy, disgust, or resentment might dictate. Separations, indeed, had been allowed by the Mosaic law under certain restrictions; but the permission had been abused to *the worst purposes*; and we are now taught, that
nothing

nothing but infidelity in the wife can absolve the husband from the obligations of the marriage bond. Alas! it is too evident from the state of things among ourselves, that, with respect to this important subject, the authority of Christ is but little regarded, and that the chastity and continence, which he inculcated, are most shamefully violated.

3. He expounded also the third commandment. The heinousness of perjury, which is a solemn appeal to God in attestation of a lie, was generally acknowledged among the Jews. But they shewed a manifest contempt of the majesty of God by the frequency of their oaths in common conversation. And it should seem, that they so interpreted the law, as to justify the practice of swearing, if they abstained only from the express mention of God, or did not call upon him to confirm a falsehood. How ingenious is the depraved nature of man in perverting the truth, and inventing arguments, for the vindication of his own evil conduct! For, agreeably to our Lord's representation, we may ask, What do you, when you swear by any creature? Your appeal in effect is, and must ultimately be, to the great Creator himself, though it contain not any direct invocation of his name. It is therefore enjoined, that you "swear not at all."

We are not forbidden to make use of oaths in a solemn manner, and for important purposes, in support of the truth: for these were commanded in the old Testament, and unexceptionable examples of them are recorded in the new. But Jesus prescribes a rule only for our common conversation. Inasmuch as it is an insult to Jehovah, to introduce him as a witness or an arbiter of our trifling controversies, in familiar discourse; we are required to avoid all strong and vehement asseverations, and only simply to affirm, or simply to deny, without having recourse to any other *expedient to establish our credit*. For not merely

from the palpable violations of the ~~com~~ by perjury, or impious execrations, ~~but~~ conversation with "simplicity and godly." How little is this attended to! Is not the God frequently introduced, in a light manner, as an embellishment of discourse, ~~pression~~ of surprise? Do we not adopt certain able phrases, which have the nature of oath to them? Alas! the practice is general; God is provoked among us every day. For by the multitude of perjured persons and ~~bl~~ we observe that the sacred appellations an God and his Christ are treated with the utmost, being constantly used as words of the mere expletives of language, by many of their morality, and possess the fairest reputation in the world.

4. He guarded against a misunderstanding of the Mosaic law of retaliation. A precept had it for the direction of magistrates in the punishment of injuries; for they were authorized to take for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." This interpreted, as if private persons might avenge for any assault and require the of

to collect from them, that a malicious, vindictive mind is totally opposite to true religion; that, rather than furiously withstand or retaliate one injury, we ought to expose ourselves to a second, by gentleness and forbearance; that it were better quietly to sustain any trifling damage, such as a blow on the face or the loss of a garment, than rigorously insist upon a compensation; and that our benevolence should be so extensive, that no suitable opportunity of doing good should be neglected.

It is easier to find the meaning, as to the substance at least, than to make the application. Who among us are willing to be directed by this divine Teacher? The temper of real Christians and that of worldly men are quite contrary to each other: and to fulfil the law of Christ would subject us to the reproach of cowardice and meanness of spirit. Be it so: let us cheerfully bear the imputation. That sense of honour, which is so much contended for, is a principle most odious to God, as it implies a vindictive disposition, or, what must lead to it, a determination not to pass by the most trifling offence. We need not, then, reflect upon the Scribes and Pharisees; as retaliation is practised and justified among ourselves. Whoever insults the man of honour must answer it at the peril of his life. Nay, do we not all, under provocations, feel a desire of revenge? And have we not been betrayed into such a conduct, as our Lord has here condemned? He, however, has given us an example of forbearance, as well as the precept. May we study to attain "the mind, which was in Christ Jesus!"

5. He inculcated the law of universal love. It was allowed to be a divine command, that we should love our neighbours; but, as if neighbours included only those, who are nearly related or intimately connected, the command was so expounded, that it was judged right, perhaps expedient, to treat those with contempt and scorn, who were of a different coun-

usage a sufficient reason for withholding the offices of Christian benevolence. He has in us, that, as the children of God possess peculiar privileges, they must surpass all others in a spirit of giveness and disinterested goodness, and prelation to their heavenly Father by their resemblance of him.

What shall we say to these things? Have we learned Christ, as to love our enemies? It is to profess this enlarged philanthropy, while we have the general countenance and favour of the world. But can we stand "the fiery trial," and, in the most injurious persecutions, return good for evil? Are we not easily offended, and hardly reconciled; "implacable, unmerciful?" And is this the temper of mind, which becomes the heirs of the kingdom? "What do we more than others?" Or what do we differ from them, who know not God? In what similitude do we bear to him, whom we call Father? "God is love;" and, if we feel not the influence of that principle, we are not renewed after the image of God, nor can we dwell with him.

But shall we not own, that the divine law

we not satisfied ourselves with a partial, and merely external obedience; without attempting to regulate the inward desires of the mind? "The commandment is exceeding broad *;" and each particular precept, in the spiritual meaning, proves that we are all in a state of guilt and condemnation. Let the conviction have its full influence; and we shall then welcome the Saviour, who "is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth †."

Believers, however, as before observed, though "justified from all things," are not released from their obligations to holiness. Does Jesus speak, as if the law were designed to be abrogated, or to be no longer binding upon his people? Is it not strongly enforced for the direction of our conduct? Here, then, we should study, "what manner of persons we ought to be," how far superior to others, "in all holy conversation and godliness." Our impartial and constant regard to duty will be the safest evidence of our faith; and without it our expectations of the divine favour are no better than the hope of the hypocrite, which shall perish.

* Psal. cxix. 96.

† Rom. x. 4.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 10.

*The third part of our Lord's sermon on the mount
which he cautions his disciples against vain glory,
the love of the world.*

THE necessity of religion is generally acknowledged, whilst the nature of it is but little understood. Many comply with the forms, and put on the semblance of piety, and fancy themselves devout, because they are so accounted, at the very time they are under the influence of the basest disposition. Such were the Pharisees of old, who, with all boasted goodness, betrayed an hatred of the doctrine and genius of Christianity. It became expedient therefore for our Lord to expose their real charac-

ness must be of another sort; or else, we cannot be the subjects of Christ's kingdom, however frequent or fervent we may be in the external observances of divine worship. Let us pray, that He, who alone knows our secret desires and purposes, would discover to us and eradicate every motive and affection of our hearts, incompatible with true Christianity, that we may not be found destitute of that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

I. We are cautioned against vain glory, or that ostentatious display of our own goodness, which is meant to catch the notice, and procure the admiration, of men. An arrogant spirit, which is always contemptible, is never more preposterous, than when it assumes the mask of piety. It were the height of absurdity and profaneness, to practise those very duties, which should proceed from the deepest humility, and cannot be acceptable without it, merely to gratify a conceited and ambitious temper: and yet it is a common case. The most painful and mortifying injunctions are submitted to, in order to gain a character. Persons professing godliness have peculiar need to guard against this principle; for they are not so much in danger from sensual, as from spiritual wickedness. They are often overtaken and deceived, even in their best services, by the secret workings of pride, which, while it conceals itself from the nicest observation, influences and corrupts the whole conduct. Our Lord, therefore, mentions several instances of religious acts, which we may be tempted to perform entirely or chiefly with a view to the esteem of our fellow-creatures; and on this account he calls upon us to "take heed."

1. Alms-giving. The duty is not in this place commanded; but it is supposed, that every disciple of Jesus will practise it: and it is still universally allowed among Christians, that we are under indispensable obligations to relieve the distressed, ac-

ing to our abilities. But our attention is here directed to the proper principle of obedience. Aims are to be given, from a supreme regard to God, not to men. Hypocrites, we find, can distribute large sums, for the purposes of charity. But usually they are ostentatious; and, as they seek the praise of the world, they fail not to publish their own liberality, and contrive that it may be of such a sort, or exerted at such times and places, as will engage general notice and esteem. The motive being wrong throughout, the most extensive munificence, on this plan, cannot be an acceptable service. Surrounding spectators and witnesses, who look only on the outward appearance, may express their admiration; but the Lord God, who is forgotten and despised, since the sacrifice is not offered to Him, will bestow no recompense. Yet even these persons "have their reward." Many are ready to compliment them for their generosity, and court their favour; but this, which is all they will receive, is a poor benefit indeed, fleeting as a breath of air!

How different is the disciple of Jesus! His aim is to approve himself to God; and, to be consistent, he should be as glad to embrace a private, as a public

nions of men, we are acting from the vain-glorious principle, which is here condemned.

2. Prayer. This also will be allowed to be an important duty, and one which enters into the life and essence of religion; so that those who habitually neglect it, we will not say cannot be eminent Christians, but are no Christians at all. Yet the bare external performance of this service does not necessarily imply any real piety. Forms and ceremonies may be punctually observed, and warmly contended for, without a sincere regard to God. Hypocrites may be exact in their attendance upon divine worship, and value themselves, because they "make many prayers." They "draw nigh unto God with their mouth, and honour him with their lips, but their heart is far from him;" and therefore "in vain they do worship him*." They would gladly be thought religious; and accordingly they comply with such institutions and rites of devotion, as are most likely to call them forth into public view, and procure them applause. Thus they may obtain the character of saints; and this is the grand object, which they aim at. But it is all, that they shall have. From such persons "incense is an abomination unto God," and their boasted services will increase their condemnation. This was the very case of the Pharisees, whom our Lord described. They were so scrupulously observant of their stated times of prayer, that they would not omit or delay the duty, on account of any company or engagement. Nay, it should seem, they contrived to be in places of much resort at those very seasons, that the eyes of the multitude might be fixed upon them, and thus their sanctity be remarked and celebrated.

In opposition to this practice, Jesus enjoins the religion of the closet; not forbidding public, but commanding private, worship; or rather shewing in

* Mat. xv. 8, 9.

what manner the latter should be performed. It were absurd and impious to seek the notice of men, when our concern is with God alone. If possible, we should retire from noise and observation; that we may avoid interruption, and maintain a holy converse with the God of heaven, abstracted from the cares and business of the world. This communion between God and the soul must, from the nature of it, be contracted from our fellow-creatures, and may not gain us respect in this life. But the eye of the Lord God is upon his people, at those times especially, when they withdraw from human society to hold fellowship with Him; and He will proclaim and prove to the assembled universe, for his own glory as well as their recompense, with what frequency and fervour they kept up their intercourse with Him.

Does not our Lord's injunction detect the hypocrisy of many? There are those among ourselves, who, like the ancient Pharisees, with a confident and clamorous profession of religion, express a decided preference for those services, which bring them into notice, and take pains to catch the esteem and applause of the public. They may not stand to repeat their prayers in the open streets, as those of old; but do they not evince something of the same disposition, when they are forward to call the attention of others to the ardour of their devotions? May we not fear, that among the multitudes, who constantly tread the courts of the Lord, many totally neglect the duties of the closet? In such a case, no sacrifice is offered to God; but all their works are done to be "seen of men."

From the foregoing caution, Jesus proceeded to further instructions for the framing and presentation of solemn addresses to God. He has directed us with serious deliberation, and to avoid prolixity of expressions, which the heathen used. All repetitions in imploring the di-

wine blessing are not condemned; for our Lord himself, three times together, in pouring out his soul before God, “said the same words*,” and it seems the natural effect of a pious fervour and importunity, to urge the same request again and again. But we are required to abstain from those repetitions only, which are unmeaning, and not to suppose that a multiplicity of words will constitute a good prayer, or procure us a favourable acceptance. It is neither necessary nor expedient to protract our devotions to a tedious length, as if we could thereby give any information to God, or produce any change in his mind. We cannot, indeed, be too earnest, nor ought we to be weary of the service. But we should remember, that we come to a God, who knows all our wants and desires, better than we can represent them, and who is more ready to bestow, than we to ask, his blessing.

We behold also an instance of the amazing condescension of Jesus, in delivering to his disciples a form of prayer, adapted to their use. He takes them, as it were, by the hand, leads them to the throne of grace, instructs them what requests they should make, and even puts words into their mouths. The form, here prescribed, might be designed as a general model, by which we may frame our petitions; but it seems also intended to be introduced among our other devotions, and offered to God, exactly as it is. Perhaps it was drawn up with a particular reference to the situation of his followers at that time; but with the utmost propriety it is still continued as a suitable address for Christians in all possible circumstances; since it is a clear and compendious representation of their common desires and necessities, and every expression in it is such as they may adopt for their own.

* Mat. xxvi. 44.

We cannot here give it that full consideration, which its importance demands; and therefore a few general observations must suffice.

The introduction or invocation teaches us to approach to God with confidence and love, as to a Father concerned for our welfare, and yet to maintain the deepest reverence and humility before Him, who is in heaven, and who there reigns in glorious majesty. When our minds are thus impressed with suitable conceptions of the God, whom we worship, we may proceed to the petitions, which are six in number, the three first relating to the honour of God, the three latter to the necessities of man. We pray, therefore, that the name of God may be hallowed, that the excellency and perfections of his nature may be known throughout the world, and that every where He may be regarded with all that veneration, which is justly due unto Him. For this purpose we desire, that his kingdom of grace may be universally established, and that the Gospel, which is designed and calculated to promote it, may be spread abroad with increasing energy and success. But since this dispensation of mercy requires unfeigned obedience to God, we have that, as all in heaven, so all on earth may have

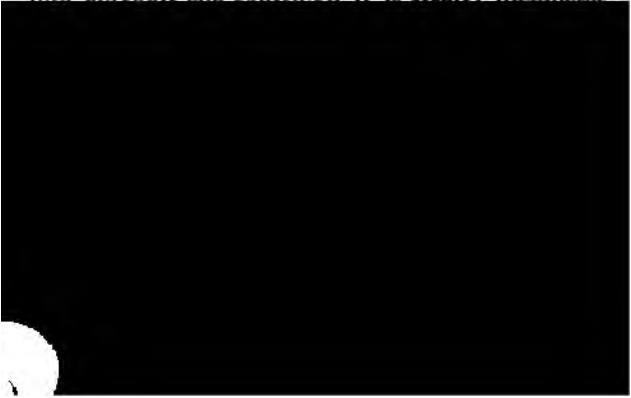
forfeited all claims to the divine favour by sin. It is always proper to confess our sin, and denounce the wrath we have deserved. We are sinners to God, and liable to justice; therefore we pray that he would cancel the black account, and not impute his demands upon us. Here we must lay hold on his promises in the new Covenant and have recourse to him, as he is revealed through the Mediator: a God "forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." But, since it is probable in the present state of human affairs, that we may sustain much injurious treatment from others, we are required solemnly to declare before God our readiness to extend full forgiveness to them, and only to impute his merit as we can pardon our offending brethren. Still being exposed to continual assaults, which may endanger our souls, unless God preserve us, we request that His "who keepeth Israel," would so guide us and dispose of us in his providence, that we may not be brought into circumstances of severe trial, or else that we may be strengthened to overcome the temptation. In order to this, we supplicate the divine aid, that we may be delivered from the attacks of the wicked One, who is our grand adversary, and from every thing, which is to be dreaded as a real evil in this life or another.

In the conclusion of the prayer, which is a theology or an ascription of praise to God, we acknowledge this to be the worship, which he deserves, and has a right to demand; since he is the universal Sovereign, the Almighty Potentate, the God of all perfection, the unchangeable Jehovah, from everlasting to everlasting. And, while we thus adore and magnify the Lord for his greatness and his excellency, each of these considerations will furnish a plea, by which we may enforce our requests. We confirm the whole, and again express our ardent wishes for a favourable acceptance, when we add in the close, "AMEN," or, So let it be.

In the form which Jesus here taught his disciples, the declaration, annexed to the petition for pardon of sin, is of so much consequence, and, as it might appear to them, so new and singular, that he subjoined a particular reason for it, observing, that God will receive no sacrifice, except from the man, who is of a placable and forgiving temper. And is it thus that we lift up our hands to the throne of grace? Do we possess those principles and affections, which the words imply or call for? How often have we repeated the prayer without any holy, spiritual desires, when we have neither felt nor understood the force of the language! And is this the worship, which we dare to offer to the heart-searching God? For, as he is not to be imposed on, or satisfied like our fellow-creatures, with an unmeaning compliment, we may fear, lest our pretended devotions should provoke his indignation against us.

The same caution, which Jesus gave respecting the two forementioned duties he extended also to another instance.

3. Fasting. However the folly, pride, and superstition of some persons may have brought the practice into disrepute and contempt, it is clearly incumbent



rupt influence into our best actions. How preposterous is it, to make a parade with that, which is intended to denote humiliation! We must, therefore, avoid all ostentatious display, which is so common with hypocrites; and, while with sincerity of heart and unfeigned contrition we practise self-denial and mortification, we shall not pass unobserved, nor fast in vain. Men may disregard or despise us; but God will graciously accept, and publicly reward, what is really done unto him, though we shall not presume upon any merit in ourselves, as if we had any claim to his favour on the ground of justice. But to what purpose do we speak of abstinence? For where are those, who "crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts?" Who among us are willing to renounce any beloved gratification? Do not most persons plead for, and pursue with an insatiable avidity, every sensual pleasure and delight?

In these several instances, almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, the religion of Jesus instructs us to fix our supreme regard upon God, as the Judge, to whom alone we are accountable, and to be perfectly unconcerned about human opinions and decisions. It commands us to look forward to a future day, when all hypocrisy will be exposed and detested, and the excellency of the true believer confessed and admired. How many mistakes will then be rectified! "For that, which is highly esteemed amongst men," will appear to be "abomination in the sight of God *." On the contrary, Jehovah will declare his approbation of those, who had faithfully discharged the duties of righteousness in secret, though their names were cast out as evil: and, to the astonishment of those, who had despised and hated them, he will proclaim, with high commendations, how much they have done for him, and appoint them a glorious re-

* Luke xvi. 15.

tribution for the most private exertions of their charity, piety, and abstinence.

11. We are required to beware of the love of the present world. There is no sin, against which the Saviour has delivered more or stronger cautions, than an inordinate attachment to the concerns of this life, and perhaps there is none more dangerous to the soul. It frequently lies concealed under the garb of a religious profession; for men are apt to flatter themselves, and cry "Peace, peace," if they practise no gross iniquity, approve of right doctrines, and give a regular attendance to the means of grace. Yet all this may be, while the heart remains totally alienated from God, and "goeth after covetousness." He, who is solicitous only to promote his secular interest, and consequently immersed in worldly cares, cannot possess any proper regard to God, or his own everlasting welfare. Though decent in his conduct, orthodox in his notions, constant and exact in all external forms and observances, he is just as far from heaven as the drunkard and adulterer; perhaps more so, as being less likely to apprehend his own danger.

There might be a peculiar suitableness in our Lord's

ject we propose to ourselves. For our affections and pursuits will be determined by the nature of that treasure, which we desire to attain. But, in order to decide aright on that which is most valuable, a clear discernment is absolutely needful. How shall the body be directed in its movements, if the eye be so vitiated, that it cannot properly distinguish one thing from another? Or how shall the mind lead us to a just conclusion, whilst it is under the influence of wrong maxims and inclinations? There is a mental darkness, which perverts the judgment, and produces the most fatal consequences.

Is it supposed, that some happy expedient may be found, by which religion may be made consistent with an entire devotedness to present gain? No; it is impossible: the love of God and the love of the world cannot prevail in the same heart. They are like two adverse masters, whose commands and expectations contradict and oppose each other; so that we cannot be sincerely attached to their different interests. We should, therefore, determine without delay, whom we will serve, and instantly renounce one of them.

Do any plead, "I am not enslaved to the world; I look not for real happiness in it, nor seek great things to myself, but am anxious only to secure a comfortable subsistence?" It may be proper to remark, that our Lord's injunctions require us to lay aside all distressing cares about the enjoyments or even the common supports of life. His directions on this head equally concern the poor and the rich. For, as in each situation the heart may be drawn away from God to present objects, both are forbidden to indulge any excessive solicitude about their secular affairs.

We may apply the reasons, which Jesus has alleged. God has given you life, and he is able to maintain it. You may surely rely upon him for the *continuance of that vital principle, which he has graciously*

ciously bestowed upon you; since he can as easily preserve, as create. Behold the tender care, which he exerciseth over inferior animals! He constantly provides sustenance for the fowls, which are of far less value than you. But with all your anxiety, how little can you effect for yourselves! You cannot lengthen out your existence one moment. Or, should you be distressed about procuring a suitable covering for your body, we refer you to the flowers of the field. The Lord God has clothed them with a gayer attire, than the most splendid monarchs can exhibit: and shall you be unwilling to intrust yourselves with him?

Besides, this worldly solicitude, which may be expected to prevail in them, who know not God, is unsuitable and dishonourable to your character, who profess to be his children. If God be your Father, he cannot be inattentive to your wants. Is there not, also, a more glorious object proposed to you, which demands your warmest affections and most diligent pursuit? You cannot be too earnest in preparing for your eternal state: and if that be your first and grand concern, as it ought, every earthly care will appear comparatively small. But to secure an admis-

sion into heaven, is the best expedient for enjoying

season, in which you may find enough both to do and to suffer.

Such is the temper of mind, which Jesus has inculcated in his sermon on the mount: and so superior to the world must all his disciples be. Yet this is an excellency, which can be attained only by the knowledge of him. For "this is the victory, that overcometh the world, even our faith *."

But how few appear to possess that divine principle! We perceive and lament the prevalence of a Pharisaical spirit among ourselves. Are not most persons hurried away by an immoderate attachment to their gain? And do not some, even of those who profess godliness, betray a sordid, unbelieving, distracted state of mind? We need not advert to the multitude of open and profligate offenders; for perhaps more are destroyed through the fatal influence of covetousness, which may consist with a fair character among men, than by any other sin whatever. Let us beware, and examine, where is our peculiar danger. Let us watch and pray, lest our hearts be totally engrossed by those secular cares, which may, to a certain degree, be expedient and necessary: and, remembering how very poor is the richest treasure, which can be attained in this life, let us "covet earnestly the best gifts," and desire above all things to possess "the unsearchable riches of Christ." Amen.

* 1 John v. 4.

JESUS CHRIST.

S E C T. II.

The conclusion of our Lord's sermon on the mount, in which he gives various practical directions and exhortations.

WE have already perceived much of the excellence and importance of the sermon, which Jesus delivered on the mount; and the conclusion, to which we now proceed, will appear equally interesting. We shall meet with further proofs of the holiness of that religion, which he taught, while we consider the various directions here given for the conduct of his disciples *.

To guard them against the censorious disposition of the Pharisees, who were ever prone to condemn others in the most rigorous manner, he commanded them to abstain from all rash and severe judgment. "Judge not," is indeed an extensive precept. We cannot help forming an opinion of those actions and characters, which force themselves upon our observation: nor are we forbidden, surely, to blame what is evidently wrong; nay, our duty requires us, as we love our brother, to point out his faults to him, and warn him of his danger. But we are enjoined to conclude against any person precipitately, not influenced in our decisions by pride or malevo-

* Matt. vii. 1, &c.

lence. Yet do we not perceive amongst ourselves much of this very spirit, which prevailed with the Pharisees of old? How few are actuated by that divine principle of love, which "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things *!" Do not the various parties, who contend so warmly for their respective sentiments and adherents, both in politics and religion, discover a bitter and malignant disposition? For how unwilling are they to believe any thing favourable of each other, or to make any candid allowance for the mistakes or the failings of their opponents! How keen in their remarks; how glad to find any thing justly censurable; and how eager to fix names of contempt and reproach, one upon the other! We need not enquire or assign a reason for this, besides our own depravity. We need not inveigh against the bigotry and malevolence of persons on this or on that side of the question; since these are the weeds, which spring up in every soil, and are the natural produce of the human heart. "The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy †."

Jesus has suggested some important considerations, which should deter us from forming any rash judgment. Those, who are most severe in their reflections upon others, need expect no favour from their fellow-creatures. Men will not be disposed to pardon or palliate their misconduct; but will greedily catch at an opportunity of requiting them with the same acrimonious censures, which they have liberally dealt out. And what treatment may they look for, at the hands of a righteous God? How will they stand before him, when their characters are scrutinized with that rigorous exactness, with which they have decided upon others? He has determined, that "they shall have judgment without mercy, who have shewed no mercy ‡."

* 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

† James iv. 5.

‡ ii. 13.

It should also be considered, that we are but ill qualified to pass sentence on any persons around us. Few of their actions, in comparison, fall under our notice, and, perhaps, of those few we see not the whole. We may not understand their inward principles; or we may conclude too hastily from appearances, which are deceitful, or from mere reports, which are generally vague and uncertain. If, however, there be something in their manners, which we must condemn, may not certain extenuations be admitted in their behalf? We know not, under what temptations and difficulties they have laboured, and how much they have been excluded from opportunities of information or admonition. At least, a sense of our own ignorance and liability to err, through prejudice and misconception, should incline us to draw the most candid and charitable conclusions; and the remembrance of our own numerous and aggravated faults should deter us from speaking evil of any man.

Jesus has instructed us, likewise, to look well to our spirit and conduct, when we undertake to reprove. Our office in life, and our christian duty in

the love and power of sin, that it may be qualified to determine honestly, and bring a true charge against another. "Cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

Prudence will require us, also, to consider the character of those, whom we may wish to rebuke or exhort. For there are some such profane and bold contemners of every thing good and serious, that any solemn admonition would not only be lost upon them, but excite in them the most violent resentment; which, besides bringing us into difficulties, might cause the name and the truth of God to be blasphemed. Therefore the Saviour adds, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine:" and on the same ground Solomon directs us, "Speak not in the ears of a fool; for he will despise the wisdom of thy words *."

The caution, probably, may be abused, and urged in defence of that cowardly disposition, which is afraid of opposing sin upon any occasion whatever. While, therefore, we plead for prudence and reserve, let us endeavour to regulate our conduct, not by worldly motives, but by a supreme desire to promote the glory of God. It may be difficult, in particular cases, to determine the line of propriety and duty, or still more difficult to pursue it; on which account we shall have need of constant application to the God of all grace, for his guidance and assistance. Jesus, therefore, proceeds to inculcate fervour and importunity in prayer. We seek not for an exact connection in the different parts of this discourse; yet exhortations to call upon God appear at once to follow very suitably from the preceding subject.

It is said, however, "Though our work be arduous, our petitions to God can avail us nothing. He

* *Prov. xxiii. 9.*

has the divine declaration been fulfilled. We should form larger and more honourable conceptions of the goodness of God: for Jesus has here taught us to consider him as a tender and loving Father, who cannot sport with the miseries of his dear offspring, or mock them when they cry for help. A striking appeal is made to the feelings of every parent, to determine the case. For such a monster is scarcely to be met with, as can insult over his children in distress, and, instead of ministering to their necessary support, give them that which would be an injury rather than a benefit. And shall the God of heaven be less kind and compassionate than we, who are depraved and perverse from our very birth?

But what effect should the mercy of God produce in us? It should render us not only fervent in prayer to him, but upright and faithful in our dealings, attentive and benevolent, one to another: nor is it possible, that we can feel any real devotion towards God, unless we have learned to exercise justice and tenderness to our fellow-creatures. Hence Jesus has inferred the necessity of observing, what is usually called, the golden rule of equity, that we should treat all men, as we could with reason expect them to treat us in similar circumstances. This contains a perfect system of ethics; at least, from this one simple direction every moral duty may be deduced. It exhibits the substance of all that the law and the prophets have enjoined, concerning our relative obligations. The propriety and excellency of the precept must be generally allowed, since it calls upon every man to judge between his neighbour and himself. If he doubt, what line of conduct he should pursue towards another, let him suppose, for a moment, a mutual change of situation, and then ask, what usage he could fairly look for from him. He cannot help drawing a right conclusion. Yet how little attention is *paid to this rule!* Most persons seem to act upon con-

tracted and selfish principles, as if they were the only people; whose advantage and comfort ought to be consulted: and few indeed, comparatively, demean themselves in life with a real and disinterested integrity. We lament the dissingenuousness we meet with in the world; but do we examine ourselves? Or rather, do we not practise the most awful self-delusion, and sooth our conscience with a false peace?

Religion, however, is a solemn business, which cannot be managed, to any good effect, with a duplicity or indifference of mind. So our Lord proceeds to admonish us. If we would save our immortal souls, we must be in earnest; and as many obstacles may await us, our utmost exertions will be required. At the very onset, much is to be done and suffered; we must "enter in at the strait gate."

Two different ways are proposed to our consideration: and we ought to deliberate very seriously, which road we should take. The first, which offers, seems to possess some advantages. "The gate is wide:" it is readily found; and admission may be obtained without difficulty. There are no disagreeable restraints to deter us, especially as "the way is broad;"

strewn in the way, to tempt unwary pilgrims; but how terrible will the end be! "Blackness of darkness for ever!" Many affect to disbelieve it; but the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, and he will execute his own denunciations. Ah! foolish people, and unwise! Sport no longer on the brink of final perdition; but instantly stop, or rather, endeavour to make good your retreat without delay.

Another road is proposed, which is attended with some discouraging circumstances; but let us consider, of what sort they are, and what influence they should have. "Strait is the gate:" it requires mature thought to discover it, and many strenuous efforts to gain admission. In order to enter in, we must consent to certain painful separations, for we must part with many things which we might wish to retain, and expect violent opposition from our nearest relatives and associates. If there are such obstacles at the very beginning, what will be the remainder of the journey? Throughout the whole, even to the very close, our corrupt nature will dislike it. "The way is narrow;" so that we shall be constantly in danger of deviating from it. The restraints, also, which are imposed, the various snares, laid for the travellers, and the resistance made to their progress, may discourage and distress them: for most persons are unwilling to combat with difficulties. It may be asked, Who are they, that walk this road? And here, perhaps, another objection will be raised, since "few there be that find it." It is not pleasant to be marked out and derided, as precise and singular; and on this very account many will refuse, and turn aside from, a path, which is so little frequented, determined to be like their neighbours. Besides, the company upon this road is not only small, but of such a sort, as to disgust those, who are devoted to worldly pursuits. For "not many wise men after the flesh, not many

mighty, not many noble are called *:" so that they, who dare to "tread the narrow way," must be willing to be accounted of a weak understanding, and of a mean, contemptible spirit.

But will you not enquire, what will the issue be? And will it not at once fix your resolution, to hear that "it leadeth unto life?" Only enter by the appointed gate, and persevere in the path prescribed, and you will be eternally happy with your God. It will infallibly conduct you to heaven; for every one, that endureth unto the end, shall be put in complete and everlasting possession of that kingdom of bliss and glory. For the present, storms and tempests may beat upon you, briers and thorns may obstruct your progress; but hold on your way, and soon shall your pilgrimage be finished, when you shall partake of that fulness of joy, and those pleasures, which are at God's right hand for evermore. Does there a doubt remain? O credit the declarations of him, who cannot lie: and delay not, for a moment, a business of unspeakable importance! Whatever painful struggles it may cost you, as you value the salvation of your soul, strive to gain admission at the only door, to which the Gospel refers you before it be finally

base and mischievous: they are enemies to the flock of God, which it is their aim to scatter and destroy: for "inwardly they are ravening wolves." "Beware," says the great Shepherd: be cautious, what credit you give to the claims and declarations of those, who put on the fair shew of piety, and undertake to instruct others.

Is there, then, any sure test, by which their sincerity may be tried? The general tenour of their conduct will furnish the most decisive proof. "Ye shall know them by their fruits." The nature of a tree is always determined by its invariable produce. That only, which yields something useful in life, is allowed to be really good: and that, which, however beautiful in its appearance, brings forth nothing but what is noxious or worthless, will not long be suffered to stand; "it is nigh unto cursing, and its end is to be burned*." The subject is applicable to those who receive, as well as those who give, instruction; and it is, therefore incumbent upon all to enquire of themselves, Are there any fruits of righteousness to be found in me? If we have nothing more to exhibit, than the leaves and blossoms of a religious profession, we may justly dread that sentence, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

It were absurd to attempt any imposition upon Jesus by an hypocritical shew. He requires a sincere and uniform obedience; nor will he be satisfied by the strongest declarations of high regard, where there is no intention to please him, no strenuous endeavours to do his will. Expressions of esteem are cheap: and are these all that you look for from your friends? If you perceive in them a continual neglect of your wishes, and an opposition to your known interest, you will not credit their words. Nay, you will account them as your enemies, who with their mouths pretend

* Heb. vi. 8.

a cordial attachment to you, the better to carry on some hostile designs against you. Accordingly, Jesus assures us, that all those, who shall be found "workers of iniquity," shall be disowned by him in the great day, and sentenced to an everlasting separation from him, however they may be able to plead, that they have been zealous advocates for his truth, and eminent officers in his Church, possessed of distinguished gifts for the benefit of others. How tremendous is the declaration! Can any more forcible argument be suggested, which may induce us to examine, with true seriousness of mind, What are we? Does our conduct, as well as our language, evince an unfeigned regard to the Saviour? Or what reception may we expect from him, when he will come to exhibit every character in its true light, and execute an impartial judgment upon all?

So solemn were the admonitions of Jesus to his hearers! The close of the sermon may be considered as a practical application of the whole, and may furnish his ministers with an excellent model for their public addresses to the people. He separated and divided his audience into two classes; and it will, in general, be proper and necessary to distinguish our

pendent storms. For such trials, probably, will soon come upon them, as will prove, that they stand on firm ground, and that their house of defence is immovably established. Is the ministry of the Gospel, then, precious unto us? And are we giving heed to the precepts, as well as to the promises? Our obedience, doubtless, is defective: but does the general practice of our lives evince our sincerity? If so, being accepted of God according to his Covenant, we shall be preserved in the hour of temptation, supported and comforted in the pains of dissolution; and in the solemn day of accounts, when the hope of the hypocrite shall perish, we shall maintain a holy confidence and joy before the presence of our Judge.

But there are those, who constantly attend upon the word of God, and yet regulate not their conduct by it. It is proper to detect their hypocrisy, and, if possible, to discover them to themselves, that they may be awakened out of the dreams of self-deceit, and alarmed by a faithful representation of their danger. They hear the sayings of Christ; and so far it is well: but they do them not. The preaching may please and astonish them; but it has no practical influence upon their tempers and conversation; so that they continue as covetous, sensual, and malicious as ever. How absurdly do they act! By their religious services, they seem to be preparing a house of defence; and they flatter themselves with security. But the season is approaching, when their folly will be exposed. Their building will not stand against those tremendous tempests, which may be expected to arise. It has no foundation, not being established upon the rock; and therefore the very first storm, which beats upon it, may level it with the ground, and bury them in its ruins.

And have we not occasion to lament, as Jesus did, that many seem to hear in vain? Many, who neglect not the ordinances, are remiss in the common duties

of life. We rejoice to perceive their attention at church, but grieve to observe no amendment at home. We solemnly warn them, then, not to trust to their professions of regard to Christ and his Gospel, nor to flatter themselves, on this ground, that they have provided a place of safety. The tempestuous day is coming; and wo be to all those, who have built their house upon the sand! God "will lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place *." Horror and anguish inconceivable must ensue, when they, who "were exalted to heaven" in their religious privileges, "shall be thrust down to hell" to suffer the vengeance of eternal fire.

Such was the import of this awful, pointed, and awakening sermon, which Jesus preached upon the mount. "The people were astonished at his doctrine:" and, as to many, this was all the effect produced. Yet what does it avail, merely to express an admiration of the speaker, while the truth delivered is rejected with scorn? Soon it will be said, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish †." Justly, indeed, might the audience of Jesus be amazed: for

Let all the hearers of the Gospel make the application to themselves. It is Jesus, who yet addresses you by the mouth of his servants, and to him your attention is demanded. What influence, then, have the truths, which are preached, produced in your minds? You may have been astonished, but have you been truly converted by them? Remember, with whom you have to do; it is One, whom you cannot deceive. Though with demure appearance you tread his courts, if you work iniquity, he will search it out, and finally reject you with contempt and abhorrence. He spake on earth, and much more will he speak from heaven "with authority," when he shall come with power and great glory, as the Judge of quick and dead. "But who may abide the day of his coming?, and who shall stand when he appeareth *?" There are those, who will "have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming †." But there are multitudes, even in his visible Church, who shall then be overwhelmed with confusion, whilst he will pronounce the tremendous and irrevocable sentence, "I never knew you: depart from me."

"The Lord grant unto us, that we may find mercy of the Lord in that day!" Amen.

* Mal. iii. 2.


† 1 John ii. 28.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 12.

Jesus healed a leper—retired into the wilderness—attended by Pharisees and Doctors—cured a paralytic—called Matthew, the publican—visited him, when many Publicans were present—justified his disciples for their free and social manner of life.

In every part of our Lord's public ministry, we shall find him attended, through his different movements, by immense multitudes. The doctrines, which he preached, and the miracles, which he performed, generally brought together a large concourse of people; though but few in comparison seem to have been cordially attached to him. Some were led



Among the crowds, which followed Jesus, after his sermon on the mount, was a poor unhappy man, "full of leprosy*." A malady this, which was peculiarly distressing. For, not to observe that it was most offensive, painful, and dangerous, the Jewish law excluded all persons, infected with it, from public worship, and from a free intercourse with society, forbidding them to dwell in any town. How wretched their situation! Here was one, who, being deeply impressed with a sense of his own misery, earnestly implored relief. When he saw Jesus, having heard of his character and his wonderful works of mercy, he applied to him with much importunity, and with evident signs of a real dependence upon him, though, probably, not without a mixture of unbelief. He worshipped him, falling down on his face before him, and very ardently besought him to extend his compassion to him. "Lord," said he, "if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." With a full confidence of his power, he yet seemed to entertain a doubt of his willingness, to heal him. What a picture of distress was here! An afflicted creature, deprived of the main comforts of life, shut out from friends and relations, loathsome in the sight of others, and burdensome to himself, despairing of obtaining deliverance from men, and now prostrate as an humble suppliant at the feet of Jesus! And did the Saviour ever turn away from such an object, or disregard such an application? No; his heart was ever susceptible of the tenderest pity; and, therefore, no sooner was the desire expressed, than it was granted in its full extent. For instantly, at his word, the malady was removed, and a perfect cure wrought. He upbraided not the leper with his distrust, but, to demonstrate that his grace is equal to his power, and that he is as ready as he is able to relieve every needy petitioner, which

* Mat. viii. 1-4. Mark i. 40-45. Luke v. 12-16.

seemed

tern, set before us: alas! how defective are the most eminent of his followers! In nothing, perhaps, do they fail more, than in the improvement of their leisure for devotional purposes. And is not this holy retirement neglected, because it requires the most lively, spiritual affections, and flatters not the vanity of the mind, by exciting the admiration of others.

Jesus, however, was soon called forth again to public view and activity. Though it might have been pleasing to himself to have spent a longer season in solitude, he could not be unmindful of the multitudes, who flocked after him, and therefore for their sakes he returned to his former exertions *. Upon his coming back to Capernaum, immense crowds attended him, to whom he preached the Gospel. Amongst these were some persons of higher station and more respectable appearance, than those who usually resorted to him; "Pharisees and Doctors of the law." It is but seldom that men of rank or consequence in the world pay any serious regard to the word of God; and therefore we may be disposed to wonder that these made part of the congregation. But it is remarked of them, that "they were sitting

The ministers of Christ are often placed in a similar situation, being surrounded by those, who are unfriendly, and disposed to find fault. Such hearers may properly be said to be "sitting by;" for they come to pass their judgment on the sermon, not to be instructed from it; and, therefore, they criticise both the preacher and his doctrine with malevolence and severity. The servant of the Lord, however, though his own feelings may be hurt, must still persist in the faithful discharge of his office, nor conceal any part of the truth, even while he knows that he shall excite opposition by it.

When Jesus was thus attended, a poor disabled paralytic was brought before him. The crowd about the house prevented all access to him; but such was the eagerness of the afflicted man and his friends to obtain relief, that with great pains and difficulty he was taken up to the roof, and let down by cords, probably into the court yard, where our Lord might be preaching.

Perhaps, this particular method of application arose from ignorance and unbelief, as it seemed to imply, that the Saviour could not work the cure at a distance. He did not, however, upbraid them with their weakness; but, considering their conduct as an evidence of faith, he received them graciously, and encouraged the palsied person by an assurance of the pardon of his sins. A blessing this, which does not appear to have been solicited or desired. But so free and extensive is the mercy of our God, that all, who apply to him with real sincerity of heart, shall find him "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that they ask or think."

The declaration of Jesus, which denoted his sovereign majesty and divine power, disposed his captious hearers to raise a formidable objection against him. They argued within themselves, that he was guilty of the grossest impiety in the claim, which he had set

up. Their position was true, that none can forgive sins but God alone; yet their conclusion, that Jesus had spoken blasphemy, was false. They knew not, and would not believe, though the clearest evidence was given, that he possessed the perfections of Deity, and, therefore, that the forgiveness of sins belonged to him, as his high prerogative. He replied to the charge, even before they had dared to avow it, and thereby discovered his intimate acquaintance with their very thoughts. Who, then, can this be, that calleth men to account for the imagination of their hearts? He proposed to exhibit sufficient proof, by instantly restoring the poor cripple before them to health and vigour, that he had not been guilty of a vain, presumptuous boast; and therefore, with all the majesty and authority of a divine person, and with a view to shew his full right to pardon offenders, he thus addressed the man, "I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house."

The word was effectual; for immediately the paralytic received strength, so that he departed without assistance, ascribing glory to God. This excited a general amazement and consternation among the

nels against us, that our transgressions are very many, let us go to him with an humble reliance upon his mercy, and say, "Lord, thou only canst remove my load of guilt; extend thy compassion to me; assure me of thy favour; and speak peace to my soul, that I may depart with deepest impressions of gratitude and love, glorifying God."

