



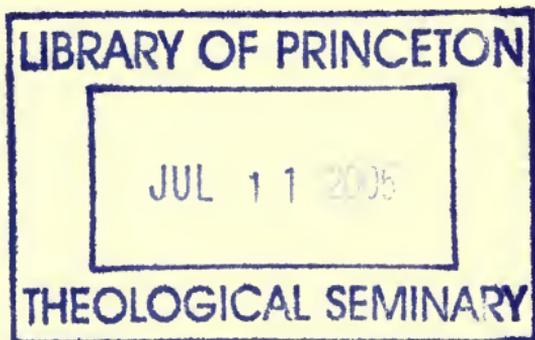
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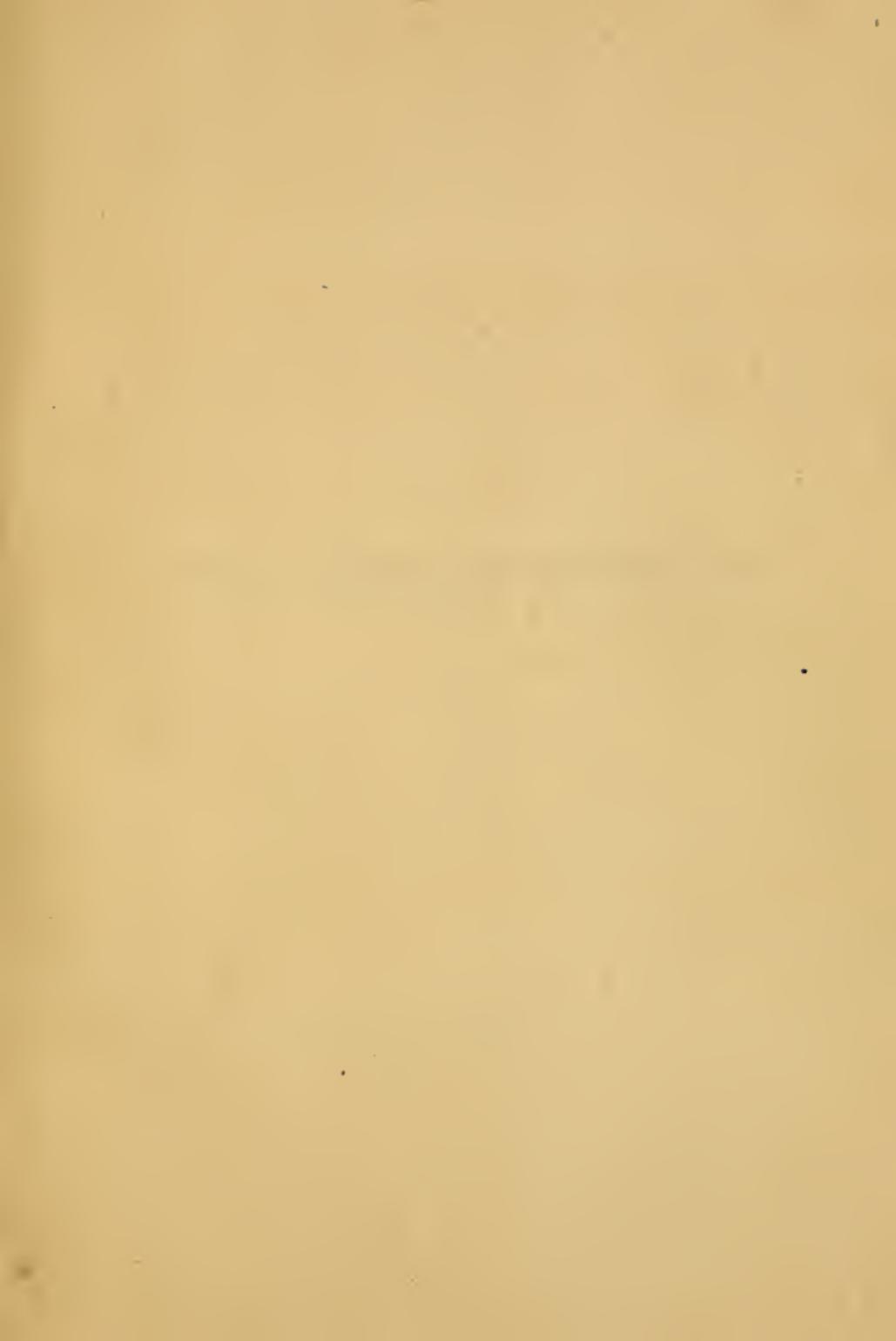


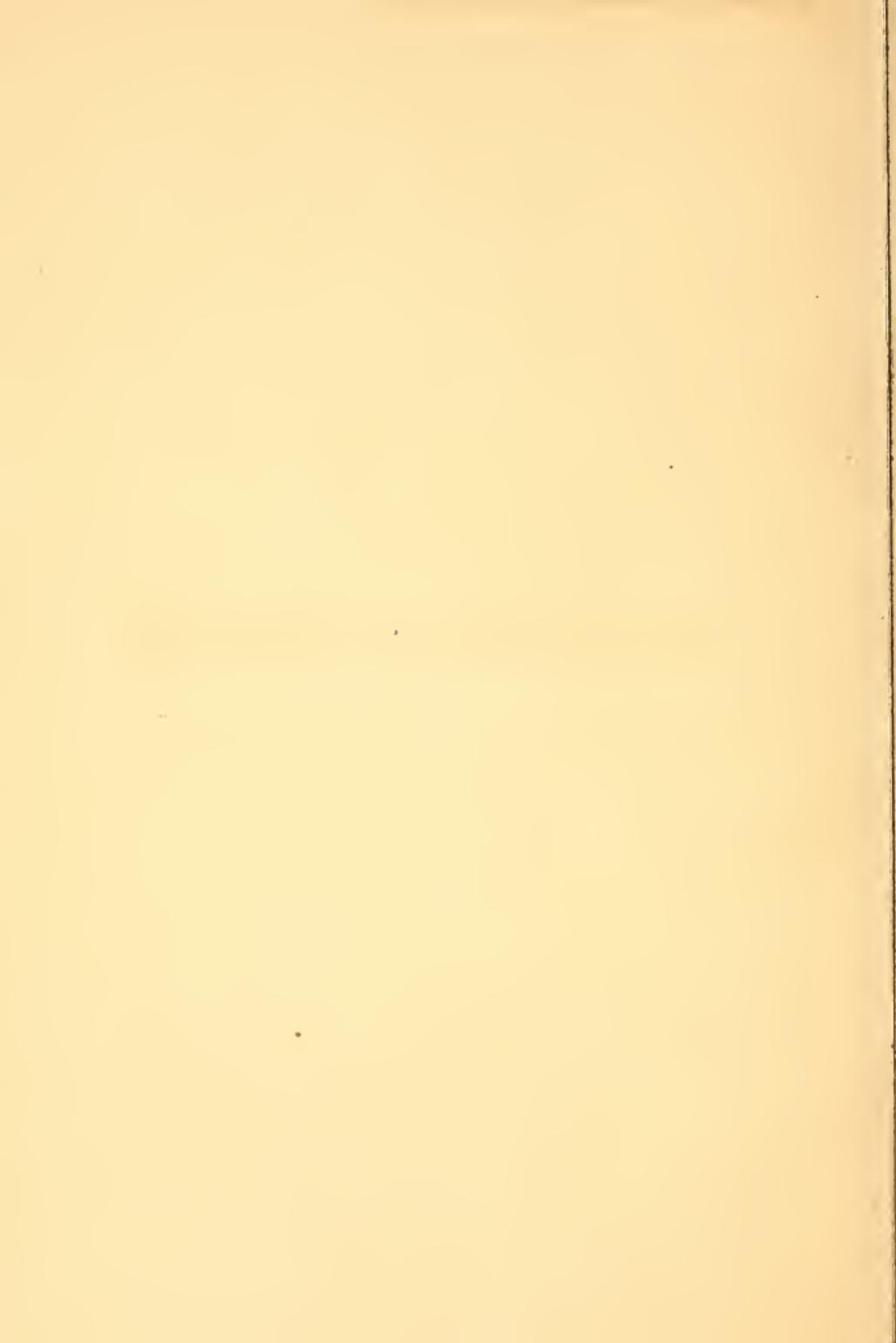
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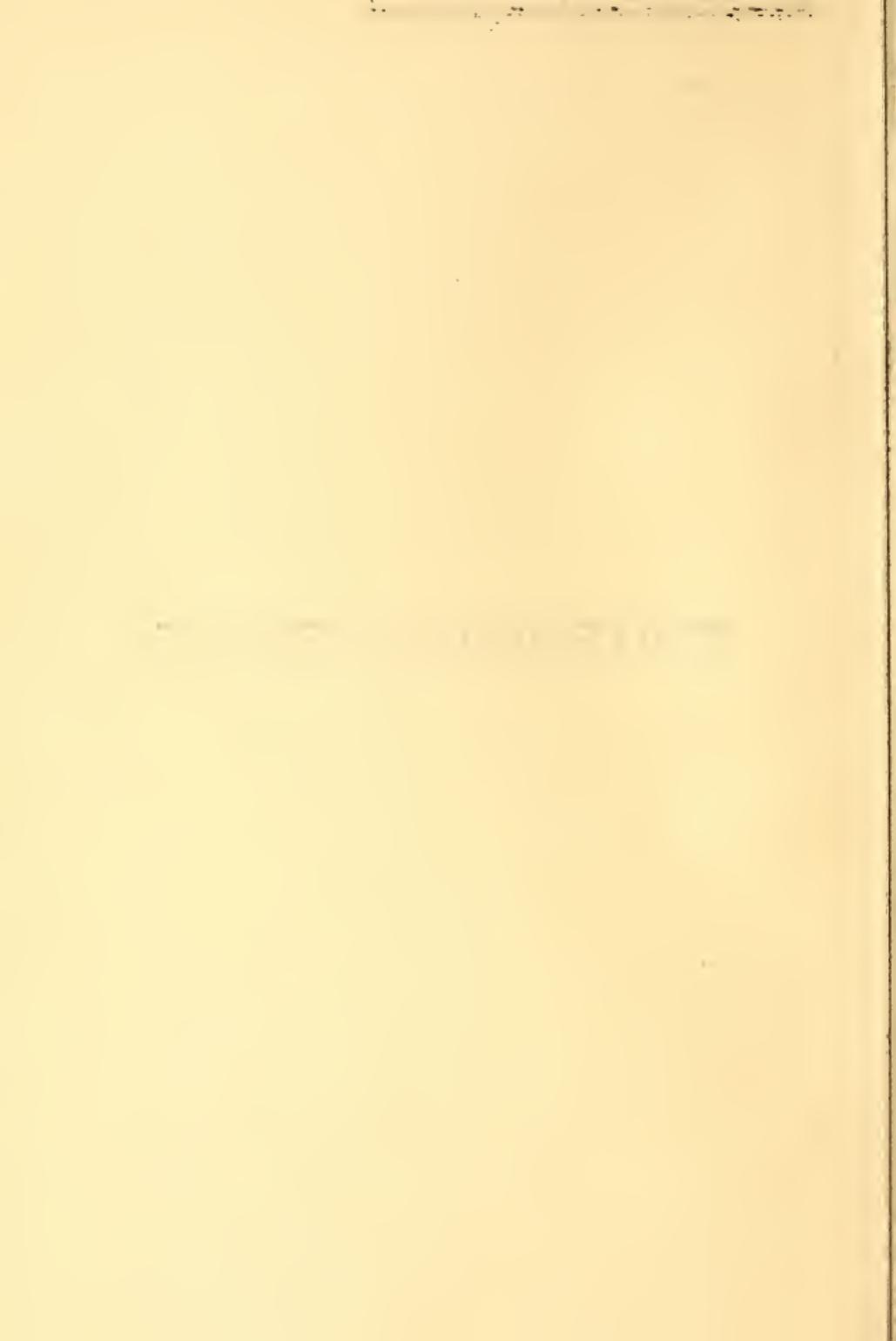
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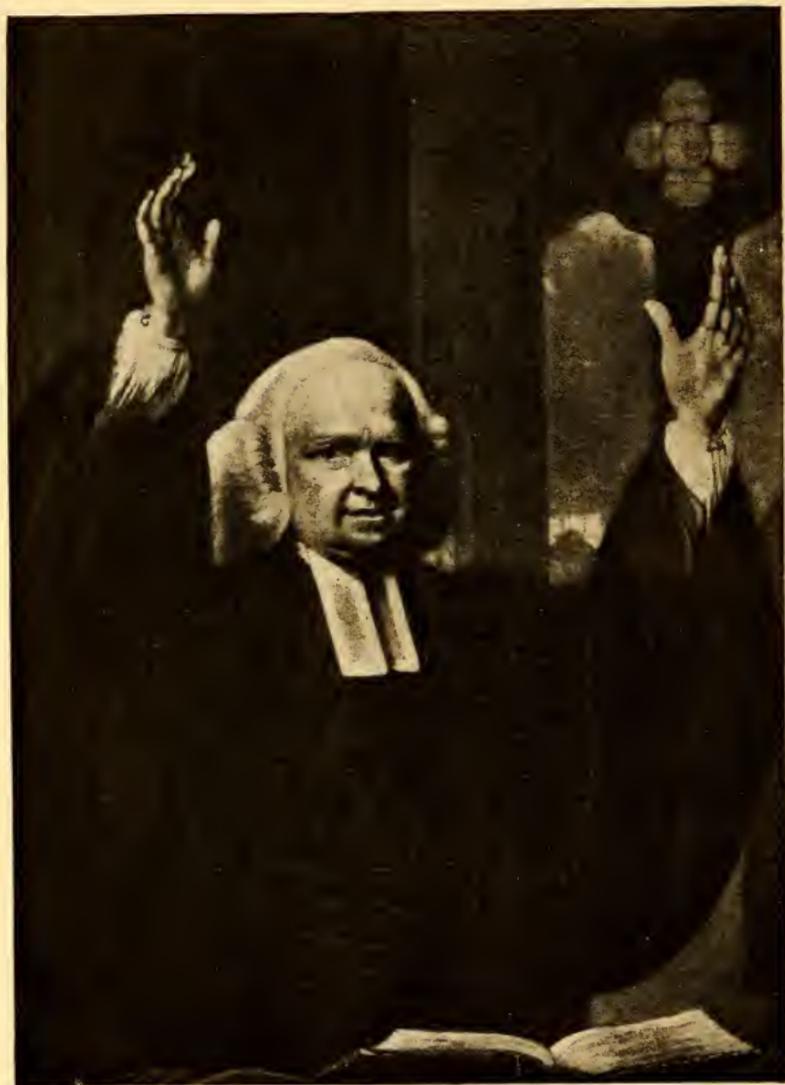