As Jesus retired from Capernaum toward the sea-shore, he fixed his eye upon a certain publican, named Matthew or Levi, who was busily employed in his occupation, as a tax-gatherer, "sitting at the receipt of custom," and immediately called him to be his disciple*. The office of publicans was odious to the Jews, and, as their business exposed them to many temptations, they were generally persons of an infamous character; so that it became proverbial to join "publicans and sinners" together. But by our Lord's conduct we are taught to despise no man, whatever he may have been. Jesus can pardon, and can sanctify, and disdains not even those, who have been most atrocious offenders: nay, he seems purposely to have chosen some of this very stamp, that he might display the greatness of his mercy, and to encourage the hopes of all, who are willing to submit unto him, however desperate their case may appear to be. In certain instances, we perceive, he has sought after them, without waiting for their application, and constrained them, by the discovery of his love and the influence of his Spirit, to forsake their beloved pursuits, and to follow him.

Such, we apprehend, was the case of Matthew. He was immersed in all the hurry of business, which was advantageous, though not honourable, probably without any serious care or desire of a spiritual nature, when Jesus looked upon him, and required him to renounce his secular gains, and become one of his

* Mat. ix. 9. Mark ii. 13, 14. Luke v. 27, 28.

despised attendants. Many, also, among ourselves, who seem not to have had any previous preparation of heart, any solemn consideration or convictions of religion, are suddenly awakened in the midst of various schemes of vanity and sin. A thought is darted in upon their minds, as quick and as effectual as the word spoken to Matthew, in consequence of which they immediately covet and seek for that acquaintance with Jesus, which they disdained before. The transition from one course to another is rapid; and the change, in every view of it, is truly wonderful. Yet, we see, it is easy for Him, who has access to the conscience, to produce it in an instant. The call given to Matthew, though urged upon him by no motives or persuasions whatever, went with a powerful impression to his heart, and succeeded. He "conferred not with flesh and blood," but obeyed the summons without hesitation, cheerfully relinquishing his lucrative post, and entering on the service of a poor and despised Master. "He arose, and left all, and followed him." From that time he was numbered among the disciples of Jesus, and afterwards chosen to be an Apostle.

Some persons were prejudiced against Jesus, and

God in Christ Jesus? It matters little, in what way, or by what particular means, this has been effected: but are we really influenced to follow the Saviour? Matthew, doubtless, was condemned for his conduct, as a wild visionary or a weak enthusiast: nor need we wonder, if we come under such censures for our attachment to Jesus. "Let us go forth, bearing his reproach," and be solicitous only to approve ourselves unto God.

Some time after this occurrence, we find the young convert entertaining his beloved Master at his own house. It may not be easy to fix the precise date of the visit; but perhaps it will be most suitable to consider it here, while Matthew's character is before us. Perhaps to shew his grateful regard to the Saviour, and to recommend him to the notice and esteem of his former acquaintance, at least to give them an opportunity of receiving benefit from his conversation, he provided a large feast, at which he invited many publicans, and others of a similar stamp, to be present with Jesus *. We admire the condescension of this exalted Guest, who was willing to mix with any company, where there was a prospect of usefulness, and who, upon the occasion now mentioned, conversed in a familiar manner with persons of an ignominious reputation. But his conduct again called forth the enmity of the Scribes and Pharisees, who, with a pretence of superior sanctity, held all others in the utmost contempt, and could not bear that favourable notice should be taken of any besides themselves. They seemed to insinuate, that Jesus, by a free communication with men of an infamous character, appeared as the patron of iniquity. He replied, that he did not maintain an intercourse with them, as a partaker or encourager of their evil deeds, but from a real desire to save their precious souls, just as a phy-

* Matt. ix. 10—17. Mark ii. 15—22. Luke v. 29. &c.

fician visits his patients, to heal and restore them. He observed, that his business properly lay amongst those, who readily acknowledged themselves sinners, more at least than with such as were so conceited of their own righteousness, that they disdained the offer of a Saviour. He intimated, however, that, while he shewed a regard to the most abandoned, his object was, "to call them to repentance," and that herein he performed an act of mercy more acceptable to God, than any ceremonial observances.

The ministers of Christ are censured in the same manner, whenever they are followed, as is frequently the case, by persons who have been irregular and profligate in their conduct. It is suggested, if not openly asserted, that their doctrine is favourable to the purposes of licentiousness, as if it allowed men to continue in their evil practices. This is said, or hinted, by those, "who trust in themselves, that they are righteous, and despise others." But we would admonish them, that in such a temper of mind they are of all others most opposite to the Gospel, and farthest from the kingdom of heaven. "Many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first." The

cation would be unsuitable to their situation, as they were then rejoicing in the presence of the heavenly Bridegroom. He had, also, another reason to offer, which he illustrated by certain similitudes taken from the common concerns of life. Some of those, whom he had attached to himself, had been strangers to that humiliation, which would afterwards be necessary for them; and therefore, in a wise and compassionate regard to their weakness, and even to their former prejudices, he would not put them upon severe trials or duties, for which their strength was insufficient, but he designed to lead them on gradually, as they were able to bear it. A different treatment might have had the worst effects, in making them averse to his service, which they might be disposed to consider as rigorous and intolerable.

This exhibits a pleasing representation of the manner, in which he deals with his people now. He proportions their difficulties to their ability. Many things, both in doctrine and practice, to which they would violently object upon their first conversion, they are brought by degrees to submit to, approve, and admire. When they enter on the Christian course, they are generally favoured with peculiar consolations, and know little of those burdens, by which others are oppressed. The Bridegroom is with them; and they rejoice in his presence. Indeed, he never deserts them; but as they advance in wisdom, strength, and courage, he calls them out to severer exercises; and then frequently the clear manifestations of his love are withdrawn from them, and they are weighed down with many heavy afflictions and temptations. Such was the divine conduct towards the children of Israel, when they were led about through the wilderness, and not by the direct road to Canaan, that they might gradually be prepared for those sharp conflicts, which they had to sustain *. Let us praise him for

* Exod. xiii. 17, 18.

the methods of his grace so exactly suited to the various cases of his people, and cheerfully commit ourselves to his care and disposal.

We observe, what perverseness and "contradiction of sinners" our Lord endured, and with what meekness he replied to their malicious objections. We learn, therefore, to abstain from all pride and vehemence of spirit, and with patience to bear the folly and malignity of those, who oppose themselves. Let us beware, especially, lest we be numbered amongst "the adversaries of the Lord." Are there not those, who shew the same cavilling temper of mind, which the Pharisees did of old? Most awful indeed is your situation. He, who suffered his enemies to raise their wicked contentions against himself, when he was upon the earth, may exercise much forbearance towards you; but he will soon reckon with you for your captious insolence in resisting his Gospel, and for your obstinate contempt of his grace. And "can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong, in the days that he shall deal with you?" O submit; nor dare any longer to maintain the vain and presumptuous contest! Refuse not to comply with his de-

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 13.

Jesus, celebrating the passover, cured an impotent man at Bethesda—called to account, declared his own dignity—stated the proofs of his divine mission—and subjoined the most solemn admonitions to his opposers.

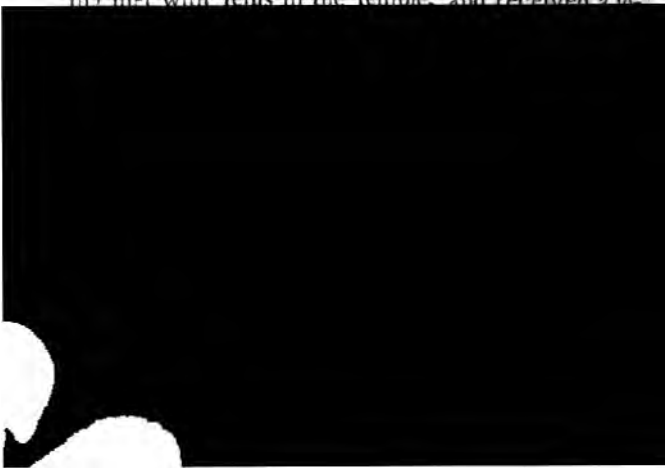
It is generally supposed, that our Lord celebrated four passovers during his public ministry; and that the circumstance, which we are now about to consider, occurred at the second of them. At the annual celebration of that great festival, he went up to Jerusalem, as the law commanded. He was constant in his attendance upon all instituted means: and his example teaches us, not to slight or neglect the ordinances; since he, who could not stand in need of them, as we do, put such honour upon them.

When he came to Jerusalem, an opportunity soon offered for the exercise and display of his power and compassion *. A poor disabled man, who had remained in a state of entire impotency for thirty-eight years, lay at the pool of Bethesda, waiting in expectation of a cure from the miraculous motion of the water, which it pleased God to appoint at certain seasons, for the healing of the most inveterate diseases. This afflicted person attracted the notice of Jesus, who even prevented an application, and, without re-

* John v. 1, &c.

ceiving so much as a petition for relief, (the cripple, probably, knowing nothing of his character) instantly by a word restored his strength, and commanded him to give full and public proof of his recovery, by taking up his bed and walking.

The supernatural effect was manifest; and we might have thought the conclusion from it so obvious, that all must acknowledge it. But the superstitious Pharisees immediately objected to it, because the work had been performed, and the man had carried away his couch, on the sabbath day. Hypocrites, we find, are generally attentive to outward observances, while they are content to be destitute of real religion in their hearts. The person, who was cured, rightly argued, that he, who had so wonderfully removed his disease, could not be supposed to require him to do, what was sinful. They, however, probably suspecting that Jesus was the author of the miracle, were desirous to bring him forward to public view, that they might accuse him. But in the mean time, he had judged it proper, either through modesty or prudence, to retire from their observation, before he was known. Afterwards, indeed, the man, having met with Jesus in the temple, and received a se-



The circumstance, here related, may repress our wonder, when we hear the basest misrepresentations of excellent characters and the most benevolent conduct. Those, who are followers of Jesus, must expect to pass through evil report, as he did, and should not be staggered in their minds, though they hazard the loss of every thing, even when they exert themselves most earnestly for the honour of God and the benefit of their fellow-creatures. "Though war should rise against them," let them "not be weary in well-doing."

Jesus, then, was called to account for what he had done, probably in a public manner, and, as it should seem, before the Sanhedrim, the great council of the nation. There he stood arraigned as a criminal; and yet, when put upon his defence, he spake as the sovereign Lord of all, possessing full authority to condemn and destroy his accusers. With an inexpressible dignity he declared, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work;" as if he had said, "My Father is continually carrying on his works of providence, and ceaseth not on sabbath days from exercising his Almighty power for the support of the creation; and I, who maintain the same dominion, and act in the same absolute manner, am no more to be restrained and limited in my operations, by those rules, which must direct the conduct of creatures." If this be, as it evidently appears, the fair import of his words, we wonder not that the Jews, who determined not to acknowledge his divinity, considered him as a blasphemer, for this plain reason, that "he made himself equal with God." This charge, therefore, they immediately urged against him; and he replied to it without fear or reserve. He took occasion from it to enter upon a full vindication of himself, asserting the high dignity of his character and the offices he sustained and warning them of their danger in opposing him. The whole of his speech is inconceivably

especially if it be understood to be addressed to the rulers of the people, collected in their grand assembly, and sitting in judgment upon him.

Had they mistaken his words, or drawn a false and mischievous conclusion from them (as they certainly did, if he be not very God), he would instantly have corrected the error, and explained his meaning more explicitly. But, so far from contradicting, he allowed and confirmed, their inference. For he proceeded to declare, that "what things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise," not only performing the same operations, but conducting them in the same manner, with an equal display of supreme and sovereign authority. And is it not, then, a fair deduction, that the Father and the Son, who are confessedly united in their plans of action, are one in nature, and possess the very same perfections? He referred them to some stronger testimonies of his Omnipotence, than had already been given by the cure of the lame man, and observed, that in two particular instances his dignity, as the Son of God, would be manifested, to their astonishment. The one was, his restoring of life to the dead, according to his own pleasure: for even now he quickens whom he

the former, is, in effect, denied to the latter. Of what sort, then, is their religion, who are attempting the degradation of the Saviour? With all their pretences of veneration for the God of heaven, they are here expressly declared to be his enemies.

Accordingly, the Lord Jesus, in the most solemn manner, demanded the attention of his judges, representing himself as the grand source of all spiritual blessings, and requiring them to submit to him, and depend upon him, as the author and giver of everlasting life. To fix a deeper impression on their minds, he set before them the awful proceedings of the last day, when they should hear his voice, awakening them from their graves, and stand at his bar, to receive their final sentence from his mouth.

It is objected to the doctrine, which asserts his Deity, that he said on this very occasion, "I can of mine own self do nothing;" clearly implying an original subjection and inferiority to the Father. But we apprehend, that no such conclusion can be fairly drawn from his expressions. True it is, that "the Son can do nothing of himself;" that is, he can have no distinct plan of his own, nor can he act separately from, or in opposition to, the Father: such is their union, and perfect agreement together.

But does not Jesus describe himself as subordinate and dependent? Doubtless, there is a sense, in which he is so. He speaks of a commission which he had received, and of an authority with which he was intrusted, from the Father. But this may properly be referred to his mediatorial office, and does not prove any difference or inequality, previous to his voluntary assumption of that office. In that capacity he submits to be a servant, and acts by express directions from the Father, and in subjection to his will. "Because he is the Son of man," having taken our nature upon him, and appeared in the likeness of sinful flesh, he is, in this respect and for this very

son, inferior to the Father, and is sent and appointed by him. Yet the character he sustains, and the acts he performs, as Mediator, clearly manifest his Divinity: for no created being in earth or heaven possesses powers sufficient for them.

Are we, then, in danger of rendering too much honour to Jesus, or of exalting him higher than he deserves? Who does not tremble at the suggestion? But have we indeed obtained suitable conceptions of his dignity? and are we habitually giving him the glory due unto him? Let us fear, lest we come under the condemnation of those, "who honour not the Son." If we are disaffected to him, and unwilling to pay him profound and supreme adoration, we are fundamentally and dangerously wrong. For it is indispensably required, that, as we believe in God the Father, we should also believe in his Son Jesus Christ.

He proceeded to state certain decisive proofs, in support of the claims, which he made. Our reason is appealed to, in confirmation of our faith: and evidence, in abundance, may be adduced, to convince us that our holy religion is no foolish fancy, or base imposition. The Gospel does not seek to evade,

He referred them to his own miracles, in attestation of his divine mission. He performed such wonderful works, as human powers were unequal to; and these, therefore, sufficiently evinced, that he could not be a deceiver, but that he was indeed, what he had uniformly maintained, the Saviour that should come into the world.

He alleged, that his Father also had borne witness of him; which he had done, not only by the extraordinary gifts communicated to him, but by an express declaration "from the excellent glory," that Jesus was his beloved Son. Such an evidence as this had not been vouchsafed on any other occasion. Yet to what purpose was it then given? Alas! it rendered many the more inexcusable for their unbelief; as they hardened their hearts against conviction.

He directed them, likewise, to the testimony of the holy scriptures. These were the writings of the old Testament, the authenticity of which they all acknowledged, and to which they professed to pay a very high regard. To these divine oracles he made a solemn appeal, in vindication of his own claims, and argued their inconsistency, who, with vast pretences of reverence for the sacred records, rejected the very Saviour, whom they all pointed out. Their inspired authors are witnesses of Christ, either by types, promises, or prophecies; and, since Jesus has exactly fulfilled those ancient descriptions, they illustrate and confirm his declarations. How strange is it, then, that any, who have the Bible in their hands, should remain in ignorance of him! How absurd and sinful is the general inattention of men to the important contents of that book, which they allow to be a revelation from heaven!

Thus Jesus endeavoured to convince the Jews of his character and mission, and of the justice of those claims, which he advanced. And are not we ^{also} interested in the subject? Do we, then, receive C

He warned them, finally, that the great founder of their own religion, Moses, to whom they professed an unreserved submission, appeared as their accuser before God; and that they would be so fully convicted on the charge of rejecting that prophet, there would be no need for him to bring any testimony against them. They would, therefore, be condemned on their own principles: for, as Moses had written much concerning the Redeemer, and almost all the rites and ceremonies of his law represented the office, work, or character, of Messiah, a real regard to those ancient records would have produced a cordial reception of Jesus, in whom the types and prophecies were fulfilled. Yet such was their astonishing ignorance and perverseness, that, with the Bible in their hands, they denied and persecuted the very person, of whom they were continually reading.

The address is applicable to others besides Jews; to many among ourselves, who pretend to pay the highest deference to both the old and the new Testament, as the revelation of God. May we not ask, Do not these scriptures contain the heaviest charge against you, while you oppose the authority of Christ, and despise his grace? And should you not, to be confis-

is the state of your minds, while you discover the utmost disdain for infinite excellence, and repay the tenderest love with hatred! Your wickedness is of a heinous nature, and highly aggravated. You despise "the Lord of glory," the Son of God, "who thought it no robbery to be equal with God." You pay no regard to the united testimonies of earth and heaven in his favour. You scorn the kindest and richest offers, ever made to man. You are unwilling to bow to him, whom Angels worship, or to be indebted to him for the life of your souls, which must inevitably perish without him. You set light by his unparalleled condescensions and labours of love: and, in defiance of all admonitions and threatenings, you are rushing on, with steady course, to certain and everlasting damnation.

It is proper, by these repeated warnings, to call your attention to your own perilous condition. But how little effect is produced by such solemn reproofs! Probably after our Lord's address, his accusers and judges were silenced, and restrained by an awful impression upon their minds from proceeding to any act of violence against him. So possibly may you, who are his avowed opposers, for a season at least, be convinced and alarmed by these faithful representations of your guilt and danger. You may seem to relinquish your objections, and yet persevere in unbelief, and be destroyed for ever. Most tremendous thought! May it please God, not only to awaken your fears, but to subdue the enmity of your hearts! Then you will not cease to pray, "O Lord, fulfil in us all the good pleasure of thy goodness, and the work of faith with power!"

sabbath, for the support of himself and his attendants, which in any other situation would have been highly sinful. To save life is more pleasing to God than the observance of any merely positive institutions; for, as Jesus argued, our gracious God has declared, that "He will have mercy and not sacrifice *;" that is, when they interfere with each other, the former must have the preference, and the latter be dispensed with. From this part of the defence we are led to remark and admire the faithful and zealous attachment of his followers, who cheerfully exposed themselves to hunger, that they might wait upon him, and enjoy the benefit of his divine instructions. We are not aware, how many and extreme difficulties they endured; and, probably, we should not have known their distress on this occasion, had it not been requisite to offer an excuse for them. But where do we now perceive such a regard to Jesus, as disposes men to suffer in his service? In general, many withdraw from him upon the first appearance of hardships, and "walk no more with him." Like swallows, they abide not the winter, but depart, when storms approach.

Our Lord alleged, likewise, that, as the priests

from mount Sinai; and He, who ordained it, has a right to dispense with to modify, or alter it, as He pleases. It was, therefore, a sufficient vindication of his followers, in the circumstances now mentioned, that they acted in his service and by his permission.

It becomes us, also, to regard "the Son of man" as "the Lord of the Sabbath." In this view, we should observe that sacred season out of obedience to his command, and seek the enjoyment of his presence and favour, as the grand object of it. We believe it to have been agreeable to his will, if not by his express directions, that a change should be introduced, and that the first, instead of the last, day of the week should be kept holy to Him. This is now distinguished by a new and more honourable name, "the Lord's day." He claims it as his own, in a peculiar manner; and he has laid us under fresh and greater obligations to sanctify it, by rising from the dead, and blessing his Church with the miraculous effusions of his Spirit, on that very day. In this alteration it is not implied, that the sabbath itself is abrogated, or that any thing is taken away, essential to the original institution, which prescribes such a portion of our time to be set apart for God. But rather, according to this representation, if Jesus be "the Lord of the sabbath," the appointment is confirmed, and its continuance among Christians is ordained by him.

Soon after the incident last mentioned, we find him combating the same, or similar, objections of the Pharisees. "On another sabbath," probably in some city of Galilee, he attended the public worship of God at the synagogue, as his custom was; and there also he took the opportunity of teaching the people*. Here again we are instructed to be thankful, that we have a house of prayer, to which we can resort, and that divine ordinances are administered among o

* Mat. xii. 9—21. Mark iii. 1—12. Luke vi. 6—11

if we are not, in one respect or another, actuated by a similar spirit. What, then, will the issue be? What can you expect, in prosecuting a contest against Him, who has all power in his hands? O "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little *!"

It should seem, that, even in our own times, some unfair and mischievous conclusions have been drawn from our Lord's conduct upon the sabbath, and his vindication of himself. Many, clearly, think themselves authorized to pursue their worldly projects of business and pleasure. But is there any thing, in what he has said or done, to countenance such a practice? Do we perceive in him any contempt of the sacred day? Or can we infer more from his example, than this, that works of piety, charity, and necessity may be attended to? We ask, then, Are these the only calls, which you regard on the season, set apart for holy rest? Have you not taken pains to explain away all obligations to a strict and serious observance of the sabbath; as if, at least, the Gospel had so far released us from them, that every man is now at liberty to prosecute his own plans, as interest or con-

venience, fashion or inclination may lead him? You

tually neglect and shamefully violate the duty? We see them deserting the house and ministry of God, ready to join in every scheme of idleness, vanity, and dissipation, or else so engrossed with secular cares, that their thoughts and affections cannot be raised to any higher objects; and yet they wish to be complimented as good Christians. How strange and grievous an inconsistency is this!

The same ardent zeal, for the glory of God and the salvation of men, continued to actuate the Saviour. Intending to appoint certain persons, out of his constant attendants, to the Apostleship, he previously retired for secret prayer to a mountain, where probably an oratory was erected*, that he might engage the divine blessing upon the institution: and so fervent was his devotion, that he remained all night in the same spiritual exercise†. A whole night spent in importunate supplications to God! Ah! at how great a distance do we stand from this eminent example! Would not a single hour, so employed, seem a weariness to us? Yet surely we must allow the propriety and necessity of consecrating some portions of our time to the same pious purpose. Especially, when our minds are fixed upon any important scheme or undertaking (and what can be more important than the ordination of persons for the work of the sacred ministry?) a more than common length of holy retirement, and an unusual earnestness in prayer, will be requisite, that we may proceed to it with right principles, and prevail with our God to assist and prosper us in it.

After such a preparation, very early in the morning Jesus called together his disciples, or stated followers, who by their previous acquaintance with him had been in some measure trained up for the service;

* Prid. Connect. vol. iv. p. 557.

† Mark iii. 13—19. Luke vi. 12—49.

tain remarkable passages of the sermon, which he had preached some months before, probably in a distant place, and to a different audience. As that sermon has been already considered, it may be sufficient briefly to suggest the principal topics, on which our Lord insisted at this time; not as if they were of small moment, but because they have so lately engaged our serious meditation.

With a view to encourage his true disciples, and perhaps those more especially whom he had just appointed to the sacred function, "he lifted up his eyes on them," as if rejoicing over them, and expressing his peculiar affection towards them. He then described their character, their exalted privileges and happiness, notwithstanding all they might suffer, and, with the language of authority as well as love, pronounced them blessed. This is perfectly applicable to his sincere followers in every age. They are "poor," it may be in worldly things, as they certainly are "in spirit;" but they are the favoured subjects of Christ's kingdom, and heaven, with all its bliss and glory, shall be their inheritance. They may suffer the extremity of want, so as to be destitute of

But, turning to others of an opposite character, he described their awful case, and denounced the most tremendous woes against them. Let those, in the present day, who are destitute of true religion, hear their doom declared, and fear for themselves. They perceive not their need of any spiritual blessings, nor feel any ardent desires to obtain the grace revealed in the Gospel. Whatever temporal advantages, therefore, or sensual pleasures they may now enjoy, they are wretched; since they "have neither part nor lot in this matter." Possibly, they may abound in wealth, and be able to command every gratification, which a carnal heart may covet; they may live in splendour, gaiety, and dissipation; they may be admired and applauded amongst men; but the day of their calamity is coming; for their expiring breath will conclude all their comfort and their glory, nor can any thing await them beyond the grave, except tribulation and anguish, shame and everlasting contempt.

After such alarming declarations, Jesus proceeded to deliver various precepts, which prove the peculiar holiness of his religion, and are of general use to all his professed disciples, for the regulation of their tempers and conduct.

He enjoined the exercise of forgiveness and love towards the most violent and malignant persecutors, together with the practice of universal and disinterested benevolence. But to return kindness for injuries, blessings for curses, how opposite to the pride, envy, anger, and resentment of our fallen nature! To do good, without the prospect of present recompence or advantage, and without exception of persons, how contrary to the selfish, contracted notions of men! Yet only by such an enlarged beneficence can we prove ourselves to be partakers of the grace of Christ, and the children of the Highest, who extend his benefits to all.

He gave cautions about judging and reproving others. There are cases, in which it may be proper and necessary to undertake that unpleasant office; but we should be sure, that the occasion demands it, and that we do it not rashly or severely, or from an arrogant, censorious, or malicious disposition. Upon this head, our Lord intimated the danger of following "blind guides;" and, as we are generally much influenced by our teachers, we should beware lest we attach ourselves to those, who do not feel or understand the mild and liberal spirit of Christianity. Yet, while we look to others, we should not forget ourselves, but rather begin the work of reformation there. For except we perceive, condemn, and correct our own faults, we are incompetent to decide upon the characters and conduct of others.

He enforced the necessity of proving a professed regard to him by a holy life. As the fruit determines the nature of a tree, so the habitual tendency of our actions, words, and tempers will best discover the state of our hearts towards him. By such marks, then, we must examine, whether we are truly united to Christ, and renewed by his grace. To what purpose shall we make a shew of high respect for him

The sincere believer comes to Christ, receives with an humble mind the doctrines of grace, and by an exemplary life proves, that the word, which he has heard, has produced its right influence upon him. His trust is built on an immovable basis: "the rock of ages" is the sure foundation, on which he rests. Trials and temptations, like heavy storms, may beat upon him; but nothing shall be able to overthrow his hope, or disappoint his expectation. The hypocrite may listen to, and perhaps zealously contend for, the pure system of the Gospel; but he advances no farther. He depends on his accurate notions and distinctions, or his compliance with the forms and ceremonies of religion, while he feels not its inward energy. He will, therefore, be left defenceless and unsupported in the day of his calamity: "the overflowing shower" of divine indignation shall suddenly cast him down, and sweep him away into everlasting destruction.

Such were the solemn admonitions of the Saviour. They have been offered to our notice before; but surely we may bear the repetition of them again and again. They are at all times interesting, seasonable, and necessary. May they lead us to a strict and impartial examination of our own hearts! What, then, is our character? what our expectation beyond the grave? If we call ourselves the disciples of Jesus, what is the regard we pay him? Do we give him any thing more than a bare compliment? Or are our affections and general habits regulated by an unfeigned obedience to his will? What benefit do we derive from hearing the Gospel? Or what fruits of righteousness do we produce? These important enquiries naturally arise from the subject before us; and they claim our most serious consideration. Let us examine the foundation, on which our edifice rests, since we are building for eternity. How terrible will the confusion of the ungodly, when "the hail

sweep away their refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow their hiding-place *!" But may we, "being rooted and grounded in the love" of Christ, stand fast in the faith, against every assault on earth, and then appear at the last awful day with confidence and exceeding joy, through the merits and mediation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! Amen.

* Isa. xxviii. 17.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 15.

Jesus healed a Centurion's servant—raised a widow's son to life—testified of John the Baptist—lamented over the impenitent—encouraged the contrite—dined with a Pharisee, and vindicated the woman, who stood as a mourning penitent at his feet.

AMONGST the various incidents, which meet us in the life of Jesus, none will be found of a trifling or uninteresting nature. Every thing in this history is extraordinary, and replete with instruction. Each step that we advance will furnish us with fresh proofs of his divine character and mission, and at the same time with renewed instances of his condescending and compassionate regard to our miserable and guilty race. May every view of him constrain us to cry out, with admiration and gratitude, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us *!"

After the solemn address, which Jesus delivered to his disciples in the audience of the people, he retired to Capernaum, his most usual residence †. Wherever he went, opportunities of exerting his benevolence were offered, which he readily embraced. In this city, a man of good reputation, who, it should

* Luke i. 68, 69.

† Mat. viii. 5—13. Luke vii. 1—10

seem, attended to the worship of the true God, a Centurion, or a Captain in the Roman army, having heard of Jesus, of his character, and the miracles he had wrought, applied to him, to come and heal a favourite servant at the point of death. The Gentile soldier discovered a remarkable degree of humility and faith, upon the occasion. Thinking himself unworthy to solicit the kind notice of so exalted a Personage, he prevailed on some of the principal Jews in the place, to present and second his petition. Jesus, who was ever inclined to succour the afflicted, immediately consented to comply with their request. But the Centurion, ashamed to give him the trouble, and conceiving it to be an unsuitable thing, that he should receive such a visitant in his house, believing also that he was able to perform the cure at a distance, sent another deputation of his friends, and then at last went forth himself to meet Jesus, entreating him to proceed no farther, but only by his powerful word to command the health of the servant to be restored. "Even I," said he, "who am subject to the authority of another, as I have soldiers under my control, no sooner issue out my orders, than they are executed." Many were involved then in the


kingdom of glory, whilst those, who presumed upon their exclusive right to it, should be condemned to a state of everlasting torment and despair. This conveys a suitable admonition to us. We observe, that there is no situation or condition of life, however unfavourable, in which the grace of God may not produce eminent instances of real religion. And it should excite our thankfulness, to meet with any one, under great disadvantages of education and in the midst of many snares, like this officer in the Roman army, humbled with a deep conviction of extreme unworthiness, and entertaining high and honourable thoughts of Jesus. He did not stoop too low, when he said, "Lord, I am not worthy, that thou shouldst come under my roof;" for the most exalted monarch in the world might properly adopt the same confession. And shall not we remember and acknowledge, that we deserve no tokens of the Saviour's kind regard, and that, if He deign to visit us, it must be ascribed to his own wonderful condescension and mercy? But do we possess the faith of the Centurion? Or, do we not, rather, distrust the power of Christ? We are favoured, not above the Gentiles only, but even more than the ancient Jews; so that we may be called "the children of the kingdom." Yet have we not occasion to fear, that many, who are destitute of our privileges, may rise up in judgment to condemn us? And would it not aggravate our misery, to see them admitted into heaven, whilst we ourselves are excluded for ever?

The request of the Centurion was granted, and his confidence in Jesus proved to be well founded. He was dismissed in peace, and his servant instantly restored to the full vigour of health, merely by the efficacious word of the great Physician. Nor will any be finally disappointed of their hope in Him. We should entertain large expectations, from a persuasion of his ability to save; and a strong, unshaken fi

in him will infallibly secure his blessing to our souls.

After this miracle, it is probable that the fame of Jesus was celebrated, and that, in consequence, the number of his followers increased. The multitude, indeed, so pressed upon him, that he had no leisure to take proper refreshment: and so incessant was his attention to them, that his friends interfered, blaming him for an excess of zeal, and with much vehemence importuning him to desist from his labours, as injurious to himself, and even denoting a degree of insanity *. Peculiar occasions may justify and demand such ardent exertions, as to some may appear needless and extravagant. Nay, the very fervency, which at all times becomes the servant of Christ, will be accounted by the world a sure mark of weakness or derangement of the faculties: But, compared with the vigorous efforts of the Saviour, the most eager and strenuous endeavours of his people will seem to savour of lukewarmness and sloth. Probably, we are not capable of activity, like His.

He might so far yield to the solicitations of his friends, as to receive some nourishment, and then re-



her tears. But what consolation could he administer to one, who seemed to have lost her all? "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" He shewed himself stronger than death; for instantly, with a divine majesty and authority, as the Almighty Lord, "who quickeneth whom he will," he spake the word, and the dead revived. He restored to the disconsolate widow her beloved child, in all the vigour of life; and thus "gave unto her, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

What an astonishing exhibition both of mercy and of might! We are at a loss to know, which of them we should most admire. No wonder, that an event so uncommon, and incontestably miraculous, impressed the minds of all the spectators with a serious awe, and constrained them to acknowledge, that an illustrious prophet had risen up among them, and that God had again visited his peculiar people. And shall not we, also, be struck with a holy fear and reverence of the Saviour, while we contemplate his actions? Does not the occurrence before us clearly prove his divine mission? Why, then, do not all receive him, as coming from heaven to instruct and redeem his Church? Alas! but few are convinced; or, their convictions are very superficial. Many will not examine the evidence with serious attention, but, in proud or careless contempt, turn away both their eyes and their ears from the truth. Others, we observe with grief, though obliged by the strength of argument to assent to the Gospel, fail of that unfeigned and supreme regard, which is due to Jesus. They may feel an impression of terror upon their minds, like the inhabitants of Nain, and confess, that "a great Prophet is risen up," while they refuse to submit or listen to the doctrines, which he delivers. How strange and fatal an inconsistency is this!

We have seen the tenderness of Jesus towards the poor and afflicted; we shall learn from the example, to be as gentle to the afflicted with kindness and compassion, and to stretch out our hands for their relief. But feeling our compassion, is our pity: for, in many cases, our efforts to remove, or mitigate, distress are ineffectual. Jesus alone can administer suitable and adequate assistance. O fix your attention upon Him, you that are overwhelmed with trouble, whose "tears have been your meat day and night!" He can instantly turn your weeping into joy, and your complaints into loud thanksgivings, by accomplishing deliverance in a way, which to you may seem impossible. For what cannot his power effect? Or what will not his love be disposed to grant, if really expedient for you? Death, indeed, may rob you of those who were the delight of your eyes, and the desire of your hearts, and the grave may detain them; yet, under the pressure of this calamity, you are taught to rejoice in Jesus, as "the Resurrection and the Life," who will shortly break up the mansions of the dead, and restore to you every dear friend, who has departed in the faith, clothed with glory and immortality, to rejoice with you in his blissful presence for

selves to Him, after John's decease. They beheld the wonderful exertions of his power and mercy: for in their presence, while they stood before him, he healed all manner of diseases, cast out devils, and restored sight to the blind. He referred them, therefore, to his works for a decisive proof of his character, and directed them to carry a faithful relation to John, of what they had seen and heard, that they might all perceive the ancient prophecies, concerning the Saviour of the world, to be fulfilled in him. At the same time he added, that it would be happy for them, if they should not be staggered in their minds, or influenced by the prevailing prejudices and objections against him. It is of importance to ourselves also, to be assured that Jesus is no deceiver, that he exhibited the strongest testimonies of his own divinity, and, therefore, that our faith rests on a sure foundation. Yet many reject him: and it is allowed, that there are such things, relating to Him, his doctrines, and adherents, as may give offence to superficial and captious observers, and such as proud and sensual minds can never relish. In this view, blessed indeed are they, who have themselves escaped or surmounted these difficulties, and who are not led away by the exceptions of others.

Our Lord took occasion from the visit of John's disciples, to address the multitude concerning the Baptist, who had once been extremely popular amongst them. He spake of him in the most honourable terms, as being stedfast both in his preaching and practice, not easily shaken like a reed with the wind, not seeking the pomps of the world or sensual gratifications, but as a man of singular austerity and self-denial. He declared him to be superior, in some respects, to all the ancient prophets, especially as being the Harbinger of Messiah, and preparing the way for his reception. He remarked the peculiar ardour, to which some had been excited by his ministry, who

seemed as if they would gain an admission into the heavenly kingdom by a holy violence; and yet he lamented the awful condition of those, who rejected both the Baptist, and the Saviour, whom he came to introduce. He was led, therefore, to complain of the perverseness of that generation, who had discovered the most absurd prejudices against them, and condemned the one and the other, though for different and opposite reasons; so that there appeared no prospect of obtaining any acceptance with them. They had refused their attention to John, on account of his austerities, as if he were a melancholy, distracted man, under the possession of an evil spirit: and now they calumniated Jesus, for the freedom of his intercourse with men of all characters, as if he were himself addicted to intemperance, and a patron of the dissolute and abandoned. Yet the Saviour rejoiced, that, amidst these various misrepresentations, there were those, who perceived and approved the wisdom of their conduct.

The application to ourselves is obvious. Many, in our own day, betray a frowardness and malignity of temper, similar to that of the ancient Pharisees.



of heaven! They perceive the propriety and necessity of many things in religion, with which others are disgusted: and, instead of being carried away with the torrent of general prejudice, they determine to adhere to the truth and service of God, however vilified in the most opprobrious terms.

On the occasion just mentioned, Jesus was induced to speak more largely, and with a peculiar ardour of affection, while he lamented over the impenitent cities of Galilee, in which he had performed most of his mighty works. The meek and compassionate Saviour denounced one wo upon another, against Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, and predicted the final and aggravated ruin, which was coming upon them for their obduracy and contempt of the Gospel. Many, it should seem, of respectable character and abilities, remained in unbelief. This very circumstance has been thought an objection to the Christian faith. But surely, in this view, it appears, that it was not a mere human system, or indebted to worldly policy for its support. The ways of God are in the deep: but we perceive it to be His purpose to abase the pride, and stain the glory, of man; and, while we observe, that his salvation is not revealed to many of high attainments in literature, as it is to some of inferior parts and mean rank in life, we are constrained to be silent in the dust, or rather, with the Saviour, to adore the sovereignty of the awful dispensation.

At the same time, however, to encourage those humble penitents, who, under a conviction of their guilt, might be ready to fear, that the condemnation, he had denounced, would fall upon them, he represented his own supreme authority and divine perfections, commensurate to those of the Father, and then declared his peculiar tenderness and grace to all, who might be bowed down with a sense of their sin and misery. He published the most kind and general in-

vation to all, who felt a burdened conscience and sought deliverance, adding express and absolute assurances of pardon, peace, and salvation, on their unfeigned application and cordial submission to him.

We ask, then, What conceptions do you form of Jesus; what regard do you shew him? Do objections arise in your minds, and prevent your cordial belief of the Gospel? But after such proofs, as have been adduced, who shall complain of the want of evidence? Have you no apprehensions of the tremendous consequences of rejecting him? Shall Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum be condemned with accumulated woes for their infidelity, and you escape unpunished? Or, do you consider yourselves as utterly excluded from his notice, and incapable of receiving mercy, on account of your extreme depravity and long continuance in sin? He speaks expressly to your case, and gives you direction and encouragement, suited to your distress. O keep not at a distance from Him, while He says, "Come unto me!" He will not disdain you, nor withhold his blessings from you. "He is meek, and lowly in heart;" and, therefore, he will condescend to your request, mean and worthless as you are. Only, be willing,

who sought opportunities of doing good in all places and among all characters, readily complied *. During his visit there, a singular circumstance occurred, which shewed the ignorance and pride of the Pharisee, and the amazing grace and compassion of the Saviour. A woman in the town, who had been a notorious sinner, and, as it is supposed, infamous for her lewdness, having heard where he was, and, probably, being emboldened by his assurances of mercy and peace to the mourning penitent, desired to give some testimony of her strong regard for him, and for that purpose prepared certain costly perfumes, with which she might anoint him. She was admitted into his presence, while he was at dinner; and standing behind him, as he lay reclined upon the couch, she betrayed marks of extreme distress, and wept to such a degree, with unfeigned contrition for her sins, that her tears flowed down upon, and bedewed, the feet of the Saviour, which, therefore, she wiped with her dishevelled hair. Nor was this all: she could not refrain, even before the company, from expressions of her ardent gratitude and love: she kissed his feet, and poured her rich ointment upon them, not presuming to do it upon his head.

These signs of her fervent affection our Lord did not disdain, but received them favourably. The Pharisee, however, who looked on her with contempt, took offence. Lifted up with a proud conceit of his own goodness, he considered the very touch of the woman as carrying defilement with it, and concluded that a prophet of God must not only know the baseness of her character, but instantly turn away from her with disgust. This disposition is not uncommon. Those, who have high thoughts of themselves, set up a kind of claim to the divine regard, and cannot bear, that such, as have been notorious offenders

should be admitted to a share in that regard, or that any encouragement should be given to them, even when transformed and established "in newness of life." But how large is the grace, how great the condescension, of Jesus! He did not scorn the poor, weeping penitent, though she had been most abandoned, and long enslaved in the service of Satan; but he received, he comforted, he defended her, at the hazard of his own reputation.

He replied, in a very apposite parable, to the secret objections of the Pharisee (for he had not avowed them), shewing, that of two debtors, both of whom are insolvent, and both freely released from their obligations by their generous creditor, he, to whom the largest forgiveness is extended, will feel the warmest gratitude. He then referred immediately to the case of Simon and the woman, reproving him for the neglect of those tokens of respect to him which are usually paid to welcome visitants, and commending her for the expressions of her regard, however extravagant they might seem. The Pharisee thought his own offences few and trivial, and, therefore, he could not entertain any high value for the Saviour; but she, who was overwhelmed with a deep sense of her

ceived to favour, but to establish her the more in thankfulness, hope, and joy, he solemnly pronounced her absolution: "Thy sins are forgiven." That very circumstance occasioned fresh offence among those, who were present; for they had no just conceptions of the person and authority of Jesus. But, in order to declare his divine character most peremptorily, and to assert his high prerogative, however they might cavil at it, he repeated the assurance of her pardon and salvation, through faith in his name, and dismissed her in peace.


A serious attention to this little narrative may suggest the following enquiries, which will furnish an useful improvement of the subject.

Are we not debtors to God, according to the description of the parable? Have we not failed of that obedience, which He has a right to demand? Is not our debt large, immense, beyond any calculation we can form? Let us beware of the ignorance and presumption of the Pharisee. Though others may seem to owe far more than we, will this procure our discharge? Or are there any, among the most atrocious offenders, whom we may disdain? Does it not, rather, become us to confess, that our own transgressions are innumerable, and, considering how we have violated the strongest obligations to God, that none can need forgiveness more than we?

Are we not, likewise, insolvent? Or, in what manner shall we contrive to answer all the claims, which the Lord God has upon us? What payment can we tender? Is it such, as will be sufficient to satisfy his just demands? It is said, perhaps, "We shall repent, and do better." But shall we ever perform more than would have been due from us, if we had not sinned? And, if we only prevent an increase of the debt in future, can this have any effect in diminishing what is already contracted, or wipe off any part of the old account against us? What, then

shall we resolve on? Let us not waste the time, in forming vain and fruitless schemes of our own, but frankly acknowledge our inability, and go with deepest humiliation to that Jesus, who "receiveth sinners." Let each of us cry to Him, "O Lord, undertake for me:" He will appear as our "Surety," and present us with a full and free discharge. If, like this penitent woman, we mourn and weep at his feet, he will observe our tears, commiserate our distress, and hasten to comfort us with the assurance, that "our sins, which are many, are forgiven."

If, then, He pronounce us to be acquitted, what should hinder, but that we depart in peace? This is his own gracious proposal, and ought not to be refused. Yet do not many reject the consolation, and indulge an excess of sorrow? Doubtless, there is continual cause to abhor ourselves, and lament our folly; but to grieve as if there were no hope, is to despise the mercy provided. Jesus, "mighty to save," the compassionate Redeemer, stands ready to wipe away our tears, and bids us "Be of good cheer." Let us only, without reserve, submit to him, and depend upon him; and then we may "go on our way rejoicing."



compensation; but do we not wish to testify the sense, which we feel, of our immense obligations to him?—

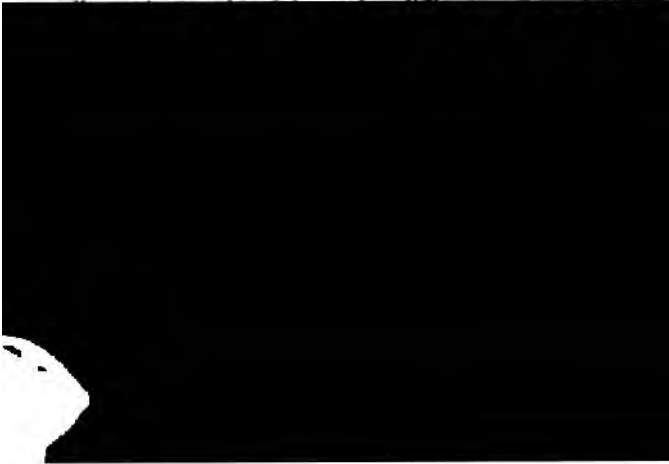
“ O Lord, come, and shed abroad thy love in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, that we may hereby be constrained to dedicate ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto Thee, who hast loved us, and given thyself for us!” Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 16.

Jesus took another circuit—healed a demoniac—vindicated that miracle, against the objections of the Pharisees—admonished and reproved them—and encouraged his faithful adherents.

THE grand luminary, which visited the earth in the person of Jesus Christ, diffused its unequalled splendour through a large extent. Happy indeed would have been the men of that generation, if they had been sensible of their inestimable privilege, in having such an Inhabitant, such a Teacher amongst them. He brought with him “good tidings of great joy to



be willing to sacrifice our ease to usefulness. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." So shall "this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus *." A similar benevolence may be displayed even by persons of moderate abilities and private situations. According to our talents and occasions, we should lay ourselves out for the glory of God and the best interests of our fellow-creatures. Hereby we shall evince our acquaintance and union with him, whose name we bear, while "we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of our God."


Many who resorted to him, soon withdrew from his company, having no relish for his conversation. But he had some stated attendants, throughout his various movements, who were almost inseparably attached to him. "The twelve were with him." These he selected, as "his chosen witnesses," that they might be instructed in the mysteries of his kingdom, confirmed in their regard to him, and fitted for their apostolic function. Certain pious women, also, who had been healed of their infirmities and converted by his grace, occasionally at least waited on him, and "ministered unto him of their substance." What condescension in him, to receive such assistance! He became very poor indeed. Though "the earth is his, and the fulness thereof," so mean and destitute was his condition here, that he subsisted upon the charity of others. Shall we admire their liberality, in contributing to his support? Or rather, shall we not envy them the honour put upon them, in their being permitted to do it? "It is more blessed to give, than to receive †." And may not this blessedness be our's? Though we cannot minister unto Jesus, in his person, we may do it in his representatives, in his distressed members. For what is bestowed upon

* Phil. ii. 4, 5.

† Acts xx. 35.

them, he will consider as bestowed upon himself. And, if we "shut up our bowels of compassion from them, how dwelleth the love of God in us *?"

Thus attended, then, Jesus took another circuit, in which we shall meet with some remarkable occurrences. In the course of his progress, a poor unhappy man, under the possession of the Devil, so grievously afflicted as to be deprived both of his sight and speech, was brought to him, and obtained immediate relief †. According to his custom, he paid a gracious regard to the application, by expelling the evil spirit, and restoring the demoniac to the perfect exercise of his faculties. And what effect did the miracle produce? The common people were struck with astonishment, and ready to draw the conclusion, that Jesus must be the promised Messiah. But were not these persons ignorant, and liable to be imposed on? That they were unlettered, it is allowed, nor was that circumstance any disadvantage to them in the present case: for they were as capable of judging of plain facts, as the acutest Philosophers. The Scribes and Pharisees, conceited of their wisdom, like most pretenders to science, possessed more pride, and



accomplice of the Devil? No: the farthest from it, that can possibly be conceived. But it is not uncommon for men, who hate the Gospel, to give a credit and importance to such insinuations against it, as appear, upon the very face of them, ridiculous and false.

This circumstance, however, rendered the character of Jesus the more illustrious; for it produced fresh proofs of his meekness and wisdom. His followers, also, should remember, that, while they preserve a proper temper under malicious calumnies and reproaches, they afford such an evidence of their sincerity, and the excellency of their principles, as must eventually turn to the confusion of their enemies. Our Lord spoke in his own vindication; but his defence went rather to convince, or, at least, to silence, his adversaries, than to justify himself. "It is a very small thing, that we should be judged of man's judgment;" and therefore, if we be ever so much traduced (and it is not possible that we can be more so than the Saviour), let us not be solicitous, on our own account merely, to obviate the charges, which envy or malevolence may bring against us. Yet there may be reasons, which may render it expedient to reply.

Jesus shewed that he was privy to their thoughts, for he spoke to their secret surmises, while he proved their objections to be most foolish and profane. He argued, that Satan would never oppose his own interest, or dispossess himself; for such a conduct would infallibly weaken, and even destroy, his kingdom amongst men: and on the same ground we maintain, that, the Gospel, which contains a system of religion, manifestly subversive of the Devil's influence in the world, must be from heaven. He alleged, that, as they believed some of their own disciples to cast out demons by the Spirit of God, they ought not to ascribe his miracles to any other cause. On the

own principles, then, he convicted them of the most partial and unjust judgment, in not allowing those dispensations, which he had effected, to proceed from the Holy Ghost, as well as those, which were effected by the counsels of their own adherents. But he contended, that, granting a divine agency in what he had performed, they must also admit, that he was come to set up the kingdom of God among them; and, therefore, that instead of foolishly and maliciously envying at him, they ought with profound humility to solicit a place in that kingdom. The fact was, that Satan, who had long maintained an undisturbed dominion, was now in various instances deprived of his influence. His authority was evidently destroyed; and those, whom he had held in cruel bondage, were rescued out of his hands by the superior and irresistible power of Jesus. The inference, then, was clear and decisive, that he, who "destroyed the works of the Devil," could not be his confederate.

Our Lord proceeded to warn them, that it was impossible for them to observe a neutrality in that contest, which he had instituted against the prince of darkness, and that all were required to declare themselves either on one side or the other. The same

fied, that they do not set themselves in an avowed resistance against Christ and his measures! You, who do not oppose the Gospel, or those, who profess it, may boast of your candour and liberality; and, because you are not open enemies, you presume upon being accounted his friends. But you are most unhappily deluded. Your indifference about his cause, he considers as a marked contempt of him: and therefore he thanks you not, merely because you abstain from hostilities; but, while you refuse to exert yourselves for him, he looks upon you as being in the interest of his grand opponent.

Jesus, perceiving in these proud and malevolent cavillers a confirmed hatred of him, warned them still further of their danger in daring to ascribe to Satan's agency, what had been effected only by the divine Spirit. He declared, that, while the Gospel offers a full and free forgiveness of "all manner of sin and blasphemy," one offence is excepted, and that "the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men."

This is a most tremendous assertion indeed! It should excite a holy fear and circumspection in us all. We ought to beware, that we do not even approach to this sin; much less should we imitate the profane effrontery of those, who deny or ridicule the operations of the Holy Ghost. It is far better to keep at a distance from it, than to understand exactly the particular nature and precise limits of it. But it may be proper to enquire, of what kind the offence is, of which such awful things are spoken. Many painful apprehensions are entertained by persons of a tender conscience, as if they had certainly committed it, and therefore, by the divine decree, were absolutely and for ever excluded from mercy. But so far, perhaps, we may confidently affirm, that those who are most oppressed with the dread of it, are least in danger of having contracted this enormous guilt.

From a comparison of the different passages in the sacred scriptures, where the sin is spoken of *, it appears to be an entire rejection of the salvation of the Gospel. And since there is no other remedy for our fallen state, who shall complain, after their own deliberate refusal of it, that the consequences are so terrible? Yet this is not all: it is an avowed and continued opposition to the grace of Christ. The Pharisees, to whom our Lord spoke, persecuted and calumniated him, as acting under the direction of Satan. But the most decided enmity against him is not, of itself, unpardonable. Many, who have made long and furious resistance to him, have found mercy. Saint Paul himself had once been "a blasphemer and a persecutor;" and it is probable, that some, who had "crucified the Lord of glory," were redeemed to God by the very blood, which they shed. But they sinned ignorantly. The offence, here specified, is committed against strong evidence and conviction of the truth. One miracle upon another had been wrought in the sight of those, who continued to revile our Lord; and probably they acted in repugnance to the full persuasion of their own minds. Yet it is supposed by some, that Jesus

marked, that "backsliding," though attended with circumstances of peculiar aggravation, may obtain forgiveness with God, and that then only we may fear, it is the black offence, to which remission is denied, when it involves in it a malicious and confirmed opposition to the truth. For it should carefully be noted, that it is never followed by contrition or godly sorrow, but always accompanied with an unrelenting obduracy of mind. The apostate, whose case is desperate, cannot be "renewed unto repentance." Those, therefore, who feel a tenderness of conscience, and a real compunction of heart for the guilt they have contracted, and who seek deliverance by the blood of Jesus, afford the strongest evidence, that the sin, here spoken of, is not chargeable to their account, however they may be oppressed by the painful apprehension. After all, any other transgression against God, if persevered in, will be fatal and damnable to the soul; and yet, in every instance, forgiveness is in this life promised and granted to the humble and believing penitent.

But why, it may be asked, was this severe admonition addressed to the Pharisees? Had they cast off all regard to religion? No: but their professions were hypocritical, as their words and actions clearly proved. Jesus, therefore, exhorted them to a consistency of conduct, either in one way or another, by giving up themselves to God sincerely and without reserve, or else by throwing off their pretences to piety, and appearing openly and avowedly wicked; that so the fruit might accord with the nature of the tree *. They had uttered blasphemous expressions, from which he proceeded to convict them of their guilt and danger. He affirmed, that they had spoken agreeably to their inward dispositions, and that the source of all foolish and profane conversation lies in a depraved and uncon-

* Mat. xii. 33, &c. Mark iii. 31, &c. Luke xi. 24—26.

But that which should be made light of, as a trifling matter, is not more than a mere breath of words. In consequence, he warned them, that they should call them to judgment, not only for the particular sins or evil affections, but for all their sins, as they appeared in their common discourse. This was the more in evidence of the state of their hearts, that it was equal to their condemnation.

But what things concern none but the ancient fathers, and who shall be tried for the words which they have uttered? Shall doom be assigned according to the words which they shall deliver? Yet what is the substance of his conversation, or what is the state of his heart, that he may not be ashamed of himself in the day of judgment?"

But what is the source of the heart the mouth speaks? Shall we stand the test; or what will our prevailing tempers and passions appear to have been? Do not the mouths of many among us utter blasphemy; and others delight in expressions of lewdness, slander, and reviling? Where are those, who conform to the apostolic rule? "Let no corrupt

visible display of his divine glory, or an appearance from heaven, which should carry absolute demonstration with it. How preposterous was this! Shall proud and obdurate sinners prescribe to God, by what particular kind or degree of testimony he shall confirm his own revelations to them? Jesus, therefore, declared, that no other sort of attestation should be granted, till his own resurrection, which, he foretold, would happen on the third day from his death, agreeably to its typical resemblance in Jonah's miraculous deliverance. He reprovèd them for their obstinate impenitence and unbelief, and threatened them with the most aggravated punishment, inasmuch as they had despised him, though the Ninevites had repented at the preaching of Jonah, who was in every respect inferior to him. He referred them, also, to the Queen of Sheba, who had travelled from a remote country, with much pains and expense, that she might profit by the wisdom of Solomon, while they had shewn the utmost contempt and hatred of him, who was inconceivably greater than Solomon; and he warned them, that her example would condemn their perverseness.

Are we satisfied with the proofs, brought in favour of the Gospel? Nothing, indeed, but a proud or sensual disposition will lead us to object to their sufficiency. Many in our own day, like the unbelievers of old, call for additional and stronger evidence, and presumptuously refuse to examine that, which is already proposed to them. But the Lord God is not at their command; nor will he model his dispensations according to their wishes. O beware, lest in righteous judgment for your arrogance, he leave you to yourselves! "Light is come into the world;" and, if your eyes have not discerned its excellency, the reason is, you have "loved darkness rather than light:" and your final condemnation will be much more aggravated, when you are compared with c

him, and gave him a more entire ascend
them: and therefore Jesus foretold, that th
state would be worse than the first." On t
sion he delivered the parable of the relapsin
niac. The evil spirit may depart for a time
had quitted his hold of the poor enslaved si
yet may return to his possession. The do
open, the heart prepared to comply with hi
tions, and no contrary principle forbidding
mission, he will enter with greater strength,
the captive soul, with increasing obduracy,
degree of wickedness to another.

This describes a common case. Many a
affected by the faithful and lively preaching
Gospel; and a temporary reformation tak
with them. Their attention may be rou
passions moved, and especially their fears al
the striking addresses of some plain practical p
and then they cannot continue in the same
sinful habits as before. Like Herod, who
John the Baptist gladly, and did many thing
may express a warm approbation of the prin

attack of a disorder. "Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse *:" "the latter end is worse with them than the beginning †." Let us, therefore, implore the God of all grace, so to drive out the prince of darkness, that he himself may take full and everlasting possession of our souls, and nothing be "able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."


In this awful manner Jesus continued to preach the word, with unshaken fortitude and unwearied patience, exposing himself to the malevolence of his enemies by his pointed reproofs, and exhausting his bodily strength by his incessant labours. While he was thus employed, a certain woman, impressed by his exhortations, exclaimed, as if in envious admiration of the happiness of her, who was favoured with such a Son: but he replied, that a far greater privilege is conferred on those, who believe and obey the Gospel. His pious mother, together with some of his near relations, stood at a distance, anxious for his safety, and, probably through an apprehension of danger, wished to call him away; but they were prevented from approaching him by the crowds, which surrounded him. It was, therefore, intimated to him, that they were waiting to speak with him. But he, still intent upon his important work, and to encourage the attendance of his faithful followers, declared, that those, who truly received and practised his word, were much dearer to him, than the nearest among his earthly connections, merely as such, could possibly be. He meant not to slight his mother, or any of his kindred, but to shew that we should be superior to all carnal and worldly regards, by looking beyond the ties of consanguinity; and, in order to animate his disciples to diligence and perseverance in his

* 2 Tim. iii. 13.

† 2 Pet. ii. 20.

service, he took that opportunity of expressing his warmest affection for them.

Are any persons ready to congratulate the blessed Virgin, who had the distinguished honour of bringing forth the Saviour of mankind? The way is here pointed out, in which you may obtain a superior dignity. Only yield an unfeigned respect to the Gospel, give up your whole hearts to God, and walk in cheerful obedience to his commands, and you shall be happier, and dearer to Jesus, than any natural relation to him could make you. If you profess a peculiar attachment to him, and number yourselves among his followers, we ask, whether you are willing to walk in holiness, as he requires. Are you satisfied with paying him an unmeaning compliment, as if it could please him, to cry, "Lord, Lord," while you regard not his precepts? But observe, that he pronounces his benediction upon those, who not only HEAR, but DO, his word, and perform "the will of his Father." Are you such? Or, are you not conscious, that some or other of your tempers and practices expressly contradict his injunctions? You must search out, and put away from you, "the accursed




But let "the sinners in Zion be afraid, and fearfulness surprise the hypocrites." The eye of Jesus discerns your insincerity, under every specious disguise, which you may assume. And in what light do you appear before him? Does he regard you as "a brother, a sister, and a mother?" No: he detects the baseness of your character; and he will avenge the insults, you put upon him. O cast off the mask of an unsound profession; confess your iniquity; flee to him for pardon, while he waits to be gracious; and implore the influence of his Spirit, that he and he may establish your hearts, unblamable in doings."

JESUS CHRIST.

S E C T. 17.

Jesus repaired to the sea-shore, and instructed the multitude by the parables of the sower—the tares—the growth of corn—the grain of mustard-seed—the leaven in meal—the treasure hid in a field—the pearl of great price—and the net gathering different kinds of fishes.

THE life, at least the public life, of Jesus was very short, but, being employed in almost constant exertions for the glory of God and the benefit of men, it was crowded with important events. If we possessed a larger measure of his activity and zeal, much might be done in the contracted period of our existence upon earth: for our usefulness depends not on length



are, evidently, within our power. Thus a man is said to "shed abroad his love in the name of the Father Ghost," that his work may ever be "in the Father." Then shall we lament, that our power is so limited, so confined, and that our best efforts bear but a small proportion to the extent of our nature?

No sooner did Jesus quit the temple, than he had withdrawn, than someone amongst the Jews followed him, as before*. Being desirous to make use of the better convenience of teaching in the synagogues, he entered into a ship, from whence he taught the people, who stood upon the shore in a respectful manner to hear him. He taught in parables, that is, by certain similitudes or comparisons, taken from the objects of common observation, which, while a common subject of conversation, conveyed some spiritual information to those who were attentive. This method of teaching was common to the ancients; and it is usually practised by the moderns, and leave a lasting impression upon the memory. He proposed to the multitude of his audience, then assembled before him, to give them of this kind, as of their seed, and to sow it upon the soil of his kingdom upon earth, the hearts of his members, its gradual augmentation, and its final blessings.


The parable of the sower teaches, that here an attentive and diligent husbandman is prohibited, in the cultivation of an extensive field, from procuring a large quantity of seed, because the good seed should be sown upon the soil of the heart, as it consisted of different sorts of soil, the effects were very different. In one place where the soil was as hard as a beaten pavement, the seed could not enter, and, as it lay exposed, it was either destroyed by the heat of passers, or devoured by the wind.

* Mat. xiii. 1-23. Mark. iv. 1-20. Luke. viii. 1-18.

place afforded a promising appearance for a short time: the ground was rocky being covered only with a thin coat of earth; and this for a while gave nourishment to the grain, which was cast upon it; but, having no depth, it could not defend the root from the scorching sun; and therefore the whole of the produce soon withered away. A third situation proved unfavourable to the good seed; for the thorns, which grew there, checked the efforts of the rising corn, and effectually prevented it from coming to maturity. Was, therefore, all the labour vain? No: there was one portion of the field which answered the expectations of the owner; for it brought forth a plentiful increase, though in various degrees, which gradually ripened till the time of harvest, and was then gathered into the barn.

At the conclusion of this little narration, Jesus required his audience to fix their attention upon it, implying that truths of great importance were contained in it. He proclaimed aloud, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear;" which intimated, that some would understand and regard the instruction, whilst it would be totally lost upon others.

But wherefore did he use such a studied obscurity



vealed unto you, my beloved friends. And this method is agreeable to the righteous proceedings of God, who dispenses his favours to men, according to their temper and improvement. Those, therefore, who have refused to be convinced on the strongest evidence, and contemptuously rejected all the offers of my grace, shall be given up to a judicial blindness and obduracy; so that, how long soever they may be spared under means and ordinances, they never will be brought to a true and spiritual understanding of the Gospel. How great, then, is your blessedness, who have obtained a divine illumination, whereby you will perceive the doctrines, which I deliver, and feel their powerful influence upon your minds! You are distinguished above the most eminent saints of old, who saw but through a glass darkly, and looked forwards, with ardent desires, to the advantages and privileges, which you now enjoy."

Such was the purport of our Lord's interesting address to his disciples: and a solemn warning it conveys to us. We must render an account to God, for the religious opportunities, with which we are favoured. He hath sent to us the Gospel of his Son, and He will shortly enquire, What reception we have given it. Are there none among us, who will not even examine it with seriousness, but, like the Pharisees, disdainfully put away the truth from them? No wonder, then, that to you, who are of this character, the doctrines of Jesus appear obscure or inconsistent. O be afraid, lest, while you shut your eyes and stop your ears, God determine in his wrath, that they never shall be opened! The day of grace may be expired, with respect to some, even while they are suffered to remain upon earth. O listen to those, who beseech you, "that ye receive not the grace of God in vain!"—"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation *!"

* 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2.

This very caution is inculcated in the parable before us. That we may enter more fully into the subject, let us advert to our Lord's explanation. Jesus is "the Sower," who by himself and his ministers scatters abroad the good seed of his word. But alas! the most excellent instruction does not always produce the desired influence: in numerous instances it is rendered unfruitful. Through various causes men are prevented from receiving that real advantage by it, which it is calculated to effect. These causes exist in the men themselves.

Some are hard and impenetrable as the ground, on which they tread; fitly compared, therefore, to "the way-side." They give no serious attention to the momentous truths, which they hear, nor take any pains to understand them. Upon these, then, no good impression is made: the word preached to them is soon forgotten and lost: they do not even resist the attempts of Satan, who is hovering about them, like a devouring bird, and who, to frustrate the design of the Gospel, will artfully contrive to divert their minds from it, by proposing subjects more pleasing to their carnal nature.

But others are affected with the declarations of



A third sort may also promise fair, and preserve a shew of piety for a length of time. The corn springs up, and may endure the various changes of the weather. Yet it does not thrive; for thorns surround and choke it. Ah! how many constantly attend upon the ministry of the Gospel, in whom no saving efficacy is produced! The cares, riches, and pleasures of life so engross their minds, that no proper heed can be given to the truth, which is heard; and, of consequence, it is lost upon them; for, with a heart so much attached to secular concerns, they cannot possess any spiritual life or vigour. They may maintain their place in the visible church; but, when we look for the fruits of righteousness in them, we are disappointed; and therefore their religion is vain.


But the labour of the husbandman is not in every instance unprofitable. There are those, who resemble the good ground, prepared by divine grace for a due reception of the heavenly word. Their supreme regard is fixed upon it; they perceive its important meaning, and cherish it in their hearts, till the grand design of it is answered. "They walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God *." A difference, indeed, in their excellence and usefulness is observable; but all bring forth fruit to maturity, and some in an eminent degree. Their sincerity is proved by their perseverance in holiness. They endure every trial; for they stand both the winter's cold, and the summer's heat, and "go on unto perfection."

Can we avoid making the application? If we are favoured with the preaching of "the everlasting Gospel," and constantly attend upon it, let us enquire, What is the effect produced? Do we seriously meditate on what we hear? Is any deep and la-

* Col. i. 10.

pression fixed upon our minds? Are any spiritual principles implanted, and habits formed? Is our religion such, as will carry us through temptations and persecutions? Is it such, as renders us superior to the sollicitations of the flesh, and the allurements of the world? Do none of these things take up that time and thought, which should be devoted to the care of the soul? And are we not, consequently, in a lean and barren state, notwithstanding the faithful administration of the sacred ordinances around us? If those only receive real advantage from the Gospel, who are so affected by it, as to bring forth the substantial fruits of holiness, do we come under that description? Or what is the profit, which has accrued from our profession?

The Saviour subjoined a most solemn caution, reminding his disciples, that divine light was communicated to them for the benefit of others, and that they should make a good improvement of the instructions delivered to them, by recommending the same important truths to the world around them. And ought not we, also, to consider, for what intent our religious privileges are bestowed upon us? Do we shine, in our respective places, as “lights of the




cious interference of one, who was an enemy to the owner of the land, and through the negligence of the servants, to whom it was committed, tares were scattered among the wheat. The injury was not discovered, till the fruit of the corn appeared; and then it was proposed to root up the noxious weeds, which obstructed the ripening of the crop. The master, however, rejected that scheme, as being attended with some danger, and allowed the tares to remain, commanding only, that in the time of harvest they should be carefully separated, and consumed by fire, while the good grain should be collected and secured in the storehouse.

What instruction, then, does this narrative convey? The disciples did not at first perceive it, and therefore afterwards, when Jesus retired, they requested him to explain it. In condescension to their enquiries, he gave a clear and minute interpretation; from which we learn, that the parable represents the present state of his kingdom or the visible church, as it consists of a mixed company, hypocritical pretenders as well as real believers. These may not always be distinguishable from each other, and for wise purposes may be suffered to continue in the same religious community. The latter only are "the children of the kingdom," entitled to its blessings; and they possess their high privileges merely by the grace of Jesus; for He it is, who sows the good seed in his field. The former are "the children of the wicked one," being induced by his influence to put on the semblance of piety; whilst yet they bear his likeness, cheerfully comply with his temptations, and do his work. In the rashness of our zeal, we might sometimes wish a separation to be made, that the saints of God might be no longer "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked." But it is otherwise appointed. We must wait for that event till the end of the world, the great harvest; and then, how ac-

curate will be the distinction of characters, how wide the difference between them! The reapers, who are the Angels of God, cannot err in the awful division, which they shall make, or appoint any individual to an improper place. Every tare shall be burned with fire: every grain of wheat shall be safely lodged in the heavenly garner. How tremendous the destruction of the ungodly in that "furnace of fire, where shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth!" How excellent the glory, into which the righteous shall enter, where they "shall shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father!"

May God excite in us "great searchings of heart!" What is our present character? What our future prospect? We are fixed in the outward Church of Christ; but we are not therefore secure of an admission into his blissful presence above. Possibly, we may wear the garb of sanctity; and others may not suspect any insincerity in us. But unless we are renewed in righteousness, and "have our fruit unto holiness," our hope is presumptuous, and our "expectation shall perish." Nor let the impenitent flatter themselves, that they shall escape detection, in the midst of so immense a multitude. Sinners, be assured



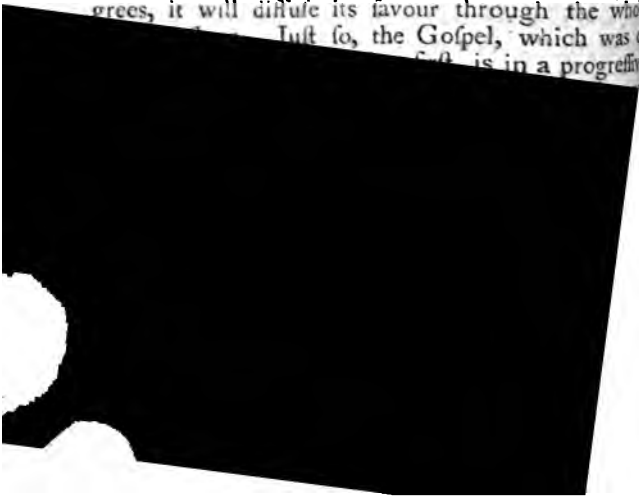
He referred them to the gradual increase of corn, by the inexplicable principle of vegetation, as a representation of the progress of his spiritual kingdom. The seed is cast into the ground, and, without any further care of the husbandman, it rises insensibly, and advances by degrees to a state of maturity, when, being fully ripe, it is cut down and gathered into the barn.

The interpretation is obvious. The work of God, both in the Church as a community, and in the heart of each individual believer, is carried on imperceptibly, like the growth of corn, in a way which depends not on human management, and which we cannot explain. The seed may appear to perish in the earth, or the blade to spring up in a very slow manner, while the mysterious process goes forward without interruption. Let us not despond, though we see not the most favourable appearances at once; nor let us be impatient, though we perceive not, after a length of time, the perfection of grace either in ourselves or others. Let us pray, that the Gospel may spread its influence from one kingdom to another, and that we ourselves may "go from strength to strength." We wait for the harvest: may we all be ripening for it; that, when the great Reaper "putteth in the sickle" (as he will at the hour of death, with respect to every separate person), we may be received into his celestial garner!

The same instruction is conveyed to us in the parable of the grain of mustard-seed. This, though one of the least of seeds, it is observed, produced in eastern countries a tree so large, that the birds might build their nests in its branches. This astonishing increase exhibits the mighty power of God in his providence; and equally illustrious is the display of his grace, in causing his Gospel to spread and flourish, from the smallest and most contemptible appearances, till it fill the earth, and afford a refuge

the Church for men of all ranks and characters, and for all the nations of the world. The progress in our day may seem inconsiderable; but we look forwards, with cheerful hopes, to those glorious times, when the branches of this tree shall be so enlarged, as to reach the most distant lands: for "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ *." The case is similar, with respect to the establishment of divine grace in the heart of every Christian. This holy principle may seem, in its beginnings, to possess little influence, and promise no great improvement. But the plant is under the peculiar care of Heaven, and, being watered from above, it shall thrive and prosper. It shall gradually extend its shoots, till it occupy every part of the soul, in which it has been fixed.

Our Lord confirmed and illustrated this truth, by the parable of the leaven, which he described as put into a large quantity of meal. This, being inconsiderable in its bulk, may lie concealed for a time, as if it had no effect; but its operation, though secret, is powerful; and, as its fermentation spreads by degrees, it will diffuse its flavour through the whole. Just so, the Gospel, which was at first in a progressive



will be effectual in the end. It will be felt in every faculty and member, and gain a complete ascendancy over the whole man. Such is the usual advancement of religion in the soul.

Is this, what we are acquainted with, in our own particular state? It may be proper to encourage any favourable appearances, any feeble attempts to serve God "in spirit and in truth." "For who hath despised the day of small things *?" Yet we are taught to expect a gradual progress; and therefore we should enquire, Are we growing in grace? Do we increase in spiritual light and vigour, and become more and more confirmed in holy principles and habits? Doubtless, we should feel an ardent desire, that the Gospel may extend its influence from house to house, and from town to town, in every nation, till it reach the remotest corners of the earth. But let us not forget ourselves, nor cease to lift up our prayer, that, professing the truth of God, we may feel more of the efficacy of our own principles, and be gradually transformed into the divine likeness "from glory to glory." May the sanctifying energy of our religion diffuse itself throughout all our faculties, and bring our affections, words, and actions into subjection under the government of Christ!

Thus Jesus continued to describe the nature of his kingdom by figurative illustrations. This method of teaching, indeed, has something of obscurity in it; and that obscurity was intended: for many of his audience could not bear a more clear and avowed declaration, so that he might have hazarded his life, by speaking more explicitly. Besides, in this very way of delivering his instructions by parables, he accommodated himself to an ancient scripture, which is therefore said to be fulfilled in him.

* Zech. iv. 10.

Other treasures were added, which were calculated to give direction and encouragement to his disciples. The Gospel may fitly be compared to a precious treasure; it is an inexhaustible mine of glory. This may be represented as "hid in a field." The valuable substance, not being exposed on the surface, may escape the notice of careless observers. But can it be explored without much pain. Just as carnal dispositions are not aware, how many and precious blessings are comprised in that salvation, which they neglect and despise. But those, who perceive its transcendent worth, will "rejoice as one that hath great spoil," and gladly relinquish every other possession, if necessary, that they may secure it for their own. Who, then, among us are anxious to purchase this field, which contains such inexpressible wealth? Alas! do you not betray your ignorance of "the kingdom of heaven," who estimate the Gospel at so low a rate? It would not pass for a trifling trade, as it now does, if you were acquainted with its hidden treasure. You would not be reluctant to part with any thing for Christ's sake, if you properly understood the value of his grace. You put contempt upon him, if you do not prefer him to the best enjoyments of the world, or if you hesitate to sacrifice them all, when they stand in competition with him.

This also we learn from the parable of the pearl of great price. A merchant, in search of rich commodities, having discovered a pearl of peculiar excellency, abandoned every other pursuit, and relinquished all his gains, that he might purchase that one jewel. Such is the man, who obtains a true knowledge of the Saviour, and becomes a member of his kingdom. I may be, he has long been in quest of happiness, and each fair object appeared to him, for a time,

as a beautiful gem: but he found continual disappointment, till he heard of Jesus, and beheld something of his glory, when every thing else lost its former charms, and seemed trifling and worthless, in comparison. Then he began to desire, most ardently, the grace of Jesus, and fixed all his attention upon that one point, being willing to sustain any loss, and renounce every advantage, for the acquisition of that high prize. Have you, then, any proper conceptions of the value of Christ, who shrink from his service, because it requires so many painful sacrifices? Do you apprehend, that you shall pay too dear for his benefits? No, Sirs: this is the pearl of so great price, that there can be nothing in the whole world equivalent to it. Give up interest, pleasures, reputation, friends, and relatives, father, mother, brothers, sisters, wife, and children; yet, if Jesus be your's, we will congratulate you on your immense gain. Whatever you lose, you receive "unsearchable and durable riches" in Him; and therefore you may adopt the Apostle's exultation, "As having nothing, and yet possessing all things *."

But let no man deceive himself. It will not suffice to "name the name of Christ," where there is no cordial attachment to him. And are there not many professors of the Gospel, who by their formality, worldliness, or sensuality disgrace the cause? These weaken the hands, and distress the hearts, of faithful ministers. Yet let us not be staggered, since our Lord has taught us to expect it by the following similitude.

He subjoined another parable, taken from the practice of fishermen. They cast their net into the sea, which collects various kinds of fishes; nor can any separation of them be made, till they are brought to the shore: but then the useful are preserved, and the

worthless rejected. So mixed is the present state of the Church, and such will be the final division of its members. Those, who preach the Gospel, go forth, as it were upon the wide ocean of the world, to throw the net, desirous of inclosing in it all they can. Many may accordingly be taken, who may not be approved upon an exact scrutiny. And such a scrutiny will be instituted at the end of the world. Who can abide the strict examination? The Angels will part the different characters asunder, however close their connection may now be. They, who possess only the form of godliness, shall then be for ever excluded from the society of the saints, among whom they were numbered here; and their portion shall be assigned them in "the furnace of fire," where they shall for ever "wail" their sin and folly, and "gnash their teeth" through the extremity of horror, anguish, rage, and despair.

So solemn and alarming were the addresses of Jesus. And if his servants in the Gospel must endeavour to speak, as he did, they must remind their hearers of the important distinction, which subsists between them, and thus, even now, by faithful admonitions "take forth the precious from the vile*." Their work is difficult, and often painful. How necessary is it for them to be well acquainted with the religion, which they teach! Let them attend, then, to the question, which Jesus proposed to his disciples: "Have ye understood all these things?" Let them consider, too, what improvement should be made. The scribes, who are "instructed unto the kingdom of heaven," or properly qualified to declare its mysteries, resemble the householder, who has a large family to provide for. They should, therefore, treasure up useful observation, that they may always be able to communicate something from their stock, for

* cr. xv. 19.

the service of the family. While they are concerned for their own support, they must employ their fund, whatever it may be, for the benefit of those committed to them, "giving them their portion of meat in due season."

Let prayer be offered to God without ceasing, both for them who preach, and them who hear, the Gospel; that the former may dispense the word with all fidelity, and the latter receive it with meekness. Let us thankfully accept the salutary provisions, which the great Lord of the household has here set before us, and feed upon them to our spiritual nourishment. May we be led to try our own characters, and be alarmed or comforted, as our case may render most expedient! May God in mercy prevent us from being deceived to our eternal ruin: and "if in any thing we be otherwise minded," than we ought to be, may he "reveal even this unto us!" Amen.

permission to perform the funeral solemnities of his father. The request appeared reasonable: for religion does not forbid, but rather enjoin, all due respect to be shown to friends and relations. But Jesus, knowing it to be a mere pretence, or at least a mark of some reluctance to engage in the work of God, we might have been augmented by an interview with his former connections, demanded an immediate compliance with the call. He replied, "Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou, and preach the kingdom of God." As if he had said, "Sooner, let any office be neglected, than that of the sacred ministry, to which thou art appointed. Leave it, therefore, to those, who being dead to God are unfit for his service, to bury their deceased kindred: but delay not thou, through any carnal regards, to enter upon and prosecute thy important function."

An example of like sort occurred, perhaps on another occasion. A third person professed a resolution to become a follower of Jesus. And what prevented him? He had certain affairs to settle, or friends to take leave of, if not to consult.

This might seem to us expedient and proper. But there was a secret unsoundness, a wrong attachment to worldly connections, a wavering mind, a desire to regain the things, which had been renounced, as in the case of Lot's wife. Our Lord, therefore, detecting his hypocrisy, replied, "No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Do not similar instances present themselves, under our own observation? Do not many "halt between two opinions?" Or "turn to the Lord, not with their whole heart but feignedly?" Their supreme affections are fix
 ed on
 earthly
 objects; and therefore,
 their words they declare their
 unity, they will comply with
 its

ts dictates no farther, than their convenience will permit.

Various excuses are urged. It is said, "We have too much business of another kind, to give that attention to religion, which is required." Or, "Our connections are unfavourable to our wishes, and we cannot detach ourselves from them." But will these pretexts bear a serious examination? Or will any deliberately maintain, that the care of the soul and the service of Christ may be safely neglected, till every worldly obstruction be removed? If you are unwilling to contend with difficulties, the Saviour will *ed-*own you, and treat you as avowed opposers.

"But we intend, after a time, to be his faithful disciples. When this or the other scheme is accomplished, we are resolved to trifle no longer, but to obey his injunctions with the utmost ardour and without reserve." Ah! Sirs, will he admit of such an answer to the solemn call of his Gospel? He requires our submission now; and for you to talk of *voluntary* compliance, only on a future day, is to declare that you prefer the world to him. You do in fact *reject* him, while you plead for a *delay*. He shows the ground of your excuses; and *condemns* the double mind, whatever *specious* excuses it may assume.

When Jesus had taken ship, and was sailing on deep water, a severe storm arose, and the *disciples* were distressed by the apprehension of immediate destruction: for the vessel seemed on the very point of sinking. But where was their beloved Master? *He* lay out with the labours of the preceding day, and fallen asleep. What? could he be ignorant or careless of the danger of his faithful *disciples*? but he designed to try the strength of their *faith* in him, and to shew their security in *him*. They awoke him, while they were in *peril* and anguish, "Lord, save us, we per-

strange, how inconsistent was this! Will not the weakest believer allow, that it were impossible to perish, with-Jesus in the ship? But imminent perils will sometimes render even advanced Christians strangely forgetful of their own principles, and prove them defective in faith, as indeed they are in every grace. The fears, perplexities, and despondency, which some of them discover in such situations, sufficiently evince it.

Jesus reproved them sharply for their unbelief; and then, to encourage their unreserved reliance upon him in every future difficulty, and to demonstrate that all nature was at his command, he arose with a peculiar majesty, and spake the authoritative word: the furious winds instantly ceased to blow, and the turbulent sea was calm. Such a grand display of his divine power astonished them: "the men marvelled." They ought, indeed, to have recollected, that he was the God of the whole creation; and this very miracle might have led them to that conclusion. "O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord, like unto thee? Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them *." But so much darkness yet remained in their minds, that they had no clear or consistent views of "the great mystery of godliness," and perhaps some of them might then consider him as no more than a human being.

The distressed situation of the disciples is an apt emblem of the Church, and of many private Christians, in perilous circumstances. It is one principal part of the Redeemer's plan to exercise and prove our faith; and therefore he conducts us through various trials. "He affords us his gracious presence, and, over the tempestuous sea of life, in our perils, we ought to be satisfied, that

* Psal. lxxxix. 8, 9.

He is in the vessel with us. If we are his people, we must be secure; because our safety is in him. Let us not presumptuously impeach his wisdom, faithfulness, or love, when he suffers the severest storm to arise, though he should even then seem regardless of our danger. Our busy fears may suggest, that we shall surely be lost, and we may be almost overwhelmed with perplexity and despair. His design is, that we should throw in entire and cheerful dependence upon him; but we soon betray our unbelief, and treat him, as the disciples did. If, then, we can trust him no longer, than while the calm continues, "where is our faith?" Or, 'why are we so fearful?' Let us be ashamed of our doubtful and suspicious temper towards him; and, adoring the power and grace of this mighty God and Saviour, let us learn, with unshaken confidence, to repose ourselves and our concerns in his hands.

The storm being appeased, they arrived in safety at the country of the Gadarenes, opposite to Gallilee: and immediately an occasion was offered for the exhibition of his divine character, which excited general attention *. There met him two persons possessed with devils, in a state of the utmost distraction and fury, driven out from society, and incapable of being governed or restrained †. Many circumstances in this case are not to be accounted for, on any other supposition than that of a real demoniacal influence. We here perceive, indeed, an awful representation of the wretchedness, in which we should be involved, if subjected to the malice of infernal spirits. A considerable number (for their name was Legion) had entered into these unhappy men, and reduced them to the most miserable condition. When our Lord beheld the pitiable objects, he commanded the de-

* Mat. viii. 28, &c. ix. 1. Mark v. 1—21. Luke viii. 26—40.