The World's Great Sermons.

WHITEFIELD'S SERMONS





GEORGE WHITEFIELD.

After the painting by Hone.

SELECTED SERMONS OF
✓
GEORGE WHITEFIELD



With an Introduction and Notes

by the

Rev. A. R. BUCKLAND, M.A.

Morning Preacher at the Foundling Hospital

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GEORGE WHITEFIELD

Born at Gloucester, Dec. 16, 1714.

Entered as a Servitor at Pembroke College, Oxford, 1732.

Ordained Deacon, 1736.

First Visit to America, 1738.

Ordained Priest, 1739.

First Open-Air Sermon at Moorfields, April 29, 1739.

Second Visit to America, 1739-41.

Third Visit to America, 1744-48.

Fourth Visit to America, 1751-52.

Fifth Visit to America, 1754-55.

Sixth Visit to America, 1763-65.

Last Sermon in England prior to last Embarkation for America,
Sept. 16, 1769.

Last Sermon in America, Sept. 29, 1770.

Died at Newburyport, Mass., Sept. 30, 1770.

INTRODUCTION

WHITEFIELD AS A PREACHER

IT is usual to say of George Whitefield's printed sermons that they do not explain his unparalleled influence as a preacher. The criticism marks the high expectation of the reader, and warns us to look beyond the preacher's words for the secret of his power. Other men have outshone Whitefield in force of reasoning, in charm of diction, in all the literary qualities of the sermon-writer. Other men have been as sincere in their faith, as eager in their ministry, as clear in their statement of the Gospel message; but they were not used, as Whitefield was, to change the lives of thousands in Great Britain and America. Remembering with reverence the power which alone can make preaching effective, it may still be worth our while to see what circumstances and qualities offer, on

the human side, an explanation of Whitefield's success.

The times were favourable to a ministry delivering such a message as that of Whitefield and in such a manner. The eighteenth century is often blamed beyond its deserts. Whitefield's contemporaries, both amongst Churchmen and Nonconformists, included men of piety and zeal as well as of learning and orthodoxy. The Church of Butler, of Secker, of Gibson, of Sherlock and of Waterland could not lack worthy leaders; nor were the ranks of the clergy at large without men of real devotion. But the period was one of moral depravity and decaying faith. Arianism, developing into Socinianism, infected Church and Nonconformity alike. Theological learning was of little repute. The Universities had sunk into intellectual obscurity. The observance of the Lord's Day and the practices of religion had decayed. The type of preaching most common was that of the written sermon composed of cold and polished phrases which left the hearer untouched.

The preaching of the men who began the

Evangelical Revival came with the freshness of a new message, and the very message which the times so sorely needed. If they reasoned, in terms that were sometimes lurid, of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come, they declared with no less conviction the love of God and the forgiveness of sins through the finished work of Jesus Christ. If Whitefield's sermons are read in the light of the times in which they were delivered, their influence will seem less surprising than the absence of some qualities that make for greatness may suggest.

Regard must be had also to the circumstances under which Whitefield often preached. He began his ministry at Gloucester in the church which still stands in the same street with the inn (now the Bell Hotel) at which he was born. His early fame in London, won as a young deacon ordained below the canonical age, came from sermons preached in churches. But when pulpits were closed against him, and when churches were all too small for the congregations which gathered to hear him, he began to preach in the open air. Vast crowds

gathered around him at Moorfields, even when violence and ribaldry did their worst to drown his voice.¹ At Kingswood, near Bristol, an audience of 200 colliers grew day by day till 20,000 hearers were assembled. Once, in America, he accompanied a repentant criminal to the gallows, and preached, standing upon the coffin in the execution cart. Amidst the acute terror produced by the earthquake of 1775 he preached at midnight to a vast assembly in Hyde Park. His last address was delivered at night on the staircase of the house in which he died, whilst the bedroom candle burned to the socket in his hand. Whitefield has told us, in the preface to his edition of a sermon by Foxe, the martyrologist, on what authority he acted. 'Our Lord has given us a universal commission: "Go ye, and preach the Gospel to every creature." When thrust out of the synagogues, a mountain, a ship were His pulpit, and the heavens were His sounding-board. Thus Latimer, Cranmer, Ridley, and Mr John Foxe, the famous

¹ See Tyerman's *Life of Whitefield*, i. 554-57, for Whitefield's account of his Moorfields experiences in 1742.

martyrologist, preached. And who needs to be ashamed of such unexceptionable examples?'¹ Open-air preaching has long been too familiar to excite the interest it did in the days of Whitefield and John Wesley; but never since their days has it been so powerful an evangelistic agent.

But we shall find a further explanation of Whitefield's success, on the human side, in the manner and method of the preacher. His voice was an organ of singular power and beauty. Franklin, by experiment, reached the conclusion that Whitefield could be heard in the open air by 30,000 persons. A born orator, Whitefield had even at school been chosen for his 'good elocution and memory' to speak before the Corporation at their annual inspection. He recalls, as a young preacher, the advantage he derived from this early training; he commended the study of oratory to others; and he deplored the absence of any such training amongst candidates for the ministry of the Church. His own oratory was dramatic to the last degree. Unsupported

¹ Quoted by Tyerman, ii. 418.

by transparent sincerity and a passionate love of souls, it would have been intolerable. Employed by Whitefield, it appeared beyond criticism. Some of his sermons were, in substance, delivered again and again, revised with scrupulous care as the test of delivery disclosed weaknesses or new opportunities, and, apparently, gaining rather than losing in power from their repetition. Franklin says that such sermons gave 'a pleasure of much the same kind with that received from an excellent piece of music.' But, after all, far more than justness of emphasis, and musical cadences, and appropriate modulations of the voice, there appealed to hearers the zeal of the man. There was conviction in every sentence. Whitefield preached not to charm the ear, but to win souls. His hearers knew it, and felt the urgency of his appeal. Mr Lecky with justice observes that 'of no other preacher could it be more truly said that he preached as a dying man to dying men.'¹

This combination of oratorical power, with a passionate yearning for souls, would of itself

¹ *England in the Eighteenth Century*, II. ix. 569.

explain the immediate impression created by Whitefield's ministry. Before he had been many months ordained London crowded to hear him. 'One might, as it were, walk upon the people's heads. Thousands went away from the largest churches for want of room. . . . The people were all attentive, as hearing for eternity.' So he wrote himself, and without exaggeration. This early interest was sustained throughout Whitefield's career. The 'common people heard him,' as they had heard his Master, 'gladly'; but more fastidious judges also bore witness to his power. At the Countess of Huntingdon's house at Chelsea Bolingbroke was amongst his hearers, and 'was much moved at the discourse.'¹ David Garrick is reported to have exclaimed, 'I would give a hundred guineas if I could say "Oh!" like Mr Whitefield.'² David Hume bore even more striking testimony³:— 'Towards the close of one of Whitefield's sermons at Edinburgh, after a solemn pause, the preacher broke the silence with this appeal

¹ Southey's *Life of Wesley*, chap. xxv. ² Tyerman, ii. 355.

³ Quoted in J. P. Gledstone's *Life of Whitefield*, pp. 378-9.

to his audience: "The attendant angel is just about to leave this threshold, and ascend to heaven; and shall he ascend and not bear with him the news of one sinner, among all this multitude reclaimed from the error of his ways?" To give the greater effect to this appeal, the preacher stamped with his foot, lifted up his hands and eyes to heaven, and cried aloud, "Stop, Gabriel! stop, Gabriel! stop ere you enter the sacred portals, and yet carry with you the news of one sinner converted to God!" Hume said that this burst of oratory was accompanied with such animated, yet natural, action, that it surpassed anything he ever saw or heard in any other preacher.'

Not less decisive is the evidence of Benjamin Franklin. He disapproved of Whitefield's design to build an orphan home in Georgia. But—to take up his own narrative—'I happened, soon after, to attend one of his sermons, in the course of which I perceived he intended to finish with a collection, and I silently resolved he should get nothing from me. I had in my pocket a handful of copper money, three or four silver dollars, and five

pistoles in gold. As he proceeded, I began to soften, and concluded to give the copper. Another stroke of his oratory made me ashamed of that, and determined me to give the silver ; and he finished so admirably, that I emptied my pocket wholly into the collector's dish, gold and all ! At this sermon there was also one of our club, who, being of my sentiments respecting the building in Georgia, and suspecting a collection might be intended, had, by precaution, emptied his pockets before he came from home. Towards the conclusion of the discourse, however, he felt a strong inclination to give, and applied to a neighbour who stood near him to lend him some money for the purpose. The request was made to perhaps the only man in the company who was not affected by the preacher. His answer was, "At any other time, friend Hopkinson, I would lend thee freely ; but not now, for thee seems to me to be out of thy right senses." ¹

Perhaps no one was ever more dramatic in the pulpit than Whitefield. 'In some such manner,' said the Rev. Joseph Smith, in a

¹ Gillies' *Life of Whitefield*, p. 302.

sermon preached at Charlestown in 1740, 'I have been tempted to conceive of a seraph, were he sent down to preach among us, and to tell us what things he had seen and heard above.'¹ He described the Last Judgment in the terms of an actor in it. His picture of a ship overtaken by a tempest at sea worked up to this climax: 'Our masts are gone! The ship is on her beam-ends! What next?' 'The long-boat! Take to the long-boat!' shouted his audience of sailors. He illustrated the perils of sinners by the picture of a blind man, deserted by his dog, stumbling feebly over a desolate moor, and at last hovering upon the very edge of a precipice. 'Good God! He is gone!' exclaimed Lord Chesterfield.

Chesterfield, Hume, Bolingbroke, Garrick—these are strange witnesses to a preacher's power. Let us end by quoting one of another order, John Newton: 'I bless God that I have lived in his time. Many were the winter mornings I have got up at four, to attend his Tabernacle services at five. I have seen Moorfields as full of lanterns at these times as I

¹ *Sermons on Important Subjects* (Ed. 1828), p. 796.

suppose the Haymarket is full of flambeaux on an opera night. As a preacher, if any man were to ask me who was the second I ever had heard, I should be at some loss ; but in regard to the first, Mr Whitefield exceeds so far every other of my time, that I should be at none.'

'Whitefield,' says Canon Overton,¹ 'was a preacher and nothing more.' Mr Lecky puts the case with a greater fairness when he says² that 'the position of a roving evangelist was of all others that for which both the genius and the disposition of Whitefield were most suited.' To be such a preacher 'and nothing more' might satisfy the ambition of any man.

The text of the following sermons is, with some slight omissions and the correction of one or two obvious errors, that of the *Sermons on Important Subjects*, published by Henry Fisher, Son, & P. Jackson in 1828.

A. R. BUCKLAND.

¹ *The Evangelical Revival*, p. 32.

² *England in the Eighteenth Century*, II. ix. 567.

The first part of the history is a general account of the state of the country at the beginning of the reign of King Henry the First. It describes the various provinces and the different manners of the people. It also mentions the wars which were then going on between the king and his nobles.

The second part of the history is a particular account of the reign of King Henry the First. It describes the various events which happened during his reign, and the different wars which he fought. It also mentions the death of King Henry the First, and the beginning of the reign of King Stephen.

The third part of the history is a particular account of the reign of King Stephen. It describes the various events which happened during his reign, and the different wars which he fought. It also mentions the death of King Stephen, and the beginning of the reign of King Matilda.

THE REIGN OF KING STEPHEN

The reign of King Stephen was a very turbulent one. It was marked by a civil war between King Stephen and his cousin, King Matilda. The war lasted for several years, and ended in the death of King Stephen.

I

THE NECESSITY AND BENEFITS OF RELIGIOUS SOCIETY¹

‘Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.’—ECCLES. iv. 9-12.

AMONG the many reasons assignable for the sad decay of true Christianity, perhaps the neglecting to assemble ourselves together, in

¹ Preached in the Church of St Mary de Crypt, Gloucester—the church in which Whitefield was baptised, where he had first received the Holy Communion, and contiguous then to the school in which he had been educated—on the afternoon of June 27, 1736. Mr Tyerman (i. 51) thinks it ‘probably the same sermon he afterwards preached before the Religious Societies, at one of their quarterly meetings, in Bow Church, London.’ A large crowd, drawn together, Whitefield tells us, by curiosity, filled the church at Gloucester. The results of the sermon were remarkable: ‘A few mocked, but most for the present seemed struck; and I have since heard that a complaint has been made to the Bishop that I drove fifteen mad.’ On the following day the Bishop sent the young preacher five guineas—‘a great supply for one who had not a guinea in the world.’

religious societies, may not be one of the least. That I may therefore do my endeavour towards promoting so excellent a means of piety, I have selected a passage of Scripture, drawn from the experiences of the wisest of men, which being a little enlarged on, and illustrated, will fully answer my present design ; being to show, in the best manner I can, the necessity and benefits of society in general, and of religious society in particular.

‘ Two are better than one,’ etc.

From which words I shall take occasion to prove,

First, The truth of the wise man’s assertion, ‘ Two are better than one,’ and that in reference to society in general, and religious society in particular.

Secondly, To assign some reasons why two are better than one, especially as to the last particular. 1. Because men can raise up one another when they chance to slip : ‘ For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow.’ 2. Because they can impart heat to each other : ‘ Again, if two lie together, then they have heat ; but how can one be warm

alone?' 3. Because they can secure each other from those that do oppose them: 'And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.' From hence,

Thirdly, I shall take occasion to show, the duty incumbent on every member of a religious society.¹

And *Fourthly*, I shall draw an inference or two from what may be said; and then conclude with a word or two of exhortation.

I. I am to prove the truth of the wise man's assertion, that, 'two are better than one, and that in reference to society in general, and religious societies in particular.'

And how can this be done better, than by showing that it is absolutely necessary for the welfare both of the bodies and souls of men? Indeed, if we look upon man as he came out of the hands of his Maker, we imagine him to be perfect, entire, lacking nothing. But God,

¹ Religious Societies for mutual edification and for co-operation in good works, originated amidst the profligacy of the Restoration. They increased in number and influence after the Revolution of 1688. In 1710 there were forty-two in London and Westminster alone. They flourished also at Oxford, Nottingham, Bristol, Gloucester, and elsewhere.

whose thoughts are not as our thoughts, saw something still wanting to make Adam happy. And what was that? Why, an help meet for him. For thus speaketh the Scripture: 'And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make an help meet for him.'

Observe, God said, 'It is not good,' thereby implying that the creation would have been imperfect in some sort, unless an help was found out meet for Adam. And if this were the case of man before the fall; if a help was meet for him in a state of perfection; surely since the fall, when we come naked and helpless out of our mother's womb, when our wants increase with our years, and we can scarcely subsist a day without the mutual assistance of each other, well may we say, 'It is not good for man to be alone.'

Society, then, we see, is absolutely necessary in respect to our bodily and personal wants. If we carry our views farther, and consider mankind as divided into different cities, countries, and nations, the necessity of it will appear yet more evident. For how can com-

munities be kept up, or commerce carried on, without society? Certainly not at all, since Providence seems wisely to have assigned a particular product to almost each particular country, on purpose, as it were, to oblige us to be social; and hath so admirably mingled the parts of the whole body of mankind together, 'that the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the hand to the foot, I have no need of thee.'

Many other instances might be given of the necessity of society, in reference to our bodily, personal, and national wants. But what are all these when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, in comparison of the infinite greater need of it with respect to the soul? It was chiefly in regard to this better part, no doubt, that God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.' For, let us suppose Adam to be as happy as may be, placed as the Lord of the creation in the paradise of God, and spending all his hours in adoring and praising the blessed Author of his being; yet as his soul was the very copy of the divine nature, whose peculiar property it is to be communicative, without

the divine all-sufficiency he could not be completely happy, because he was alone, and incommunicative, nor even content in paradise, for want of a partner in his joys. God knew this, and therefore said, 'It is not good that the man shall be alone, I will make a help meet for him.' And though this proved a fatal means of his falling, yet that was not owing to any natural consequence of society ; but partly to that cursed apostate, who craftily lies in wait to deceive ; partly to Adam's own folly, in rather choosing to be miserable with one he loved, than trust in God to raise him up another spouse.

If we reflect, indeed, on that familiar intercourse our first parent could carry on with heaven in a state of innocence, we shall be apt to think he had as little need of society, as to his soul, as before we supposed him to have in respect to his body. But yet, as God and the holy angels were so far above him on the one hand, and the beasts so far beneath him on the other, there was nothing like having one to converse with, who was 'bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh.'

Man, then, could not be fully happy, we see, even in paradise, without a companion of his own species ; much less now he is driven out. For, let us view him a little in his natural estate now, since the fall, as 'having his understanding darkened, his mind alienated from the life of God ; as no more able to see his way wherein he should go, than a blind man to describe the sun ; that notwithstanding this, he must receive his sight ere he can see God : and that if he never sees him, he never can be happy. Let us view him in this light (or rather this darkness), and deny the necessity of society if we can. A divine revelation we find is absolutely necessary, we being by nature as unable to know as we are to do our duty. And how shall we learn, except one teach us? But were God to do this Himself, how should we, but with Moses, exceedingly quake and fear? Nor would the ministry of angels in this affair be without too much terror. It is necessary therefore (at least God's dealing with us has showed it to be so) that we should be drawn with the cords of a man ; and that a divine revelation being

granted, we should use one another's assistance, under God, to instruct each other in the knowledge, and to exhort one another to the practice, of those things which belong to our everlasting peace. This is undoubtedly the great end of society intended by God since the fall, and a strong argument it is why 'two are better than one,' and why we should 'not forsake the assembling ourselves together.'

But farther, let us consider ourselves as Christians, as having this natural veil, in some measure, taken off from our eyes, by the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, and so enabled to see what He requires of us. Let us suppose ourselves in some degree to have tasted the good word of life, and to have felt the powers of the world to come, influencing and moulding our souls into a religious frame; to be fully and heartily convinced that we are soldiers listed under the banner of Christ, and to have proclaimed open war, at our baptism, against the world, the flesh, and the devil; and have, perhaps, frequently renewed our obligations so to do by partaking of the Lord's Supper; that we are surrounded with

millions of foes without, and infested with a legion of enemies within ; that we are commanded to shine as lights in the world, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation ; that we are travelling to a long eternity, and need all imaginable helps to show, and encourage us in, our way thither. Let us, I say, reflect on all this, and then how shall each of us cry out, Brethren, what a necessary thing it is to meet together in religious societies !

The primitive Christians were fully sensible of this, and therefore we find them continually keeping up communion with each other : for what says the Scripture ? ‘ They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship,’ Acts ii. 42. Peter and John were no sooner dismissed by the great council, than they haste away to their companions. ‘ And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them,’ Acts iv. 23. Paul, as soon as converted, tarried three days with the disciples that were at Damascus, Acts ix. 19. And

Peter afterwards, when released from prison, immediately goes to the house of Mary, where there were great multitudes assembled, praying, Acts xii. 12. And it is reported of the Christians in after-ages, that they used to assemble together before daylight, to sing a psalm to Christ as God. So precious was the *communion of saints* in those days.

If it be asked what advantages we shall reap from such a procedure now? I answer, much every way. 'Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.'

II. Which directly leads me to my second general head, under which I was to assign some reasons why 'two are better than one,' especially in *religious society*.

1. A man in his present condition cannot

always stand upright, but by reason of the frailty of his nature cannot but fall. One eminent reason why two are better than one, or, in other words, one great advantage of religious society, is, 'that when they fall, the one will lift up his fellow.'

And an excellent reason this, indeed! For alas, when we reflect how prone we are to be drawn into error in our judgments, and into vice in our practice; and how unable, at least how very unwilling, to espy or correct our own miscarriages; when we consider how apt the world is to flatter us in our faults, and how few there are so kind as to tell us the truth: what an inestimable privilege must it be to have a set of true, judicious, hearty friends about us, continually watching over our souls, to inform us where we have fallen, and to warn us that we fall not again for the future! Surely it is such a privilege (to use the words of an eminent Christian), we shall never know the value thereof till we come to glory.

But this is not all; for supposing that we could always stand upright, yet whosoever

reflects on the difficulties of religion in general, and his own propensity to lukewarmness and indifference in particular, will find that he must be zealous as well as steady, if ever he expects to enter the kingdom of heaven. Here then the wise man points out to us another excellent reason why two are better than one. 'Again, if two lie together, then they have heat; but how can one be warm alone?' Which was the next thing to be considered.

2. A second reason why two are better than one, is, because they can impart heat to each other.

It is an observation no less true than common, that kindled coals if placed asunder soon go out, but if heaped together quicken and enliven each other, and afford a lasting heat. The same will hold good in the case now before us. If Christians kindled by the grace of God unite, they will quicken and enliven each other; but if they separate and keep asunder, no marvel if they soon grow cool or tepid. If two or three meet together in Christ's name, they will have heat: but how can one be warm alone?