† As St. Mark and St. Luke mention only one person, it sh^d seem that one was more fierce, and therefore more an obj^t of notice, than the other.

nons to quit their hold. This they were unwilling to do; and yet they were constrained to acknowledge the superior power of Jesus, as "the Son of the most high God," and were terrified at his presence, as criminals before their judge. Being perfectly aware of that extremity of torment, which will shortly be executed upon them by Christ himself, they requested that their final punishment might not be inflicted before the time. They entreated him also, for the present, not to dismiss them entirely from that country, and, probably with a mischievous and destructive intention, desired permission to enter into a numerous herd of swine in the neighbourhood. Permission, accordingly, was granted, not to gratify but confound their malice; and immediately the whole herd, to the amount of two thousand, rushed into the deep with violence and perished in the waters.

This was a remarkable transaction. It has been treated with impious ridicule; but it ought to be observed, as a sufficient answer to objections, that, by this very occurrence, Jesus has demonstrated the reality of possessions, the malevolence of infernal spirits, and their entire subjection to him: for they acknowledged his dominion, when they solicited his leave to enter into them. He displayed, likewise, his power over the elements of nature, when he commanded the

The report of this event caused a general consternation among the inhabitants. They flocked in great multitudes to see the Person, who had wrought so stupendous a miracle; and, as if struck with a sense of their guilt, and afraid of his presence, lest he should bring some deserved judgments upon them, they unanimously requested him to "depart out of their coasts." Little did they understand, what they asked. Shall sinners petition, that the Lord of life and glory would leave them to themselves? How dreadful must be the consequence! Better be destitute of all, both friends and substance, than be deserted by the Saviour. Yet such is the folly and stupidity of men; they are unwilling to abandon their sensual pleasures and worldly advantages, or to be disturbed in their old practices, however unjustifiable; and, therefore, they put from them the ministers and the Gospel of Christ, madly supposing they shall be happier without them. They say unto God, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways *."

How different is the disposition of those, who have a true spiritual discernment! They desire nothing so much as the presence of Christ, and communion with him. Their language is, "When wilt thou come unto me? O make thine abode with me, and let me remain under thy shadow!" The persons, who had been delivered from Satan's influence, were instantly restored to reason and comfort; and they were observed to be "sitting at the feet of Jesus," impressed, no doubt, with unspeakable delight, admiration, and gratitude, for the grace bestowed upon them. They wished to accompany him upon his departure, and solicited his permission, "that they might be with him." But he intended them to be the instruments of usefulness among the people, who were so deeply immersed in ignorance and sin. Though he himself de-

* Job xxi. 14.

serted the country, he determined to leave these his chosen witnesses there, and therefore sent them to publish throughout their neighbourhood, "what great things the Lord had done for them."

We also, considering ourselves alone, may wish to be constantly sitting at the feet of Jesus, under the instructions of his mouth, and the light of his countenance. But, for the present, he has assigned us other work, to which we must attend. We must bear our testimony for him, in the midst of a dark world, "holding forth the word of life," if not by public preaching, yet by our private conversation, and shew in our respective places, "what great things he has done for us." Where are those, then, who have such an evidence to give? What have you received at his hands? He yet distributes his gifts, and works deliverance for men. Have you experienced his power to save? Are you the monuments of his grace? Then commend him to others, and acquaint your husband, wife, parents, or children, what he can accomplish for them.

Upon his crossing the lake again, and returning to Galilee, multitudes awaited his arrival, and welcomed him with the liveliest joy. How different is the

of profound veneration for his character, most earnestly entreated his gracious interposition. Our Lord acceded to his request, and followed him without delay, accompanied by immense crowds, who were desirous to witness the event.

A circumstance occurred by the way, which deserves our notice. A poor diseased woman, who had suffered exceedingly by a bloody flux for twelve years, and had spent her whole substance upon physicians without obtaining relief, heard of the extraordinary works of Jesus, and felt a strong persuasion in her mind, that he had power to heal her. Yet afraid, or ashamed, to describe her situation, she came behind him, and touched the border of his garment, in a believing expectation of a cure. The cure was instantly performed; and such was the change produced within her, as to convince her of its efficacy. This was entirely concealed from the observation of the people; but Jesus, who was privy to the whole, would have them acquainted with it from her own mouth. At first, through the tremor of her spirits, and an apprehension of being reprov'd for presumption, she was unwilling to appear; but, finding it in vain to hide herself from him, she came forward, and, with many tears, declared the miracle in public. Thus he was pleas'd to manifest his own supernatural influence, and her humble dependence; and for the encouragement, not of her alone, but of others, he said, "Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole: go in peace."

Here was an instance of much weakness, mixed with real belief; and hereby we are taught, that Jesus has compassion on our infirmities, and despises not "the day of small things." Come unto him, you, who have many fears. Come, however hopeless your case may seem. Like this poor woman, you may have sought relief in vain, for a long season: or rather, like her, you may grow worse and worse. The rea-

son is, your application has hitherto been to "physicians of no value." But, turning from all others to Jesus Christ, reach forth your hand, though it be with much trembling, and desire in faith "to touch him;" and immediately "virtue will go out of him," for the perfecting of your recovery.

Before the ruler of the synagogue had reached his own habitation, a fresh trial arose, enough to shake his confidence. A messenger informed him, that his daughter was actually dead, and therefore that it was needless for Jesus to proceed any further. Still however the Saviour, who attended him, encouraged him to believe, and expect her restoration. They came at length, to the house, where great lamentations were made for the beloved child; and so unquestionable were the marks of her dissolution, that the intimation of her revival was derided. But Jesus, to whom "belong the issues from death," with a peculiar display of majesty, called her forth again to life and vigour. The event, so confessedly miraculous, filled all those, who had observed it, with unspeakable astonishment; but, to avoid ostentation, or for reasons of prudence, he requested them not to divulge it.

The little narrative conveys much instruction to us. We perceive, how uncertain are all human comforts, and are taught to look for painful trials, in our families, as well as in our own persons. In such circumstances, may we imitate the conduct of Jairus, and apply to Jesus for relief! Yet, while we are waiting for his help, it is possible, that, for the further exercise of our faith, increasing troubles may come upon us. Then, in an especial manner, we are required to believe; nor is any deliverance too far from that Jesus, "who quicken-

thence, two blind men followed
 & importunate cries for relief:
 id, have mercy on us." Nor

was their petition vain. They were instantly restored to sight; and, though charged with secrecy, probably from emotions of the warmest gratitude they published abroad the kindness of their Benefactor.

Immediately afterward, a dumb person under a demoniacal possession was brought to him, and received a perfect cure at his hands. Well might the people, overwhelmed with astonishment, confess, "It was never so seen in Israel." What, then, prevented him from being universally acknowledged in his proper character, as the promised Redeemer? The Pharisees exerted their influence against him, and, though they disputed not the facts, blasphemously ascribed them to the agency of Satan. Their malicious cavils had been fully refuted before, and yet they continued to urge the same absurd charges. Just so, in the present day, the weak and profane objections of infidels, which have been repeatedly answered, are produced afresh, and with as much petulance and acrimony as ever. But shall not we conclude, from the stupendous miracles of Jesus, that he is "mighty to save?" And, since his power and grace have suffered no diminution, may we not encourage the children of affliction, in all their various distresses, to commend their cases to him, and expect seasonable and effectual relief from him?

After the above-mentioned occurrences, Jesus returned to Nazareth, the place of his education *. The inhabitants of this city had basely rejected him already, and even attempted to destroy him; yet he paid them another visit, and again delivered his solemn instructions to them in their synagogue on the sabbath day. Many of them felt a powerful impression from his preaching. They were astonished at his words: but no good effect ensued; for they took offence. Various objections were raised, chiefly from

* Mat. xiii. 54, &c. ix. 35, &c. Mark vi. 1-6.

his mean extraction, the poverty of his relations, and the low trade, to which he was brought up. They looked for a Messiah of high original, invested with worldly honour, pomp, and dominion; and they determined never to receive the man in that exalted character, whom they knew to be destitute of all such recommendations.

Opposition of a similar nature is made among ourselves. The grand doctrines of the Gospel are often treated with scorn, because they are not acceptable to "many-wise men after the flesh, the mighty, or the noble:" and the truth of Christ is denied, without examination, because some of its warmest advocates possess no eminence of rank or abilities. Prejudices of this kind, though extremely absurd, frequently operate most effectually, and prove destructive. O beware! while you are giving way to captious disputation, Jesus may withdraw. He left Nazareth, and, probably, never more returned. He wrought some miracles among them, and they had credible information of what he had performed in other places: but "he did not many mighty works there; nay, HE COULD NOT, because of their unbelief." How fatal the consequences of their obstinate infidelity! It stop-

on whom he looked with the most compassionate regard. "They fainted," probably with bodily fatigue; but their spiritual state was truly deplorable, and, on that account especially, he felt the tenderest pity for them. "They were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." Their pretended guides were such, as knew not how to direct them, and cared not for their safety. Therefore they wandered in the paths of ignorance and sin, which would infallibly lead them to destruction. Alas! what could be done for them? They discovered an earnest desire to be instructed in the word of life; but there were few to teach them. He exhorted his disciples, then, to offer up fervent prayer, that God would "give them pastors according to his own heart." Their serious attendance upon his ministry, in such large numbers, was like the promising appearances of the fields, which denoted a plentiful harvest; but labourers were wanted, to reap and gather in the valuable produce. And to whom should application be made, but to the great Proprietor, who must be concerned for the event? Petitions, therefore, should be addressed to him, to supply the deficiency, that, by a suitable provision of diligent and faithful men, the rich fruit may be secured for himself, and precious souls no longer "destroyed for lack of knowledge."

Such a tender regard for the spiritual and everlasting happiness of the human race was a distinguishing feature in the character of Jesus. This, and this alone, is true benevolence. Where are those, who feel the same generous principle, the same ardent desire to promote the salvation of sinners? You, then, will rejoice to see the multitudes of poor, ignorant persons, who flock to hear the Gospel preached with plainness and fidelity. Yet you will lament, that so few, even of those whose office demands it of them, labour with assiduity to save immortal creatures from destruction. Much of the harvest seems likely to be

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lost, for want of proper assistance to collect it. O what fervent prayer should you present to God on this account! Pray, that He himself would send forth his servants, endued with all suitable abilities to do his work. He must ordain them to their high function; and He alone can assist and prosper them in it. Thousands, alas! among us, are "scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." If such be your wretched case, be thankful that there are any, who are "moved with compassion on you," and who "watch for your souls." They desire to recover you from your wandering state, to bring you back to the fold of Christ, and to lead you into his "green pastures," where you will find safety and refreshment. Be willing to follow their directions; and, whatever difficulties they may suffer from other quarters, let them meet with no opposition from you, since it is your salvation for which they labour incessantly. You have been "as sheep going astray;" O "return unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls *!"

* 1 Pet. ii. 25.



JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 19.

Jesus sent forth his twelve Apostles, with miraculous powers, and gave them a solemn charge, for their direction and encouragement.

ONE principal purpose of our Lord's ministry was to propagate divine truth, and, in particular, to declare and explain the appointed way of access unto God. But, as his public life was so short, and his labours met with so many obstructions, it became expedient to select some faithful men, furnished with proper instructions, to assist him in the work. He had already separated twelve persons out of his constant attendants, who were to observe his directions, and to be employed as chief officers in his Church. He had gradually prepared and fitted them for the apostolic function: but hitherto they had acted only under his immediate notice; and now, for the first time, he proceeded to send them out upon a circuit by themselves *.

“No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God †.” The chosen witnesses of Jesus did not obtrude themselves upon him, but waited his summons. He, the great Lord of the harvest, appoints his labourers to their respective

* Mat. x. 1, &c. xi. 1. Mark 6. 7—13. Luke ix. 1—6.

† Heb. v. 4.

posts. When he had assembled them together, in order to deliver their sacred commission to them, he endowed them with miraculous powers, by which, as unquestionable credentials, they might recommend their doctrine, and demonstrate its truth. They were enabled, with a word, to cast out devils, and to cure the most inveterate diseases.

We offer no remarks, in this place, on the names, characters, and connections of the Apostles, observing only in general, that we need not enquire any other reason for their selection, than the sovereign will and pleasure of the Lord himself. "Ye have not chosen me," said he, "but I have chosen you *," And therefore, to the most eminent of them the question might be put, "Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou, that thou didst not receive †?"

Before their departure from him, like a tender father concerned for the welfare of his children, whom he is sending out into the world, foreseeing the difficulties, snares, and dangers awaiting them, he instructed, he warned, he encouraged them, with much solemnity and affection. He directed them to go in pairs, "by twos and twos," that they might afford mutual

able right to do what He will with his own; and therefore to send, or to withhold, his Gospel, as He pleaseth.

But what was the grand object of the embassy of the Apostles? Hear the instructions, which they received from their divine Master: "As heralds, proclaim with a loud voice, and with all the zeal and courage, which such a cause demands, that God is now visiting his people in mercy, and about to set up the promised kingdom of the Redeemer. In attestation of your sacred commission, and of the truth of your doctrine, to prove also that your ministry is designed to answer the most gracious and benevolent purposes, exert the miraculous powers now intrusted to you, as opportunity shall be given, for the relief of the distressed, and not for your own private emolument, which you must cheerfully renounce."

From this part of the charge, how excellent does the religion of Jesus appear! It brings the most reviving intelligence, as it "proclaims the acceptable year of the Lord." It proposes blessings the most valuable, represented by those supernatural cures which the Apostles wrought, and dispensed, as those also were, freely, "without money and without price," where no recompence can be expected. Shall we not rejoice, that "the kingdom of heaven" is come unto us? Or shall we hesitate to receive the gracious declarations of these primitive heralds, who exhibited incontestable evidence, that they were no other than ambassadors from God? We are assured, that in crediting their message we "follow not cunningly devised fables," while we perceive, that "God bore them witness both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will *." We are thankful, that their commission, at first so circumscribed, was afterwards

* Heb. ii. 4.

enlarged, and that they were commanded to "go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature *." Otherwise, how would the blessing have been extended to us? But praised be God, He hath sent his word to the Gentiles, and "granted to them also repentance unto life †."

Imagine the twelve standing round their Lord, to receive the law at his mouth, while he proceeds in his address, and gives them directions for their conduct. As they were totally unfurnished for their intended expedition, and without any visible means of subsistence, it is probable, that anxious thoughts might arise in their minds, about obtaining the necessary supplies. But thus the Saviour instructed them; "Of that kind of provision, which men generally make for a journey, you will have no need. Nay, you are forbidden to take such things with you, as perhaps you might procure, and prudence might seem to require. You are to expect your constant support from that God, in whose cause you go forth. "Upon Him," therefore, "cast all your care, for he careth for you;" nor doubt that his providence will sustain you, though it should be in an extraordi-

peace and comfort. The benediction, which you solemnly pronounce, shall rest upon those families, which are well-affected to my Gospel; but it will not profit such, as continue in unbelief. Your prayers, however, though ineffectual for others, will not be lost; for they shall bring down the blessing of God upon your own heads. A tremendous wo shall await those, who obstinately reject you; and, while you depart from them, you may intimate their awful state, by shaking off the dust of your feet, and thus representing the very place as utterly defiled and devoted to destruction. In the grand, the decisive day of judgment, those, who have refused to obey the word of my grace, shall perish with more aggravated ruin, than even Sodom and Gomorrah, under the vengeance of Almighty God."

In this address we discover some discriminating marks of the faithful preachers of the Gospel in every age. May God raise up among ourselves, men of this description, to testify "the truth, as it is in Jesus!" It becomes them not to be anxious for their own temporal support, much less to covet worldly dignities or sensual indulgences. While they carry with them a message of peace and love, they should prove, by the kindness of their deportment, that they wish to promote the happiness of all. Yet, in perfect consistence with this meekness, they should possess such courage and fidelity, as "to declare all the counsel of God," and solemnly to warn contemptuous sinners of impending destruction. Is this allowed? But do you, to whom they come, consider also, what is due to them and their doctrine? Do you honour their office? Do you seriously regard their exhortations? Possibly, a bold and unreserved declaration of the truth may excite your disgust, and draw forth the hidden corruptions of your hearts: at least, it will evince your real dispositions. O beware! They who long for your salvation, must admonish you

you do not, by a scornful rejection of them, bring upon yourselves certain and aggravated condemnation. Though they do not rank themselves with the Apostles, yet the Gospel, which they preach, has lost nothing of its importance or obligation, by the course of time; and the God of heaven is as much concerned now, as ever, to vindicate the honour of it. Most assuredly, therefore, though "the men of Sodom were sinners before the Lord exceedingly *," yet if you refuse or "neglect so great salvation," your guilt is more heinous than their's, and your everlasting misery will be far more insupportable.

The Apostles had nothing but violent opposition to expect, from the wickedness of the world, or rather, from the corruption of human nature. Their gracious Master, therefore, prepared them for it, suggesting, at the same time, various considerations to encourage their hopes, and invigorate their zeal. He proceeded, in a most affecting manner, to the following purpose:

"Though you are going forth at my command, in my name, and under my protection, you will not be exempt from enemies. You are to be meek and inoffensive; but you will be surrounded by those, who, being of furious dispositions, may endeavour to harass and devour you. It may be right for you to use every precaution, which prudence may dictate, for your own preservation; but beware of "rendering evil for evil;" and learn, rather, to "suffer long and be kind."

"Knowing the general depravity of men, trust not yourselves in their hands, but be prepared to meet with bitter persecution from them, for your attachment to me. With a shew of justice, they will bring you to trial in their courts, and condemn you to the most painful tortures, as the worst of criminals. In

* Gen. xiii. 13.

this manner, you may have occasion to stand before the great men of the earth, and you will embrace the opportunity, to bear witness of me and of my salvation, which otherwise they might not hear of. Such an attestation will be an honour to you, and may prove the means of spiritual benefit to them. Are you discouraged by an apprehension, that you shall not be able to speak, as you ought, in your own justification, before such auditors? You shall be inspired with wisdom from above; and it shall be immediately suggested to you by the Holy Ghost, what you should advance in vindication of yourselves and the Gospel."

"Nor shall your enemies be those at a distance merely, but even your nearest relatives in life will rise up with furious and murderous rage against you. Brethren, parents, and children will break through the ties of natural affection, while they are opposing, and endeavouring to destroy, each other from a hatred of the truth. Such a bitterness of persecution you will meet with in every place, on account of your cordial regard to me, that you will be held forth as the objects of universal detestation. But maintain your integrity and your firmness in the faith, without wavering; and, whatever you may suffer by the way, the end will be very glorious indeed."

"Resistance may drive you from one city, but immediately carry your message to another. Enough remains to be done, nor will you complete your progress through the various parts of Judea, till I myself appear, to establish mine own cause, and to destroy mine enemies."

"Are you surprised or staggered at being called out to such painful trials? Remember, what I, your Lord and Master, have to endure, and what vile reproaches are cast upon my name: and be content, that your treatment in the world should refer mine. Let not your adversaries terrify or discou-

you; for the day is at hand, when their malignity and your integrity shall be clearly exhibited, and all these dark dispensations unfolded to your view. In the mean time, keep back nothing through fear or reserve; but faithfully and publicly proclaim aloud whatever I have revealed to you in secret. Let them condemn you to the severest tortures: you know the utmost that their malicious rage can inflict. They may destroy the life of the body; but the soul, which is the nobler part, is removed far beyond their reach; so that, though the unanimated flesh be soon reduced to its original dust, the immortal spirit will remain in perfect vigour. But, oh! dread the thought of coming under the indignation of your Almighty Sovereign, whose power extends to another world, and who can render you completely miserable, both in body and soul, and that throughout all eternity."

"Be not distressed by the apprehension of such calamitous events, as may await you here. The God of heaven and earth, whose immediate charge you are, cannot forget or desert you. He exercises an universal providence; so that He marks and determines the situation of every creature, though ever so small or worthless, and disposes all their affairs."

Gospel requires, shall be disowned and rejected with everlasting abhorrence, for the baseness and malignity of their conduct."

"You may have expected much outward prosperity and peace from the coming of the Messiah, and the establishment of his kingdom; but the real consequence will be directly contrary. Though the tendency of my religion be most excellent, yet, through the corruption of man opposing it, all manner of confusion and violence will ensue. The fiercest contentions between the nearest relatives will take place; that none, probably, may be so incensed against my faithful servants, as those, who may dwell in the same family, and are connected with them by the closest bonds of friendship and of kindred."

"It is necessary, then, that you should be prepared for the most painful separation. If there be any one, even parent or child, whose favour you can refer to mine, you can have no proper sense of my worth or of my claims upon you; nor can you possess any part in my salvation. You must be willing to sacrifice your ease, your reputation, and your secular interests, for my sake and the Gospel's, and readily submit to all hardships and indignities. I, your Leader and Commander, go before you, and therefore you should not hesitate to follow me, through such tribulation. Perhaps, a violent death may close our sufferings here. Be it so. Those, who apostatize from me may lengthen out their existence upon earth a few days longer; but they shall be destroyed for ever: while you, who may shed your blood in my cause and service, shall live and reign, beyond the reach of persecutors, in everlasting happiness and glory. This is enough, surely, to fix your determination, and inspire you with increasing confidence and zeal."

"You will sustain an important character; nor is it a matter of indifference, how you are treated

the world. I solemnly declare, that whatever kindness is shewn unto you, while you are acting in my name, it shall be considered as a mark of unfeigned regard to me and my Father; for you go forth as our representatives and ambassadors. He, who shall cordially receive my prophets or ministers for the sake of that Gospel, which they preach, or even any faithful disciples in private life, from a pure, disinterested respect to their character, shall be abundantly repaid for his pious liberality towards them: for he shall partake with them of that bliss and glory, to which they shall shortly be admitted."

"I commend you, therefore, as my dear children, to the notice of all, who are concerned for my cause. Whosoever shall afford you the least attention or refreshment by the way, administering only a cup of cold water for your relief, merely because you belong to me and are employed in my service, I pledge myself to return that act of kindness in an ample manner. I will not forget, but publicly own, approve, and reward, the labours of love, which shall be wrought for my name's sake."

Such was the purport of our Lord's most affecting address to his twelve Apostles, when he sent them forth to evangelize the land. Such tender and earnest wishes did he express for their encouragement, support, and success in their arduous work. Having received their commission and the solemn charge, they proceeded, as they were directed, on their momentous expedition. They carried with them from place to place the gracious overtures of reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ, and called upon all, without exception, to humble themselves before him under a conviction of their guilt, and turn from their evil ways with sincere contrition and renovation of heart. Nor did Jesus himself cease from his own rous exertions. He continued to bear part of burden, and persevered in his progress, that

he might diffuse the knowledge of salvation all around.

While we contemplate the office and character of the Apostles, as here exhibited, we are furnished with strong arguments for the authenticity and salutary tendency of the Gospel. Such a plan could never be the contrivance of men: it must be "the power of God, and the wisdom of God *." It is also so replete with blessings, calculated to relieve our wretchedness, that we need not hesitate to pronounce it "worthy of all acceptance †." The subject will likewise lead us, as we have already intimated, to consider what manner of persons they ought to be, in modern times, who are "the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." The case of these primitive ambassadors was, in many respects, peculiar. But all those, surely, to whom "the word of reconciliation is committed," should possess the same views and dispositions, as were required in them.

We may carry the application farther, and remark, that the holy and heavenly tempers, here inculcated, are indispensably necessary, not merely for those who preach, but for those who profess, the Gospel. Though you be not invested with a public office in the Church of Christ, yet, as called by his name, you should be meek, gentle, and inoffensive. You must be willing to bear the most ignominious and scornful treatment, for the sake of your Lord and Master. You must cheerfully submit to the heaviest calamities, in the way of duty, without distrusting the providence of God; and, in every possible situation, avow your attachment to Christ, whatever painful consequences you may suffer. You never can be at liberty to deny him, though your most beloved friends, or those, on whom you depend for your sustenance, should require

* 1 Cor. i. 24.

† 1 Tim. i. 15.

you to do it. Let father and mother, wife and children be dear to you, as they ought to be; but let Jesus be dearer than all. He claims, and he deserves, your cordial and supreme regard. You do not, therefore, understand his excellency, or your obligations to him, unless you prefer his favour and the advancement of his glory to every worldly possession or enjoyment, unless you can give up your nearest kindred, your reputation, emolument, ease, or life itself for his sake, whenever they come in competition.

Where, then, shall we find such love to the Saviour, such zeal for his name? It is evident, that many are totally destitute of these holy principles. Are there not those, who are enslaved to sensual pleasures, and determined, as far as possible, to gratify every inclination of their hearts? And to what purpose should we inculcate upon them the necessity of taking up the cross, and following Jesus? They would turn away their ears in contempt or indignation. Yet we must declare the offensive truth, that "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," are as inconsistent with real Christianity now, as they were in primitive times. "Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God *."

Is it sufficient to assume expressions of respect, and, with demure appearance, upon your bended knees, to pretend a high regard for the Saviour, while you are afraid to advance one step farther in his service, than may be agreeable to the general maxims and customs of the place in which you live? Would he not account such compliments as an insult, more odious to him, than an opposition? This temporizing spirit is as it is sinful: it pleads for prudence, but destruction. You may contrive to avoid, and procure applause and prefer-

* James iv. 4.


ent among men; but what will these avail, if Jesus own you? What shame, confusion and horror will overwhelm you, when convicted, before the assembled universe, of treating him with insolent contempt! May we all, therefore, be persuaded to follow him, wherever he shall lead, and to undergo all extremities in his service! Why such a regard to present conveniences? Why such a fear of our fellow-creatures, and a distrust of God? Do not these things argue much unbelief, and betray an earthly mind? Let us rise above our little difficulties, and confide in that God, who takes care for the very sparrows, and hath numbered the hairs of our heads. He will not be inattentive to our wants, even in this life, if we be faithful to him: and a glorious recompense is laid up in heaven for those, who are willing to hazard every consequence, from a zealous adherence to his cause. Dependence on his promise, may we now surrender ourselves and our all to him, and stand with confidence and joy before him, at the great day of his appearing! Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

S E C T. 20.

Jesus, on the return of his Apostles, withdrew with them—fed five thousand by a miracle—retired from the multitude—walked on the sea—stilled the tempest—taught in the synagogue at Capernaum—carried at by the Jews, and forsaken by many disciples.

As we advance in the prosecution of our design, and contemplate the wonderful acts of the Son of man, we meet with additional proofs of his high dignity, and the perfection of his character. If we fix our attentive regard on this bright Luminary, such beams of glory will break forth upon us, as will fill, and almost overpower, the soul with an admiration of



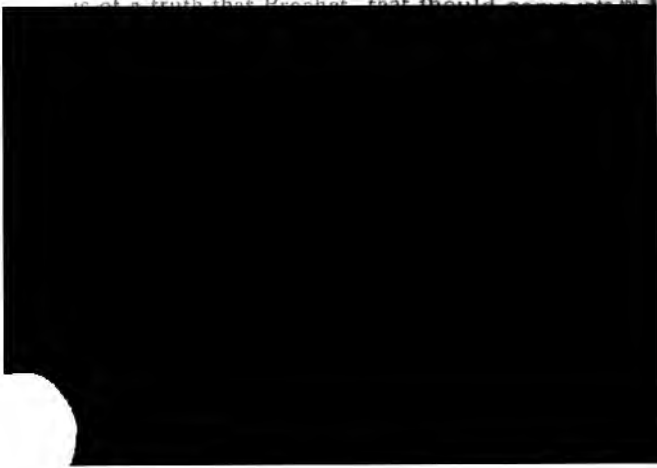
who are actively employed in the sacred functions of religion; to secure some moments to themselves, by retreating from their public engagements, that both their minds and bodies may be recruited.

To obtain the desired privacy, he passed over a part of the sea of Galilee; and great multitudes, who had observed his departure, followed him with much eagerness, "because they saw his miracles." They were induced to attend him, through astonishment or curiosity; at least, we fear, by no better motive. The compassionate Jesus, however, upon coming to the shore, where they were ready to receive him, could not look upon them without feeling the most tender concern for their state, remarking, as he had done on a former occasion, that "they were as sheep not having a shepherd." On this account, foregoing his intended rest, he began to renew his labours amongst them, and went up with them to a mountain, that he might be heard with convenience; where he opened to them the nature of his kingdom, and manifested his power, by restoring health and vigour to them that were diseased. Blessed Jesus! we beseech thee still to look with pity "on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way." How immense are their numbers, and how wretched is their condition! Stretch out thine arm to recover them from the paths of error, and reveal thy glories to them. Instruct them in thy truth, and take them into thy fold, as the sheep of thy pasture.

At the close of the day, the disciples would have dismissed the people, as they had no stock of provisions for them. But Jesus, unwilling to send them away without refreshment, desired that some food might be given them. Accordingly, at his word preparations were made, in order to furnish them an entertainment. They were all marshalled in ranks, and set down in the open air upon the grass. B
whence shall a sufficient quantity of meat be procu

for so large a multitude; as there were present five thousand men, beside women and children? This was, indeed, a severe trial of the faith of his disciples, as they could not raise more than five loaves and two small fishes. These, however, were brought forth, and, in the hands of Jesus, by an all-creating power, they were so multiplied, as to be more than enough to satisfy the whole company. "They did all eat, and were filled;" and, when the fragments were collected, it was found that such had been the miraculous increase, that the remainder far exceeded the original store of provisions.

What a grandeur do we perceive in this entertainment, surpassing that which attends the most sumptuous tables of princes! What a fervour of devotion appeared in the great Master of the feast, while he looked up in prayer for the divine blessing, and thereby taught the people to expect their food from Heaven! What an exalted majesty, mixed with the sweetest condescension, distinguished his behaviour! Was not every one, then, struck with admiration, and disposed to revere and love him? They concluded without hesitation, and they concluded rightly, "This is of a truth that Prophet, that should come into the



we not strangely perverse and infatuated, if we acknowledge him to be the Teacher of Israel, the Christ of God, and yet remain unconcerned about his doctrine? Either say at once, He is a base impostor, which few will dare to assert; or else, bow with unfeigned submission to him, and pray, "Shew me thy ways, O Lord, and teach me thy paths. Make known to me the glorious truths of thy salvation; and speak effectually to my heart, for thy servant heareth."

Or, allowing his sacred character, are we afraid to follow him? The miracle, we have considered, is calculated to fix and confirm our dependence upon him, as able to provide for our support, and exercising a tender care for our bodies as well as souls. If we are ever so necessitous, we perceive with what ease he can multiply our store. In a thousand ways, which we cannot foresee, he can furnish our tables with plenty. This very instruction was meant to be conveyed to us; and accordingly, the disciples were afterwards reproved, for not remembering the extraordinary occurrence to better purpose, when they were apprehensive of wanting bread to eat *. Let us learn, then, to "cast all our care upon him," believing that he will "feed us with food convenient for us."

The astonished multitude, concluding him to be the Messiah, and expecting, agreeably to their carnal notions, that he would set up a temporal dominion, were desirous immediately to invest him with regal honours. But, so far from entertaining any ambitious designs, or discovering any ostentation, he took pains to avoid public notice and applause, and therefore he withdrew from them. He directed his disciples, also, to depart, and to cross the lake to Bethsaida, perhaps that he might prevent them from favouring the foolish wishes of the people. In the

* Mat. xvi. 9.

mean time he himself retired to a mountain for prayer, and spent the chief part of the night in his private devotions. Ah! how unlike to him are those of his professed followers, who are solicitous to procure and preserve the pomp and power of this present world! Or what resemblance to the holy Jesus do those bear, who have no relish for religious solitude, and can spare no time for the exalted purpose of maintaining communion with God?

The disciples were on the sea, where they were overtaken by a storm, and tossed about, for many hours together, upon the boisterous waves. Their situation was distressing; the night was dark, the water tempestuous, the wind violent and contrary: they had spent their strength in vain with rowing; dangers threatened them; and their dear Lord and Master was absent from them. Jesus, however, could not be unmindful of them: he knew their difficulties, and drew near for their help. He had been retired till near the morning; but then he came to them "walking upon the sea," that he might convince them of their perfect safety under his protection, and encourage them to face every storm in his service,

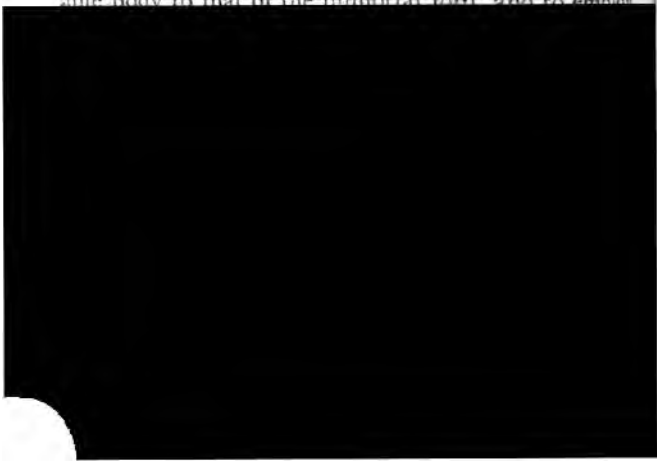
he felt the violence of the storm, his faith failed, and he began to sink; so that, if Jesus had not stretched out his compassionate hand to save him, he must have perished in the deep.

Jesus then entered the vessel, and restored peace and comfort to his disciples. Immediately, the rage of the wind abated, and they were brought to the very point of land, which they aimed at. What proofs of power; what marks of dignity were here! Yet what modesty and condescension appeared in our Lord's constant deportment! He did not display his ability in an ostentatious manner, or even for his own accommodation. He submitted to travel on foot, with much fatigue, when he could have instantly transported himself to the most distant place. His attendants were filled with inexpressible astonishment, and the more so, as they had not duly considered the miracle of the preceding day. They fell down before him, with the strongest emotions of gratitude and love, and with expressions of profound adoration, crying out, "Of a truth, thou art the Son of God." The inhabitants, also, of the neighbouring coasts no sooner received intelligence of him, than they flocked after him with great eagerness, entreating his compassion toward the sick; and, merely by the touch of his garment, the most inveterate diseases were removed.

Shall not We, likewise, be encouraged to apply to him, who has all power in his hand, and who, in so many instances, has proved himself "mighty to save?" Our faith may be tried, as that of his disciples was, and, probably, our weakness will soon be evinced. "Lord, help our unbelief." He is often pleased to suffer a violent storm to arise, and his people may seem, as if they were left alone upon the deep, toiling in extreme distress, ready to perish. But he will graciously interpose, in due season, to save them. He will manifest himself to them, appease the rage of the tempest, quiet their fears, and "bring them unto their

their desired haven." "Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men *!"

The multitude, who had been desirous that Jesus should assume the government, and from whom he had withdrawn, sought after him again with renewed ardour. They had travelled far on foot, and then they crossed the lake in search of him. At length, they found him in the synagogue at Capernaum, and, after expressing their surprise at his removal to that place, which they could not account for, they received a solemn reproof for the very low and carnal motives, from which they followed him. The miraculous entertainment, he had afforded them, had raised their expectations of his possessing a temporal dominion, and they were still in hopes of exalting and enriching themselves by his service. A poor reason indeed, for pretending an attachment to Jesus! Yet, we fear, a regard to secular advantages has been the ground of much of that religious zeal, which has been admired in the world. But it is a mean and contemptible principle. He called upon them, therefore, to turn their attention from the care of the perishable body to that of the immortal soul, and to employ



and insolently demanded his credentials, as if he had already exhibited none, which deserved regard. He had performed various miracles in their neighbourhood, of which they must have had authentic information; and their own eyes had seen unquestionable proofs of his divine mission: and still they presumed to ask, "What dost thou work?" Unbelief is always unreasonable: it cavils at the plainest testimonies, and determines never to be satisfied. We need not, therefore, be surprised at the outcry for stronger evidence, which is generally made by those, whom no evidence will convince.

It was intimated to Jesus, that his miracles were far inferior to those of Moses, who had fully demonstrated his sacred character and legation, by supporting their ancestors in the wilderness with manna from heaven. He replied, that the Lord God was then dispensing to them bread infinitely more excellent, than that which Moses had been the means of communicating, and that this bread was no other than the very Person, who had descended from the highest heavens, for the purpose of giving life to a perishing world. The extraordinary and important declaration, probably, impressed the minds of some of his audience, and constrained them to cry out, though they comprehended not the full import of their own words, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." There cannot be a more suitable petition for ourselves to offer up: only let us understand and feel its meaning. Who is not anxious to preserve life? What immense pains are taken to procure that sustenance, which merely supports the body? And shall we not be solicitous to gain a happy existence beyond the grave? Are we told, that God has graciously made provision for this very end, in the Gospel of his Son? And shall we not, instead of proudly and petulantly quarrelling with it, seriously enquire into the nature of it, and the method, in which the benefit may be

veyed to us? Such a disposition, surely, becomes our character and situation. Let us hear, then, the further instructions of Jesus on this most interesting subject.

He declared explicitly, and without reserve, that He himself is that spiritual food, on which our everlasting salvation depends, that by faith alone the blessing is obtained, and that the believer, in a sincere application to him, shall be delivered from those carnal desires, which are never satisfied, and shall find his soul contented and delighted in him. Still he observed, that many of those, who then saw him with their eyes and had the best opportunity of examining, contemptuously rejected the gracious offer. How shall this be accounted for? The true reason is assigned by our Lord. In our fallen and depraved state, such is our natural blindness, pride, and love of the world, that we are all unwilling to accept the salvation provided, by submitting to Jesus, and fixing our whole reliance upon him. Yet, that the glorious plan of redemption may not be defeated by our folly and perverseness, God hath secured a people for himself by his own Covenant; and these, under the strong influence of his Spirit, shall be preserved

vation of his people was the very end, for which he had left the glory of heaven, and that it was also the grand object of his Father's counsels. On this ground he instructed them to expect from him the completion of their happiness in an everlasting state, and promised again and again, that, though their bodies must go down to the dust, the grave should not detain them for ever, but that his arm would rescue them from death at the last day. Will not these assurances suffice us? Jesus possesses all fulness of grace for the recovery of them that are lost. The invitation is sent to all without exception; the offer is freely made to those, who sincerely desire it; and all obstructions are removed, but those, which sinners themselves obstinately continue to throw in the way. What more do you wish for, than a favourable acceptance? Why, then, do you remain at a distance from him, since he bids you to draw nigh, and engages to give you a cordial welcome? There is no decree, which can exclude you from his mercy, if only you will submit to his proposals. His hand is stretched out to communicate his blessings; and his bowels yearn with compassion toward every poor suppliant, who is humbled at his feet.

Jesus having spoken in high terms of his descent from heaven, and of the benefits to be derived from him, the Jews, who were not acquainted with his divine extraction, and supposed him to be no more than the son of Joseph, his reputed father, began to cavil at his expressions. To silence their objections, and turn their attention to themselves, he replied to the following effect:

“ Instead of indulging a captious disposition, seriously consider your own awful circumstances, and implore direction and assistance from above. For such is the natural ignorance and perverseness of man in his fallen state, that he cannot be induced to seek or accept salvation in my name, but by the power
opera

operation of God upon his mind. Your own prophets have instructed you to ask and expect this very influence; and every one, who has obtained it, will acknowledge my claims, and yield me an unfeigned submission. In this way only my blessings are to be secured. Mistake me not, as if the Father would manifest himself in a visible manner to you: He speaks to you by him, who is come from his immediate presence; and I, his faithful witness, declare with the most solemn and repeated asseverations, that he, who places his whole affiance upon me, is received into the divine favour, and possesses a sure title to eternal happiness."

"I am, therefore, that bread, which alone can afford true sustenance to your souls. How far superior to the manna, by which your ancestors were supported! That was the means of preserving their existence in this world, only for a short season: whereas the spiritual food, which I propose, will effectually secure you from perishing for ever. I myself am that food, of which the manna was a faint and imperfect representation: I came down from the highest heavens to communicate everlasting life to all those, throughout the whole world, who by faith shall partake the sacred provision. For this very purpose, I have assumed a human body, which I shall shortly offer up as an expiatory sacrifice, to rescue sinners from deserved ruin, and procure for them the possession of endless felicity."

Declarations so strong, so new, and mysterious, excited various sentiments in the minds of the Jews, who therefore, began to dispute with each other continually as they could not comprehend "give them his flesh to eat." If they were disposed to deride or absurd. But he proceeded express and vehement assertions,

*and how
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were
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tions, without deigning to answer every cavil, which a proud objector might bring.

"However you may scorn the warning, I solemnly assure you, that you are totally destitute of real, spiritual life, unless you be quickened by believing on the Son of man, as suffering and dying for you *. He surrenders up his body to the most violent tortures, and consents to shed his blood; and the benefits of this atonement will be communicated to you through faith. As the common food of your bodies must be received, that it may afford them the necessary sustenance, so must you feast upon the sacrifice, which my death will make, in order to derive from it true nourishment and vigour to your souls. The man, who thus maintains an habitual regard to me, as his grand and sole support, "who eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood," possesses the principle of immortal life within him, and I engage to raise his very dust from the grave in a glorified state. He is furnished with an entertainment more delightful, than the most

* It would be doing the utmost violence to language to explain our Lord's expressions in any other sense, than as referring to his intended sacrifice of himself. If he be no more than a Teacher of virtue, and if he save us only by his good instructions, with what propriety of speech could he talk of giving his flesh to eat, and his blood to drink? This figure, doubtless, must be understood as representing his death, and our salvation as resulting from it, agreeably to those other declarations of the Scriptures, which ascribe our redemption to his blood. Allowing the reference to his atonement, the whole appears consistent, and demands our most serious regard; but otherwise, it must be thought strange and incongruous.

The Lord's supper was not, at this time, instituted; and therefore, though many of the expressions may be properly accommodated to that sacrament, which is an emblematical representation of the flesh and blood of Christ given to us as our spiritual food and sustenance, yet we are not warranted in drawing any conclusions from the passage before us, with respect to the efficacy of that ordinance. Those, who communicate by faith, do indeed eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ, and they are vitally united to him. But the bare participation of the outward elements proves not a believing application to the Saviour, nor does it necessarily implant or increase the divine principle of life in the soul.

sumptuous

sumptuous provisions can be to the senses. He is joined to me by a mysterious and inseparable union, even resembling that which subsists between the eternal Father and his incarnate Son, by virtue of which his soul shall be sustained and invigorated, through the constant communications of the Spirit. So far, then, does the heavenly manna surpass, in its excellent effects, that miraculous food, which was granted to your progenitors in the wilderness. That imparted a benefit, comparatively mean in its nature, and short in its continuance; but this, which is now exhibited, will secure life and happiness of the most exalted kind, and durable as eternity."

Such was the purport of our Lord's address to the Jews, and it is equally interesting to us, as it was to them. Have we seriously considered it, and the important doctrines involved in it! What impressions, then, are produced in our minds? Are we, like them, disposed to murmur, because Jesus claims such an exalted dignity? Or, are we inclined to enter into curious speculations, and dispute against the plain assertions of the Bible, because they contain some things, which baffle our comprehension! How presumptuous is such a spirit! Rather, let us consider our blindness and extreme depravity, and suspect our own conclusions. Let us fervently implore those divine influences, which God hath promised, and which the wisest and best of men continually need. Our understandings must be illuminated, truly to discern the appointed method of salvation in the Gospel; our prejudices and affections must be subdued, that objections against it may be effectually silenced; our wills must be brought under a holy bias, that

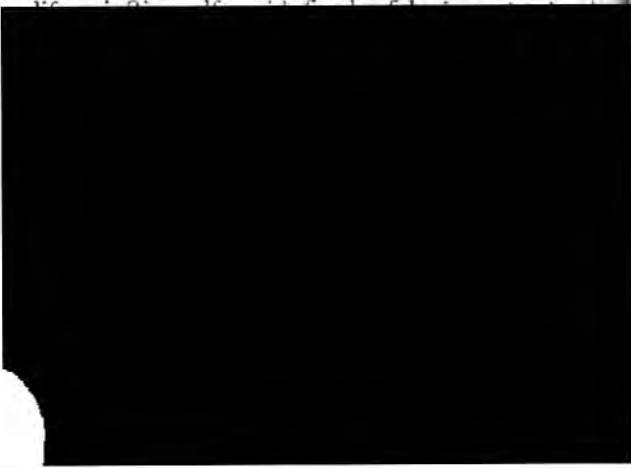
may fully comply with it.
 "as the heavenly manna, which
 "gives our souls to life eternal: Have we
 "faith in this character? He condescended
 "to be the taker of flesh and blood," that dy-
 ing

ing in our nature he might expiate our guilt: Have we fixed our regard upon him, as our atoning sacrifice? It is solemnly declared, that, without a real participation of Christ by faith, we must remain in a state of spiritual death: Have we been sufficiently aware of the absolute necessity of believing? It is not enough, that we give a cold assent to this fact, that Jesus hath died for us; but we must place our whole reliance upon him, and expect pardon, peace, and everlasting glory, as obtained for us by his blood: Do we constantly maintain such a temper of mind towards him? Very blessed are the effects of this humble and cordial application to the Saviour: Can we testify of the reality and excellency of them? Do we daily feed on the sacred sustenance, here provided for us, and find the most exquisite delight from it? Are we sensible of any communion between Jesus and our own souls? And do we derive from him, refreshment when we are weary, strength when we faint, and comfort when we are oppressed with troubles? If such be our acquaintance with him, we may rejoice in the confidence, that he will bring us forth, at the general resurrection, with triumph and exceeding joy, and grant us a sure abode in his own glorious presence for evermore.

Such a free declaration of the mysteries of faith, and especially such a particular application of them to the consciences of the hearers, will generally excite offence; nor should the ministers of Christ be surprised at that effect, when they observe the reception, which their Master met with. Many, even of his professed friends and disciples, began to cavil at his doctrine as harsh and unintelligible. He perceived their inward disaffection, and replied to the very objections, which they were afraid to utter. He intimated, that he should soon return to heaven, from whence he had come down, and that his ascension, which might puzzle them as much as what he had asserted,

asserted, would prove the justice of his claims. To prevent their abuse of the subject, he guarded them against a literal acceptation of his words, and directed them to the spiritual sense, in which alone they could be understood with profit. But he remarked, that, as he had been aware of their secret unbelief from the very first, he had insisted on divine influences, as necessary to remove the opposition of their hearts against him.

From that time, many, who had long followed him, perceiving, probably, that their hypocrisy was detected, totally withdrew from him and returned no more. Nay, such was the desertion, that it might seem as if the very twelve were staggered, and ready to depart. Jesus, therefore, called upon them to declare explicitly, whether they would abide with him, or no; that so their service might not appear to be constrained, but quite voluntary. The most distant proposal, however, of apostatizing from the Saviour, will ever strike the sincere believer with horror. Accordingly, Peter stood forth, as the mouth of the Apostles, maintaining their immovable attachment to him, and steadfast dependence upon him for eternal



will occur, which will manifest their insincerity. Very frequently, they are offended by the plain dealing of their ministers; and it is no wonder, that they depart from those, who suspect them of hypocrisy. How awful is their case! "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness *." May the example awaken the attention of all, who bear the Christian name! Happy those, who are preserved unshaken, in the midst of numerous apostates. We ask, then, of what sort is your attachment to Jesus? "Will ye also go away?" Are you moved from your hope, "who seemed to be pillars?" You must, indeed, be left to your own choice: but we entreat you to form that choice deliberately, with a full view of all the consequences before you. If you depart from Christ, to whom can you betake yourselves? Is there any other refuge? Are "the words of eternal life" to be found any where besides? We exhort, you, then, that whatever difficulties may await you, you would not "draw back unto perdition," but "with purpose of heart cleave unto the Lord."

* 2 Pet. ii. 21.

JESUS CHRIST.

S E C T. 21.

Jesus replied to the cavils of Pharisees—cautioned the people against them—tried and commended the faith of a woman of Canaan—wrought many cures—fed four thousand by a miracle—opposed by Pharisees and Sadducees—restored sight to a blind man at Bethsaida—declared his character, and foretold his passion, to his disciples, requiring them also to suffer with him.

THOUGH we are informed of many minute occurrences in the life of Jesus, many also are concealed from us. We are not told, whether he attended the celebration of the passover, which very soon succeeded the transactions, recorded in the preceding section. But, at that time especially, accounts of this very singular character might be carried from Galilee to Jerusalem, which excited the envious displeasure of the public and most celebrated teachers of religion. Accordingly, various persons of that description, the Scribes, Pharisees, went down from Jerusalem, probably to Jerusalema, which was at a considerable distance, the express purpose of watching him, that they might bring an accusation against him, or discredit him with pretence. These men, with all their y, were the most violent opposers

of the Saviour, and were, evidently, actuated by the basest motives in their conduct towards him. They discovered great zeal, by taking so long a journey; but it was in a bad cause. Nor is it uncommon for those, who resist the truth, to be at immense pains and expense, and even to suppose that they are "doing God service," at the very time they are filled with enmity against him.

Persons, so disposed, will seldom be at a loss for objections. Something or other, in the most exemplary behaviour, will appear censurable to the envious and malicious eye. What cause of complaint, then, did these insidious adversaries find against the holy Jesus? They upbraided him with the contempt, which his disciples shewed for their traditions, in eating without first washing their hands. How ridiculous, and how palpable, was their hypocrisy, who laid such stress on outward purifications, and perceived not their need of inward sanctity! Men are ever prone to depend on a strict observance of rites and ceremonies even of their own invention, and to substitute them for "the power of godliness," or to imagine that these will compensate the neglect of the most express, moral injunctions. Jesus, therefore, convicted them of their glaring inconsistency, in preferring their own superstitious institutions to the absolute precepts of God. He produced one instance, in which they virtually abrogated the fifth commandment. For they excused those, who, through a false pretext of piety and of devoting their substance to God, refused to relieve their aged parents in distress. They accounted it sufficient for them to say, that they had bound themselves by a vow to give their money to the treasury or some sacred use, and then they considered them as freed from the obligation of contributing to the support of their father or their mother.

It is indispensably required, that we "learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite our parents; for that

infatuated followers, would soon be overwhelmed with final and remediless destruction.

It is an awful case, when those, who know not the way to heaven, undertake to be public instructors. How fatal the effects to themselves and others! The deceived and the deceiver, however they may flatter and be flattered, shall perish together. Let us not, therefore, blindly and implicitly submit to the opinions and dictates of men, though they may bear a respectable character, or even fill the highest stations in the Church. But let us form our judgment, not from human decisions, but from "the law and the testimony," since, whoever may be our teachers, we must answer for ourselves before the bar of God.

The declarations of our Lord were not well understood even by his own disciples. Having reproved them, therefore, in secret for their dulness of comprehension, he affirmed in plainer terms, that the heart is the seat and source of all moral pollution, that the food which is received for the proper nourishment of the body, brings no defilement upon the soul, but that the man is rendered unclean and offensive before God, only in consequence of his inward depravity, and that which proceeds from it. This is a doctrine, which calls for deep humiliation and constant circumspection. It would be easy to eat with clean hands; but would that purge the conscience? Ah! "Who can say, I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin *?" According to the description, which Jesus here gave, our fallen nature is so fruitful of evil, that it puts forth, as its common produce, all manner of impurity. Hence we are taught to account for the various kinds of iniquity in the world. Corrupt reasonings, irregular desires, sensual affections, lewdness, violence, dishonesty, avarice, malevolence, treachery, envy, profaneness, pride, and folly, have

* Prov. xx. 9.

duct. Though for some time he appeared unrelenting and inexorable, at length his compassion broke forth; and then it was found, that he had withheld from her the desired mercy, only that he might exercise her faith, for its further increase, and exhibit it to public view for the instruction and encouragement of others. When, therefore, she had given full proof of her unfeigned humility, and firm reliance upon him, she obtained her petition. He graciously smiled upon her, declared his approbation of her behaviour, and assured her of the perfect and instantaneous recovery of her daughter.

What, then, do we learn from this incident? We hear of Jesus; but do we believe him to be "the Son of David," the "Lord," who can "have mercy on us?" Have we no request to make; no blessing to implore from him? Let us pray with importunity, and take no denial. Perhaps, he may deal with us, as he did with the woman of Canaan, by seeming to disregard our distress, and to reject our suit with disdain. But let not this apparent neglect deter us: though repulsed again and again, let us renew our application with fresh ardour, and doubt not a happy issue. He may require us to wait long for the very mercy, which he means to bestow. In the mean time, we are to manifest our deep contrition before him, and the strength of our confidence in his power, faithfulness, and love. Nay, though our guilt and depravity may be urged against us, as rendering us unsuitable objects for the Saviour's notice, we may solicit him, the more earnestly, to glorify himself in our deliverance. But ah! how much impatience do we betray! How little are we able to bear any the least delay! How soon do we give up our expectation in despondency; as if "the mercy of God were clean gone" for ever, and his promise had failed for ever. How wretched, then, would be our condition,

tion, if he should treat us according to our own unbelieving apprehensions!

Jesus, having left the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon, came near to the sea of Galilee, where he ascended a mountain, probably for the purpose of instructing the multitudes, who followed him. Here, the case of one, deprived entirely of his hearing and almost of his speech, was submitted to him; nor was his help implored in vain. Devoutly looking up in prayer, and then pronouncing the word with peculiar majesty, he instantly restored the obstructed faculties to their proper functions. That he might avoid ostentation, or that he might not provoke the malice of his enemies, he desired the matter to be concealed from public notice; but the cure appeared so wonderful, that it was soon proclaimed abroad, and all expressed their admiration of his character, saying, "He hath done all things well."

Nor was this the only miracle, which he performed there. Many other infirm and diseased persons were brought and cast at his feet, who excited his pity, and experienced his power to heal *. These astonishing events could not but make a deep impression on the minds of the people, who, therefore, "glorified the God of Israel" for his gracious interposition. And shall we hear of them with a careless indifference? Shall we not be induced, from such proofs of the strength and mercy of our Redeemer, to trust, and love, and praise, and serve him? Shall we not perceive herein the performance of ancient promises, and bless God, who "hath remembered his holy Covenant, and raised up an horn of salvation for us?"

The dignity of Jesus was displayed in other instances. Again he put forth his creative power, as on a former occasion, to supply the necessities of those

* Mat. xv. 30, &c. / Mark viii. 1—10.

who attended his ministry. Moved with compassion for the people, who had continued with him three days together, and were then quite destitute of food, and many of them at a distance from their own homes, he furnished a table for them in the open fields. He directed his disciples to impart to them their own scanty provisions, consisting only of seven loaves and a few small fishes; which were so multiplied in the distribution, that four thousand persons, besides women and children, were fed and satisfied. The remains of this miraculous feast, also, as of the former, exceeded the original store; seven baskets of fragments being gathered up. He has afforded us sufficient encouragement, surely, to depend upon him for our daily bread. Only let us follow him in the way of duty, and he will not suffer us to "want any good thing." He "giveth food to all flesh;" say, "the earth is his, and the fulness thereof;" so that he can, without difficulty, supply all our need. He has instructed us, also, we perceive, to be frugal in the midst of plenty, and not to lavish by an useless profusion, what his bounty bestows. In every case it is proper to "gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost."

Having dismissed the multitude, he crossed the sea to the coasts of Magdala. Here a fresh attack was made upon him by a company of Pharisees and Sadducees united, who wished to ensnare him *. These men were as repugnant to each other in their principles, as possible; the former being superstitious in the extreme, the latter perfectly licentious: but they came together to tempt Jesus. We see, that persons of opposite tempers, of different sentiments, and of adverse parties, who cordially hate one another, can aside their animosities for a season, and forget their evulence, that they may join their strength


and interest, in acting against Christ. These subtle antagonists, like modern infidels, objected to the sufficiency of his evidence, and demanded of him another sort of attestation, than what he had yet given. They desired "a sign from heaven," intending, probably, some splendid appearance in the skies. But is it not the height of pride and insolence for sinners to prescribe unto God, what measures of conduct he should pursue towards them, what kind of a revelation he should afford them, or by what particular testimonies it should be confirmed? Men presumptuously despise and reject the plain and incontestable proofs, by which he has evinced the truth of his Gospel, and arrogantly call for those, which he has wisely denied, and which, also, would be ineffectual to convince them.

Many discover an acute discernment in their attention to worldly things, who betray the grossest ignorance and stupor in spiritual concerns. They will also transact their secular affairs with confidence, where they have nothing to depend on, but mere conjecture; and yet hazard their eternal salvation, while they are petulantly objecting to the infallible credentials of the holy scriptures. Such was the case of those captious disputants, who attacked the Saviour; and on this ground he reproved their inconsistency in forming an accurate judgment of the weather, and yet obstinately refusing to see "the signs of the times." He then declared, with deep distress for their awful state, that no such evidence, as they desired, would be granted, except it were his own resurrection on the third day; and then he left them to themselves, departing to the opposite side of the lake. Let their case stand as a solemn admonition to those, who study to invalidate revelation by their subtle arguments. Alas! while you are debating, Jesus may entirely withdraw himself from you, and give you up

to corrupt reasonings, and a confirmed obduracy of heart.

When they had crossed the sea, the disciples of Jesus were distressed to find, that they had nearly exhausted their whole stock of provisions. Their Master, to turn off their attention to a more profitable subject, cautioned them to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees," intending thereby to guard them against the dangerous opinions of those false teachers, whom he had lately combated. But they were so anxious about their bodily sustenance, that they considered him only as directing them, what bread they were to avoid. He reproved them, therefore, very sharply for entertaining the distrustful fear of wanting food to eat, after having twice seen, as they had done, thousands supported by a miracle. Do not most of our own painful apprehensions arise from a forgetfulness of the Lord's gracious interpositions in our favour? Oh! what shame and confusion belong to us, because we have profited no more by our past experience!

Jesus then declared explicitly, that he meant to guard them against those corrupt doctrines of his opposers, which might be compared to leaven. How



Jesus came to Bethsaida, where he was requested to extend his compassion to a blind man *. He readily consented; and yet he chose not to perform the miracle within the confines of the town, nor would he suffer the person to return thither, to publish his case: which might be intended as a mark of his displeasure against the unbelieving inhabitants. Many of the astonishing effects of his power and grace, at this time also, are purposely concealed from the observation of sinners, who would be disposed to treat them with contempt and derision. But the day is approaching, when all his wonderful works, and the excellency of his character, shall be made known to the assembled universe, to the unspeakable joy of his faithful people, and the confusion of his enemies.

When he had withdrawn the man to a little distance from the city, he restored his sight, but in a gradual manner. At the first touch of the Saviour, some faint glimmerings of light were conveyed to the darkened eyes, so that things were perceived very obscurely, and men appeared "as trees walking." But, upon the second touch, every object was seen distinctly. In every one of his miracles, Jesus exhibited his divine perfections: but he did not confine himself to a particular mode of operation. In some instances, we apprehend, the full blaze of day was suddenly poured in upon the blind, but here was a regular advance from one degree of clearness to another. It is the same in spiritual concerns. He alone "giveth light and understanding to the simple;" but the methods of his grace are different in different persons. We must not dictate to him, nor set up the case of any Christian as a standard, to which that of all others must be accommodated. Some may be instantaneously "called out of darkness into marvellous light;" whilst many attain, by a slow progress, to the knowledge

* Mark viii. 22—26.

From this circumstance, Jesus was led to address, not his disciples only, but the multitude at large, on the necessity of being willing to suffer with him. Let us attend to his solemn declarations; for they concern ourselves. Do we profess a regard to him? He exhorts us to enter upon a strict course of self-denial, and to submit to extreme difficulties, even to martyrdom itself, in his cause. We must testify a grateful sense of his love, and a pure desire to promote his glory, by sacrificing ease, interest, reputation, and life itself, when we are required, for his sake. A strong attachment to present enjoyments may ruin us for ever; but a cheerful renunciation of every thing dear and valuable upon earth, in the service of Christ, will be recompensed with eternal blessedness hereafter.

Are any deterred, by such considerations, from following the Saviour? Then make your choice, and, if you please, prefer the world to him. Secure its best delights, and, if it be possible, possess the whole of its pomps, its dominion, or its pleasures: what will you have gained? Can you estimate your profit, when you shall be rejected of God, and your souls be lost, beyond the power of recovery, for ever? Is there any

No: he will separate you from their company, for whom you dared not to avow an attachment upon earth; he will reject you with abhorrence, and consign you to a state of unutterable confusion, torment, and despair.

Such was the purport of our Lord's solemn admonitions; and in the same manner should sinners of the present day be warned. Perhaps the objection might be raised, If he were indeed of that exalted dignity, which he represented, why did not his glory immediately appear? And it might be with a view to obviate the difficulty, that he assured the persons around him, that some of them should not die, till they had seen a grand exhibition of his majesty, which might be considered as the commencement of his government. Some have supposed, that this referred to his transfiguration, which soon followed; but it has more generally been explained of that remarkable display of his power, which took place in the destruction of Jerusalem, to the overthrow of his enemies, and the establishment of his Church. That event he frequently described as his coming; and it was an awful emblem of his future and more illustrious advent for the final judgment of the world.

His predictions have been in part fulfilled; and in due time, when his righteous purposes are effected, they will all have their full completion. He will be revealed in his glory, as he hath told us; "and every eye shall see him." How shall we stand before him? What is our hope and expectation? Does the prospect of his manifestation fill us with delight? For so it ought to do, if we be indeed partakers of his salvation. It is the privilege of his faithful people to look and long for his appearing, crying, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." But such as remain at enmity against him, have abundant cause to dread "the day of the Lord." In vain would they call upon the rocks and

mountains to cover them, and hide them from face. They must be arraigned at his bar; and the everlasting doom shall be pronounced from mouth.—May we find mercy of the Lord in that, and enter with him into his kingdom for ever. Amen.



JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 22.

Jesus was transfigured, and declared to be the Son of God—expelled an evil spirit, which his Apostles could not—warned them of his approaching sufferings—paid the sacred tribute by a miracle—suggested solemn cautions against ambition, offences, contempt of any the weakest believers, severity and revenge towards an offending brother.

THE Lord Jesus Christ appeared upon earth in a state of profound humiliation: the brightness of his original glory being obscured by the infirmities of humanity, and the external meanness of his condition. His example, indeed, his preaching, and his miracles, proved him to be, not only superior to the children of men, but “the Lord from heaven.” There were also certain occasions, on which his true dignity was displayed in a very signal manner. The following instance is of that kind; and it seems to have been intended, not for vain parade, but for important purposes to himself and others.

About a week after the solemn address to his disciples, which was last mentioned, he retired to a high mountain (supposed by some to be mount Tabor), for the purposes of secret devotion*. He selected three out of the twelve, Peter, James, and John, his

* Mat. xvii. 1—13. Mark ix. 2—13. Luke ix. 28—36.

THEY WERE ASSURED, THAT THEY MIGHT BE WITNESSES OF A GREAT REVELATION OF THE GLORY, AS THEY TOON AFTERWARDS WERE SEEN ASCENDING AGAIN, IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE, IN HIS PRESENCE, AS HE OFFERED UP HIS FERVENT PRAYERS, HE ASSUMED A MOST MAGNIFICENT APPEARANCE, PUTTING OFF, FOR A SEASON, "THE FORM OF A SERVANT AND THE LIKENESS OF MEN," AND DISCOVERING HIS PROPER CHARACTER, WHILE HE SHONE WITH THE LUSTRE OF DIVINE MAJESTY. HIS COUNTENANCE BECAME BRIGHT AND BEAMING, AS THE SUN IN THE FIRMAMENT; AND SUCH A GLORIOUS COLOUR COVERED HIS WHOLE BODY, THAT THE RAYS, AS IT WERE, SHED THROUGH HIS GARMENTS, WHICH ALSO WERE LUMINOUS AND SPARKLING AS THE LIGHT ITSELF. TWO EMINENT PERSONS, LIKEWISE, WHO HAD BEEN HONOURED IN HIS SERVICE UPON EARTH, MOSES AND ELIJAH, THEN ATTENDED HIM FROM THE WORLD OF SPIRITS, IN A GLITTERING, REPLENDED FORM, AND CONFERRED WITH HIM ON THE GRAND DESIGN OF HIS INCARNATION, THE SACRIFICE WHICH HE WAS DUELY TO MAKE FOR THE SINS OF MANKIND, BY HIS CRUCIFIXION AT JERUSALEM.

A sight so wonderful, might well overwhelm the three Apostles. At first, they had fallen asleep through fatigue; but being awakened, probably by the exceeding brightness of the appearance, they beheld the

eternal Father, and the object of his supreme complacency, and required an earnest regard and an unfeigned submission to him. Here, then, was a clear revelation, and a near approach of the Deity. But was not the grand exhibition too much for human powers to sustain? Alas! such is our state of infirmity, and such the effect of guilt upon the conscience, that the most advanced saints in this world would feel some degree of terror, if God were to manifest himself to them in his glorious majesty, though sweetly tempered with grace and mercy. If our eyes should behold the Lord of hosts, we should exclaim, as Job, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes *:" or as Isaiah, "Wo is me! for I am undone †:" or as Peter, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord ‡." So these three distinguished disciples "fell on their face, and were sore afraid." But Jesus, who undertakes to introduce his people into the presence of God, and to give them confidence before him, immediately interposed to support and comfort them. He put his hands on them, and encouraged them to arise, and lay aside their fears.

The transfiguration was ended; the heavenly visitants disappeared; and Jesus, being left alone with his Apostles, charged them not to divulge what they had seen, till after his resurrection. Perhaps, their account of it would not have been credited before that event, and it might have produced some dangerous consequences. It should seem, that they expected Elijah's continuance among them, and were surprised at his being withdrawn. For it was commonly supposed from Malachi's prediction, that he would return to dwell on the earth, to effect a general reformation, and thus pave the way for the kingdom of Messiah §. But Jesus taught them, that the pro-


* Job xlii. 6.

† Isa. vi. 5.

‡ Luke v. 8.

§ Mal. iv. 5, 6.

vulsed with fits, and tortured in various ways through the possession of an evil spirit. The father, representing the case, kneeled as an humble supplicant at the feet of Jesus, and cried, "Lord, have mercy on my son:—if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us." In this very application, the man had discovered some degree of dependence; but doubt and hesitation seemed to be mixed with it: and perhaps his principles were shaken by the opposition of the Scribes, and by the failure of the disciples, who had tried in vain to effect the cure. Jesus, therefore, required a more decided testimony of his faith, and observed, that the greatest deliverances were not too much to be expected in an humble reliance upon him. The poor petitioner, being instantly convicted of his weakness, exclaimed, with evident marks of distress, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." The confession was accepted, and the prayer granted. The Saviour did not even upbraid him with his distrust, but proceeded to perform his request. He rebuked and expelled the devil, who seemed unwilling to relinquish his hold, and, even in the act of departing, grievously tormented the unhappy patient. After suf-



not withhold his favour from you on account of it: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Nor should you entreat him for yourselves alone, but for your friend, or your child in distress. In all circumstances, he can extend to you the very relief, which you want.

The disciples, as we have intimated, in vain attempted to expel the demon: and at this they expressed their wonder, when they had retired with their Master. They had wrought many miraculous cures before, and, perhaps, for that very reason, they were too self-sufficient, forgetting their entire dependence upon him for all their success. At least, in this instance their faith failed them; and, accordingly, he taught them, that, only by maintaining a constant reliance upon him, though it were but in a feeble manner, they should perform the most astonishing operations. He further observed, that it was necessary to implore divine assistance, especially on solemn occasions and in great difficulties, by a more than ordinary measure of devotion and humiliation.

We are not called to the same high office, or invested with the same powers, as the Apostles. But we have all, in our respective places, continual need of God's strengthening and supporting hand. In the view of our several duties and trials, we may see reason to cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Perhaps, our good endeavours have miscarried, "because of our unbelief." With what temper of mind, have we set ourselves to combat our spiritual enemies? Shall we wonder, that we have been defeated, or that our corruptions still retain their ascendancy, notwithstanding our opposition? For is it not true, here also, that the victory, we seek, cannot be obtained, "but by prayer and fasting?"

From the mount of transfiguration, Jesus, through different parts of Galilee. There opportunities of privacy, that he might o

them debating upon the road, concerning the right of precedence in his kingdom; for, still expecting a temporal dominion, and being too much under the influence of an ambitious spirit, they were all eager to obtain the highest places of preferment. But, when he had enquired the subject of their dispute, and they seemed ashamed to avow it, he spoke to their secret thoughts, and suggested, that, to be truly honourable in his account, they must possess other dispositions, and excellencies. At length, they introduced the matter, saying that it was not concealed, and asked, "Who is the greatest?" To this he replied, "who is brought an infant before me," and took him in arms, that, except they were converted to God, they could never be considered meek, teachable, and free from designs, and aspiring views, like little children, they could not only attain no exaltation, but have no place in his kingdom; and that the person, who is covered most of an unfeigned lowliness of mind, stood the highest in his favour.

And are we duly sensible of the spiritual nature of our religion? Are we not aiming at worldly grandeur and pre-eminence, instead of attending to the frame of our souls? What have we known of real conversion of heart? Is not the very term treated with profane ridicule, as if the mention of it proved a man a visionary and an enthusiast? But surely, if conversion were so absolutely necessary in our Lord's time, it cannot now be dispensed with, however the idea may be scorned among us. Where shall we look for Christian humility? Do all, who pretend to be the disciples of Jesus, bear evident marks of a child-like simplicity, modesty, submission, and dependence? Or rather, is not such a disposition derided as a despicable meanness? How strange, that those should retain the name of Christianity, who are ashamed of its peculiar excellencies and most essential attributes! Do we judge
of

of our growth in grace, by the criterion here laid down? Do we become more and more abased in ourselves? Have we a deeper sense of the malignity of sin, and of our extreme depravity? Do we learn to trust, more unreservedly, to the help of God, and daily to maintain faith in the Redeemer, more firmly, for every blessing? Thus only shall we prove our advancement in the divine life, and our progress towards heaven.

Jesus, having mentioned one distinguishing part in the character of his people, proceeded to shew, what a tender regard should be paid to them. He declared, that whatever favour was done unto any of them, though it were one as feeble as the infant in his arms, he would consider as done unto himself; but that a contempt of them, or a deliberate purpose to turn them out of the way, or interrupt them in it, would be followed by a punishment, infinitely more tremendous than any temporal destruction. Alas! how many such stumbling-blocks are laid before us, as not only obstruct the weak, but prove fatal to the souls of thousands! So circumstanced, indeed, as we now are, these things are to be expected: by inevitable consequence they will occur. But how provoking to God; how terrible the effects! "Wo unto the world, because of offences! Wo to that man, by whom the offence cometh!"

Would you avoid the awful denunciation? Then beware, lest there be something in your temper and conduct, which may be the means of seducing others, or prejudicing their minds against the truth of God. Attend to what the Saviour has suggested in his solemn exhortation. It may be expedient for you to relinquish the most delightful gratification, every favourite lust, every worldly prospect, though as dear to you, and in your estimation as necessary, as a hand, a foot, or an eye. Do not hesitate, because the mortification is painful. It were far better, surely, to suffer

times together, that in hell "their w
and the fire is not quenched?" The s
the Mosaic law were sprinkled with salt
to which it is asserted, that "every c
sacrifice to the justice of God, "shall
fire;" and this represents the fierceness
nature of those flames, to which the i
be doomed. Would you escape them
tion is clear: "every sacrifice shall b
salt;" that is, every one, truly devoted
whom he will accept, must be consecra
vice by his grace, which alone can purifi
the soul. This is "the salt," which i
tain; or else, notwithstanding your rel
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The subject being important, Jesus
enforce an affectionate regard to the lea
est of his members. While he held
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commissioned to attend: much less, the
disdain those, represented by the babe.

cured within his fold. We, also, should possess a similar disposition; and, therefore, so far from obstructing the salvation of any soul, we should delight in promoting it.

Even a Christian brother may sometimes act inconsistently, and we may suffer through his misconduct. But we are not therefore rashly to abandon him, or indulge a vindictive temper. We are immediately to attempt his restoration, first by private admonitions, then by the interference of a few common friends, and, if that method should be ineffectual, by the more public censures of the religious community, to which we belong. It is only, when every effort fails, that we may proceed to the painful extremity, and renounce all fellowship with him. Perhaps, this expedient may be salutary; at least, it will be proper. And, that discipline might be maintained in his Church, our Lord has assured us, that the decisions of his ministers and people, acting in his name and from a regard to his glory, shall be ratified in heaven. Not only for the regulation of a Christian society, but for the encouragement of all to meet in a dependence upon him, for the purpose of united prayer, though it should be only in the smallest companies, he solemnly promised, that their petitions should be granted, and their assemblies honoured with his own immediate presence: "There," said he, "am I in the midst of them." How exalted is the language! How gracious the declaration! He can be no other than the Omnipotent Jehovah, who " filleth heaven and earth," since he engages to manifest himself in all the various places where his people meet, at the same moment of time. He speaks also in terms peculiar to the Deity, "I AM." Yet "as his majesty is, so is his mercy." He will not be unmindful of them, who seek him. Let them associate together in his name, professing their regard to him and offer up their joint petitions, "with one mind

one mouth" pleading his merits, and they shall know, that he is in the midst of them, by the strength and comfort of his Spirit. Surely, the promise should enliven our affections, and enlarge our expectations, in his service.

As our Lord had insisted on the manner, in which dissensions between Christians should be healed, Peter took occasion to propose the enquiry, how often forgiveness should be extended to an offending brother, as if some limits should be affixed to the exercise of our patience and forbearance. But Jesus, in his reply, has taught us, that, if injuries should be multiplied against us without number, we should still be ready to pardon, not merely "until seven times, but until seventy times seven;" and even that our lenity to others should be as unbounded as that of God is towards us. This astonishing compassion and grace of our God is represented in an affecting parable. He is the great King, who "takes account of his servants," and to whom we are indebted in a larger sum, than we are able to compute. Should he rigorously demand the payment, our case would indeed be desperate. Let us try the effect of an humble application to his mercy. He will not proceed in strict

the injuries, which we can possibly sustain from one another, compared with our manifold and heinous provocations against God. If, then, in the warmth of our resentment, we conclude, that our brother has no claim to our compassion, and we refuse to extend any mercy to him, what do we, but pass sentence upon ourselves? The indignation of the lord, who had shewn so much tenderness, was roused against the inexorable wretch. "So likewise," said our divine Teacher, "shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

How tremendous is the thought, that a malicious, cruel, and revengeful disposition is odious in the sight of God, and, unrepented of, will bring down his heaviest displeasure! And how forcible an argument does it suggest for the exercise of mutual forbearance, candour, and love among Christians! "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you *."

* Eph. iv. 31, 32,

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 23.

*Jesus, reproached by his
tabernacles—taught in
served from the rage
cers of the Sanhed
adulterers—renewed
various cavils—offer
racle escaped a violent*

*d—went to the feast of
mple—miraculously pre-
ople, and from the offi-
ealed to, concerning an
c instructions—answered
Deity, and only by a mi-*

It was a striking proof of the condescension of Jesus, and no small part of it, that he “endured such contradiction of sinners against himself *.” That He, who “is Lord of all,” should dwell in mortal flesh, was an instance of deep humiliation: yet he stooped still lower, in bearing the malicious insults and violent opposition of those, who were not only the creatures of his hands, but obnoxious to his wrath, and whom he might in a moment have confounded and destroyed for ever. He suffered their perverseness with unexampled patience, and laboured incessantly for their good. May his servants learn from Him “to be gentle unto all men, and in meekness to instruct those that oppose themselves!”

It has been remarked, that our Lord continued to teach in Galilee; and it is accounted for by an angelist, who observes, that he declined spending

* Heb. xii. 3.

much time in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, because of the murderous designs, which were there formed against him *. At the approach of the feast of tabernacles †, though he intended to be present at the celebration of that solemnity, he delayed his journey for some days, that he might attract the less notice. But his brethren (which expression includes all those, who were nearly related), knowing his constant practice, wondered at this delay, and, with an insolent taunt, desired him to take that opportunity of going to display his works at Jerusalem; as if he courted popularity, and aimed at nothing more than public applause. Never was any objection more groundless or more invidious than this. His whole deportment manifested a contrary disposition. But men, with a malevolent heart, are capable of the basest misrepresentations. There were unbelievers, we perceive, among the kindred of Jesus, and probably in the same house with him, who, though witnesses of his exemplary holiness and miraculous operations, derided and rejected him. They, who dwell in a pious family, who are intimately connected with a person eminently religious, enjoy peculiar advantages for their own spiritual improvement; but, even in so favourable a situation, they may remain in ignorance and contempt of those principles, the excellency of which is continually before their eyes. We do not wonder, therefore, that the faithful servants of Christ are often shamefully calumniated by those, who are nearly allied to them; especially as we observe such malignant reproaches cast upon their Lord and Master.

* John vii. 1, &c.

† This was one of the grand festivals of the Jews, appointed in remembrance of their ancestors dwelling in tents, and kept for seven or eight days together in booths, which were built for that purpose. Lev. xxiii. 34—36.

SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

Jesus replied, that he was aware, how much hatred he had incurred by his severe reproofs, and, therefore, that he should not yet venture himself amongst his decided enemies. He further remarked, that this reason need not detain them, since their conduct was so agreeable to the spirit of the world, as to excite no disgust against them. The observation accounts for all the violence of persecution, which is raised against those, who boldly condemn the sinful practices of their own times, and shews also, that it may be avoided by a moderate and servile compliance with the general sin of the age. Perhaps, our Lord could not have followed them, if even in the company of his own disciples, and before he followed them, in the most secret privacy. Had he been otherwise, he would probably, have been exposed to the same obloquy and censure as the Pharisees, who, though they professed religion: for there was much to be said in their favour, even at the festival, and, in the temple, there was much to be said against them. It is evident, then, that he was regular in his attendance on divine ordinances; thus he "fulfilled all righteousness," and left a perfect example to his people. What resemblance of him do they bear, who neglect the sacred institutions of God's house? Do not their very excuses convict them of profaneness, indolence, or avarice? To tread in his steps, we must carefully observe the appointed times and solemnities of public worship.

It might be, also, to avoid ostentation as well as danger, that Jesus travelled to Jerusalem in private. Perhaps even there he concealed himself upon his first arrival; while warm debates were held concerning him, some allowing his integrity, others condemning him as a deceiver, and none daring to avow an attachment to him. But, about the midst of the festival, excited, doubtless, by a pure zeal for the honour of God, and compassion for the souls of the very numerous


nerous congregation then assembled, he appeared in the temple, and delivered his holy instructions with unshaken firmness and intrepidity. The Jews immediately perceived such a depth of sacred knowledge in his address to them, as they could not account for, considering the meanness of his education. But he proceeded to declare, that he was invested with a commission from heaven, and that his doctrine was not the fruit of human learning, or the deductions of reason, but a direct revelation from God. He observed, that the evidences were such as would convince an honest enquirer, and that the man, who was seriously disposed to do the will of God, would certainly attain a right understanding of the truth, however obscure or absurd it might seem to others. As to himself, he maintained, that he sought nothing but the divine glory, and therefore that they should give him credit, at least, as being no impostor.

The Gospel, then, which Jesus taught, demands our unfeigned regard, because it is a message from God. Herein he still preaches to us, as he did to the Jews of old. Let us examine, whether we “know of the doctrine.” Are we persuaded of its authority and excellence? Have we a clear perception of its grand design? And have we carefully traced its distinguishing lineaments? If otherwise, we should suspect in ourselves an unsoundness of heart, a determined love of sin, and a spirit of presumptuous disobedience to God. These are the chief causes of infidelity and ignorance, where the truth of God is sent: and it is generally evident, that men’s difficulties and objections betray a perverse and unholy disposition.

Jesus, by a bold appeal, accused his hearers of transgressing that very law, of which they boasted, and even charged some of them with harbouring designs of violence against him. They, indeed, denied the imputation, and insolently reviled him for it, 1

if he were under the possession of the devil. But he proceeded to convict them of persecuting him with much bitterness, merely because he had cured the poor impotent man, at the pool of Bethesda, on the sabbath *. And, having argued their inconsistency for condemning that miraculous work of mercy, as a violation of the law, while they themselves constantly performed the rite of circumcision on the sacred day, in obedience to the same law, he exhorted them no longer to decide against him by a partial and unjust judgment.

Many of the people were impressed with an admiration of his courage, especially when they knew that there were serious intentions of destroying him; and yet they foolishly concluded, that he could not be the Messiah, because they thought his low extraction incompatible with that high character. To these captious adversaries he replied, that, notwithstanding their supposed acquaintance with him and his origin, he came to them with an express and full commission from that God, of whom they were ignorant, and that he had the most intimate communications and union with him. Alas! how many deceive themselves, in boasting of their clear perceptions of the



possible, that they should have power to destroy him, till all the purposes of Heaven were accomplished in him. Yet there were many of the lower order, who seemed convinced that he was indeed the Christ; for they argued rightly, that the promised Deliverer could not perform more astonishing operations, than Jesus had done. These favourable dispositions in the people towards him alarmed the great council of the Sanhedrim, then assembled, who immediately sent their officers to apprehend him. But the malevolent design was baffled. Jesus continued to preach, even before the face of those, who were charged with a commission to seize him. He warned them, that, notwithstanding their opposition, he should proceed in his work a little longer, that shortly, returning to the state of glorious exaltation, which he had left, he should be removed beyond the reach of their violence, and that they might seek in vain to be admitted into his presence. How solemn the admonition! Alas! how few considered the time of their visitation! How few, in our own day, consider, that Jesus, who waits upon them in the ministry of his word, will soon withdraw himself, that the gracious offers, now made them, will never be renewed, and that an eternal separation must take place between them and that Saviour, whom they despise! "Where He is, thither they cannot come."

While they were puzzled to comprehend his meaning, he proclaimed aloud the rich mercy of the Gospel, inviting the application of all, who were truly desirous of spiritual blessings, and promising to dispense unto them the abundant influences of the Holy Ghost, which would support and refresh them, and the benefits of which might extend to others connected with them. This grand and encouraging address to the whole body of the people was pronounced on the last day of the feast, when the congregation was probably larger than usual; and it is supposed,

that even then the officers of justice stood before him. On that day it was customary to fetch water from the fountain of Siloam, and pour it on the altar with great exultation, perhaps singing at the time, "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation *." It is thought, that upon this occasion Jesus stood on an eminence, and, exerting his voice that he might be heard by the surrounding multitudes, directed their attention to himself, as intended to be represented in that ceremony, as "the fountain of living waters," communicating the most plentiful supplies of grace to every thirsty soul.