Observe, 'How can one be warm alone?' The wise man's expressing himself by way of question implies an impossibility, at least a very great difficulty, to be warm in religion without company, where it may be had. Behold here, then, another excellent benefit flowing from religious society; it will keep us zealous, as well as steady, in the ways of godliness.

But to illustrate this a little farther by a comparison or two. Let us look upon ourselves (as was above hinted) as soldiers listed under Christ's banner; as going out with 'ten thousand, to meet one that cometh against us with twenty thousand'; as persons that are to 'wrestle not only with flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, and spiritual wickednesses in high places.' And then tell me, all ye that fear God, if it be not an invaluable privilege to have a company of fellow-soldiers continually about us, animating and exhorting each other to stand our ground, to keep our ranks, and manfully to follow the Captain of our salvation, though it be through a sea of blood?

Let us consider ourselves in another view, before mentioned, as persons travelling to a long eternity; as rescued by the free grace of God, in some measure, from our natural Egyptian bondage, and marching under the conduct of our spiritual Joshua, through the wilderness of this world, to the land of our heavenly Canaan. Let us farther reflect how apt we are to startle at every difficulty; to cry, 'There are lions! There are lions in the way! There are the sons of Anak' to be grappled with, ere we can possess the promised land! How prone we are, with Lot's wife, to look wishfully back on our spiritual Sodom, or, with the foolish Israelites, to long again for the flesh-pots of Egypt; and to return to our former natural state of bondage and slavery. Consider this, my brethren, and see what a blessed privilege it will be to have a set of Israelites indeed about us, always reminding us of the folly of any such cowardly design, and of the intolerable misery we shall run into, if we fall in the least short of the promised land.

More might be said on this particular, did

not the limits of a discourse of this nature oblige me to hasten,

3. To give a third reason, mentioned by the wise man in the text, why two are better than one ; because they can secure each other from enemies without : ' And if one prevail against him, yet two shall withstand him : and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken.'

Hitherto we have considered the advantages of religious societies, as a great preservative against falling (at least dangerously falling) into sin and lukewarmness, and that too from our own corruptions. But what says the wise son of Sirach ? ' My son, when thou goest to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation : ' and that not only from inward, but outward foes ; particularly from those two grand adversaries, the world and the devil : for no sooner will thine eye be bent heavenward, but the former will be immediately diverting it another way, telling thee thou needest not be singular in order to be religious ; that you may be a Christian without going so much out of the common road.

Nor will the devil be wanting in his artful

insinuations or impious suggestions, to divert or terrify thee from pressing forwards, 'that thou mayest lay hold on the crown of life.' And if he cannot prevail this way, he will try another : and, in order to make his temptation the more undiscerned, but withal more successful, he will employ perhaps some of thy nearest relatives or most powerful friends (as he set Peter on our blessed Master), who will always be bidding thee to spare thyself ; telling thee thou needest not to take so much pains ; that it is not so difficult a matter to get to heaven as some people would make of it, nor the way so narrow as others imagine it to be.

But see here the advantage of religious company ; for supposing thou findest thyself thus surrounded on every side, and unable to withstand such horrid (though seemingly friendly) counsels, haste away to thy companions, and they will teach thee a truer and better lesson ; they will tell thee that thou must be singular, if thou wilt be religious ; and that it is as impossible for a Christian, as for a city set upon a hill, to be hidden ; that if thou wilt be an almost Christian (and as good be

none at all) thou mayest live in the same idle, indifferent manner as thou seest most other people do ; but if thou wilt be not only almost, but altogether a Christian, they will inform thee thou must go a great deal farther ; that thou must not only faintly seek, but ‘ earnestly strive to enter in at the strait gate ’ : that there is but one way now to heaven, as formerly, even through the narrow passage of a sound conversion : and that in order to bring about this mighty work, thou must undergo a constant, but necessary discipline of fasting, watching, and prayer. And, therefore, the only reason why those friends give thee such advice, is, because they are not willing to take so much pains themselves ; or, as our Saviour told Peter on a like occasion, because they savour not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.

This, then, is another excellent blessing arising from religious society, that friends can hereby secure each other from those who oppose them. The devil is fully sensible of this, and therefore he has always done his utmost to suppress, and put a stop to, the

communion of saints. This was his grand artifice at the first planting of the gospel, to persecute the professors of it, in order to separate them. Which, though God, as He always will, overruled for the better; yet it shows what an enmity he has against Christians assembling themselves together. Nor has he yet left off his old stratagem, it being his usual way to entice us by ourselves, in order to tempt us; where, by being destitute of one another's help, he hopes to lead us captive at his will.

But, on the contrary, knowing his own interest is strengthened by society, he would first persuade us to neglect the communion of saints, and then bid us 'stand in the way of sinners,' hoping thereby to put us into the seat of the scornful. Judas and Peter are melancholy instances of this. The former had no sooner left his company at supper, but he went out and betrayed his Master; and the dismal downfall of the latter, when he would venture himself amongst a company of enemies, plainly shows us what the devil will endeavour to do, when he gets

us by ourselves. Had Peter kept his own company, he might have kept his integrity; but a single cord, alas! how quickly was it broken! Our blessed Saviour knew this full well, and therefore it is very observable that He always sent out His disciples two by two.

And now, after so many advantages to be reaped from religious society, may we not very justly cry out with the wise man in my text, 'Woe be to him that is alone; for when he falleth, he hath not another to lift him up!' When he is cold, he hath not a friend to warm him; when he is assaulted, he hath not a second to help him to withstand his enemy.

III. I now come to my third general head, under which was to be shown the several duties incumbent on every member of a religious society, as such, which are three. 1. Mutual reproof; 2. Mutual exhortation; 3. Mutual assisting and defending each other.

1. *Mutual reproof.* 'Two are better than one; for when they fall, the one will lift up his fellow.'

Now, reproof may be taken either in a

more extensive sense, and then it signifies our raising a brother by the gentlest means, when he falls into sin and error; or in a more restrained signification, as reaching no farther than those miscarriages which unavoidably happen in the most holy men living.

The wise man in the text supposes all of us subject to both: 'For when they fall (thereby implying that each of us may fall), the one will lift up his fellow.' From whence we may infer that 'when any brother is overtaken with a fault, he that is spiritual (that is, regenerate, and knows the corruption and weakness of human nature) ought to restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.' And why he should do so, the apostle subjoins a reason—'considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted;' that is, considering thy own frailty, lest thou also fall by the like temptation.

We are all frail, unstable creatures; and it is merely owing to the free grace and good providence of God that we run not into the same excess of riot with other men. Every offending brother, therefore, claims our pity

rather than our resentment ; and each member should strive to be the most forward, as well as the most gentle, in restoring him to his former state.

But supposing a person not to be overtaken, but to fall wilfully into a crime ; yet who art thou that deniest forgiveness to thy offending brother ? ‘ Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall.’ Take ye, brethren, the holy apostles as eminent examples for you to learn by, how you ought to behave in this matter. Consider how quickly they joined the right hand of fellowship with Peter, who had so wilfully denied his Master : for we find John and him together but two days after, John xx. 2. And verse 19, we find him assembled with the rest. So soon did they forgive, so soon associate with their sinful, yet relenting brother. ‘ Let us go, and do likewise.’

But there is another kind of reproof incumbent on every member of a religious society, namely, a gentle rebuke for some miscarriage or other, which, though not actually sinful, yet may become the occasion of sin. This indeed seems a more easy, but perhaps will

be found a more difficult point than the former; for when a person has really sinned, he cannot but own his brethren's reproof to be just; whereas, when it was only for some little misconduct, the pride that is in our natures will scarce suffer us to brook it. But however ungrateful this pill may be to our brother, yet if we have any concern for his welfare, it must be administered by some friendly hand or other. By all means then let it be applied; only, like a skilful physician, gild over the ungrateful pill, and endeavour, if possible, to deceive thy brother into health and soundness. 'Let all bitterness, and wrath, and malice, and evil-speaking be put away from you.' Let the patient know his recovery is the only thing aimed at, and that thou delightest not causelessly to grieve thy brother; then thou canst not want success.

2. *Mutual exhortation* is the second duty resulting from the words of the text: 'Again, if two lie together, then they have heat.'

Observe, the wise man supposes it as impossible for religious persons to meet together, and not to be the warmer for

each other's company, as for two persons to lie in the same bed, and yet freeze with cold. But now how is it possible to communicate heat to each other, without mutually stirring up the gift of God which is in us, by brotherly exhortation? Let every member then of a religious society write that zealous apostle's advice on the tables of his heart: 'See that ye exhort and provoke one another to love, and to good works; and so much the more, as you see the day of the Lord approaching.' Believe me, brethren, we have need of exhortation to rouse up our sleepy souls, to set us upon our watch against the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil; to excite us to renounce ourselves, to take up our crosses, and follow our blessed Master, and the glorious company of saints and martyrs, 'who through faith have fought the good fight, and are gone before us to inherit the promises.'

A third part, therefore, of the time wherein a religious society meets, seems necessary to be spent in this important duty; for what avails it to have our understandings enlightened by

pious reading, unless our wills are at the same time inclined and inflamed by mutual exhortation to put it in practice? Add also, that this is the best way both to receive and impart light, and the only means to preserve and increase that warmth and heat which each person first brought with him ; God so ordering this, as all other spiritual gifts, that 'to him that hath (that is, improves and communicates what he hath) shall be given ; but from him that hath not (or does not improve the heat he hath) shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have.' So needful, so essentially necessary, is exhortation to the good of society.

3. *Thirdly*, The text points out another duty incumbent on every member of a religious society—to defend each other from those that do oppose them : 'And if one prevail against him, yet two shall withstand him ; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.'

Here the wise man takes it for granted that offences will come, nay, and that they may prevail too. And this is no more than our blessed Master has long since told us. Not,

indeed, that there is anything in Christianity itself that has the least tendency to give rise to or promote such offences: no, on the contrary, it breathes nothing but unity and love.

But so it is, that ever since the fatal sentence pronounced by God, after our first parents' fall, 'I will put enmity between thy seed and her seed,' he that is born after the flesh, the unregenerate, unconverted sinner, has in all ages 'persecuted him that is born after the Spirit': and so it always will be. Accordingly we find an early proof given of this in the instance of Cain and Abel; of Ishmael and Isaac; and, of Jacob and Esau. And, indeed, the whole Bible contains little else but a history of the great and continued opposition between the children of this world and the children of God. The first Christians were remarkable examples of this; and though those troublesome times, blessed be God, are now over, yet the apostle has laid it down as a general rule, and all who are sincere experimentally prove the truth of it, that 'they that will live godly in Christ Jesus, must (to the end of the world, in some degree or other) suffer

persecution.' That therefore this may not make us desert our blessed Master's cause, every member should unite their forces in order to stand against it. And for the better effecting this, each would do well, from time to time, to communicate his experiences, grievances, and temptations, and beg his companions (first asking God's assistance, without which all is nothing) to administer reproof, exhortation, or comfort, as his case requires : so that 'if one cannot prevail against him, two shall withstand him ; and a threefold (much less a many-fold) cord will not be quickly broken.'

IV. But it is time for me to proceed to the fourth general thing proposed—to draw an inference or two from what has been said.

1. And first, if 'two are better than one,' and the advantages of religious society are so many and so great ; then it is the duty of every true Christian to set on foot, establish, and promote, as much as in him lies, societies of this nature. And I believe we may venture to affirm, that if ever a spirit of true Christianity be revived in the world, it must be brought about by some such means as this. Motives surely cannot be

wanting, to stir us up to this commendable and necessary undertaking; for, granting all hitherto advanced to be of no force, yet methinks the single consideration, that great part of our happiness in heaven will consist in the *communion of saints*, or that the interest as well as piety of those who differ from us is strengthened and supported by nothing more than their frequent meetings; either of these considerations, I say, one would think, should induce us to do our utmost to copy after their good example, and settle a lasting and pious communion of the saints on earth.