To us, also, the blessing is offered, the same kind invitation is given. His ambassadors still address us, with similar proposals, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters †." The grand source, to which we are referred, remains inexhaustible as ever; nor is there any thing to obstruct our access to it, except our own indifference or aversion to it. "Let him that is athirst, come: and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely †." Have we any ardent desires for those spiritual benefits, which Jesus confers? It is well, if we be truly sensible of their excellence and importance. Let our application

JESUS CHRIST.

and they were too careless or too bigotted to enter into further enquiries. The very men, who were employed to apprehend him, and some of whom were disposed to take him by force, listened to him till, under the strongest impressions of admiration and reverence, they were unable to execute their purpose. They returned without their prisoner, and were constrained to allege in excuse for not fulfilling their commission, "Never man spake like this man." How easily can the Lord God over-awe and confound his enemies! "Surely, the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain *." We have known many instances of those, who, unaccountably to themselves, have been suddenly obliged to relinquish their designs of violence, and even to plead the cause of persons, whom they had vowed to destroy. Not a few have been brought to a state of penitence under a sermon, while they were seeking objections, and forming malevolent intentions, against the preacher.

The Sanhedrim, however, were the more exasperated, and represented all, who favoured Jesus, as ignorant, deluded, and infatuated wretches, not worthy to be regarded. Nicodemus attempted to moderate their rage; but he met with a severe rebuke for the prudent advice, which he suggested; and probably the council broke up in confusion.

The evening approached, and Jesus retired, not to indulge in sensuality or indolence, nor even to obtain the necessary refreshment of sleep. He withdrew to the mount of Olives, at some little distance from the city, where he might give vent to the ardent affections of his soul in secret prayer †. The night, therefore, as well as the day, was devoted to the service of God, with a view, probably, to the salvation of sinners, for whom he was most anxiously concerned.

* Psal. lxxvi. 30.

† John viii. 1, &c.

their entire ignorance of his Father, as well as of him. This was a bold charge indeed; and, considering his situation and their malevolence, it was wonderful, that they bore with him. But they were still under an invincible restraint; as the full time for his being delivered into their hands was not arrived. He continued, therefore, to warn them, that he should shortly leave them to perish in their unbelief, and that then it would be too late for them to solicit an admission into his presence. When they turned his very warning into ridicule, he declared more plainly, that he descended from the heavenly world, and properly belonged to it; but that they were entirely earthly in their views, affections, and pursuits, and that rejecting him they would sink under the curse of their sins into final destruction.

Ah! how foolish as well as wicked is the conduct of those, who persist in opposing the Saviour, to their own inevitable ruin! They trifle away their precious moments, in raising one petulant objection after another, while they stand on the brink of eternal misery. Should we not desire to rouse them from their lethargy? What means your indifference, and your levity, so long as the grand concern of your souls is


taking him off by the violent death of the cross, they would be struck with a conviction of his divine character and high office; and he solemnly assured them, that, though rejected and scorned by sinners, he was not deserted of his heavenly Father, but was the constant object of his complacency and delight. O let us fear to indulge a captious disposition, lest we be given up to a reprobate mind! Is not this exalted Teacher "worthy of all acceptance?" Why, then, do we not sincerely and thankfully submit to his instructions? Does not our perverse opposition evince a proud and an earthly mind?

The solemn declarations of Jesus, though generally despised, produced an evident impression on some of the company, who, therefore, professed to regard him as the Messiah. Addressing himself to these persons, in particular, he exhorted them to yield a steadfast and persevering attention to his word, and thereby to prove themselves, beyond a doubt, his faithful disciples; and he subjoined a most gracious promise, that in this way they should be enlightened with such a knowledge of his doctrine, as would establish them in a state of glorious freedom. Yet even this gave offence, so much disposed were most of them to cavil at all his expressions. His proposal of conferring freedom implied, that they had been in servitude; which they resented as a gross insult, boasting of their high privileges as the children of Abraham. Their proud and ignorant objection, however, led him to shew, that his meaning was spiritual; and he replied to the following effect:

"Little as you may be aware of the melancholy truth, I solemnly assure you, that every one, practising iniquity, is actually a slave to sin, the worst of tyrants. So circumstanced, then, notwithstanding your descent from Abraham, you are not the children of God, and may expect to be excluded from household. But I, his only begotten Son, who

entitled to all the honours of his family, am empowered likewise to confer them upon you; so that, if you receive the liberty which I bestow, you will be rescued from a state of miserable bondage, and the most exalted privileges be secured to you for ever. You boast of your extraction from an illustrious Patriarch; but this cannot profit you, since at this very moment you are so incensed at my doctrine, as to be filled with murderous rage against me. I declare to you the will of my Father, that which I know to be so, from the most intimate acquaintance with his mind: and you also shew by your deportment, what you have learned from your father."

Here they interrupted him, still maintaining that they sprang from no other than Abraham. But Jesus proceeded;—"Were you indeed the children of Abraham, you would tread in his steps: but how widely do you differ from him in your spirit and conduct, while you are aiming at my life, for boldly asserting among you the truth of God? Your actions correspond with the original, from which you are derived." This insinuation they considered as reproachful to their character, and contended that God was their Father. The Saviour answered, "If seek



you are, that you cannot bring any charge of guilt against me: and, if you must admit my integrity, why will you not credit my assertions? Every one, who is born of God, and under the influence of his grace, will yield a serious attention and an unreserved submission to the will of God, in whatever manner it be revealed: this, therefore, cannot be your character, as you prove by your perverse and obstinate unbelief."

These severe reproofs exasperated the Jews still more, so that they replied with manifest rancour, that they were now justified in their suspicions of him, as being an enemy to their religion, like the Samaritans, and acting under the instigation of the devil. He repelled the blasphemous charge with singular meekness, observing, that so far from having connections with Satan, he had uniformly shewn a zealous regard to his Father's glory, which had brought their contempt upon him; that yet, though he might be indifferent about his own personal honour, there was One, who would assert it to their entire condemnation. He added, also, the most gracious and solemn protestations, for the encouragement of the penitent, that the sincere believer in him should never taste the bitterness, or come under the power, of death. The precious promise, no less than his reproofs, incensed them, and confirmed them in the persuasion, that he was actuated by a diabolical influence. They grossly misapprehended him, as if none of his followers should suffer even the dissolution of the body, and insolently asked, what privilege or dignity he claimed, beyond the ancient prophets.

He answered, "If my claims were unsupported, they might safely be despised; but I appeal to the attestations of that God, to whom you profess to stand in a peculiar relation. Alas! your pretences are false and presumptuous: on the contrary, I possess the most perfect knowledge of him, and yield a consta

and could do violence to him. You reject me with scorn, but Abraham, your great progenitor, showed the highest possible respect for my character, looking forward with ardent desires to the day of my appearance, and, by faith, existing in the prospect of it. Thus he plainly declared himself to be the Messiah, whilst they continued most foolishly to carp at his expressions, as implying that he had been contemporary with Abraham upon the earth. To give the most decisive answer to their cavils, and to assert his own Deity, in express and unequivocal terms, he added, while he called their attention to it as a certain and unerring truth, "Before Abraham was, I AM." This language was too clear to be misunderstood, and it contains a doctrine too important to be abandoned. The very mode of speaking, which he adopted, is peculiar to the Godhead; and it amounts to a full proof, that he is the unchangeable Jehovah, who remains "the same" from everlasting to everlasting, and, therefore, that the ages and generations of men make no difference in his existence. He affirmed, then, that he is that very God, who revealed himself to Moses by that adorable name, "I AM."

destitute of the truth. Probably, the most unreasonable prejudices will so prevail, as greatly to obstruct their usefulness. Their plainest expressions may be misunderstood, or wilfully distorted; the most malicious charges may be urged against them, and their characters blackened by the basest aspersions. All this may be done, even among the people, for whose eternal welfare they are labouring with the most generous and unwearied assiduity. But let them study, and endeavour to copy, this divine exemplar. Like the blessed Jesus, it will become them to stand unmoved against all the assaults of ignorance, pride, and envy, to obviate mistakes, and inculcate right doctrines, with patience and forbearance. Yet, consistently with this gentleness of spirit, they should also warn the impenitent, and without fear or reserve denounce "the terrors of the Lord." They should reprove and admonish, not with rashness or malevolence, but with courage and fidelity, and, while they plainly represent the state and character of the ungodly, affectionately beseech them "to flee from the wrath to come."

Would to God, that opposition to Christ had been confined to the Jews! Are there none among us, who in a similar way resist the truth? How vile their affections! How wretched their condition! They may boast of liberty, but "they are the servants of corruption." They may suppose, that they are doing God service, and be ready to demand a recompense from him, even while they fulfil the purposes of Satan, and prove themselves to be totally under his influence. They may pretend to a peculiar penetration and discernment, when they are deluded by "the father of lies," and, through the ascendancy of carnal principles, "cannot hear" the pure doctrine of the Gospel. Let us pray, that we may not be given up to such infatuation as this.

Do

fixed on for the relief of Moses in his office *. These also he divided into pairs, that they might strengthen each other's hands; and, upon their departure, he gave them instructions similar to those, which he had delivered to the Apostles. This appointment, probably, took place before his attendance at the feast of tabernacles, last mentioned.

He addressed them to the following purpose: "Unite your fervent prayers, for more labourers to be sent out into the very extensive field, which lies before you, that the harvest may be gathered in; for, though a large addition is now made, there is sufficient work to call for a further increase. And, as none should presume to intrude themselves into this employment, your application should be to the great Lord of the harvest, who alone can discern the proper persons, and furnish them with all necessary preparations for the sacred function. You go forth under my directions "as lambs among wolves," in the face of furious adversaries, who will endeavour to harass and destroy you. But commit yourselves to the care of divine Providence; nor take with you any supplies for your temporal support. Like men in haste, who

to establish his kingdom. Whoever may despise your message, leave them not till you have solemnly warned them of their sin and danger; since aggravated ruin will come upon them, for their contempt of mercy. The curse of an incensed God awaits the inhabitants of those cities, which have scornfully rejected my ministry; and, however exalted their privileges have been, they shall finally perish with a much more tremendous destruction, than even those abandoned places, Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon, which have already felt the weight of divine vengeance. Thus, also, I shall consider myself, and my Almighty Father likewise, either as regarded or condemned by the persons, among whom you shall discharge your embassy; and upon their conduct towards you their everlasting salvation or perdition will depend."

What eager solicitude, what a generous concern did Jesus discover for the welfare of mankind! What various methods he devised, to save immortal souls! He sent out, we observe, a numerous company of harbingers and heralds, proclaiming pardon and peace; and he himself took one laborious journey after another, for the same benevolent purpose. Nor was his love less conspicuous, when he warned the despisers of his Gospel, that the most tremendous woes were coming upon them; for he poured out his heart in deep distress on their account. Still he presides as Head over his Church; and still, with a view to rescue sinners from eternal misery, he raises up and employs many ambassadors in his service, to whom he "commits the word of reconciliation." And, as it seems most probable, that he will promote the cause of truth and righteousness in the earth by means of faithful and evangelical ministers, we should unite our prayers to him for their increase, that by their testimony his name may be declared from town to town, and from one kingdom to another. Where he sends his messengers, we are encouraged to hope,
that

this proclamation of mercy is made, much depends upon it. "It is not you, because it is your life †." If it to save you, it will aggravate your Those, who "watch for your soul witness either for you or against your reception of them. They are witnesses of their adorable Lord and Master, who shortly arise to vindicate his own cause, if you meet him, if you treat his grace with scorn or indifference?

The seventy disciples returned to about the feast of tabernacles, with their ministry. They appeared to be having succeeded beyond their expectation, to their grateful surprise, because the very subject to them, as if nothing, from them, be able to stand against them. Jesus triumphed in the downfall of Satan, proving the punishment inflicted on original apostasy, but as foreseeing the rest and kingdom in this world to

the heirs of heaven, than to possess an absolute dominion over the infernal spirits.

On that occasion, the Saviour exulted in his heart, and broke forth into expressions of grateful satisfaction, from the prospect of what these feeble instruments should accomplish, though opposed by persons of consummate wisdom and prudence. But how profound the mystery! Salvation is revealed to those, who are weak and of as little account, as babes, while men of admired abilities and high rank in life remain in ignorance and contempt of it. In this inscrutable dispensation, Jesus acquiesced and rejoiced. The Lord God is a righteous Sovereign; and, under a full conviction of his equity, we should submit implicitly to his appointments, though we see not the reasons of them. It should suffice us, that "so it seemed good in his sight."

Jesus took that opportunity, also, to direct the regard of his disciples to himself, as united with the Father in the grand economy of grace, as possessing an extent of power and understanding, far beyond the reach of any creature, and as the only One, who can declare the nature and will of God. Then likewise, to excite their thankfulness for being acquainted with him, he congratulated them, apart from the rest, because they were favoured with higher privileges and clearer discernment in divine things, than many of the most eminent characters in old times, prophets and kings, who were beloved of God.

And are not our obligations immense, if we "have obtained like precious faith," and can on solid ground conclude, that our "names are written in the book of life?" For, "how great things hath God done for us!" We need not envy those, who were invested even with the apostolical commission and miraculous powers. That grace, which is infinitely more valuable, is bestowed upon us. Our distinguished felicity appears the more remarkable, when we observe

thy sight." Let us also pray for those
in darkness, that they may partake of
by being "called into marvellous
their eyes may be blessed, in beholding
excellency of our Redeemer.

During some part of our Lord's ad-
venty upon their return, it should see
surrounded by a large company. A
was a certain lawyer (one of those who
expounded the law of Moses), who
with much self-consequence and secret
Jesus, and proposed a question to him
guard, but designing to involve him.
He begged to be informed, what he
attainment of eternal life. The subject
portant above all others; and, had it
been asked with an humble, teachable
Jesus would not have refused a direct an-
swer. But, as he knew the proud and
per of the man, he replied in a way
tend to humble or silence him. He
the demands of the law (upon his obser-

ait thee: but the least deviation or defect will expose thee to condemnation *."

In the same manner it may be proper to treat all persons, as value themselves on their supposed wisdom. This method seems calculated to convince them of their ignorance and presumption; so that they may serve "as a schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ, that they may be justified by faith †." We are, if your hopes are built on your own duties, are not aware, how much is required of you? Have you ever failed of loving God supremely and fervently, with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind; or your neighbour as yourselves? If these dispositions have their constant and full influence upon you, from your earliest moments to this present hour, you need implore mercy, or be indebted to the Saviour: on no ground of justice, according to "the law of works," you may expect and even claim eternal life. Does not this very representation awaken your fears, rather than flatter your pride, or confirm your confidence?

What effect was produced upon the Scribe? He was neither humbled nor silenced; but, still desirous to stand upon his own defence, and perhaps in order to evade conviction, he proposed another question, "Who is my neighbour?" From this circumstance the Lord took occasion to confute the erroneous notion, then generally prevalent, that neighbours included only particular friends, and such as were situated near to each other, or connected by the bonds of blood or religion. The sense of the law was confined within a narrow compass, while it was thought, that persons of this description only have any claim on our benevolence. But Jesus shewed, that we are indispensably required to extend our utmost kindness to all our fellow-creatures in distress, of what-

* See Gal. iii. 10-13.

† 24.

ed, and related with such simplicity
to interest every reader.

A Jew is represented as reduced
to a miserable and dangerous condition,
of robbers. Two men of sacred
and a Levite, travelling the same
nesses of his misery; and, though
in an especial manner, should have dis-
acted of tenderness and compassion
from the painful sight, without e-
relief. But a Samaritan, who was
earliest years to hate and avoid the
misfortune, upon the first view of
ject, and, forgetting the odious of
the two nations, ran to his assistance
cular attention to the case, made
for his support. Such a conduct
proof of benevolence. Even he
was constrained to admire the Samari-
fess that he had shewn himself a ne-

The proper application is pointed
each of us, as well as to the lawyer.
"Go, and do thou likewise."

ced upon all men as his neighbours, and treated them with the same kindness, which he should expect himself in similar circumstances? How little do we resemble our great Pattern, who has exhibited the most extensive and disinterested benevolence! The Lord Jesus "remembered us in our low estate," though we were "sinners and enemies," not only stretched out his arm to rescue us from misery, but gave himself a sacrifice, and "died for the ungodly *." May the contemplation of this love excite us to "love one another, with a pure heart fervently †!"

At Bethany, about two miles distant from Jerusalem, lived an amiable family, to which our Lord seems to have been much attached. Probably upon his return from the feast of tabernacles, he called at this village, to visit Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary, where he was received with great affection. The interview is mentioned, chiefly that we may remark the different kinds of attention, which these two pious women paid to Jesus. Mary placed herself at his feet, like an humble scholar, with an ardent desire to imbibe his important instructions. But Martha, to whom perhaps the chief care of their domestic affairs belonged, discovered her regard to him, by her solicitude to provide a proper entertainment for him; and, being too intent upon that object, she complained with some marks of peevishness, that her sister did not help her. Jesus, therefore, with much tenderness reproved Martha for her unreasonable and immoderate anxiety about the various concerns of the family, or the preparing of such accommodations, as were trifling, if not needless, and at the same time solemnly reminded her, that, while any lower matters engaged her attention and distracted her thoughts, "one thing" was of absolute

* Rom. v. 6—10.

† 1 Pet. i. 22.

necessity, and that all others should give place to it. On this ground he commended the conduct of Mary, who appeared to be more "spiritually minded," as improving the opportunity for her own greatest advantage. He declared, therefore, that Mary had acted wisely in preferring "the good part," because it is excellent in itself, and infinitely more valuable than all earthly possessions, as being secure and inviolable.

The example as well as the observations of Jesus upon this occasion will furnish solid instruction. We should learn from him to shew the influence of our religion, as well in our common intercourse with each other, as in the temple and closet. In every house, where he was admitted, he delivered his heavenly doctrines, "his mouth speaking wisdom, and his tongue talking of judgment *." And shall we be unwilling or ashamed to introduce any mention of our spiritual concerns, wherever we may be? How do we appear to have the mind of Jesus, if divine things engage no part of our private conversation? Do not some plead the cares of a family, the hurry of business, and an attention to company, as if these were of the first consequence, or as if God were to be regarded, and the interests of the soul consulted, only in the second place? What, then, has Jesus taught you? He declares, "One thing is needful:" but how many things are so in your estimation! That, which he enjoins you, as important above all others, is either totally forgotten, or thrust aside, that you may be more at leisure to pursue that, which is of little worth, and cannot long be secured to you. Even some pious persons are much obstructed in their spiritual progress through an excessive anxiety about their secular affairs. They do not, therefore, as they ought, glorify God by bringing forth fruit abundantly, or do they enjoy the comforts of religion in them-

* Psal. xxxvii. 30.

selves. But the greater part of mankind seem entirely carnal; for they propose no higher object to themselves, than to gratify their animal nature; as if "the one thing needful" were to make the most of the present life, to eat, drink, and be merry. A zealous regard to religion is condemned and derided, as extreme folly, though it be the truest wisdom. The servant of Jesus, who is observed to "sit at his feet and hear his word," is complained of as deserting his post. But his divine Master will plead his cause to the confusion of his opponents; and, when they shall be for ever separated from all that was dear to them, he will possess a treasure and a happiness in the heavens, "which shall not be taken away from him."

On another occasion, and in a different place, where Jesus had retired, he was requested by one of his disciples, at the conclusion of his devotions, to teach them to pray, as John also had taught his followers *. It cannot be supposed, that they had continued so long with him in ignorance or neglect of this duty: for they must have learned the necessity of it both from his example and his exhortations. But they now desired some particular instructions in it, perhaps some form of prayer to be delivered to them; and it is supposed, that the most eminent Jewish masters, as well as John the Baptist, gave their respective scholars and adherents a short model for their worship. In compliance with their wishes, then, he repeated, with certain trifling alterations, that brief but comprehensive address to God, with which he had furnished them before, as a directory to them in their devotions; and now he appointed it to be used as a stated form †.

It has been already observed, that it might be adapted to the peculiar situation of the disciples, and in-

* Luke xi. 1—13.

† See Sect. 10.

tended only for that time; but that, as the expressions are suitable for Christians in all ages and circumstances, it may still be retained with great propriety, both in public and private worship; though it could not be meant to exclude other petitions. The composition is wonderful and excellent, beyond any commendation which we can offer. We call upon those, who desire to serve God acceptably, to study the full sense of all its parts distinctly, and endeavour to enter into the true spirit of it. Consider, how you pray. You are here taught to approach to God with affection and confidence as to your Father, yet with profound reverence as to him, who "hath prepared his throne in the heavens." His name should be dear to you; and you should implore grace for others, that it may be known and sanctified in every place, requesting also, that he would establish his kingdom in righteousness by the everlasting Gospel, and that all the inhabitants of the earth may unite with those of heaven, in yielding him a cheerful and perfect obedience. Looking up in faith, you must ask your daily support from him. You must confess to him your numerous and aggravated offences, humbly seeking his forgiveness, and declaring your readiness to pardon every injury, received from your fellow-creatures. Yet, as you will be constantly exposed to fresh temptations, entreat him to strengthen and preserve you by the power of his Spirit, and to rescue you out of the hands of your enemy.

Such are the supplications, which you are taught; but you should pray, as persons in earnest, unwilling to take a denial. For our Lord Jesus, that, as one man prevails upon another, by argument or through the influence of friendship by his incessant solicitation, you also, by the importunity of your requests, may have with obtain his blessing. The prayers of success are absolute and inviolable.

able. No instance can be produced, of any one continuing to wait upon God with unwearied diligence and ardent devotion, who was finally rejected. You are encouraged to expect a favourable answer, from God's parental disposition. If you feel the affection of a father, what would you not grant to your beloved offspring, who earnestly entreat your assistance? You, indeed, who are "evil," may easily be warped from your duty, under the influence of corrupt passions; yet you cannot refuse to relieve your children. And shall God with-hold any thing really good, from those who send up their unceasing petitions to him? No: he will give them his Holy Spirit, which will "fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness." Ah! how cold, how lifeless are your prayers, if the duty be at all attempted! Shall you complain, or wonder, that you succeed no better? Will you not be roused to greater fervour? But, if you "restrain prayer before God," and call not upon his name, your guilt is extreme; and his tender mercies, in waiting to be gracious, will render you the more inexcusable.

It may be difficult, nor is it of any real importance, to ascertain the exact connection of the following narrative. But at another time, when Jesus was delivering his instructions to the people, he received an invitation to dinner from a Pharisee, which he immediately accepted with his usual affability *. It should seem from the sequel, and from the manner of our Lord's address, that a scheme was formed to ensnare him, and that for this purpose a large company of these captious adversaries was collected together. But their malicious project was baffled; and they met with a most severe reprehension for their odious hypocrisy, and the numerous inconsistencies of their conduct.

* Luke xi. 37, &c.

Jesus sat down to eat without observing the usual ceremony of washing his hands: when the master of the house, who narrowly watched him, secretly condemned him for the neglect. Our Lord was aware of the objection, though it was not avowed; and therefore he took the opportunity, not so much of vindicating himself, as of exposing the folly and dissimulation of the Pharisees in general. Many were then before him, and yet with remarkable plainness and courage he reprov'd them, while he detected their avarice and oppression, their pride and malignity of heart. He pointed out their absurdity, in paying such scrupulous attention to external purifications, while their minds were filled with schemes of rapine and various kinds of wickedness. He exhorted them, therefore, to consider, that the God, who made them, would not be satisfied with any outward observances, and that their great object should be to approve themselves to him. He urged them, also, to renounce their covetousness and cruel exactions, and to be kind and liberal to the poor; in which way their food would be much more effectually sanctified to them, than merely by the cleansing of their hands.

Their danger was not to be concealed; and therefore, that they might no longer flatter themselves, he addressed them in language the most authoritative and majestic, and denounced against them one tremendous wo upon another, for their neglect of real and inward holiness while they boasted of their formalities, for their ostentation and ambition, and for their egregious hypocrisy, by which so many were deceived to their utter ruin.

As having included the Scribes also in one of his sermons, a person then present, belonging to that class, expressed some degree of warmth, that their conduct should be so severely censured. But, neither their anger nor courting their favour, he proposed to them for enjoining so many burdensome

den some rites upon the people, by their absurd interpretations and traditions, while they themselves observed not their own precepts. They pretended a regard for the ancient prophets, and built the tombs of the men, whom their fathers had slain. But, as they inherited the cruel and persecuting disposition of their ancestors, they were convicted of the grossest hypocrisy; and the very sepulchres, which they erected, witnessed against them. Jesus, therefore, knowing what was in their hearts, and what terrible consequences would follow from their violent opposition to the Apostles and preachers of the Gospel, solemnly declared, that God, in righteous judgment, would shortly reckon with that generation, and bring the most awful desolations upon them, for all the blood of his martyred saints, which had been shed from the foundation of the world. These perverse expounders of the law had to answer likewise for the general ignorance of the people; for, by their false though specious comments, they locked up the grand treasury of divine knowledge, and prevented others from receiving the Saviour; which was a high aggravation of their own guilt, and for which the curse of God rested upon them.

Such were the reproofs of Jesus, suited, no doubt, to the state and temper of his hearers. It is not for us, who possess not his information or authority, to thunder out anathemas in the same manner. But his ministers, surely, should learn from him to be bold and strenuous in rebuking sin, and to declare, without respect of persons, that "the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience *." Very frequent occasions call for language of this kind: for how numerous is the company of gross offenders, as well as ceremonious hypocrites! Shall the servant of the Lord, then, keep silence, or debase his office by

* Col. iii. 6.

smooth and flattering addresses? No: "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear," he must "cry aloud and spare not," while he faithfully "shews them their transgression." The event must be left to God.

What effect had our Lord's address upon his proud and captious auditors? Their indignation was kindled, and yet they knew not how to vent it. They set upon him with fury, urging him to speak on various subjects, only that they might bring an accusation against him. But such was his wisdom, that their schemes could not prevail. Their case stands as an admonition to future ages; and from them we should be warned to beware of formality, and of opposition to Christ or his people. How terrible the condemnation of those, who are incensed by the very word, which should humble them! "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts *."

* Heb. iii. 7, 8.



JESUS

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 25.

Jesus warned his disciples of hypocrisy and cowardice—delivered the parable of the rich fool—gave cautions against worldliness—exhorted to prepare for his coming—foretold violent persecutions—preached the necessity of repentance, on the massacre of the Galileans—described the barren fig-tree—healed an infirm woman on the sabbath—shewed that many will be shut out of heaven—his message to Herod, and lamentation for Jerusalem.

THE conclusion of the preceding section represented our Lord in the midst of malicious enemies, at the house of a Pharisee, where he was invited to dine. During his continuance there, so great was the eagerness of the people without to hear his instructions, that an immense company, consisting of many thousands, assembled together, and even trampled on each other, from an earnest desire to be near him *. To gratify their wishes, therefore, he went out, and, in the presence of them all, gave a solemn charge to his disciples, that they might not be misled or discouraged by the opponents, with whom he had been contending. He cautioned them to beware of that dissimulation, which he had just condemned in the Pharisees, and which would operate in them like

* Luke xii. 1, &c.

leaven, spreading its pernicious influence around. It were easy to assume the garb of religion, and make high pretences to a peculiar sanctity. But what would this avail? As it cannot impose upon God, so there is a day coming, when it shall be published to the whole world: for every secret thing shall be brought to light. Ah! how different will many characters then appear! What dishonesty, treachery, and oppression, what malice, and revenge, what lewdness, and intemperance will be discovered, which are now concealed from human observation, if not cloaked under a shew of piety! Who shall stand the test of this scrutiny? Those, who now possess no more than a painted outside, will then be the objects of contempt and abhorrence.

The disciples had seen something of the furious opposition of these insidious adversaries, which might have had a bad effect upon their minds, in deterring them from a bold profession of the Gospel. Jesus, therefore, thus exhorted them to maintain a holy firmness in their adherence to his cause:—"You, my friends, must prepare to meet with cruel persecution; and in such a service it will be dishonourable for you to dread those, who may resist you, however great and powerful they may be. You cannot suffer much or long from their rage. They may, possibly, be permitted to take away the life of your bodies; but their malicious efforts can extend no further. Let the Lord God Omnipotent be the sole object of your fear; for his influence reaches to the eternal world, and, if he be your enemy, he can render you miserable
a! your bodies and your souls for ever.

Themselves to his care, and he will provide constant support. He, who forgetteth not the weak and helpless as they may seem, is constantly in the midst of our concerns; for "the very hairs of your head are all numbered." But, what losses you may lose for your attachment


tachment to me, I, your Lord and Master, whom you are not ashamed to follow, will acknowledge, approve, and honour you before that glorious assembly of Angels, who shall attend me in the day of my future appearance. Then, the persons, who have declined an open profession of my name, through cowardice, or other worldly motives, shall, in the same public manner, be disowned and rejected, as base and detestable characters. They, indeed, who have resisted me, may yet obtain forgiveness; but the case of those, who continue to despise the multiplied testimonies of the Holy Ghost, and blasphemously ascribe his operations to the influence of Satan, is remediless and desperate, their sin unpardonable. The divine Agent, whom they treat with impious scorn, will afford you his most gracious direction and support in your severest trials. Depending on his aid, you may cheerfully face your persecutors, when you are called to answer at their tribunals; for he will inspire you with wisdom and courage, and furnish you with words and arguments to plead my cause, so that you shall never be confounded before them."

Such were the Saviour's exhortations to his ancient disciples; and surely of us also he requires the same steadfastness of faith, the same contempt of the rage and threatenings of men, the same unshaken adherence to him and his service. Have we any reason for dread, while the God of heaven is engaged to sustain, protect, and comfort us, and a crown of glory is secured to us at the end of our warfare? Let those tremble for the consequences, who, in opposing Christ, undertake to "fight against God." For, however his patience may bear long with them, at last he will arise to execute judgment, when they shall be driven away, "as chaff before the wind," and overwhelmed with everlasting horror and despair.

After this address, Jesus was desired by one of the company, to persuade his brother to agree to a fair division

vision of their paternal inheritance. This our Lord declined, as being a matter totally foreign to his character and office. His grand design was to draw men's attention to their spiritual concerns; and therefore he took occasion from this dispute between the brothers, to warn his hearers against covetousness, one great cause of contentions in the world. He observed, that an eager solicitude to procure temporal possessions is absurd, since the largest property will not prolong our lives, or render them truly comfortable.

He shewed the fatal tendency of an immoderate attachment to present things, by a very striking parable. A person is described, as receiving a vast augmentation of fortune by the fertility of his ground, and intent upon making the most of his substance. He proposed to erect more capacious granaries, in which his increasing store might be secured, and flattered himself with the prospect of many years of affluence, ease, and sensual indulgence. Having attained the summit of his wishes, he determined to retire from the hurry of business, and enjoy himself in whatever his wealth could furnish. Who would not have pronounced him a wise and happy man?




s of others; and who at the same time are at no pains to obtain the far more valuable riches of divine grace.

Jesus proceeded to caution his disciples against an inordinate attention to worldly circumstances, as being inconsistent with the true spirit of the Gospel: it implies a distrust of God, and a comparative neglect of eternal things. On this occasion he related some sentiments, which he had before advanced in his sermon upon the mount; while he spake to the following purpose. "I charge it upon you, not to distract your minds with any secular cares, not even for the necessary provision of food or raiment. Will not He, who gave you life, supply you with the proper means of supporting it? The great God sustains the ravens, without any contrivance on their parts: would he forget you, who are so much more valuable in his sight? Besides, your utmost solicitude could not effectually secure to you the least advantage: it could not add, in any degree, to your stature or your age. Look, also, upon the inanimate world, and observe God's minute attention to the very lilies, which, without their labour, he has decked with glorious ornaments, far surpassing the richest attire of the most exalted monarchs. Shall he, then, bestow such a profusion upon the short-lived flowers, and not furnish you with suitable apparel; since you are the objects of his choice and love, though you are so backward to trust him? It is incongruous to your character, to be intent upon such trifling concerns, and perplexed about your temporal support. This, indeed, may be the case with those, who know not God: but you should leave the care of yourselves to the God of heaven, who is your Father, and who, as he perceives, can readily bestow, what is needful for you. Only be you vigorously pressing towards his kingdom of glory; and, in addition to better blessings, you shall possess the things of earth, which

which shall be expedient for you. In the prospect of that kingdom go forth with courage, feeble and defenceless as you may seem; for though you are a "little flock," your Father has decreed, and will rejoice, to fix you in that blissful inheritance, to which, therefore, he will conduct you. This hope, surely, will render you indifferent about your worldly property, and dispose you to part with it, if God shall call you to the trial, that you may lay it out upon the poor; for you should be chiefly solicitous to secure to yourselves those treasures, of which you cannot be deprived, and which will preserve their value and their lustre for evermore. These alone merit the affections of your hearts; and if indeed you have chosen them for your portion, your thoughts and desires will be directed to them, more than to any other object."

Such manner of persons were the primitive Christians required to be: and is it allowable for modern Christians to be engrossed with secular pursuits, or principally attentive to the supports and comforts of the animal life? No: it is still as necessary as ever for the disciples of Jesus to be "spiritually minded," and



ligerly attending to your proper work, with "your loins girded about," like men in readiness for a journey or any vigorous exertions, and with "your lights burning," standing in a proper posture for the honourable reception of your Master. He may come suddenly; and, therefore, it is for you to be watching every moment, lest you be confounded at the intimations of his approach. The faithful and the active servant, thus persevering to the end, shall be gloriously distinguished, when the Son of Man appeareth."

Peter enquired, whether the exhortation was designed for all, or for the Apostles in particular. Jesus replied:—"Wherever the steward, of approved fidelity and prudence, shall be placed, if his Lord shall find him performing the duties of his office, and discharging his important trust, he shall obtain peculiar notice, and be advanced to a state of high dignity. But the careless and slothful servant, who, presuming upon the delay of his Lord's return, shall abuse the confidence reposed in him, and proceed to acts of oppression and intemperance, shall be awfully surprised in the midst of his sin and folly, and instantly destroyed without remedy. The man, who clearly understands and yet despises his Master's will, shall feel the greatest severity: for the degree of future punishment shall be proportioned to the advantages and opportunities enjoyed upon earth, according to that equitable maxim, "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."

The admonition should rouse us to a serious enquiry, how we are acquitting ourselves in our respective places. Are we properly fulfilling our trust? If our Lord should appear, could we meet him with joy, or expect a favourable reception from him? Are we waiting for his coming? On the contrary, are we not negligent and treacherous, endeavouring to put away from us the thought of death and

SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

ment? One thing, however, we must allow; we have had clear information in our duty: repeated calls and exhortations to it have been addressed to our consciences by religious books, friends, and ministers. Much, indeed, in various ways, has been committed to us; which, if we remain impenitent, will render our guilt more heinous and our condemnation more aggravated.

Many might be looking for temporal advantages from the service; but, therefore, to obviate their mistake, "The most violent contentions will be the consequence of my Gospel; yet, afflicted as I may be, I cannot but earnestly wish, that the work already begun. I have myself extreme anxiety; and, though I see the whole before me to enter upon the conflict, and feel that it desires for the great event to be accomplished, I desire my followers, therefore, be content to be despised and hated; for my kingdom, though calculated to produce universal peace, will occasion the most unnatural and furious contests, because of the general prejudice and enmity against it. Many of those, who are united by the strongest ties of kindred, will now forget their mutual obligations, and be incensed against each other. This must be ascribed to the perverseness of men, who reject my doctrine against the clearest evidences. They are attentive enough to the common concerns of life, and discover some ingenuity in judging of the wind and the weather: but ah! how stupidly unmindful of the surprising testimonies, which God has given of his Son! Might not reason itself have led them to a more consistent determination? Is there any one liable to be convicted of an offence, for which he may suffer the severest penalties of the law, who will not be disposed to seek reconciliation with his adversary, while any terms can be obtained? Give diligence, then, to procure forgiveness with your offended God, before

before he proceed against you and summon you to judgment, when nothing but rigorous justice can be expected, and the everlasting punishment, due to your iniquities, must be inflicted on you."

Let us seriously attend to these declarations of our Redeemer. The very effects, which he foretold, have taken place: furious and bloody persecutions have been raised against the professors of his Gospel; and, even to this day, they are generally opposed and hated by some of their nearest relatives. Let us not, however, be intimidated by the prospect of any difficulties in his service; but, while we contemplate his courage and zeal in meeting death itself for our sakes, let us cheerfully follow him. We blame the stupidity of the Jews in their obstinate rejection of the Messiah; but do we discern the character of Jesus, and unfeignedly submit to him? O let us gladly accept his mediation, that we may not come under the wrath of our Almighty God, as we have deserved, nor be cast into that prison, from which there can be no deliverance!

Some of our Lord's audience acquainted him with the terrible slaughter of certain seditious Galileans, whom Pilate had put to death, even while they were offering their sacrifices *. But, without passing any judgment on their case, he endeavoured to turn the attention of the people to their own perilous situation, representing them all as equally in a state of ruin, and exposed not merely to temporal calamities but to eternal perdition, without an entire change and renovation. Those, who are destroyed suddenly and by any singular affliction (as the Galileans, and others who had been killed by the fall of the tower of Siloam), are often considered as offenders of the most atrocious kind, marked out by the visitation of an angry God, as monuments of his peculiar vengeance.

* Luke xiii. 1, &c.

SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

But **Jesus** has here taught us, not to decide against so rash a manner, or to set ourselves above ~~men~~, but seriously to remember our own danger and the absolute necessity of our conversion. For he solemnly declared, twice together, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Is this awful assertion sufficiently regarded? Do not many draw the most uncharitable conclusions against others, and presumptuously flatter themselves on their supposed comparative excellence? ~~It is~~ that persons of a very profligate character ~~have~~ incurred the divine displeasure and must be reformed. ~~It is~~ those, who have been regular in their conduct, ~~do not~~ bear to be ranked upon a level with them, ~~and~~ believe that there is any need of deep contrition ~~in~~ themselves. This is indeed a fatal delusion: for ~~if~~ all inherit a natural depravity, all must be reformed and sanctified; or else salvation is impossible.

To impress them with a sense of their danger, **Jesus** delivered a parable. A fig-tree, planted in a well cultivated soil, disappointed the owner's wishes for three years together, as it produced nothing, but only cumbered the ground; and therefore he directed it to be cut down. The servant, to whom the care of the trees was committed, requested that it might be spared one year longer, till further expedients were tried; and then it was agreed, that, if it still continued barren, it must be destroyed as utterly hopeless. The instructions, hereby conveyed, are obvious. It is, surely, a reasonable injunction, that those, who are placed in the Church, under the culture of religious means and ordinances, should bring forth fruit unto God. But ah! how many, even in such a favoured situation, remain unprofitable, and therefore must be useless to God. Through the intercession of his Son, or the prayers of his ministers, he may graciously delay his threatened vengeance; but the time of his patience is limited, and, if repeated warnings produce

produce no good effect upon them, the stroke of justice must fall; and they shall feel the weight of his indignation.

As Jesus travelled through Galilee, he attended the public worship of the Synagogues on the sabbath. In one of these assemblies, a poor unhappy woman, who had been bowed together by infirmity for eighteen years, excited his compassion; and instantly, without any solicitation, he restored her to health and vigour. Such a miraculous display of power and benevolence should have drawn forth praises from every tongue. But the ruler of the Synagogue objected to it with indignation, as if it had been a profanation of the sacred day. Jesus, however, convicted him of the grossest hypocrisy in his pretended zeal for God, and defended his own conduct in relieving this afflicted creature, from the attention which they all paid to their very cattle on the sabbath. Acts of mercy, we observe, as well as those of necessity, are not prohibited as an infringement of the holy rest. His enemies, therefore, were ashamed of their opposition; and the common people were the more attached to him for his wonderful operations. On that occasion he repeated the parable of the grain of mustard-seed, and that also of the leaven, in both which he represented the gradual and very extensive enlargement of his spiritual kingdom, notwithstanding the resistance it should meet with. The hatred and violence of men shall not frustrate the counsel of God. His Gospel shall spread; and its blessed influence shall be felt and acknowledged, through all the nations of the earth.

Our Lord proceeded from one city and village to another, directing his course to Jerusalem. In every place he scattered the good seed of divine truth, diligently improving the short time, which now remained for him in the world. Upon the road, as it should
seem,

seem, a question was put to him by one of the company, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" The enquiry was probably made through vain curiosity, which Jesus never gratified: and therefore, instead of giving a direct answer, he thus addressed himself to the consciences of the people, exhorting them to be earnestly solicitous for their own salvation, rather than to indulge any subtle speculations about that of others.

"The path to heaven lies through a strait gate, which is difficult of access, and your entrance, probably, may be resisted by numerous enemies. Be not therefore discouraged; but contend for admission in the most resolute manner, and break through every obstruction. Many, who are totally indifferent about eternal life, or refuse to go in the only appointed way, will shortly find, that the door is finally and for ever barred against them. It will then be too late for them to implore the divine mercy. Though they cry ever so importunately, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," the great Master of the household will reply, "I know you not." He will not admit the plea of their former high privileges or honourable situation in the Church:

state of peculiar exaltation in my kingdom; and not a few of those, who are here distinguished above others by their religious advantages, shall then be marked out, for their contemptuous abuse of them, by the severest vengeance."

Does not the solemn admonition excite an alarm in us, who are placed in the Christian Church, and favoured with an evangelical ministry? Let us not presume upon our external privileges, but consider, how much is to be done. Let us be roused from our stupor; for "it is high time to awake out of sleep." If we be distressed by the fear of finding the door barred against us, let us now look unto Jesus, and cry, with all the strength and vigour of our souls, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," and our application will infallibly succeed.