Add to this, that we find the kingdom of darkness established daily by such like means; and shall not the kingdom of Christ be set in opposition against it? Shall the children of Belial assemble and strengthen each other in wickedness; and shall not the children of God unite and strengthen themselves in piety? Shall societies on societies be countenanced for midnight revellings, and the promoting of vice, and scarcely one be found intended for the propagation of virtue? Be astonished, O heavens, at this!

2. But this leads me to a second inference ; namely, to warn persons of the great danger those are in, who, either by their subscriptions, presence, or approbation, promote societies of a quite opposite nature to religion.

And here I would not be understood to mean only those public meetings which are designed manifestly for nothing else but revellings and banquetings, for chambering and wantonness, and at which a modest heathen would blush to be present ; but also those seemingly innocent entertainments and meetings, which the politer part of the world are so very fond of, and spend so much time in ; but which, notwithstanding, keep as many persons from a sense of true religion, as doth intemperance, debauchery, or any other crime whatever. Indeed, whilst we are in this world, we must have proper relaxations, to fit us both for the business of our profession and religion. But then, for persons who call themselves Christians, that have solemnly vowed, at their baptism, to renounce the vanities of this sinful world ; that are commanded in Scripture 'to abstain from all appearance of evil, and to have their con-

versation in heaven' ; for such persons as these to support meetings, which (to say no worse of them) are vain and trifling, and have a natural tendency to draw off our minds from God, is absurd, ridiculous, and sinful. Surely two are not better than one in this case ; no, it is to be wished there was not one to be found concerned in it. The sooner we forsake the assembling ourselves together in such a manner, the better ; and no matter how quickly the cord that holds such societies (was it a thousand-fold) is broken.

But you, brethren, have not so learned Christ ; but, on the contrary, like true disciples of your Lord and Master, have, by the blessing of God (as this evening's solemnity abundantly testifies), happily formed yourselves into such societies, which, if duly attended on and improved, cannot but strengthen you in your Christian warfare, and ' make you fruitful in every good word and work.'

What remains for me but, as was proposed in the last place, to close what has been said, in a word or two, by way of exhortation, and to beseech you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to go on in the way you have begun,

and by a constant, conscientious attendance on your respective societies, to discountenance vice, encourage virtue, and build each other up in the knowledge and fear of God.

Only permit me to 'stir up your pure minds, by way of remembrance,' and to exhort you, 'if there be any consolation in Christ, any fellowship of the Spirit,' again and again to consider, that as all Christians in general, so all members of religious societies in particular, are in an especial manner as houses built upon a hill; and that therefore it highly concerns you to walk circumspectly towards those that are without, and to take heed to yourselves that your conversation in common life be as becometh such an open and peculiar profession of the gospel of Christ; knowing that the eyes of all men are upon you, narrowly to inspect every circumstance of your behaviour; and that every notorious, wilful miscarriage of any single member will, in some measure, redound to the scandal and dishonour of your whole fraternity.

Labour therefore, my beloved brethren, to let your practice correspond to your profession:

and think not that it will be sufficient for you to plead at the last day, Lord, have we not assembled ourselves together in Thy name, and enlivened each other by singing psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs? For verily I say unto you, notwithstanding this, our blessed Lord will bid you depart from Him; nay, you shall receive a greater damnation, if, in the midst of these great pretensions, you are found to be workers of iniquity.

But God forbid that any such evil should befall you; that there should be ever a Judas, a traitor, amongst such distinguished followers of our common Master. No, on the contrary, the excellency of your rules, the regularity of your meetings, and more especially your pious zeal in assembling in such a public and solemn manner so frequently in the year, persuade me to think that you are willing, not barely to seem, but to be in reality, Christians; and hope to be found at the last day, what you would be esteemed now, holy, sincere disciples of a crucified Redeemer.

Oh, may you always continue thus minded! and make it your daily, constant endeavour,

both by precept and example, to turn all your converse with, more especially those of your own societies, into the same most blessed spirit and temper. Thus will you adorn the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in all things: thus will you anticipate the happiness of a future state; and by attending on, and improving, the communion of saints on earth, be made meet to join the communion and fellowship of the spirits of just men made perfect, of the holy angels, nay, of the ever-blessed and eternal God in heaven.

Which God of His infinite mercy grant through Jesus Christ our Lord: to Whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour and praise, might, majesty, and dominion, now and for ever. *Amen.*

II

REGENERATION¹

‘ If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.’—2 COR. v. 17.

THE doctrine of our regeneration, or new birth in Christ Jesus, though one of the most fundamental doctrines of our holy religion ; though so plainly and often pressed on us in sacred writ, ‘ that he who runs may read ’ ; nay, though it is the very hinge on which the salvation of each of us turns, and a point too in which all sincere Christians, of every denomination, agree ; yet it is so seldom considered, and so little experimentally understood, by the generality of professors, that were we to judge of the truth of it by the experience of most who call themselves Christians, we should be apt to imagine they had ‘ not so much as heard ’

¹ ‘ The second sermon I ever made, the second sermon I ever preached,’ says Whitefield, ‘ was on this text.’ This sermon was preached at the Church of St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, and was published in August 1737.

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whether there be any such thing as regeneration, or not.

It is true, men for the most part are orthodox in the common articles of their Creed ; they believe ' there is but one God, and one Mediator between God and men, even the man Christ Jesus ' ; and that there is no other name given under heaven, whereby they can be saved, besides His : but then, tell them they must be regenerated, they must be born again, they must be renewed in the very spirit, in the inmost faculties of their minds, ere they can truly call Christ ' Lord, Lord, ' or have an evidence that they have any share in the merits of His precious blood ; and they are ready to cry out with Nicodemus, ' How can these things be ? ' or with the Athenians, on another occasion, ' What will this babbling say ? ' He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange doctrines, because we preach unto them Christ, and the new birth.

That I may therefore contribute my mite towards curing the fatal mistake of such persons, who would thus put asunder what God has inseparably joined together, and vainly

think they are justified by Christ, or have their sins forgiven, and His perfect obedience imputed to them, when they are not sanctified, have not their natures changed and made holy, I shall beg leave to enlarge on the words of the text in the following manner.

First, I shall endeavour to explain what is meant by being in Christ: 'If any man be in Christ.'

Secondly, What we are to understand by being a new creature: 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.'

Thirdly, I shall produce some arguments to make good the apostle's assertion. And,

Fourthly, I shall draw some inferences from what may be delivered, and then conclude with a word or two of exhortation.

First, I am to endeavour to explain what is meant by this expression in the text, 'If any man be in Christ.'

Now a person may be said to be in Christ two ways.

First, Only by an outward profession. And in this sense, every one that is called a Chris-

tian, or baptised into Christ's Church, may be said to be in Christ. But that this is not the sole meaning of the apostle's phrase before us, is evident, because then every one that names the name of Christ, or is baptised into His visible Church, would be a new creature. Which is notoriously false, it being too plain beyond all contradiction, that comparatively but few of those that are 'born of water' are 'born of the Spirit' likewise; to use another spiritual way of speaking, many are baptised with water who were never baptised with the Holy Ghost. To be in Christ, therefore, in the full import of the word, must certainly mean something more than a bare outward profession, or being called after His name. For, as this same apostle tells us, 'All are not Israelites that are of Israel'; so when applied to Christianity, all are not real Christians that are nominally such. Nay, this is so far from being the case, that our blessed Lord Himself informs us, that many who have prophesied or preached in His name, and in His name cast out devils and done many wonderful works, shall notwithstanding be dismissed at the last

day with, 'Depart from Me, I know you not, ye workers of iniquity.'—It remains, therefore, that this expression, 'if any man be in Christ,' must be understood in a

Second and closer signification,—to be *in Him* so as to partake of the benefits of His sufferings. To be in Him not only by an outward profession, but by an inward change and purity of heart, and cohabitation of His Holy Spirit. To be in Him, so as to be mystically united to Him by a true and lively faith, and thereby to receive spiritual virtue from Him, as the members of the natural body do from the head, or the branches from the vine. To be in Him in such a manner as the apostle, speaking of himself, acquaints us he knew a person was, 'I knew a man in Christ,' a true Christian; or, as he himself desires to be in Christ, when he wishes, in his Epistle to the Philippians, that he might be found in Him. This is undoubtedly the proper meaning of the apostle's expression in the words of the text; so that what he says in his Epistle to the Romans about circumcision, may very well be applied to the present subject: that he is not

a real Christian who is only one outwardly ; nor is that true baptism which is only outward in the flesh. But he is a true Christian who is one inwardly, whose baptism is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not merely in the water, whose praise is not of man, but of God. Or, as he speaks in another place, 'neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availeth anything (of itself), but a new creature.' Which amounts to what he here declares in the verse now under consideration, that if any man be truly and properly in Christ, he is a new creature. Which brings me to show,

Secondly, What we are to understand by being a *new creature*.—And here it is evident at the first view, that this expression is not to be so explained as though there were a physical change required to be made in us ; or as though we were to be reduced to our primitive nothings, and then created and formed again. For, supposing we were, as Nicodemus ignorantly imagined, to enter a 'second time into our mother's womb, and be born,' alas ! what would it contribute towards rendering us spiritually new creatures ? Since

'that which was born of the flesh would be flesh still;' we should be the same carnal persons as ever, being derived from carnal parents, and consequently receiving the seeds of all manner of sin and corruption from them.

No; it only means that we must be so altered as to the qualities and tempers of our minds, that we must entirely forget what manner of persons we once were. As it may be said of a piece of gold that was once in the ore, after it has been cleansed, purified, and polished, that it is a new piece of gold; as it may be said of a bright glass that has been covered over with filth, when it is wiped, and so become transparent and clear, that it is a new glass; or, as it might be said of Naaman, when he recovered of his leprosy, and his flesh returned unto him like the flesh of a young child, that he was a new man: so our souls, though still the same as to essence, yet are so purged, purified, and cleansed from their natural dross, filth, and leprosy, by the blessed influences of the Holy Spirit, that they may be properly said to be made anew.

How this glorious change is wrought in the

soul cannot easily be explained : for no one knows the ways of the Spirit, save the Spirit of God Himself. Not that this ought to be any argument against this doctrine ; for, as our blessed Lord observed to Nicodemus, when He was discoursing on this very subject, ' The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth ' ; and if we are told of natural things, and we understand them not, how much less ought we to wonder if we cannot immediately account for the invisible workings of the Holy Spirit ! The truth of the matter is this : the doctrine of our regeneration, or new birth in Christ Jesus, is hard to be understood by the natural man. But that there is really such a thing, and that each of us must be spiritually born again, I shall endeavour to show under my

Third general head, in which I was to produce some arguments to make good the apostle's assertion.

And here one would think it sufficient to affirm,—*First*, that God Himself, in His holy Word, has told us so. Many texts might be

produced out of the Old Testament to prove this point ; and, indeed, one would wonder how Nicodemus, who was a teacher in Israel, and who was therefore to instruct the people in the spiritual meaning of the law, should be so ignorant of this grand article, as we find he really was, by his asking our blessed Lord, when He was pressing on him this topic, How can these things be? Surely he could not forget how often the psalmist had begged of God to make him a 'new heart,' and 'to renew a right spirit within him'; as likewise, how frequently the prophets had warned the people to make them 'new hearts' and new minds, and so turn unto the Lord their God.

But not to mention these and such-like texts out of the Old Testament, this doctrine is so often and plainly repeated in the New, that, as I observed before, he who runs may read. For what says the great Prophet and Instructor of the world Himself: 'Except a man (every one that is naturally the offspring of Adam) be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' And lest we should be apt to slight this assertion, and, Nicodemus-

like, reject the doctrine, because we cannot immediately explain 'how this thing can be,' our blessed Master therefore affirms it, as it were, by an oath, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you,' or, as it may be read, I the Amen; I, who am Truth itself, say unto you, that it is the unalterable appointment of My Heavenly Father, that 'unless a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.'

Agreeable to this are those many passages we meet with in the Epistles, where we are commanded to be 'renewed in the spirit,' or, which was before explained, in the inmost faculties of our minds; 'to put off the old man, which is corrupt; and to put on the new man, which is created after God, in righteousness and true holiness'; that 'old things must pass away, and that all things must become new'; that we are to be 'saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.' Or, methinks, were there no other passage to be produced besides the words of the text, it would be full enough, since the apostle therein affirms, that 'If any man be in Christ, he is a *new creature*.'—Now, what can

be understood by all these different terms of being *born again*, of *putting off the old man*, and *putting on the new*, of being *renewed in the spirit of our minds*, and becoming *new creatures* ; but that Christianity requires a thorough, real, inward change of heart ? Do we think these and such-like forms of speaking are mere metaphors, words of a bare sound, without any real solid signification ? Indeed, it is to be feared, some men would have them interpreted so ; but, alas ! unhappy men ! they are not to be envied in their metaphorical interpretation : it will be well if they do not interpret themselves out of their salvation.

Multitudes of other texts might be produced to confirm this same truth, but those already quoted are so plain and convincing that one would imagine no one should deny it ; were we not told there are some, ‘ who having eyes see not, and ears hear not, and that will not understand with their hearts, or hear with their ears, lest they should be converted, and Christ should heal them.’ But I proceed to a—

Second argument ; and that shall be taken from the purity of God, and the present

corrupt and polluted state of man. God is described in Holy Scripture (and I speak to those who profess to know the Scripture) as a Spirit; as a Being of such infinite sanctity, as to be of 'purer eyes than to behold iniquity'; as to be so transcendently holy, that it is said 'the very heavens are not clean in His sight; and the angels themselves He chargeth with folly.'

On the other hand, man is described (and every regenerate person will find it true by his own experience) as a creature altogether 'conceived and born in sin'; as having 'no good thing dwelling in him'; as being 'carnal, sold under sin'; nay, as having a 'mind which is at enmity with God,' and such-like. And since there is such an infinite disparity, can any one conceive how a filthy, corrupted, polluted wretch can dwell with an infinitely pure and holy God before he is changed, and rendered in some measure like Him? Can He who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity dwell with it? Can He in whose sight the heavens are not clean, delight to dwell with uncleanness itself? No, we might

as well suppose light to have communion with darkness, or Christ to have concord with Belial. —But I pass on to a—

Third argument, which shall be founded on the consideration of the nature of that happiness God has prepared for those that unfeignedly love Him.—To enter indeed on a minute and particular description of heaven would be vain and presumptuous, since we are told that ‘eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things that are there prepared’ for the sincere followers of the holy Jesus, even in this life, much less in that which is to come. However, this we may venture to affirm in general, that as God is a Spirit, so the happiness He has laid up for His people is spiritual likewise: and consequently, unless our carnal minds are changed and spiritualised, we can never be made meet to partake of that inheritance with the saints in light.

It is true, we may flatter ourselves, that supposing we continue in our natural corrupt estate, and carry all our lusts along with us, we should, notwithstanding, relish heaven, were

God to admit us therein. And so we might, was it a Mahometan paradise, wherein we were to take our full swing in sensual delights. Since its joys are only spiritual, and no unclean thing can possibly enter those blessed mansions, there is an absolute necessity of our being changed, and undergoing a total renovation of our depraved natures, before we can have any taste or relish of those heavenly pleasures.

It is, doubtless, for this reason, that the apostle declares it to be the irrevocable decree of the Almighty, that 'without holiness (without being made pure by regeneration, and having the image of God thereby reinstamped upon the soul), no man shall see the Lord.' And it is very observable, that our Divine Master, in the famous passage before referred to, concerning the absolute necessity of regeneration, does not say, Unless a man be born again, he *shall not*, but 'unless a man be born again, he *cannot* enter into the kingdom of God.' It is founded in the very nature of things, that unless we have dispositions wrought in us suitable to the objects that are to enter-

tain us, we can take no manner of complacency or satisfaction in them.

For instance, what delight can the most harmonious music afford to a deaf, or what pleasure can the most excellent picture give to a blind, man? Can a tasteless palate relish the richest dainties, or a filthy swine be pleased with the finest garden of flowers? No: and what reason can be assigned for it? An answer is ready: Because they have neither of them any tempers of mind correspondent or agreeable to what they are to be diverted with.

And thus it is with the soul hereafter: for death makes no alteration in the soul, than as it enlarges its faculties, and makes it capable of receiving deeper impressions either of pleasure or pain. If it delighted to converse with God here, it will be transported with the sight of His glorious majesty hereafter. If it were pleased with the common saints on earth, it will be infinitely more so with the communion and society of holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect in heaven. But if the opposite of all this be true, we may assure ourselves, the soul

could not be happy, were God Himself to admit it (which He never will do) into the regions of the blessed.—But it is time for me to hasten to the—

Fourth argument, because Christ's redemption will not be complete in us, unless we are new creatures. If we reflect, indeed, on the first and chief end of our blessed Lord's coming, we shall find it was to be a propitiation for our sins, to give His life a ransom for many. But, then, if the benefits of our dear Redeemer's death were to extend no farther than barely to procure forgiveness of our sins, we should have as little reason to rejoice in it, as a poor condemned criminal, that is ready to perish by some fatal disease, would have in receiving a pardon from his judge. For Christians would do well to consider, that there is not only a legal hindrance to our happiness, as we are breakers of God's law, but also a moral impurity in our natures, which renders us incapable of enjoying heaven (as hath been already proved), till some mighty change have been wrought in us.

It is necessary, therefore, in order to make Christ's redemption complete, that we should have a grant of God's Holy Spirit to change our natures, and so prepare us for the enjoyment of that happiness our Saviour has purchased by His precious blood. Accordingly, the Holy Scriptures inform us, that whom Christ justifies, or whose sins He forgives, and to whom He imputes His perfect obedience, those He also sanctifies, purifies, and cleanses, and totally changeth their corrupted natures. As the Scripture also speaketh in another place, 'Christ is to us justification, sanctification, and then redemption.' But—

Fourthly, Proceed we now to the next general thing proposed, to draw some inferences from what has been delivered. And—

First, If he that is *in* Christ be a new creature, this may serve as a reproof for those who rest in a bare performance of outward duties, without perceiving any real inward change of heart.—We may observe a great many persons to be very punctual in the regular returns of public and private prayer, as likewise of receiving the Holy Communion, and perhaps

now and then too in keeping a fast. But here is the misfortune: they rest barely in the use of the means, and think all is over, when they have thus complied with those sacred institutions; whereas, were they rightly informed, they would consider that all the instituted means of grace, as prayer, fasting, hearing and reading the Word of God, receiving the blessed sacrament, and such like, are no farther serviceable to us, than as they are found to make us inwardly better, and to carry on the spiritual life in the soul. It is true, they are means; but then they are only means; they are part, but not the whole of religion: for if so, who more religious than the Pharisee? He fasted twice in the week, and gave tithes of all that he possessed, and yet was not justified, as our Saviour Himself informs us, in the sight of God.

You perhaps, like the Pharisee, may fast often, and make long prayers; you may, with Herod, hear good sermons gladly. But yet, if you continue vain and trifling, immoral or worldly-minded, and differ from the rest of your neighbours barely in going to church, or in complying with some outward performances,

are you better than they? No, in no wise; you are by far much worse: for if you use them, and at the same time abuse them, you thereby encourage others to think there is nothing in them, and therefore must expect to receive the greater damnation. But—

Secondly, If he that is *in* Christ be a new creature, then this may check the groundless presumption of another class of professors, who rest in the attainment of some moral virtues, and falsely imagine they are good Christians, if they are just in their dealings, temperate in their diet, and do no hurt or violence to any man. But if this were all that is requisite to make us Christians, why might not the heathens of old be good Christians, who were remarkable for these virtues? or St Paul before his conversion, who tells us that he lived in all good conscience? But we find he renounces all dependence on works of this nature, and only desires to be found in Christ, and to know the power of His resurrection, or have an experimental proof of receiving the Holy Ghost purchased for him by the death, and ensured and applied to him by the resurrection, of Jesus Christ.

The sum of the matter is this : Christianity includes morality, as grace does reason ; but if we are only mere moralists, if we are not inwardly wrought upon, and changed by the powerful operations of the Holy Spirit, and our moral actions proceed from a principle of a new nature, however we may call ourselves Christians, we shall be found naked at the great day, and in the number of those who have neither Christ's righteousness imputed to them for their justification in the sight, nor holiness enough in their souls as the consequence of that, in order to make them meet for the enjoyment of God. Nor,

Thirdly, Will this doctrine less condemn those who rest in a partial amendment of themselves, without experiencing a thorough, real, inward change of heart.—A little acquaintance with the world will furnish us with instances of no small number of persons, who, perhaps, were before openly profane ; but seeing the ill consequences of their vices, and the many worldly inconveniences it has reduced them to, on a sudden, as it were, grow civilised ; and thereupon flatter themselves that they are

very religious, because they differ a little from their former selves, and are not so scandalously wicked as once they were : whereas, at the same time, they shall have some secret darling sin or other, some beloved Delilah or Herodias, which they will not part with ; some hidden lust, which they will not mortify ; some vicious habit, which they will not take pains to root out. But wouldest thou know, O vain man ! whoever thou art, what the Lord thy God requires of thee ? Thou must be informed, that nothing short of a thorough sound conversion will fit thee for the kingdom of heaven. It is not enough to turn from profaneness to civility ; but thou must turn from civility to godliness. Not only some, but 'all things must become new' in thy soul. It will profit thee but little to do many things, if yet some one thing thou lackest. In short, thou must not only be an almost, but altogether a new creature, or in vain thou boastest that thou art a Christian.

Fourthly, If he that is in Christ be a new creature, then this may be prescribed as an infallible rule for every person, of whatever

denomination, age, degree, or quality, to judge himself by ; this being the only solid foundation whereon we can build a well-grounded assurance of pardon, peace, and happiness. We may indeed depend on the broken reed of an external profession ; we may think we are good enough, if we lead such sober, honest, moral lives, as many heathens did. We may imagine we are in a safe condition, if we attend on the public offices of religion, and are constant in the duties of our closets. But unless all these tend to reform our lives, and change our hearts, and are only used as so many channels of divine grace : as I told you before, so I tell you again, Christianity will profit you nothing.

Let each of us therefore seriously put this question to our hearts : Have we received the Holy Ghost since we believed ? Are we new creatures in Christ, or no ? At least, if we are not so yet, is it our daily endeavour to become such ? Do we constantly and conscientiously use all the means of grace required thereto ? Do we fast, watch, and pray ? Do we, not lazily seek, but laboriously strive to enter in

at the strait gate? In short, do we renounce our own righteousness, take up our crosses, and follow Christ? If so, we are in that narrow way which leads to life; the good seed is sown in our hearts, and will, if duly watered and nourished by a regular persevering use of all the means of grace, grow up to eternal life.

But, on the contrary, if we have only heard, and know not experimentally, whether there be any Holy Ghost; if we are strangers to fasting, watching, and prayer, and all the other spiritual exercises of devotion; if we are content to go in the broad way, merely because we see most other people do so, without once reflecting whether it be the right one or not; in short, if we are strangers, nay, enemies to the Cross of Christ, by lives of worldly-mindedness and sensual pleasure, and thereby make others think that Christianity is but an empty name, a bare formal profession; if this be the case, I say, Christ is as yet dead in vain to us. We are under the guilt of our sins, and are unacquainted with a true and thorough conversion.