On the same day, on which our Lord had delivered the exhortations last mentioned, intelligence was brought him, that Herod, the governor of the country, was determined to destroy him. This was said, with an intention of intimidating him from prosecuting his labours in those parts. But Jesus could not be terrified; and therefore he replied, by a message to the crafty and persecuting prince, that, in spite of all his schemes, he would proceed with his work, performing the most miraculous and benevolent operations, a little longer; that very shortly he should finish his course; and yet, that he should lay down his life, not in Galilee, where he then was, but in Jerusalem, the grand seat of persecution. The example teaches us not to be dismayed, whoever may threaten or oppose us in the proper execution of our office. Let us faithfully attend to our respective duties, and persevere in them, though surrounded by dangers. We shall walk but a few days more; and the God, whom we serve, will protect us, till the end of our present appointment be answered. O that we may

close our labours honourably, and then, like our Lord, "be perfected!"

After observing that he must perish in Jerusalem, he was led to reflect upon the heinous guilt, and approaching desolation, of that murderous city, and broke forth into the most tender and affecting lamentation over it. That was the city, where the blood of many prophets and holy men had been shed; the city, which had scornfully rejected the gracious offers of the Saviour, repaid his services of love with cruelty, and even then meditated his destruction: yet, abandoned as it was, Jesus expressed the deepest sorrow for its miserable state. He declared, that God, in righteous judgment, was about to lay waste the place with the most awful calamities, till the wretched inhabitants should learn to value and long for their Messiah, though they now despised him.

What forbearance, kindness, and compassion, do we discover in the character of our Redeemer! Still he possesses the same bowels of mercy. Long time does he strive with sinners, using one expedient after another to promote their salvation. According to the description, he still proposes to gather them, like a hen her brood under her wing.

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rice, welcome the Saviour, who brings with him
ardon, peace, and eternal life! Let us take up our
ords now, with unfeigned faith, and we shall
eak them with confidence and joy at the last day,
Blessed is he, that cometh in the name of the
ord!" Amen.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 26.

Jesus dined with a Pharisee on the sabbath—healed a palsy—inculcated humility and a regard to the poor—delivered the parable of the great supper—warned his followers to prepare for suffering—vindicated his attention to sinners by the parables of the lost sheep—the piece of silver—and the prodigal son.

IF our review of the life of Jesus affect us, as it ought, it will not only produce in us an admiration of his excellency, who is “fairer than the children of men,” but it will regulate our conduct and sanctify our dispositions. While we “behold the glory of the Lord,” we shall be “changed into the same image *.” Let us pray continually, that we may feel this influence from his example; so shall we be followers of the Lord, “not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed, and in truth.”

Jesus was travelling through Galilee towards Jerusalem; and, probably in that journey, a principal Pharisee, a man of rank, invited him to dinner †. It might seem an act of condescension in a person of eminence, to ask or admit such a guest into his house, as appeared much his inferior. But a favour from a Pharisee, rather than on Jesus. The monarch might have said with rea-

Oh, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof." It was an instance of "the meekness and gentleness of Christ," that he vouchsafed to converse freely with sinful creatures, and discovered no distance in his behaviour. He readily gave his company to those, who desired it; not induced for his own pleasure, or the convenience of eating with them, but for their benefit. He "sought not his own profit, but the profit of many, that they might be saved."

As this occurred on the sabbath, we infer, that religion does not require us to refuse all intercourse with others throughout that day. There may be proper occasions for friendly visits in some parts of it; but we should be careful, to maintain a spirit and conversation, suitable to its grand design. The example of Jesus cannot be adduced in vindication of that vanity and dissipation, by which it is so generally perverted and profaned.

It should seem, that many persons were assembled at the Pharisee's house; and such as were not well affected to Jesus; for "they watched him." Perhaps the invitation was given, not from kindness, but malevolence, on purpose to pass the most invidious censures upon him. How odious the disposition of those, who are eagle-eyed in scrutinizing the conduct of others, and who rejoice to find any real objections against them! And yet you, who are the faithful disciples of Jesus, are frequently placed in the midst of such malignant observers. Their attention is fixed upon you, with a view, not to commend what is laudable, but to discover and expose your faults, that so they may reproach that holy name, by which you are called. You, therefore, should be vigilant, as well as they; that their wishes may be defeated, and they themselves ashamed, when they shall see the wisdom and consistency of your deportment.

A person, who was present, afflicted with the dropy, excited the compassionate regard of Jesus who, knowing that the lawyers and Pharisees before him were seeking for an accusation against him, appealed to them, whether it would be any violation of the sabbath to perform a cure on that day. They were unable to reply; while he, unmindful of their censures, instantly restored the diseased man to perfect health, observing to them, that, however they might object to this act of mercy, they would none of them scruple to relieve their very cattle in distress. They felt the force of his words, and were confounded. Thus likewise, it frequently happens, that the animosities of religion are suddenly restrained and abated by a serious remark or a solemn address to their consciences. Let us not, therefore, be deterred by their insidious designs, but persevere in the path of duty.

Jesus not only justified himself, but reproved them for their pride and love of precedency. He took notice, that they were all ambitious of the highest seats at the table, and argued that such a contention for places of honour was extremely disgusting, and that it would be much more becoming to give way to others. He shewed, that an arrogant spirit is odious, and, while it claims respect, incurs contempt; on the contrary, that a modest and humble deportment, which seems to shun observation, infallibly conciliates esteem. This is the case in the common intercourse of men; and it holds true, if we apply it to our temper and conduct towards God. "He humbleth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble *." "He will not allow, that it is incumbent upon us, in his presence, 'to take the lowest room?'" Yet these are the Apostolic injunctions regarded or forgot, "In lowliness of mind, let each esteem

Pet. v. 5.

other

ther better than themselves :” “ in honour preferring
ne another * !”

Jesus continued to deliver the most serious instructions and admonitions to the company before him. With a reference, no doubt, to their general spirit and practice, while he addressed himself to the person who had invited him, he condemned the custom of providing sumptuous and costly entertainments merely for their relations and opulent neighbours, and recommended an attention to the relief and comfort of the afflicted, in all their various distresses. How much extravagance prevails in supporting magnificent tables for the reception of those, who want nothing ! The large sums, which are thus expended, serve only to feed our own pride and sensuality. But what a sordid parsimony is shewn in contributing to the support of the truly necessitous, who can make no returns ! Those, however, are blessed, who, from faith and love unfeigned, “ deal their bread to the hungry, and bring the poor, that are cast out, to their houses †.” The Lord of heaven will consider himself as their debtor, and will render them an abundant recompense in the great day of retribution.

The solemn discourse of Jesus might leave a good impression on the audience. One of the company, at least, expressed his approbation and desire of continuing the subject, by remarking the exceeding felicity of those, who should be admitted to the sacred feast, which God has provided in his kingdom. Possibly, this very man might not understand or really wish for the happiness, of which he spake : however, in order to excite both him and all present to a serious examination of their state, Jesus shewed, that the most gracious offers of it are made to mankind, and rejected with contempt by the generality.

* Phil. ii. 3. Rom. xiii. 10.

† Isa. lviii. 7.

He represented, in a most interesting and affecting parable, a large and rich supper prepared for the accommodation of many guests. The Lord God, by the Gospel of his Son, has furnished the grand entertainment here implied, in which every thing is set before us, that can give delight or vigour to the soul. How valuable and exquisite are the blessings of which it consists! They are such as these: pardon, peace, holiness, and fellowship with God even upon earth; divine light, strength, and consolation communicated to the soul; an infallible promise of an admission into heaven, and a present foretaste of its joys. Who does not ardently desire to partake of the sumptuous banquet? It is a royal feast; and no want of provisions need be apprehended, for there is a bountiful and inexhaustible supply.

Many guests are invited, and an urgent message is sent, pressing their immediate attendance, since the necessary preparations for their reception are now completed. Thus the call of mercy is given, by the publication of the Gospel, to an innumerable company, who are earnestly exhorted not to neglect the gracious offer. It was first, and in a particular manner, addressed to the Jews; but the language is the same to

entertainment. Thus, alas! the proposals of the Gospel are rejected with scorn. Men pretend, indeed, to apologize for their conduct. Secular cares and occupations, or domestic comforts, so totally engross them, that it is supposed impossible and unnecessary for them to pay any regard to their spiritual concerns. Such reasons, surely, cannot be admitted in their vindication; nay rather, they will condemn them, as proving their hearts to be alienated from God. Their employments may not be sinful, but highly proper, if pursued on right principles, and in due subordination to the care of their souls. But, probably, more persons perish eternally through an immoderate and unseasonable attention to things, which are right in themselves, than by gross and avowed iniquity.

After the refusal of those, who were first bidden, the invitation is enlarged. The servant is charged to bring in the poor and disabled; and, as sufficient room still remains for the accommodation of many more guests, he is dispatched in search of those, who are dispersed abroad in the most forlorn and wretched condition; and even these are to be importuned, by the most cogent arguments, that so the sumptuous preparations may not be lost. The Jewish nation despised their own mercies; but "through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles *." To us, who are "the ends of the earth," is the gracious call addressed. Though we are in a spiritual sense, "poor; and maimed, and halt, and blind," we are allowed to partake of the rich banquet. Nay, though we be sinners of the most abandoned character, fitly represented by those who lie in "the highways and hedges," we are permitted, and even pressed in the most forcible manner, to come. Many have already complied with the invitation; but "yet there is room" f

* Rom. xi. 11.

thousands more; and it is the Lord's determination, that his house shall be filled.

The Master is incensed, when his kindness is rejected, and he resolves in his displeasure, that those who have shewn such contempt of him, shall be excluded from his entertainment. This is an awful admonition indeed. The Lord of heaven and earth considers himself as insulted, when his Gospel is brought into light of. Do we not dread his indignation? Why then, do we trifle with his messages of mercy? Possibly, they may never be renewed. He may shut the door against us, and declare, "Those who shall not taste of my supper." Since he has done this against the Jews, let us fear for ourselves, "lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief*."

Great multitudes still attended Jesus in his progress; and yet, probably, but few of them attached to his cause, from right principles. It is to be expected, that, amongst the numerous professors of the Gospel, there will be many of a suspicious character. All, therefore, should be exhorted to examine of what sort their religion is, from what motives it was first taken up, and whether they so value it, as to be willing to suffer for it. To this purpose our Lord addressed the vast concourse of people, who followed him:

"If any man would enter into my service, he must renounce all worldly views and expectations. For, whosoever consents not, on every necessary occasion, to go in opposition to his nearest friends and relatives, so as to appear even to hate them, to give up the most beloved enjoyments, and lay down life itself, he cannot have any real union with me. Severe as the trial may seem, if he refuse to combat difficulties, to endure extreme hardships, and to persist in the path, the Father or command may point out to him,

* Heb. ix. 11.

JESUS CHRIST?

re possesses not the temper of mind indispensable for my disciples."

"You, therefore, who profess an attachment to me, should deliberate well, for you are engaged in an arduous and important business. Like a general about to raise an edifice, you should make accurate calculations, that you may know, whether you can finish the work, and not expose yourself to the censure of others. Or, as a prince, who is preparing a hostile expedition against a neighbouring state, should enquire, if you are prepared to meet your enemy. Is your confidence, as you have, a reasonable confidence of success? It were better, not to provoke an attack, than hastily to rush into the battle, and there to betray your weakness by cowardice. Rather than fall in the conflict, or desert your standard, remain in your present position, bad as it may be, and prefer a dishonourable peace to a destructive war."

"Thus you should examine, whether you possess the necessary requisites for my service: for, if you be unwilling to forsake the dearest objects in life, from a cordial regard to me, you cannot be ranked amongst my people, or receive any advantage from me. With an unsound profession of religion, you would resemble the "salt, which has lost its flavour," and then, instead of answering any valuable purpose, as those who are "the salt of the earth," you would be useless, or rather a nuisance in your place, fit only to be cast out with contempt. Let every one, who desires instruction, attend to the solemn admonition."

Such was our Lord's address to his followers; and, in its main points, it is perfectly applicable to ourselves. The same bold and disinterested regard to him, which he then required, we also must possess. With the same holy jealousy and circumspection, we should search and try our hearts. Are we his disc

pies indeed? What motives or expectations induced us to assume that character? Or, what is our present plan? Are we determined to give up every thing, which stands in competition with Christ, that he may be our "all in all?" If otherwise, let us not act as dissemblers with God, lest we be rejected with abhorrence, as far more detestable than those, who never pretended to any sanctity.

The foregoing exhortation may seem harsh and severe, to persons of a tender spirit; and those who are oppressed with guilt, may be ready to infer, that Jesus forbids, rather than encourages, their application to him. But the following representation will obviate such a conclusion.

Many publicans and sinners came about him, shewing great eagerness in listening to his instructions*. Nor did he disdain their company, or drive them from him, by denunciations of vengeance, as if their case were desperate. But his condescending attentions to them, and his compassionate addresses, which were calculated to inspire them with humble hope towards God, displeased the Scribes and Pharisees, who insinuated, that he thereby countenanced their licentiousness. A similar objection is often urged against his ministers, when those, who have been dissolute and abandoned, are drawn to hear them. It is thought a reproach to the Gospel, that it gives the most gracious invitations, and proposes a full and free forgiveness, to men of this very description. But this is, in fact, its brightest glory; though it is too dazzling for carnal eyes to behold, and they turn away from it with disgust. Those especially, who and claim a preference for their own supposed, quarrel with the greatness of the mercy, usually pretend a vast concern for the interests of humanity, but they rashly conclude, are likely to

obscured by it. In opposition to them, we will maintain it to be for the honour of Christ, that "he re-
 driveth sinners," even those, (who are marked out as
 peculiarly infamous for their numerous and aggravated
 offences. He overlooks, pardons, sanctifies, con-
 verts, protects; and saves them. This is extensive,
 rich, and distinguishing grace indeed; which should
 induce us more than ever, to love, and praise, and
 trust him. He acts in a way worthy of himself; and
 those who know his character, admire that very part
 of it, which engages the Pharisees.

He vindicated his own conduct, showing its pro-
 priety, and the extreme unreasonableness of objecting
 to it. This he did in three parables, all tending to
 illustrate the abundance and the freeness of his mercy,
 and the very favourable reception, which penitent
 sinners, though they have been accounted most hope-
 less, shall meet with from him. Let the transgressor,
 then, who is ready to sink into despair, be encour-
 aged to lift up his eyes to this dear Lord and Saviour,
 who will not disdain to help him.

A striking appeal is made to our own feelings, and
 the general practice of mankind. Where is the per-
 son, who, losing only one out of a numerous flock
 of sheep, will not be at pains to search after it, and
 express a peculiar pleasure in its recovery, especially
 if it had appeared unlikely to be found? Our own
 miserable state is here exhibited. We have wan-
 dered far from the fold of God; and, though exposed
 to want and the assaults of furious and malicious ene-
 mies, we are unwilling of ourselves to return. But
 our attention is directed to the compassionate care of
 Jesus, under the character of "the good Shepherd,"
 who, with much labour to himself, seeks and rescues
 the lost sheep, and then takes it under his immediate
 protection. Nor should this be considered as a
 trifling incident, a matter of indifference. Every in-
 stance of the conversion of a sinner is an important

even.

SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

and baseness, and discovers such strong desires of restoration to the divine favour. And what other expedient can the awakened sinner adopt, but to flee to his offended God, to pour out his soul with unfeigned contrition, and to lift up his voice to heaven with incessant cries for mercy? Though he dare not be confident of acceptance, it will be proper, surely, to try the effect of an humble application: and, if he cannot ask for the privileges of a child, let him earnestly solicit an admission into the family on any terms. But his former practices, principles, and connections must be renounced, and he must be not only resolved on, but instantly attempt—

The kind and forgiving father beheld his son at a distance; and, as if he had forgotten his past ingratitude and perverseness, without waiting for his nearer approach, he ran with open arms to embrace him. The penitent youth began his intended confession; but the indulgent parent, as if impatient to relieve his distress, interrupted him, prevented his request, assured him of his love by the strongest tokens, and immediately commanded all his household to give the most expressive demonstrations of their joy, inasmuch as his dear child, who had been considered as irretrievably lost, was restored to life and happiness. What does all this teach us, but that God can pardon more freely and extensively, than we could have conceived? He views with delight the very beginnings of repentance, the first efforts of a sinner towards a return. He listens with satisfaction to his broken cries for mercy, and, instead of upbraiding him with any part of his accumulated guilt, he hastens to confer upon him every mark of affectionate regard. The Angels of heaven, also, as well as believers upon earth, are required to exult in that event, from which the most glorious effects are produced. Such is the great kindness of our God! Who, then, shall despair of mercy, or hesitate to apply unto him? “He

will

him, and going to a distant country. There the thoughtless youth soon squandered away his substance by intemperance; and he was reduced to the most infamous servitude, and to such a degree of wretchedness, that he was on the point of perishing by hunger. A lively emblem of our sinful conduct and its miserable consequences! A particular reference to the Gentile world, and to the case of profligate characters, might be designed. But we have all resembled this foolish man, in disliking the strictness of true religion, casting off the fear of God, and thus going away from him, with a full determination to gratify the desires of our hearts. But have we found the happiness, which we expected in our own ways? Alas! far otherwise. The effects of our apostasy have been distressing and ruinous in the extreme. Like this poor prodigal, we are become destitute, enslaved, and contemptible. In such a state, we can procure nothing to support and satisfy the soul, and we stand on the brink of destruction. How pitiable the case! And it is the more pitiable, as few are sensible of their degradation and wretchedness.

A change, however, took place in the unhappy youth. "He came to himself," as if he had been till that time intoxicated or insane; and then reflecting on the comfortable situation he had left in his father's family, and the misery, disgrace, and danger, which he had brought upon himself, he formed the resolution of returning to his insulted parent, confessing his aggravated guilt, and earnestly requesting to be received into his house again, though it should be in the lowest capacity of his menial servants. He proceeded, without delay, to execute his plan. In this stage of the history we perceive the pleasing character of a true penitent. Then only, does a man "come to himself," or enjoy the proper exercise of his reason, when he feels such convictions of his folly
and

every penitent is received. Let them make good their claim, and they will be treated with suitable respect. But let them not refuse to rejoice, when those, whose cases appeared most hopeless, are taken into the number of the children of God and heirs of everlasting life. The Lord God will vindicate his own glory in dispensing his mercy so freely. Let us not petulantly object to his mysterious plan of redemption, but drop all our angry prejudices against it. Let us implore forgiveness for ourselves, as those who deserve to perish; and, under such a conviction, we shall wonder, not that any others are saved, but that we, who "were enemies, are reconciled to God by the death of his Son."

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 27.

Jesus delivered the parable of the unjust steward—shewed the use of money—reproved the Pharisees—described the case of the rich man and Lazarus—exhorted to avoid giving offence, to forgive injuries, and maintain faith—cured ten lepers—foretold the destruction of Jerusalem—described the nature of acceptable prayer, by the parable of the importunate widow, and that of the Pharisee and Publican.

JESUS directed his steps towards Jerusalem, with a full view of all his sufferings before him, and even with an earnest desire to enter upon them. He was yet in Galilee, and, during his progress through that country, he continued to exercise his ministry, labouring to diffuse the knowledge of his truth, and to give unequivocal proofs of his divine character. While we contemplate him persisting in his work with diligence and cheerfulness to the very last, may we learn to persevere in the most vigorous exertions for the glory of his name, till we finish our course! What, though the cross lies before us? Let us imitate the holy example of the Saviour; and we shall follow him to his kingdom.

Publicans and sinners, we have seen, attended on his preaching, and many Scribes and Pharisees, also, were present at the same time. In the audience of them all, and with a view to their instruction, he
addressed


in general discover for the attainment of the low and trifling objects of the present life.

Jesus, also, improved and applied the parable, while he thus addressed his disciples: "Riches, which commonly deceive the expectations of their possessors; and often are subservient to the purposes of sin, may yet be employed to great advantage. By a proper use of them, you may conciliate the esteem of those, whose friendship is most valuable. Many, whom you have instructed, relieved, visited, and cheered, and to whom your bounty has endeared you, may go before you to heaven, and, upon your removal from the place you now fill up, may stand ready to welcome you to the same blissful habitations, where they will confess their obligations to you. A very small share, indeed, of wealth may be committed to your care; but your religious principles will be evinced by your behaviour in the lowest station, so that we may safely infer from it, what would be your conduct in a higher. If you act as unfaithful stewards in the disposal of your temporal substance, worthless as it is, how can you expect to be intrusted with those blessings, which are of real value? And if you treacherously misapply what is not, strictly, your own property, but only put into your hands for the benefit of others, you have no reason to believe, that God will confer upon you a certain and everlasting possession. How necessary is it, then, that you make a deliberate choice, whom you will serve! You will be supremely attached either to God or the world; and in proportion as you esteem the one, the other will be disregarded. It is impossible, that you can live in subjection to two masters, whose demands are so directly opposite."

The Pharisees heard the solemn admonition; but they treated it with scorn, because the love of money had the ascendancy in their hearts, and the doctrine of Jesus struck at the root of that vile principle. The ministers of God, like their great Exemplar, must expect

pect to be derided by those, whose practices and pers they condemn: nor should they, on this account keep silence. Jesus reprov'd the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, in the most awful terms, declaring, while it was their object to preserve appearance before men, God perceived their inward disposition and that he looks with abhorrence on those things which short-sighted mortals may admire. Would God, that every proud and covetous pretender to piety, whose reputation stands high in the Church, would seriously consider the tremendous truth!

The Pharisees profess'd a high regard for the Mosaic institution. Our Lord, therefore, remarking on them, that this was designed to continue on when John the Baptist appeared, when God began to set up the kingdom of the Messiah, into which men of all characters were entering with extreme vehemence. Still, he observed, the ancient law did not fail, as if it had not answer'd its end; for it received its completion in the Gospel, which fulfilled its types and prophecies, and enforced its moral commands. In some points, particularly with respect to the sacred and inviolable bond of marriage, they themselves explained, and



deed, the perfection of every preceding economy, and by this especially God establishes the kingdom of his Son. Do we wish to secure its blessings? Then we are required to exert all the faculties of our souls; for "every man presseth into it." The faint desire, the unoperative resolution will leave us short of heaven, the possession of which is not to be gained without a holy violence.

Before the same audience, and in order to enforce the foregoing admonitions, Jesus proceeded to deliver an affecting parable. He described the future miseries, which will follow a life of carnal indulgence, notwithstanding all its present advantages, and the everlasting blessedness, to which the servant of God shall be admitted, however afflicted upon earth. A rich man is represented, expending his fortune merely for the support of an elegant appearance and a luxurious table. His plan was, to allow himself every gratification, which his income would afford; but, while he consulted only his own wishes, he considered not the necessities of others. A poor beggar, named Lazarus, incapacitated for any labour by a diseased body, was placed before his door, imploring relief. This distressed object was neglected except by the dogs, who licked his sores, as if they were more compassionate than their master: but even this circumstance shewed his calamitous situation; as he was covered with ulcers, which were exposed to the open air, and at the same time he could hardly obtain the smallest crumbs for his subsistence. Death, however, soon put an end to the sufferings of the one, and the enjoyments of the other: and then how different their condition! Lazarus, who was dear to God, notwithstanding his extreme indigence, was conducted by a company of heavenly spirits to a distinguished abode in the kingdom of bliss and glory. The rich epicure might have the parade of a grand funeral, but his pomp followed him no farther. He was cast into
hell,

all the excruciating agonies, with
the fierceness of the flames: but
granted. Deliverance from his
smallest abatement of it, was deni-
gulf separated him from the society
he, who had once enjoyed every de-
then obtain a drop of water to
tongue.

Five brethren still survived him,
very same steps. He begged, there
messenger might be sent to them
spirits, to warn them of those ex-
which awaited them. Perhaps he
mental to their profligacy; and the
ing their destruction might arise fr
aggravating his torment. The re-
was refused, on this ground, that
the inspired writers was sufficient
tion, and that those, who rejected it
would give no credit even to a wi-
the dead.

The whole representation is tren-
most instructive. Who now will p-
voted to pleasure and sensual purp-
ness to see. There can be no ha-

and fearfulness surprise the hypocrites?" Ah! "who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings *?"

We congratulate the faithful servants of God, though destitute as Lazarus. You possess a happiness beyond the reach of the world, of which no afflictions can deprive you. Though you can hardly procure the meanest fare or the coarsest apparel; and though, while your diseased bodies can scarcely endure the hardships of hunger, nakedness, and cold, you are the scorn of your opulent neighbours, yet we will call you blessed. Death, which strikes a terror into others, may inspire you with confidence and joy. For then you shall obtain perfect deliverance, and be "carried by Angels into Abraham's bosom."

Is it supposed, that stronger evidence is wanted, to convince men of the dangerous tendency of sin? The sacred scriptures declare it, with all the strength and clearness, of which language is capable. The testimonies of departed spirits, who have entered upon the invisible world, are withheld from us, and we have no right to ask them, or to conclude that they would be at all regarded by unbelievers. Let the word of God, then, be fairly consulted, and its decisions implicitly received; or else, we shall soon feel those torments, which we are unwilling to credit.

After this interesting parable, Jesus addressed himself again to his disciples, suggesting certain cautions and directions for their conduct †. Some of these things had been said before, but their importance rendered the repetition expedient and needful. He warned them against giving any cause of offence to others, observing, that though in such a world as this, and so constituted as we now are, cases of that kind may be expected, yet they are attended with awful consequences. It is abundantly better to suffer

* Isa. xxxiii. 14.

† Luke xvii. 1, &c.

disposition, since this would be
to the Gospel, and declared that
injuries should be unlimited.
ourselves is this solemn counsel!
Lord, hate evil *:" for inconceivable
result from any wrong practices.
Many may be prejudiced against
so staggered, as entirely to renege
perceive that it produces so little.
A contentious and quarrellsome
unsuitable to your character; for
occasions of complaint may occur
long and be kind," and thus to per-
pel, which you receive, is a sym-
love.

The Apostles, it should seem,
sense of their great difficulties, and
surmount them through the weak-
ness of principles, earnestly prayed
that he would increase their faith. For
of this grace, that it will bear up
severest trials, strengthen it for the
vices, preserve it in temptation,
ward dispositions. But how frequ-

wonderful effects, and enable the Christian to perform duties, which would otherwise be as impossible, as the transplanting of a tree into the midst of the sea. Yet he taught them, after all their exertions, to assume no merit to themselves, but to acknowledge that their obedience to God in every point was no more, than he had a right to demand, and that, as it added nothing to him, it gave them no claim upon him. According to this description, we all are the servants of Jehovah, the great and sovereign Lord, and should attend to our proper work, till it be finished, not looking for our complete rest and enjoyment, before we have done the business assigned us; and even then we shall deserve nothing. Surely a very slight knowledge of ourselves will dispose us to confess, that "we are unprofitable servants," or rather, that we are miserable offenders.

Jesus continued to prosecute his journey to Jerusalem through Samaria and Galilee, and scattered blessings as he went. Near to a certain village, into which he was about to enter, ten unhappy persons, afflicted with leprosy, presented themselves before him. They stood at a distance, this being required of them, lest others should be defiled by their loathsome disorder; but, having heard of the power and grace of Jesus, they implored his merciful regard. He looked on them with compassion, and instantly directed them to shew themselves to the priests, who alone were authorized to decide, when the malady was removed. They obeyed his word in the believing expectation of a cure; and as they were going they were restored: for his influence extended to the remotest places, as well as to the objects immediately within his view. The same miracle was wrought upon them all; but only one of them, it should seem, and he a Samaritan, was properly affected with it. He returned to proclaim the kindness of his Benefactor, and his own obligations to him. With admiring and

general adoration, he bowed at his feet, and with loud voice gave glory to God. This instance of faith and love in a Samaritan, a stranger to the common wealth of Israel, was a striking reproof to the Jews. He, therefore, obtained the peculiar approbation of the Saviour, and was dismissed in peace.

Have we been the subjects of Christ's healing power? Has not the leprosy of sin spread its poisonous infection over our souls? And shall we not cry to him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us?" Those, who are restored by his grace, cannot but be sensible; yet alas! few of them feel so lively a sense of his goodness, as they ought. Is there one out of ten, who gives glory to God with proper energy and zeal? And is not ingratitude, on such an occasion, most culpable? You, who have experienced deliverance by the power of Jesus, return to praise him; and commend him to the notice and esteem of others; with astonishment and love, you declare what he has done for you.

As he was arrived at the great city, or, at least, was in the neighbourhood, when the Pharisees enquired of him, at what time God would establish his kingdom, of which he had spoken so much. He replied, that they were deceived about the nature of his kingdom: that it would not be attended with any external pomp and grandeur, as to excite general observation; but that, being inward and spiritual, it existed in the hearts of his people. He suggested also to his disciples, that they would soon be longing for his appearance, in vindication of their distressed cause, but warned them not to be misled by impostors, who should arise in great numbers. He foretold, indeed, after his passion, then approaching, that he would visit himself in a most awful manner on his enemies; for that his wrath, as the lightning, would consume them. He foretold, that many would

ould be cut off in the midst of their business, their
 city, and sensuality, as in the days of Noah and
 Lot, when thousands perished, in the former case
 the flood, and in the latter by fire and brimstone
 in heaven. And, as this tremendous desolation
 ould be accomplished so quickly, he directed his
 iples to flee for their lives, at the very first com-
 mencement of the troubles, without attempting to
 ore any of their possessions, lest they also, through
 attachment to worldly things, like Lot's wife,
 ould be involved in the general ruin. He pre-
 ked, that in this public devastation the most pain-
 separations would be made, the nearest friends di-
 ed, the most intimate connections broken; so that,
 ere two persons should be united in the closest
 nds, the one should be rescued by a peculiar act
 grace, and the other left to perish.

It was enquired, where the terrible destruction
 ould take place; and our Lord replied by a pro-
 rbial expression, that the eagles would be gathered
 the carcase. This seemed a plain intimation, that
 e Romans, whose ensigns bore the image of the eagle,
 ould be the instruments of that calamity, and that
 ey would fly as that ravenous bird to the prey. It
 ight also be intended to imply, that, wherever ob-
 nate sinners are marked for ruin, the judgments of
 od will find them out, and hasten with an unerring
 n to accomplish their perdition.

The awful subject will be afterwards resumed.
 or the present, we observe, that the prophecies of
 sus, which clearly referred to one signal event,
 ere all in due time exactly accomplished. Jerusa-
 n was given up to entire desolation, the unbelieving
 ws perished miserably, and the Christians, obeying
 r Lord's directions, obtained a memorable deliver-
 ce. Are we not, then, here instructed, that "it
 a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living
 God!"

to encourage and rejection of the Gospel
to still labour for the honour of his S
What Spirit to expect? O may we k
in our wisdom, and embrace the off
which are laid out to us, in the Saviou
We require, then, with serious conc
when the word of truth is preached, A
time of the Kingdom of God? Is it se
not? It is declared to be "righteousn
against the Holy Ghost †." Have y
the last, challenge men, so as to feel
a personal terror? If not, you are a
living, as well, in the character of Jesu
to the divine vengeance
warning, then. O flee from the trem
which denotes a possibility of escape
from the appointed refuge; th
the Angel unsheaths the sword,
and smite even the stroke of justice.
Finally with a view to encourage
the prospect of their approaching
exhorted them to pray, and to u
with unceasing ardour †. Let
angel: "Men ought ALWAYS to
and in all the various circumsta
many difficulties attend the pra

to renew our applications to him with fresh vigour, and "give him no rest," till he vouchsafe to grant us deliverance and comfort.

The efficacy of such a continued fervour in our addresses to God, is exhibited in a short parable. A poor distressed widow, under great oppression, earnestly solicited the interference of a magistrate in her behalf, that she might obtain justice. He, being destitute of every good principle both toward God, and man, refused for some time to undertake her cause; but at length he consented, merely that he might be freed from the trouble of her importunity. Jesus has directed us to draw the proper conclusion from this little history. The Lord God may seem regardless of the incessant cries of his afflicted people, for a considerable season: but still they should persevere in their ardent supplications, and expect his gracious interposition. Like holy Jacob, they should wrestle with him, and say, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Then he will rescue them from the oppression of their spiritual enemies, and satisfy the desires of their souls. Yet, great as this encouragement is, how few are animated by it! Do not the most appear disheartened, and so "faint in their minds," as to grow remiss, and almost abandon their hope? Thus Jesus lamented, that, upon his coming, he should find but little faith on the earth. And should this be the day of his visitation among ourselves, we fear that the number of firm and lively believers would be proved to be very small indeed. Ah! why do we distrust his promise? Or, if we maintain our dependence upon it, why do we give way to so many distressing apprehensions? Why are we so backward to prayer; so cold and languid in our addresses? Surely we treat him, as if we thought that he would not be true to his word.

Another parable, addressed to those, who boasted of their own goodness, and looked down with contempt

upon others, instructs us with what temper of mind we should approach to God. We may draw near with confidence, in reliance on the Saviour; but not with presumption, as if we had a claim upon him, on the ground of our own merit. We are taught to bow before him with the deepest humiliation and abhorrence of ourselves, confessing our iniquity, and imploring forgiveness through his free and abundant mercy, as revealed in the Gospel. This is represented in the case of two men, a Pharisee and a Publican, who went to worship at the temple. Their principles and dispositions were widely different; and very different also was the effect of their prayers.

The Pharisee stood by himself, with much self-sufficiency, as if he should be polluted by coming near the Publican. His devotions, if such they may be called, contained not one petition; and, though he pretended to thank God, his object was to commend himself, while he described his own excellences, and recounted the various services he had performed. He alleged, that he was far better than the generality of mankind, that he had avoided the gross sins which many others lived, and which might be charged upon the notorious character then present, and that he had also been exact in all ceremonial observances. Such was the detail of his goodness, such the foundation of his hope towards God. And we read us "sacrifice an abomination unto the Lord." Yes, a proud spirit is peculiarly odious to him who hath determined, "that no flesh shall see my presence." But are not many, under a false profession, worshipping with the very temper of the Pharisee? Let his prayer be translated into our language, and it would describe precisely the state of numbers among us. For thus we boast of our comparative excellence above the heathen, from scandalous crimes, and above the Jews, from certain customary rites.

And

And so long as they exalt themselves, their most specious offerings, whether of charity or devotion, are offensive to God.

But another character is here exhibited, and that of an acceptable worshipper. The Publican, or Roman tax-gatherer, whose former life, it may be allowed, had been stained with many enormities, was compelled under the terror of an awakened conscience to humble himself in the presence of God, and to deprecate his vengeance. He stood at a distance from the sanctuary, and with eyes cast down upon the ground, thus expressing his unworthiness to draw near or look up to God: and then, finiting upon his breast, through extreme anguish for his accumulated guilt, and confessing himself a sinner obnoxious to justice, without offering any plea in his own favour, he prayed, that, if it were possible, God would extend his mercy to him. To such a contrite penitent as this, however flagitious his conduct may have been, the promises of the Gospel are addressed. "Let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon *." This the Publican found: he went down to his house in peace, having obtained acceptance with God. How instructive, how animating is the example! It is recorded for our encouragement; and the declaration is added, to revive the heart of all those who are ready to despond, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." For this abundant grace, indeed, we are indebted to him, who "died for the ungodly," and whose "blood cleanseth from all sin." Our application to God must be made in his name, and in dependence on his merits. But even the interposition of Christ will not avail us, unless we feel that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance," and that deep humiliation,

* Isa. lv. 7.

with any other prayer that is to be
is here provided, "God, be merciful
unto us."

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 28.

Jesus, attending at the feast of dedication, gave sight to a man born blind—revealed himself to him, when excommunicated—described himself as the door, and the good Shepherd—declared his union with the Father, and miraculously escaped from being stoned.

JESUS had now taken his leave of Galilee, and arrived at Jerusalem. There he attended at the celebration of a certain festival, which is supposed to have been kept in remembrance of the purification of the temple by Judas Maccabeus *. This was an institution only of human authority; but he did not on that account neglect it, and he has taught us by his example to pay a serious respect to those observances, which tend to the advancement of religion, even though they be not established by the divine command.

In such a world as this, objects of wretchedness present themselves on every side: but we may learn from Jesus, not to look on the distressed without feeling the tenderest emotions of compassion. As he passed through the streets of Jerusalem, he beheld with merciful regard a poor beggar, who had been blind from his birth †. The disciples taking notice

* John x. 22. 1 Macc. iv. 59. Joseph. Antiq. book xii. chap. 11.

† John ix. 1, &c.

of the unhappy case, proposed a question of curious speculation. They asked, whether the calamity was not to be considered as a particular judgment from God, for some heinous transgression committed either by the man or his parents. Probably, they entertained the idea of a pre-existent state, and supposed, according to the absurd doctrine of certain heathen philosophers, that the sufferings of this life are punishments for former sins.

Jesus, however, without entering into an examination of the visionary system, declared, that the affliction was appointed, not as a judicial visitation for any remarkable offence, but that the mighty power of God might be displayed by a miraculous removal of it. He further observed, that his time of service in this world, which he knew to be very short, must be diligently improved, in order to promote the great end of his mission, and that he should continue, during his abode here, to give light to them, that were in darkness. How forcibly does this apply to ourselves! It becomes us not to censure those, who are oppressed by the heaviest calamities, as sinners above others, or as bearing peculiar marks of the divine indignation; and it should reconcile us to the severest dispensations, that, in various respects, God may glorify himself by them. Remembering also, how soon our day of labour and of usefulness will be closed, we should exert ourselves with vigour, for the benefit of others, especially by "shining as lights in the world," that we may not depart from life, before we have answered any good purpose in it. If we would imitate our Saviour, we must not trifle away the few remaining moments of our life, in sensuality or supineness, or omit any of rendering assistance to our fellow-

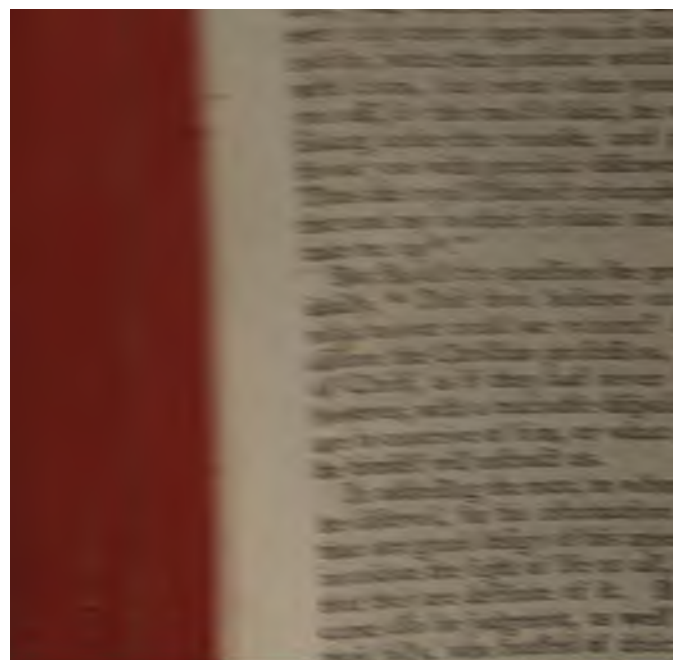
attended to the cries of the distressed, and granted relief, where it was not
stance before us. We observe,

too,

to the pride of those, who have acquired a name for learning and discernment, to be treated actually dark, and having the same need of illumination, as the most illiterate. Jesus, warned them, that they could not plead in themselves the want of information, and conceit of their own knowledge chiefly kept in belief, and greatly aggravated their guilt of damnation. This, surely, may furnish a fortification to us, that we "lean not unto our understanding," and that we pray earnestly, not to fall over to a judicial blindness, but, being led by the Holy Spirit, to discover "the light is in Jesus."

Our Lord continued his address, with a particular notice of those false teachers, who rejected him *. In parabolical language, he declared, by a solemn declaration, that whosoever enters into the kingdom of God, other way than by the appointed door, is considered as an injurious and destructive intruder. He described the real shepherd, as approaching to the fold by regular access, which alone can be allowed, and giving immediate admission. To such an one the care of the sheep is intrusted: he watches over them with a tender regard to their different cases and necessities; and they acknowledge him as their guide, protector, and defender. But they will not pay the respect to him, who is not thus connected with them, and yields not a due attention to them. This seemed an awful reproof of the Pharisees, who pretended to instruct the people, and yet used only instituted method of salvation, without any intimation to them, that, when they were presumed, the true members of the church ought to submit to them, but turn away from them. Yet they saw not the direction.

* John x. 1, &c.



nitive to the pride of those, who have acquired a reputation for learning and discernment, to be treated intellectually dark, and having the same need of the illumination, as the most illiterate. Jesus, therefore, warned them, that they could not plead in excuse for themselves the want of information, and a conceit of their own knowledge chiefly kept them in unbelief, and greatly aggravated their guilt of condemnation. This, surely, may furnish a forceful exhortation to us, that we "lean not unto our own understanding," and that we pray earnestly, not to be given over to a judicial blindness, but, being enlightened by the Holy Spirit, to discover "the truth as it is in Jesus."