But, beloved, I am persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation though I thus speak ; I would humbly hope that you are sincerely persuaded, that he who has not the Spirit of Christ is none of His ; and that unless the Spirit which raised Jesus from the dead dwell in you here, neither will your mortal bodies be quickened by the same Spirit to dwell with Him hereafter.

Let me, therefore (as was proposed in the *last* place), earnestly exhort you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to act suitably to those convictions, and to live as Christians, that are commanded in holy writ, to 'put off their former conversation concerning the old man, and to put on the new man, which is created after God in righteousness and true holiness.'

It must be owned, indeed, that this is a great and difficult work ; but, blessed be God, it is not impossible. Many thousands of happy souls have been assisted by a divine power to bring it about. And why should we despair of success ? Is God's hand shortened, that it cannot save ? Was He the

God of our fathers ; is He not the God of their children also ? Yes, doubtless, of their children also. It is a task likewise that will put us to some pain ; it will oblige us to part with some lust, to break with some friend, to mortify some beloved passion, which may be exceeding dear to us, and perhaps as hard to leave, as to cut off a right hand or pluck out a right eye. But what of all this ? Will not the being made a real living member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, abundantly make amends for all this trouble ? Undoubtedly it will. The setting about and carrying on this great and necessary work, perhaps may, nay, assuredly will, expose us also to the ridicule of the unthinking part of mankind, who will wonder that we run not into the same excess of riot with themselves ; and because we deny our sinful appetites, and are not conformed to this world, being commanded in Scripture to do the one, and to have our conversation in heaven, in opposition to the other, they may count our lives folly, and our end to be without honour. But will not the being numbered

among the saints, and shining as the stars for ever and ever, be a more than sufficient recompense for all the ridicule, calumny, or reproach, we can possibly meet with here?

Indeed, were there no other reward attending a thorough conversion, but that peace of God, which is the unavoidable consequence of it, and which, even in this life, 'passeth all understanding,' we should have great reason to rejoice. But when we consider that this is the least of those mercies God has prepared for those that are in Christ, and become new creatures; that this is but the beginning of an eternal succession of pleasures; that the day of our deaths, which the unconverted, unrenewed sinner must so much dread, will be, as it were, but the first day of our new birth, and open to us an everlasting scene of happiness and comfort; in short, if we remember, that they who are regenerate and born again, have a real title to all the glorious promises of the Gospel, and are infallibly certain of being as happy, both here and hereafter, as an all-wise, all-gracious, all-powerful God can make them; methinks, everyone that has but the

least concern for the salvation of his precious and immortal soul, having such promises, such a hope, such an eternity of happiness set before him, should never cease watching, praying, and striving, till he find a real, inward saving change wrought in his heart, and thereby doth know of a truth, that he dwells in Christ, and Christ in him; that he is a new creature, therefore a child of God; that he is already an inheritor, and will ere long be an actual possessor, of the kingdom of heaven.—Which God of His infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

III

A PENITENT HEART THE BEST NEW YEAR'S GIFT

‘Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.’—
LUKE xiii. 3.

WHEN we consider how heinous and aggravating our offences are in the sight of a just and holy God, that they bring down His wrath upon our heads, and occasion us to live under His indignation ; how ought we thereby to be deterred from evil, or at least engaged to study to repent thereof, and not commit the same again ! But man is so thoughtless of an eternal state, and has so little consideration of the welfare of his immortal soul, that he can sin without any thought that he must give an account of his actions at the day of judgment. Or if he, at times, has any reflections on his behaviour, they do not drive him to true repentance. He may, for a short time, refrain from falling into some gross sins which he had

lately committed ; but then, when the temptation comes again with power, he is carried away with the lust : and thus he goes on promising and resolving, and in breaking both his resolutions and his promises, as fast almost as he has made them. This is highly offensive to God, it is mocking Him.

My brethren, when grace is given us to repent truly, we shall turn wholly unto God ; and let me beseech you to repent of your sins, for the time is hastening when you will have neither time nor call to repent ; there is none in the grave, whither we are going ; but do not be afraid, for God often receives the greatest sinner to mercy through the merits of Christ Jesus ; this magnifies the riches of His free grace ; and should be an encouragement for you, who are great and notorious sinners, to repent, for He will have mercy upon you, if you through Christ return unto Him.

St Paul was an eminent instance of this : he speaks of himself as 'the chief of sinners,' and he declares how God showed mercy unto him. Christ loves to show mercy unto sinners, and if you repent, He will have mercy upon

you. But as no word is more mistaken than that of repentance, I shall,

- I. Show you what the nature of repentance is.
- II. Consider the several parts and causes of repentance.
- III. I shall give you some reasons why repentance is necessary to salvation. And,
- IV. Exhort all of you, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, to endeavour after repentance.

I. Repentance, my brethren, in the first place, as to its nature, is the carnal and corrupt disposition of men being changed into a renewed and sanctified disposition. A man that has truly repented, is truly regenerated: it is a different word for one and the same thing; the motley mixture of the beast and devil is gone: there is, as it were, a new creation wrought in your hearts. If your repentance is true, you are renewed throughout, both in soul and body; your understandings are enlightened with the knowledge of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ; and your wills, which were stubborn, obstinate, and hated all

good, are obedient and conformable to the will of God. Indeed, our deists tell us, that man now has a free will to do good, to love God, and to repent when he will : but indeed there is no free will in any of you, but to sin ; nay, your free will leads you so far, that you would, if possible, pull God from His throne.

This may, perhaps, offend the Pharisees ; but (it is the truth in Christ which I speak, I lie not) every man by his own natural will hates God ; but when he is turned unto the Lord by evangelical repentance, then his will is changed ; then your consciences, now hardened and benumbed, shall be quickened and awakened ; then your hard hearts shall be melted, and your unruly affections shall be crucified. Thus, by that repentance, the whole soul will be changed, you will have new inclinations, new desires, and new habits.

You may see how vile we are by nature, that it requires so great a change to be made upon us, to recover us from this state of sin ; and therefore the consideration of our dreadful state should make us earnest with God to change our condition, and that change true repentance

implies. Therefore, my brethren, consider how hateful your ways are to God, while you continue in sin; how abominable you are unto Him, while you run into evil. You cannot be said to be Christians while you are hating Christ, and His people. True repentance will entirely change you, the bias of your souls will be changed, then you will delight in God, in Christ, in His law, and in His people; you will then believe that there is such a thing as inward feeling, though now you may esteem it madness and enthusiasm; you will not then be ashamed of becoming fools for Christ's sake; you will not regard being scoffed at; it is not then their pointing after you and crying, 'Here comes another troop of His followers,' will dismay you; no, your soul will abhor such proceedings, the ways of Christ and His people will be your whole delight.

It is the nature of such repentance to make a change, and the greatest change that can be made here in the soul. Thus you see what repentance implies in its own nature; it denotes an abhorrence of all evil, and a forsaking of it. I shall now proceed,

II. To show you the parts of it, and the causes concurring thereto.

The parts are, sorrow, hatred, and an entire forsaking of sin.

Our sorrow and grief for sin must not spring merely from a fear of wrath; for if we have no other ground but that, it proceeds from self-love, and not from any love to God; and if love to God is not the chief motive of your repentance, your repentance is in vain, and not to be esteemed true.

Many, in our days, think their crying, God forgive me! or, Lord have mercy upon me! or I am sorry for it! is repentance, and that God will esteem it as such: but indeed they are mistaken; it is not the drawing near to God with our lips, while our hearts are far from Him, which He regards. Repentance does not come by fits and starts; no, it is one continued act of our lives; for as we daily commit sin, so we need a daily repentance before God, to obtain forgiveness for those sins we commit.

It is not your confessing yourselves to be sinners, it is not knowing your condition to be sad and deplorable, so long as you continue in

your sins : your care and endeavours should be, to get the heart thoroughly affected therewith, that you may feel yourselves to be lost and undone creatures, for Christ came to save such as are lost ; and if you are enabled to groan under the weight and burden of your sins, then Christ will ease you and give you rest.

And till you are thus sensible of your misery and lost condition, you are a servant to sin and to your lusts, under the bondage and command of Satan, doing his drudgery : thou art under the curse of God, and liable to His judgment. Consider how dreadful thy state will be at death, and after the day of judgment, when thou wilt be exposed to such miseries which the ear hath not heard, neither can the heart conceive, and that to all eternity, if you die impenitent.

But I hope better things of you, my brethren, though I thus speak, and things which accompany salvation ; go to God in prayer, and be earnest with Him, that by His Spirit He would convince you of your miserable condition by nature, and make you truly sensible thereof.

Oh, be humbled, be humbled, I beseech you, for your sins! Having spent so many years in sinning, what canst thou do less, than be concerned to spend some hours in mourning and sorrowing for the same, and be humbled before God?

Look back into your lives, call to mind thy sins, as many as possibly thou canst, the sins of thy youth, as well as of thy riper years; see how you have departed from a gracious Father, and wandered in the way of wickedness, in which you have lost yourselves, the favour of God, the comforts of His Spirit, and the peace of your consciences; then go and beg pardon of the Lord, through the blood of the Lamb, for the evil thou hast committed, and for the good thou hast omitted. Consider, likewise, the heinousness of thy sins; see what very aggravating circumstances thy sins are attended with, how you have abused the patience of God, which should have led you to repentance; and when thou findest thy heart hard, beg of God to soften it, cry mightily unto Him, and He will take away thy stony heart, and give thee a heart of flesh.

Resolve to leave all thy sinful lusts and pleasures ; renounce, forsake, and abhor thy old sinful course of life, and serve God in holiness and righteousness all the remaining part of life. If you lament and bewail past sins, and do not forsake them, your repentance is in vain, you are mocking of God, and deceiving your own soul ; you must put off the old man, with his deeds, before you can put on the new man, Christ Jesus.

You, therefore, who have been swearers and cursers, you, who have been harlots and drunkards, you, who have been thieves and robbers, you, who have hitherto followed the sinful pleasures and diversions of life, let me beseech you, by the mercies of God in Christ Jesus, that you would no longer continue therein, but that you would forsake your evil ways, and turn unto the Lord, for He waiteth to be gracious unto you, He is ready, He is willing, to pardon you of all your sins. Do not expect Christ to pardon you of sin, when you run into it, and will not abstain from complying with the temptations ; but, if you will be persuaded to abstain from evil and

choose the good, to return unto the Lord, and repent of your wickedness, He hath promised He will abundantly pardon you, He will heal your backslidings, and will love you freely.

Resolve now this day to have done with your sins for ever ; let your old ways and you be separated ; you must resolve against it, for there can be no true repentance without a resolution to forsake it. Resolve for Christ, resolve against the devil and his works, and go on fighting the Lord's battles against the devil and his emissaries ; attack him in the strongest holds he has, fight him as men, as Christians, and you will soon find him to be a coward ; resist him, and he will fly from you.

Resolve, through grace, to do this, and your repentance is half done : but then take care that you do not ground your resolutions on your own strength, but in the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ ; He is the way, He is the truth, and He is the life ; without His assistance you can do nothing, but through His grace strengthening thee thou wilt be enabled to do all things ; and the more thou art sensible of thy own weakness and inability, the more

ready Christ will be to help thee ; and what can all the men of the world do to thee when Christ is for thee ? Thou wilt not regard what they say against thee, for thou wilt have the testimony of a good conscience.

Resolve to cast thyself at the feet of Christ in subjection to Him, and throw thyself into the arms of Christ for salvation by Him. Consider, my dear brethren, the many invitations He has given you to come unto Him, to be saved by Him ; God has ' laid on Him the iniquity of us all.' Oh, let me prevail with you, above all things, to make choice of the Lord Jesus Christ, resign yourselves unto Him, take Him, oh, take Him upon His own terms ; and whosoever thou art, how great a sinner soever thou hast been, this evening, in the name of the great God, do I offer Jesus Christ unto thee ; as thou valuest thy life and soul, refuse Him not, but stir up thyself to accept of the Lord Jesus, take Him wholly as He is, for He will be applied wholly unto you, or else not at all. Jesus Christ must be your whole wisdom, Jesus Christ must be your whole righteousness, Jesus Christ must be your

whole sanctification, or He will never be your eternal redemption.