Our Lord continued his address, with a particular warning to those false teachers, who rejected him *. Speaking in parabolical language, he declared, by a solemn asseveration, that whosoever enters into the Kingdom of God by any other way than by the appointed door, is to be considered as an injurious and destructive intruder. He described the real shepherd, as approaching by the regular access, which alone can be allowed, to gain immediate admission. To such an one the care of the sheep is intrusted: he watches over them with a tender regard to their different cases and necessities; and they acknowledge him as their guide, supporter, and defender. But they will not pay the due respect to him, who is not thus connected with them, and yields not a due attention to them. This is indeed an awful reproof of the Pharisees, who pretended to instruct the people, and yet understood not the only instituted method of salvation; and it is an intimation to them, that, whatever character they assumed, the true members of the Church would not submit to them, but turn away from them with disgust. Yet they saw not the drift of the parable;

* John x. 1, &c.

salvation of God. Many, many
deceived to their eternal ruin. I
fore, that "the Church, being all
false apostles, may be ordered and
and true pastors, through Jesus Ch

"The good Shepherd" can nev
his flock. Let us contemplate this
till we feel an increasing strengt
faith and hope, of love and joy.
that compassion, which induced his
our wretched case! How should r
lution and suffering, to which he
recovery, endear him to us! How
derness of regard, with which he
various cases of his people, encour
inspire us with confidence! But ar
sheep of his pasture?" Have we h
calling us from our wanderings; an
tent to abide in his fold? In dependen
we go in and out, and feed upon t
his grace? "All we, like sheep h
let us "now return unto the Shep
our souls †," and pray that other
off, may be brought nigh, and ma

more favourably of him, both from the doctrines he advanced, and the miracles he wrought. Thus, also, the faithful preaching of the Gospel generally creates a division. It is no uncommon thing for men to speak evil of what they understand not, and to vent their enmity against the zealous advocate for Christ, by scornful reproaches similar to those, which were cast upon Him. And yet, such is the force of the truth, that, even in the midst of much opposition, some will be so impressed with it, as to exert their influence in its support. Let us "take heed, how we hear," and examine for ourselves, without being biased by the objections of others.

Jesus was walking in the portico, which surrounded the temple, probably soon after his preceding discourse, when many of the Jews came about him, but with no friendly disposition. They desired a still plainer declaration from himself, whether or no he was the Messiah; and it is likely that they wished for it, as a ground of accusation against him. Jesus, therefore, reproved them for their unbelief, in disregarding his former very express claims, and referred them to his works, for a full demonstration of his divine character. He shewed their baseness in continuing to reject him, notwithstanding such accumulated evidence; by which they clearly proved, that they belonged not to that favoured company, the sheep of his flock, all of whom acknowledge him as their Leader and Commander, receiving his doctrines, and obeying his directions. These, however reproached by men, he affirmed to be the objects of his peculiar notice, and secure under the protection of his Almighty arm, from the assaults of their most powerful enemies. He has redeemed them to himself, and engaged to rescue them from every danger, and conduct them to the possession of eternal life. He added, therefore, that the Omnipotence of the Father is pledged for their defence, since he and the Father

common of all his enemies.

We have only to add, that he drew from this persecution at a distant part, even beyond Jerusalem, where he formerly exercised his ministry, and returned to him, having been persecuted, by the testimony of his disciples. These, therefore, withdrew from him, while the great and the noble rejected him with scorn. The sons of men may eventually become the sons of God. "The kingdom of God," which is opposed to it, is given to such as submit to it. Happy the people who were favoured with the presence of Christ, because they knew the time of their trial for ourselves and our country. Should provoke him to depart, therefore let us yield all serious attention to the truth, which is spoken unto us, not the Gospel of thy grace, nor the Spirit, from us! Fix thine attention on the will of God and obedience to it.

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 29.

Jesus answered enquiries about divorces—shewed a tender regard to little children—replied to a young ruler—warned his disciples of the danger of riches—delivered the parable of the labourers in the vineyard—hastened to Jerusalem to suffer—cured two blind men near Jericho.

THE enemies of Christ, even while they seem to prevail, are subservient to his purposes; for, by their opposition to the truth, they are eventually the cause of its more extensive promulgation. Thus, we have seen, when Jesus was driven away from Jerusalem, the people beyond Jordan received the benefit of his ministry. To them he imparted his blessings with a liberal hand: for he was followed by great multitudes, whom he instructed in the mysteries of his kingdom, and healed of their various bodily diseases *.

Hither, also, the malice of the Pharisees pursued him. They came, with an intention of drawing him into some difficulty, or of prejudicing the people against him. They pretended to consult him on the subject of divorces, and asked, whether it were allowable for a man to dismiss his wife for every trifling reason. He knew their malevolent designs, and yet

* Mat. xix. 1—12. Mark x. 1—12.

During our Lord's continuance
in Bethany, the inhabitants regarded
him with admiration, that many presented
him with offerings, who were not capable
of giving him instructions, requesting his sole
devout intercessions for them.
Some have prevented it, and put them
off, that their Master's time should be
employed in other more important
affairs, as he had other more impor-
tant to employ him. Jesus, however, shew-
ing no regard to their officious interposition; a-
nd even the youngest children should
have access to him, inasmuch as the
Church should consist of such members.
as he had done before, that no
one should be excluded from that holy community, who is
of simplicity of disposition, resembling
a child. With the greatest compo-
sition and most amiable condescension, he
took them in his arms, and pronounced his bless-
ings.
This occurrence may seem trifling
with instruction. It should endear

inclusive. For why did he shew such a regard to infants, but because they were the proper objects of his care and love, and might partake of his grace? Parents, therefore, may be encouraged to present their offspring to Christ, and entreat his kind attention to them. They may solemnly devote them to him in his Covenant by the initiating ordinance of baptism, even as circumcision was practised for the very same purpose among the Jews. We believe, that they will be an acceptable offering to him, and rejoice, that "the promise is unto us and to our children *."

The representation here given seems particularly fitted to engage the notice of our youngest readers, and to such we would apply it. Inconsiderable as you may be thought in the world, you are not beneath the Saviour's regard. Let nothing, then, keep you from his arms, which stand open to receive you. While you hear him say, "Suffer them to come unto me, and forbid them not," be encouraged to have recourse to him, whoever would prevent your approach. Cast yourselves before him, and implore his blessing. Surrender up your hearts, in willing submission, that he may attach them to himself, and accomplish in you the purposes of his mercy. Though your years have been few, you stand in need of redemption through his blood, and the sanctification of his Spirit; nor will his grace be denied you, while you wait in humble faith and fervent prayer before him.

As he was departing from the place, in which the last occurrence happened, a certain person came running to him, evidently with much eagerness, and with profound veneration, acknowledging him as a divine Teacher; for he kneeled down at his feet, and desired information from him on a subject of all others the

* Acts ii. 39.

junction was more than the youth could bear, but not more than Jesus had a right to ordain: nor would those refuse to comply with it, who are truly sensible of their own demerit and the worth of the Saviour. The merchant, who finds "the one pearl of great price," will sell all that he has, and buy it *: for he will say, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord †." Not so this man of fortune. He was disappointed, grieved, confounded; and instantly he betrayed the secret insincerity of his heart, which Jesus meant to detect by the trial here proposed. He gave up all further enquiries about the religion of the Gospel; "he went away sorrowful," for this reason chiefly, that he was attached to the world, under all his promising appearances; and he foolishly preferred the enjoyment of his large possessions to the grace and salvation of Jesus.

Ah! who can refrain from tears, on account of the hopeful youth thus departing from Christ, and at length, as we fear, perishing in sin? Yet similar cases frequently occur. We would ask all those, who seem desirous to learn the way to heaven, Do you unfeignedly consent to the terms, which Jesus requires? He does not, indeed, say to you, "Sell whatsoever thou hast;" but he may probably call you to make some painful sacrifices, as an evidence of your regard to him. You must, at least, be ready to relinquish the dearest objects in life, if he shall so appoint; nor are any of his disciples exempted from the obligation of taking up the cross, and following him through shame, contempt, and suffering. If you comply not with his demands, whatever they may be, you lack the one thing, an integrity of heart, an unreserved submission to him, for which no compensation can be allowed. Would you, then, depart from

* Mat. xiii. 46.

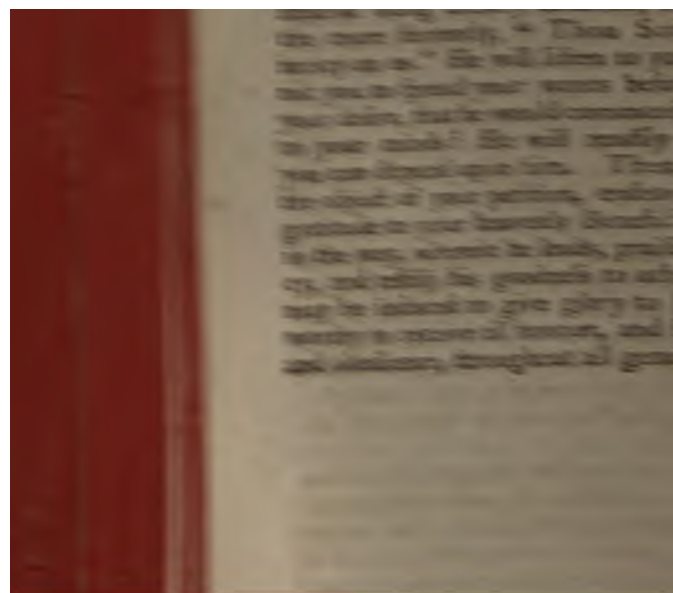
† Phil. iii. 8.

him?

him? O think again, what the consequences must be! Those, who know your danger, tremble and weep for you, though you feel no pity for yourselves.

Jesus, being much affected, directed the attention of all the people, and especially of his disciples, to this occurrence, while he taught them the proper improvement. He declared, such are the snares of riches, such the obstructions which they cause to the spiritual life, that few persons in affluence will be disposed to receive the Gospel, or to pursue that course, which alone will conduct them to heaven. Much is to be given up, and many severe struggles to be endured in all situations; but those, whose hearts are attached to their worldly possessions, labour under peculiar difficulties, and it must be a miracle of grace indeed, which will enable them to make the necessary sacrifices, in the service of God, and for the attainment of his kingdom. The disciples were almost confounded at this intimation, and cried out, with inexpressible astonishment, "Who, then, can be saved?" To which Jesus replied, that, though the strength of man be insufficient, the power of God will be effectual, to accomplish the arduous work. To him, therefore, should our fervent prayers be directed, that by his Almighty grace we may resist and overcome the temptations, peculiar to our various circumstances in life.

But how few are aware of the danger of riches! Instead of shrinking at, do not almost all eagerly covet, an exalted rank? The affluent, in general, desire no better portion than their temporal possessions, and consider not that these may be the means of excluding them from the happiness of heaven. On the very same principle, also, the poor repine at the appointment of God, when they ought to be thankful, that he has placed them in a situation, the most favourable to religion. Surely, we should be more anxious for



JESUS CHRIST.

S E C T. 30.

Jesus visited Zacheus the publican, who became a true convert; and, as he approached to Jerusalem, he delivered the parable of the ten pounds.

THE city of Jericho had been formerly rendered famous by the remarkable triumph, which Joshua there obtained. In this same spot, the Lord Jesus triumphed by his grace, and erected a trophy in proof of his victory over Satan. He had already manifested his high character, in the confines of the town, by giving sight to the blind: but a more illustrious instance of his power and mercy is now to be exhibited, in the conversion of a notorious sinner. Let us 'praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men.' How many witnesses declare, that He is "mighty to save!" Every fresh example encourages our application to him and dependence upon him. May his Spirit work effectually in us, that, while we contemplate his free and extensive kindness to others, we also may partake of his great salvation!

As Jesus passed through Jericho, he was attended by an immense concourse of people. Perhaps, also, the miracle, which he wrought there, might add to his train. One of this numerous company is selected for our peculiar notice; and his case is considered by the sacred historian so interesting, that it is introduced

The call of Christ to Zaccheus was no sooner given, than it was cheerfully obeyed: and it is of importance to remark the astonishing alteration, which the man immediately discovered. The effect, however, must be ascribed, not to the word alone, but to the divine Spirit, which rendered that word so powerful. With eager haste the rich Publican came down from the tree, where he had taken his stand, and received this illustrious guest with impressions of lively joy. He could not but be surprised to hear a perfect stranger to him, as he might conceive, addressing him by name, and proposing to abide at his house: but it is evident, that he instantly felt a conviction of the high dignity of the Personage before him, and considered the offer as an act of gracious condescension. His heart, therefore, being first opened, he was glad to admit the divine visitant within his doors, and thought himself honoured by his presence.

Is this the reception, which the Saviour meets with among ourselves? How few yield a ready obedience to his word! "He hath called, but we refused: He hath stretched out his hand, and no man regarded*." Is there, even with you who profess an attention to his Gospel, any thing like that affectionate attachment to him, which Zaccheus shewed? Would you consent that he should abide with you; and would you rejoice to furnish an entertainment for him? He is, indeed, removed from the earth; but you have many of his representatives around you, and you are required to evince your love for him, by your kindness to them. Do you, then, search out his poor members, that you may minister to their necessities? Do you embrace every opportunity of relieving them? And are you thankful for the exalted privilege? This fruit of divine grace we observe in Zaccheus. While he made a public confession of his former

* Prov. i. 24.

wickedness

wickedness before Jesus and all the company, he wished to testify the sincerity of his repentance. He, whose grand object had been to amass worldly treasures, was no sooner acquainted with the Saviour, than he expressed a willingness to give up a large share of his wealth, for the support of the indigent. He declared his determination to consecrate his substance to the Lord, by devoting even the half of it to charitable purposes. The same extensive distribution, according to that exact division of our property, is not binding upon us. But we are strangers to the love of Jesus, if we shut up our bowels of compassion from the afflicted, nay, if we do not "open our hand wide unto them," as God hath prospered us. Ah! how many warm advocates for the Gospel betray their insincerity, as "having an heart exercised with covetous practices *!"

But you are required to be just, as well as liberal; for God says, "I hate robbery for burnt-offering †." If there be any dishonest gain in your possession; if you have enriched yourselves by fraud or extortion; it is surely known unto God, and an explicit confession of it should be made. Thus the Publican acknowledged his baseness in oppressing the people by a violent and injurious execution of his office. But you must do more, than merely declare your sorrow for the past. Nor is it enough for "him that stole, to steal no more;" you must not retain in your hands, what you have wrongfully taken from another. Suppose not, that your guilt will be expiated by your giving a pittance of it to the poor: for such charity is continued theft. It is not your's to bestow: it is another's property, and if you can find the owner, you must restore it.

This strong and necessary evidence of sincere contrition appeared in Zaccheus. "I am ready," said

* 2 Pet. ii. 14.

† Isa. lxi. 8.

livered a parable, in which he represented the nature of his dominion, and the opposition made to it, and admonished them, that the proper business of his people is, not to be solicitous for secular honours, but to employ themselves diligently in their appointed work, till he shall come again, when he will receive his faithful servants to himself, and destroy his enemies.

A nobleman, or prince, departed to a distant country, to be invested with full powers for the possession of a kingdom, to which he was heir; and then he proposed to return in all the glory of majesty. But, in the mean time, many of those, who from their peculiar relation to him were more especially bound to submit to his authority, with great malignity declared their firm determination to resist and reject him in his regal character. This is exactly the case with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is One of illustrious origin, of high descent, as "the only-begotten of the Father," and "Heir of all things," concerning whom Jehovah himself hath sworn, "That unto Him every knee shall bow, every tongue confess *." But his universal sovereignty was not to be established during his abode on earth, which was intended to be a state of profound humiliation. "He came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister." In order to enter upon his government, it was necessary for him to quit this world and ascend to his Father: and then the sceptre was delivered into his hands. At the appointed season he will return with all the ensigns of royalty, and with irresistible power. He will come in his glory; and that shall be the day of his triumph.

For the present his dominion is not generally acknowledged. The Jews especially, who were his own people, more than others, and ought to have submitted to him with joy, have shewn a most ma-

* Isa. xlv. 23. Phil. ii. 10, 11.

lignant opposition to him, and solemnly renounced him as their ruler. But, without further notice of them, the question for ourselves is, Do we reverence the Saviour, as we ought, in his regal office? The kingdom is His: do we rejoice in it? Do we cordially consent, that "this man shall reign over us?" Are we looking for his future advent? What reception may we expect from him, when he appears? Or, what should be our deportment, till he return?

The prince, here described, left his ten servants behind him with the care of a certain portion of money. Ten pounds were committed to their management, of which they were charged to make a diligent use, during his absence. Under these very circumstances the disciples of Jesus are placed. They profess subjection to him, and they should act at his command. Their very name, as they are "servants," implies their obligations to work, agreeably to his directions. They are intrusted with various advantages, one in one way, and another in another; and these they are required to improve, as men in trade, so that they may turn them to the most profitable account. It is intended, indeed, that they shall be sharers with their Master in the future glory of his kingdom; but for the present they are appointed, not to any high honours or distinctions in the world, as some persons then vainly dreamed, but to a post of labour and difficulty; and their most vigorous efforts are necessary, in the business assigned them.

The prince returned in full possession of the sovereignty, which he had expected, and strictly examined his servants, what benefit had accrued from their use of the money committed to them. Two of the number, by their fidelity and diligence in commerce, had made very considerable improvement of their stock, though one of them was far inferior to the other. Both came and acknowledged their obligations to their lord, as if they had said, "We are

expressions of love, more
agreeable satisfaction on their
elt fidelity and diligence: he
affection to him relate to
he will deprive of all their a
find them another trial. All
and trouble for ourselves!

The prince, who was be
sighted, as we have seen, to
went under peculiar obligati
count him. But when he had
he proceeded to punish them
he vindicated his own sense
terrible vengeance took effect
This Jesus predicted, that
would openly show a detest
he should come again to aflic
and give them up to the ene
as everlasting punishment for the
This has been in part fulfill
in their national capacity, rem
gle: small nations, and a

his future advent. And in that, not the
ing Jews alone, but all in every age and na-
reject the Saviour, will be deeply concern-
soever shall be found opposers of his grace,
; to bow to his sceptre, shall be brought forth
e execution, a spectacle to the whole uni-
d shall feel the fierceness of his anger, in tor-
xpressible, for ever and ever. Let every soul,
ld an immediate and unreserved subjection to
ing of Zion." Constrained by his mercies,
s awed by his terrors, let us surrender up our-
him, that he may reign over us; and prepare
gn with him in his glory. Amen.

may be delayed, till your case may seem desperate; but in the end you shall perceive stronger proofs of his power and love, and find his mercy the more precious. You should learn, also, from your situation, to improve the hours of the day, and "to walk as we see the light of this world;" remembering that all your opportunities of usefulness will be over, when the night of death arrives. You should be excited to diligence and vigour; nor should the prospect of dangers intimidate you. Desert not your Master, but determine, like Thomas, to adhere to Jesus, and to "follow the Lamb, whithersoever he goeth," even to the severest trials, and martyrdom itself.

When they came to Bethany, Lazarus had been some time in the grave, and many friends from Jerusalem were assembled at the house, endeavouring to comfort the mourning sisters for the loss of their brother. Upon the approach of Jesus, Martha with a transport which marked her nature, hurried out to meet him; and though she seemed to upbraid him for not preventing their distress, she expressed a hope, that at his prayer some deliverance might yet be obtained. Her language evinced her faith; but at the same time it betrayed much weakness. Jesus in reply, without reproving her for what was wrong or defective in her principles, declared, that Lazarus should rise again: but a resurrection from the dead, merely at the final conflagration, was not the relief she wished. He then directed her attention to himself, "as the resurrection and the life," that she might have clearer conceptions of his exalted character, and be so strengthened in her confidence upon him, as to expect the miraculous resurrection, which he meant to perform. His words were soft sublime, and replete with instruction and importance. He assured her, that as the author, and preserver of life, he has all power

power in himself to quicken whom he will, and that every believer, by virtue of an union with him, is brought into a state of glorious existence, which death cannot destroy or impair. Upon his enquiring, whether she yielded a cordial assent to this interesting truth; she perfectly acquiesced in it, professing her firm persuasion, that he was indeed the promised Saviour, the Son of God.

Have we, likewise, so regarded Jesus, as he is here represented? Behold, what honour is due to his name! Is he not to be revered and worshipped as "the mighty God," since he vindicates to himself the prerogative of reviving those, over whom death has prevailed, and of imparting and supporting a principle of endless life, according to his own sovereign pleasure? Shall we not, then, stand in awe, and confess and adore the Divinity in this exalted Personage? What answer shall we return to the question, "Believest thou this?" It is indispensably necessary for every one of us to credit his declaration, and rely upon him for the blessing, which he proposes to bestow. The promise of his salvation, including both spiritual and eternal life, is annexed to faith. If we possess an unreserved dependence upon him, how great is our felicity! We shall feel the quickening energy of his Spirit, giving vigour to our souls, and maintaining that vigour against all opposition. Nor shall any thing be able to destroy our union with him. Our present mode of existence may cease, and our bodies be consigned to the grave; but we shall even then enjoy a state of happiness and glory with him; and at the last day, "He will swallow up death in victory," "ransom us from the power of the grave," and give us "our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul," in his own everlasting kingdom. What an unfailing source of consolation is here! "Sorrow not," then, believers, "even as others, which have no hope."

while he sympathized with the
himself a partaker of human na-
derations, probably, upon this
oppressed his mind, and contra-
dicted his compassionate feelings.
He accompanied them to the sep-
the stone to be removed. Mar-
body was become offensive, and
deliverance could not then be
immediately reproved her for her
by the tomb, with uplifted eyes,
thanks to his Father for granting
for the opportunity of displaying
stance; and with a divine majesty
Almighty Lord, "to whom belongeth
death," he commanded the grave
liver. At this powerful word, he
with life, and health, and vigour.

O what surprise, and joy, and
overwhelmed the dear friends, upon
restoration of him, whom they so
had considered as irrecoverably n

Will not this be allowed as an unquestionable evidence of our Lord's divine character? Who can withstand the testimony of one, that arose from the dead? Will not all be constrained to yield unfeigned reverence and submission to the Son of God? Many of those, who were present, felt a forcible conviction from the view of the miracle, and immediately believed on him. But oh! the blindness and obduracy of the human heart! External proofs are not sufficient to produce the efficacious principle of faith: the mighty power of God is requisite to implant the proper disposition of mind. Some, who were witnesses of the wondrous fact, carried information of it to his avowed adversaries, and, as it should seem, with the malevolent intention of exciting opposition against him. At their report, the grand council of the Sanhedrim was assembled, to consult upon the steps necessary to be taken, for obviating his increasing popularity. The result of their deliberation was, to endeavour by some method or other to destroy him; and in this they were directed by the advice of Caiaphas, the high-priest, who spake by a divine impulse what he did not understand, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. But vain were all their designs of violence, till his hour came. He retired to Ephraim, a distant city, not far from the river Jordan, where he lay concealed till within a few days of his last passover, when he surrendered himself to their malice.

Let us meditate on the unbelief and obstinacy of the Jews, not that we may frame any bitter invectives against them, but that we may fear for ourselves; for their case furnishes the most solemn admonition to us. Let us beware of resisting the evidences, which are set before us, lest we be given up to a similar obduracy. Let us pray, that God would put forth his power, in subduing our natural depravity: for it requires the same Almighty energy, which raised

But her conduct disgusted some, even of the disciples, who probably condemned it as wild and extravagant. Judas, in particular, objected to her from the basest motives; for, while he pretended, what he never felt, a tender concern for the poor, and argued, that the price of the ointment had better have been devoted to charitable uses, he meant to enrich himself by it. Jesus, however, who knew the purity of her intentions, and the strength of her regard for him, undertook her defence. He justified and commended the action, as being well suited to his dying situation, and as it were an embalming of his body, preparatory to his burial. He observed, that opportunities of relieving indigence continually occur, which should draw forth the benevolence of his people; but that, as he was soon to leave them, and few more occasions of ministering to him would be afforded them, some extraordinary marks of respect might properly be paid him at that time. He declared also, to shew his gracious acceptance of her love, that, wherever the Gospel should be published, her affection for him should be celebrated.

This little narrative will furnish an instructive lesson. Let us not precipitately or warmly censure those zealous exertions in the service of Christ, which may appear to us needless or extravagant. While we condemn, Jesus may highly approve them. The ardour of some persons, in certain uncommon cases, may carry them such lengths, as would be extremely improper in the ordinary course of things. We may not clearly understand the circumstances or the motives of their conduct; and therefore let us leave them to him, who knows their hearts, and who will not only make all favourable allowances for the sincere, but applaud and reward whatever they have done from pure, disinterested regard to him.

Perhaps, you, who are forward to reproach others for their intemperate heat, may be much more displeasing

pleasing to Christ by your coldness, and hesitation, and fear of going too far in his cause. How rare is such love, as that of Mary to her Lord and Saviour! Many will profess a strong attachment to him, who refuse to be at any expense for him. We ask, then, if you can part with your money for his sake. You cannot, indeed, yield an exact imitation of this pious woman, since the bodily presence of Jesus is removed from the earth. But his poor remain among us, and they are appointed his receivers: "whensoever ye will, ye may do them good." O let not a covetous, parsimonious spirit represent a liberal disposition as improper or wasteful. There are those, who will plead for charity, as Judas, till they are brought to the trial; and then it appears, that they are more anxious to increase their own store, than to relieve the indigent. Judge yourselves: do you not content yourselves with doing very little, and yet rate that little highly?

When it was known at Jerusalem, that Jesus was in the neighbourhood, a large concourse of people resorted from that city to Bethany, not merely for his sake, but that they might also have a sight of Lazarus, who was so wonderful a monument of his power and grace. The miracle, which had been wrought, had already attached the hearts of many to the Saviour, and excited the curiosity of more; but the chief priests, who were enraged on this very account, seriously meditated, not only his destruction, but that of Lazarus also. How foolish, as well as wicked the design! He, who had been once raised from the dead, might, with the same ease, have been instantly restored again. But those, who resist the Lord's Anointed are chargeable with the grossest absurdity. Their wisest contrivances are "a vain thing:" and "the Lord shall have them in derision *."

* Psal. ii. 1-4.

We do not wonder, that they, whose cases have illustriously displayed the mercy of the Redeemer, are persecuted, like Lazarus, with peculiar malignity. The enemies of Jesus, who really aim at Him, direct their envenomed shafts against them, who are witnesses for his name. Believers, however, may possess peace and confidence in the midst of opposition, since their Defender is invincible. He, who keepeth them, has numbered the very hairs of their head, and declares, that "none shall pluck them out of his hand *."

We have accompanied Jesus to the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, and now we contemplate his remarkable entrance into the city. Hitherto we have seen that he sought not any worldly honours, having studiously declined every thing like pomp and ostentation. But toward the close of his life we perceive him attended by a very singular procession, which was designed to be a representation and acknowledgment of his regal character.

On the next day after his entertainment at Bethany, he proceeded on his journey. When he came to the mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples to

an adjacent village, to bring with them an ass and her unbroken foal †. He directed them to the very place, and so minutely described the circumstances, in which they should find the animals, as to shew his exact knowledge of things distant and seemingly accidental. The narrative also proves, that he could influence the minds of men, as he pleased; for the owners of the ass relinquished her without hesitation, at the mere declaration, that "the Lord had need of her." Upon the young colt he condescended to ride in a sort of

* John x. 28.

† Mat. xxi. 1—16. Mark xi. 1—11.

Luke xix. 29, &c. John xii. 12—19.

triumph to the city, with much meekness and yet with an appearance of majesty *.

Many persons conducted him from Bethany, and many more, having heard of his raising Lazarus from the grave, came from Jerusalem to meet him. The whole multitude, as if by a miraculous impulse, appeared to vie with each other in ascribing all possible honours to him. They spread their garments in the way, and, cutting down branches of trees, part of them they strewed upon the road, and with part they marched before him; these being usual expressions of joy, upon the arrival of any potent Monarch or victorious General. Under a full conviction, that Jesus was the Messiah, and the expectation of his assuming the government, they began to praise God with a loud voice, and to shout with exultation, though they understood not the import of their own words, "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is the King, that cometh in the name of the Lord; peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!"

Do we ask the reason of all this? Among other causes to be assigned, it was the purpose of God to fulfil an ancient prophecy. Zechariah had expressly foretold †, that the Saviour, the King of Zion, would make such a public appearance, as is here described. The most minute circumstances in this view, as completions of former and authentic predictions, are important, as they furnish incontestable evidence for the truth of the Gospel. How ma-

* There was nothing ridiculous or mean in Christ riding on an ass; for, not to mention that this animal in eastern countries is of a larger size and more graceful appearance than among us, some of the most eminent persons, patriarchs, judges, and kings, made use of asses: and, probably, with a reference to that primitive simplicity, he chose this method of going in solemn and triumphant procession to Jerusalem. Gen. xxii. 3, Exod. iv. 20. Judg. v. 10. x. 4. xvi. 2. xix. 26. Bishop Chandler's Defence of Christianity. Zech. ix. 9.

nifold is the wisdom of God, who raised up holy men, and instructed them to declare very exactly, some hundred years before, many of the things which the Redeemer should both do and say! No event can take place, which he did not foresee, and which, in this sense, did not form a part of his original plan.

Do we join in these acclamations of the Jews, and welcome the King of Israel with our Hosannas? Do we, with ardent and devout affections, exult in the blessings of his government, which brings peace to man and glory to God? And do we most earnestly pray for an extensive enlargement of his dominion, even to the ends of the earth? Such zeal as this may be termed madness and enthusiasm; and accordingly, there are few, who dare to express any real fervour in the cause of Christ, lest they should expose themselves to scorn and derision. But the day of his complete triumph is coming, of which his procession to Jerusalem was a faint emblem. He shall be revealed in all the splendour of his divine majesty; and the honours of his kingdom shall be universally acknowledged. Saints and Angels shall join, with inexpressible love and transport, in everlasting acclamations to the Son of David. Would you bear a part in the joyful exultations of that day, and celebrate the high praises of your Redeemer? You must begin your song on earth, confess his glory, and pray that the purposes of his spiritual government may be fully effected within yourselves.

This profound veneration, paid to Jesus, these rapturous shouts of applause, were offensive to the Pharisees. They cried out in a rage, "We prevail nothing; Behold, the world is gone after him." They called upon him to reprehend his disciples for their officious and intemperate zeal. But he defended their conduct, maintaining that the honour due to his exalted character must be proclaimed, even though a miracle should be requisite to accomplish that en-

desired to be involved in *John 9*. They applied this to the people, and in, together with others, whom he included in his sentence, blessed *John* of their wills. They were immediately converted, and he pointed, and the Father blessed them, with great liberality, in the following style:

"The Son of man, whom you now behold in the confidence of humanity, is about to enter on a life of highest exaltation. He is not flattered, while you observe, that no glory is procured by narrow passages. He shall be sensible to accomplish the object which I have in view, the liberation of perished souls. He is about to bring up from the grave, which is still open to people in the earth, and which, except it be sealed, would produce no harvest. He is to turn a company that is external to God, a consequence of my death, and yet one of the human race can be saved without it. He will, that profits in attachment to my cause, and be willing to make the most painful sacrifices. A sincere regard to your temporal interests, will enlarge your eternal welfare; but, while you can cheerfully give up the stock for my sake, you adopt the most effectual method to secure your own happiness for ever. If, therefore, you would acknowledge me, as your Lord and Master, you must be obedient to my command, and follow without hesitation, wherever I shall lead, even to severest calamities; and then you shall be with me, to attend my glory, and sit down with me in my kingdom. My Father himself will declare his approbation of your conduct, and confer distinguished honour upon you."

It is pleasing to observe, that there are any humble inquirers after *Jesus*. His faithful ministers will rejoice to direct you, and encourage your application to him. They will, as it were, take you by the hand,

terms of mercy, may appear against us as our adversary, in the thunders of his wrath. This, then, is "the time of our visitation;" for the Saviour himself waits upon us in the ministry of his word. Are we aware of the important consequences of the present moment? If salvation be despised, it will be the ground of our heaviest condemnation: and we ourselves may perish with a more terrible destruction, than even the sinners of Jerusalem.

The entrance of Jesus, with so singular a procession, threw the whole city into commotion, and excited a general enquiry about this extraordinary Personage. Very soon he displayed the glory of his character by different proofs. He went immediately to the temple, and began, as with divine authority, to correct the abuses, and punish the profanations, which prevailed there. Now again, as he had done before, he drove out the traders with indignation, and vindicated the honour of that holy place, which God had chosen to himself for "the house of prayer." By fresh miracles, also, in healing the blind and the lame, he gave the strongest evidence, that he had a full right to that power which he exercised.

Were not all, then, at length convinced, and persuaded to receive him? The very children took up the song, while they cried, as if by a supernatural impulse, "Hosanna to the Son of David:" and thus their infant tongues, in celebrating the praises of the Redeemer, were witnesses against the rulers of the people. The chief priests, who ought to have been his most zealous advocates, expressed very warm displeasure at these proceedings. But Jesus vindicated the acclamations of the children, and shewed from the scriptures, that it was God's determination to get himself glory, as he did in that instance, "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings *." How should this

* Psal. viii. 2.

encourage those of youngest years, to offer their adorations to Jesus! It cannot be too soon for them to learn hosannas to his name. He will listen to them with peculiar delight, and consider himself honoured by their weak attempts. Perhaps, too, he may make use of them, to confound the wisest and the strongest of his enemies.

The common people, likewise, were much affected by the doctrines of Jesus. While he taught them daily in the temple, they crowded to hear him, and appeared to hang upon his words. In general, the lower orders have been found to yield a serious and eager attention to the Gospel; but the rich too frequently, possessing more pride and prejudice, turn away their ears in disdain. The Jewish rulers, continued to seek the destruction of Jesus; but their malice was restrained a few days longer. As he had so many adherents among the poor, they were afraid of proceeding to any act of violence against him: nor could any of their efforts have at last succeeded, except he had surrendered himself into their hands. The mournful history exhibits the strongest proofs of the desperate wickedness of man: but it affords us, also, a pleasing representation of the grace of the Saviour, waiting to shew mercy to his most virulent opposers. May we be constrained, by a sense of his great love, to drop all our perverse objections to him, and yield ourselves unfeignedly to his disposal! Thus may we be redeemed to God, and established "unblamable in holiness" through Jesus Christ! Amen.



JESUS

JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 32.

Jesus instructed certain enquiring Greeks—warned the unbelieving Jews—cursed a barren fig-tree—confounded those, who questioned his authority—admonished them by the parable of the two sons, and by that of the vineyard, let to unfaithful husbandmen.

A GENERAL commotion was excited in Jerusalem by our Lord's singular entrance into it, by the loud hosannas sung before him, and by the miracles, which he there publicly performed. Many persons of different dispositions came about him: some sincere enquirers sought his instructions; but a more numerous company opposed him with extreme malignity. He varied the manner of his address, according to the cases and characters of the people; and yet in every instance he preserved the same "meekness of wisdom." May his followers, and especially his ministers, learn from him to be "gentle unto all men," as well as to be ready always to declare "the hope that is in them!"

As the celebration of the passover approached, a large concourse of those, who professed to worship the God of Israel, was then assembled at Jerusalem, from all parts of Judea. Among the rest were certain pious Greeks, probably of Gentile extraction, who
desir

God, he determines that they shall be punished. It is a righteous dispensation, and the punishment will be most tremendous. Who can resist? We are aware, that this matter is per-
 vaded by a strong conviction, as if men were constrained to believe, that they were forsaken from God himself; or as if they could not believe, though they most eagerly desired to be enabled to do it. This is very true from the fact. They are left to their own choice; and God's final deliverance of them is only the just punishment of their obstinate opposition to him. But when he withdraws, we know that the most confident unbeliever will arise. We pray, therefore, "O Lord, take not thy Holy Spirit from us!"

Many of the Jewish rulers felt a strong conviction in their minds, that Jesus was the Messiah; but they dared not avow that conviction, because a public confession of him would have brought upon them severe reproach and persecution, and they were more solicitous to preserve their reputation with men, than to obtain the favour of God. How wretched the case! And yet many may read in them, what they themselves are. Such are those, who have not courage to meet the scorn and displeasure of the world, in defence of the truth of doctrine and practice, which they are persuaded is most agreeable to the sacred scriptures. The approbation of God is made light of, and his anger provoked by such a conduct. Surely, we have too much consequence to our fellow-creatures, their notice and dreading their anger, with us of conscience. What will they be able in the hour of death, or in the day of

from them, but he took another opportunity a solemn admonition to them. His mission, and his union with the grand Lumina will communicate light to all sincere

sincere enquirers, and guide them into the way of peace. But, though the purpose of his appearance on the earth was to propose salvation, rather than pronounce judgment, he observed that unbelievers shall not escape, but shall be condemned in the last day by that very word, which they now contemptuously reject. How righteous the sentence, since they despise and oppose the will of God, so clearly manifested to them by his Son!

And as Jesus did, so should his ministers also, warn sinners of their danger. Will you, then, receive the record, which he hath given? He demands your attention, not only as the messenger, but the representative, and the very image of the invisible God. Can you disprove the credentials, which he has exhibited? Or why should you resist him, who comes to rescue our fallen race from perishing, and who brings light, life, and peace to all that believe? Do you not fear the awful doom, which awaits his enemies? The Lord God will vindicate the honour of his Gospel; and, at the final consummation, you must account to him for your present neglect and contempt of it. Ah! how many will wish, that they had lived and died in Pagan darkness, since the word of salvation, which is sent unto them, will witness against them, and, as it aggravates their guilt, increase their misery for ever!

Monday in
Passion week. It is probable, that Jesus was obliged to hide himself from the malicious attempts of his opponents, and that each evening he retired from Jerusalem to Bethany for his own comfort as well as safety *. Very early in the morning, probably the second day of the week, he returned with ardent zeal to the city, from which he had fled the night before. Having set out without taking any food, he felt the call of hunger by the

* Mat. xxi: 17—19. Mark xi: 11—19.

the performance of his promise, or believe that he will hear us. To ensure a favourable acceptance, we should likewise lay aside our evil tempers, when we approach to the God of peace and love. He will not vouchsafe his presence and assistance to those, whose hearts burn with resentment, one against another. We are to "lift up holy hands without wrath," as well as without "doubting *."

After passing by the barren fig-tree, as we have seen, our Lord came again to Jerusalem, and taught publicly in the temple. The chief priests, scribes, and elders (which expressions may denote the members of the Sanhedrim), being much enraged against him, demanded of him, what authority he possessed, which could justify his very extraordinary conduct. Had the question been proposed with an humble desire of receiving information, we apprehend that Jesus would have given a different answer; for he never disappointed the serious enquirer. But, knowing the pride and obstinacy of their hearts, he intended, not so much to instruct, as to silence and confound them. He therefore interrogated them on what foundation the ministry of John the Baptist rested: for, since John had borne the most decisive testimony for him, as he himself had for John, they both stood on the same ground. This involved them in a difficulty. They could not allow the prophetic character of John, without allowing that of Jesus also; and they dared not deny it, through fear of the people, who held the name of the Baptist in the highest veneration. They were, therefore, obliged to confess their ignorance, and to relinquish their malevolent examination. How admirable was that wisdom, which could at once perplex the most subtle adversaries, and defeat all their purposes!

Do not many, also, among ourselves, like those

* 1 Tim. ii. 8.

ancient cavillers, demand, by what proofs the authority of Jesus is ascertained? We are not afraid of bringing the matter to a fair trial before impartial judges: for the truth cannot suffer by a serious disquisition. But take heed, with what temper and motive you weigh the evidences of the Gospel. They are strong enough to convince those, who are not biassed by pride or prejudice. But, if you enter upon the subject with an unhumiliated captious disposition, probably difficulties will occur, which will prevent your attaining any satisfaction: and it is a righteous thing with God to permit it. Many, who affect to call themselves freethinkers, take up the Bible, with no desire to regulate their faith or practice by it, but with a previous determination to raise objections. Are such persons, who are evidently blinded by their passions, competent to decide? Or is it likely, that, while they resolve not to be persuaded, Jesus will vouchsafe to guide them by the light of his Spirit?

But, though our Lord seemed to evade the enquiries of his enemies, he warned them very faithfully, by representing to them, in a striking manner, the baseness of their character, and the awful destruction awaiting them.

1. He described the different conduct of two sons, who were both directed by their Father to work in his vineyard. The first, with great insolence, refused to obey, but afterwards, ashamed of his perverseness, submitted, and fulfilled the injunction. The second, with fair professions of regard, and an express promise of compliance, continued to neglect the command. Jesus then appealed to his auditors upon the case he had proposed; and, while they were obliged to confess that he, who for a time avowed an opposition to his parent's will, had yet performed a more dutiful part than the other, they condemned themselves.

appear suitable to your case, as it is addressed to them, "who are ready to perish," and offers a full and gratuitous pardon to the most guilty.

2. He described the base conduct and certain condemnation of the Jews, in a parabolical representation of wicked husbandmen, who were intrusted with the care of a vineyard. The owner sent his servants to them to demand the produce of his land; but the messengers were treated by them with extreme violence, beaten, stoned, and killed. At last, as the grand expedient for recovering them to their duty, his only and beloved Son was dispatched to them; but, though he had a peculiar claim to be received with veneration, they unanimously determined to put him to death.

Jesus then appealed to his captious hearers; and, while they allowed that these unfaithful husbandmen should be deprived of that trust, which they had abused, and be destroyed for their iniquity, they passed sentence upon themselves. Jesus also confirmed the sentence, declaring, that the kingdom of God, or the dispensation of his mercy, should be withdrawn from them, and committed to another people. He further observed, that a remarkable prophecy was then fulfilled, since the very stone, which the builders refused, was appointed the head-stone of the corner, as the main support of the whole building *. And he solemnly warned them, that, by taking offence at him or his doctrine, they exposed themselves to the heaviest calamities in this life, and that finally, when his whole vengeance should fall upon them, they would perish with tremendous and irreparable ruin.

The Jewish rulers perceived, that the parable, which he had delivered, was directed against them; and yet the awful admonition did not affect them, as it ought. They hardened their hearts the more, and again they

* Psal. cxviii. 22.

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