What though you have been ever so wicked and profligate, yet if you will now abandon your sins, and turn unto the Lord Jesus Christ, thou shalt have Him given to thee, and all thy sins shall be freely forgiven. Oh, why will you neglect the great work of your repentance ; do not defer the doing of it one day longer, but to-day, even now, take that Christ who is freely offered to you.

Now, as to the causes hereof, the first cause is God ; He is the Author, ' we are born of God,' God hath begotten us, even God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ; it is He that stirs us up to will and to do of His own good pleasure : and another cause is, God's free grace ; it is owing to the ' riches of His free grace,' my brethren, that we have been prevented from going down to hell long ago ; it is because the compassions of the Lord fail not, they are new every morning, and fresh every evening.

Sometimes the instruments are very unlikely : a poor despised minister or member of Jesus

Christ may, by the power of God, be made an instrument in the hands of God of bringing you to true evangelical repentance ; and this may be done to show that the power is not in men, but that it is entirely owing to the good pleasure of God ; and if there has been any good done among any of you, by preaching the Word, as I trust there has, though it were preached in a field, if God has met and owned us, and blessed His Word, though preached by an enthusiastic babbler, a boy, a madman ; I do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice, let foes say what they will. I shall now,

Thirdly, Show the reasons why repentance is necessary to salvation.

And this, my brethren, is plainly revealed to us in the Word of God, ' The soul that does not repent and turn unto the Lord, shall die in its sins, and their blood shall be required at their own hands.' It is necessary, as we have sinned, we should repent : for a holy God could not, nor ever can, or will, admit anything that is unholy into His presence : this is the beginning of grace in the soul ; there must be a change in heart and life, before there can be a dwelling

with a holy God. You cannot love sin and God too, you cannot love God and Mammon ; no unclean person can stand in the presence of God, it is contrary to the holiness of His nature ; there is a contrariety between the holy nature of God and the unholy nature of carnal and unregenerate men.

What communication can there be between a sinless God and creatures full of sin, between a pure God and impure creatures ? If you were to be admitted into heaven, with your present tempers, in your impenitent condition, heaven itself would be a hell to you ; the songs of angels would be as enthusiasm, and would be intolerable to you ; therefore you must have these tempers changed, you must be holy as God is : He must be your God here, and you must be His people, or you will never dwell together to all eternity. If you hate the ways of God, and cannot spend an hour in His service, how will you think to be easy to all eternity, in singing praises to Him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever ?

And this is to be the employment, my brethren, of all those who are admitted into

this glorious place, where neither sin nor sinner is admitted, where no scoffer ever can come, without repentance from his evil ways, a turning unto God, and a cleaving unto Him. This must be done before any can be admitted into the glorious mansions of God, which are prepared for all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth. Repent ye then of all your sins. Oh, that it were in my power, I would place all of you, yea, you my scoffing brethren, and the greatest enemy I have on earth, at the right hand of Jesus; but this I cannot do: however, I advise and exhort you, with all love and tenderness, to make Jesus your refuge: fly to Him for relief. Jesus died to save such as you; He is full of compassion; and if you go to Him, as poor, lost, undone sinners, Jesus will give you His Spirit; you shall live and reign, and reign and live, you shall love and live, and live and love, with this Jesus to all eternity.

I am, *Fourthly*, to exhort all of you, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, to repent of all your sins, and turn unto the Lord.

And I shall speak to each of you; for you

have either repented, or you have not, you are believers in Christ Jesus, or unbelievers.

And first, you who never have truly repented of your sins, and never have truly forsaken your lusts, be not offended if I speak plainly to you ; for it is love, love to your souls, that constrains me to speak : I shall lay before you your danger, and the misery to which you are exposed, while you remain impenitent in sin. And oh, that this may be a means of making you fly to Christ for pardon and forgiveness !

While thy sins are not repented of, thou art in danger of death ; and if you should die, you would perish for ever. There is no hope of any who live and die in their sins, but that they will dwell with devils and damned spirits to all eternity. And how do we know we shall live much longer ? we are not sure of seeing our own habitations this night in safety. What mean ye, then, being at ease and pleasure while your sins are not pardoned ? As sure as ever the Word of God is true, if you die in that condition, you are shut out of all hope and mercy for ever, and shall pass into easeless and endless misery.

What are all thy pleasures and diversions worth? They last but for a moment, they are of no worth, and but of short continuance. And sure it must be gross folly, eagerly to pursue those sinful lusts and pleasures, which war against the soul, which tend to harden the heart, and keep us from closing with the Lord Jesus; indeed, these are destructive of our peace here and, without repentance, will be of our peace hereafter.

O the folly and madness of this sensual world! Sure if there were nothing in sin but present slavery, it would keep an ingenuous spirit from it. But to do the devil's drudgery! And if we do that, we shall have his wages, which is eternal death and condemnation. Oh, consider this, my guilty brethren, you that think it no crime to swear, to drink, or to scoff and jeer at the people of God; consider how your voices will then be changed, and you, that counted their lives madness, and their end without honour, shall howl and lament at your own madness and folly, that should bring you to so much woe and distress! Then you will lament and bemoan your own dreadful con-

dition : but it will be of no signification ; for He that is now your merciful Saviour will then become your inexorable Judge. Now He is easy to be entreated ; but then, all your tears and prayers will be in vain : for God hath allotted to every man a day of grace, a time of repentance, which, if he does not improve, but neglects and despises the means which are offered to him, he cannot be saved.

Consider, therefore, while you are going on in a course of sin and unrighteousness, I beseech you, my brethren, to think of the consequence that will attend your thus mispending your precious time ; your souls are worth being concerned about : for if you can enjoy all the pleasures and diversions of life, at death you must leave them ; that will put an end to all your worldly concerns. And will it not be very deplorable, to have your good things here, all your earthly, sensual, devilish pleasures, which you have been so much taken up with, all over ? and the thought for how trifling a concern thou hast lost eternal welfare, will gnaw thy very soul.

Thy wealth and grandeur will stand in no

stead ; thou canst carry nothing of them into the other world : then the consideration of thy uncharitableness to the poor, and the ways thou didst take to obtain thy wealth, will be a very hell unto thee.

Now you enjoy the means of grace, as the preaching of His word, prayer, and sacraments ; and God has sent His ministers out into the fields and highways, to invite, to woo you to come in. But they are tiresome to thee, thou hadst rather be at thy pleasures. Ere long, my brethren, they will be over, and you will be no more troubled with them. But then thou wouldest give ten thousand worlds for one moment of that merciful time of grace which thou hast abused ; then thou wilt cry for a drop of that precious blood which now you trample under your feet ; then you will wish for one more offer of mercy, for Christ and His free grace to be offered to you again ; but your crying will be in vain : for as you would not repent here, God will not give you an opportunity to repent hereafter ; if you would not in Christ's time, you shall not in your own.

In what a dreadful condition will you then be? What horror and astonishment will possess your souls? Then all thy lies and oaths, thy scoffs and jeers, at the people of God, all thy filthy and unclean thoughts and actions, thy misspent time in balls, plays, and assemblies, thy spending whole evenings at cards, dice, and masquerades, thy frequenting of taverns and alehouses, thy worldliness, covetousness, and thy uncharitableness, will be brought at once to thy remembrance, and at once charged upon thy guilty soul! And how can you bear the thoughts of these things? Indeed I am full of compassion towards you, to think that this should be the portion of any who now hear me. These are truths, though awful ones; my brethren, these are the truths of the Gospel; and if there were not a necessity for thus speaking, I would willingly forbear: for it is no pleasing subject to me, any more than it is to you; but it is my duty to show you the dreadful consequences of continuing in sin. I am only now acting the part of a skilful surgeon, that searches a wound before

he heals it. I would show you your danger first, that deliverance may be the more readily accepted by you.

Consider, that however you may be for putting the evil day away from you, and are now striving to hide your sins, at the day of judgment there shall be a full discovery of all; hidden things on that day shall be brought to light; and after all thy sins have been revealed to the whole world, then you must depart into everlasting fire in hell, which will not be quenched night and day; it will be without intermission, without end. Oh, then, what stupidity and senselessness hath possessed your hearts, that you are not frightened from your sins! The fear of Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace made men do anything to avoid it; and shall not an everlasting fire make men, make you, do anything to avoid it?

Oh, that this would awaken and cause you to humble yourselves for your sins, and to beg pardon for them, that you might find mercy in the Lord!

Do not go away, let not the devil hurry you away before the sermon is over; but

stay, and you shall have Jesus offered to you, who has made full satisfaction for all your sins.

Let me beseech you to cast away your transgressions, to strive against sin, to watch against it, and to beg power and strength from Christ, to keep down the power of those lusts that hurry you on in your sinful ways.

But if you will not do any of these things, if you are resolved to sin on, you must expect eternal death to be the consequence ; you must expect to be seized with horror and trembling, with horror and amazement, to hear the dreadful sentence of condemnation pronounced against you : and then you will run, and call upon the mountains to fall on you, to hide you from the Lord, and from the fierce anger of His wrath.

Had you now a heart to turn from your sins unto the living God, by true and unfeigned repentance, and to pray unto Him for mercy, in and through the merits of Jesus Christ, there were hope. But at the day of judgment thy prayers and tears will be of no signification ; they will be of no service to thee ; the Judge will not be entreated by thee : as you would

not hearken to Him when He called unto thee, but despised both Him and His ministers, and would not leave your iniquities; therefore, on that day He will not be entreated, notwithstanding all thy cries and tears; for God Himself hath said, 'Because I have called, and you refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded, but ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would have none of My reproof; I will also laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you: then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer, they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me.'

Now, you may call this enthusiasm and madness; but at that great day, if you repent not of your sins here, you will find, by woeful experience, that your own ways were madness indeed; but God forbid it should be left undone till then! seek after the Lord while He is to be found; call upon Him while He is near, and you shall find mercy; repent this hour, and Christ will joyfully receive you.

What say you? Must I go to my Master, and tell Him you will not come unto Him, and will have none of His counsels? No; do not send me on so unhappy an errand: I cannot, I will not tell Him any such thing. Shall not I rather tell Him you are willing to repent and to be converted, to become new men, and take up a new course of life? This is the only wise resolution you can make. Let me tell my Master that you will come unto and will wait upon Him: for if you do not, it will be your ruin in time, and to eternity.

You will at death wish you had lived the life of the righteous, that you might have died his death. Be advised, then; consider what is before you, Christ and the world, holiness and sin, life and death: choose now for yourselves; let your choice be made immediately, and let that choice be your dying choice.

If you would not choose to die in your sins, to die drunkards, to die adulterers, to die swearers and scoffers, live not out this night in the dreadful condition you are in. Some of you, it may be, may say, You have

not power, you have no strength : but have not you been wanting to yourselves in such things that were within your power? Have you not as much power to go to hear a sermon, as to go into a playhouse, or to a ball, or masquerade? You have as much power to read the Bible, as to read plays, novels, and romances ; and you can associate as well with the godly, as with the wicked and profane. This is but an idle excuse, my brethren, to go on in your sins ; and if you will be found in the means of grace, Christ hath promised He will give you strength. While Peter was preaching, the Holy Ghost fell on all that heard the word : how then should you be found in the way of your duty ! Jesus Christ will then give thee strength ; He will put His Spirit within thee ; thou shalt find He will be thy wisdom, thy righteousness, thy sanctification, and thy redemption. Do but try what a gracious, a kind, and loving Master He is, He will be a help to thee in all thy burdens : and if the burden of sin be on thy soul, go to Him as weary and heavy laden, and thou shalt find rest.

Do not say, that your sins are too many and too great to expect to find mercy. No; be they ever so many, or ever so great, the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ will cleanse you from all sins. God's grace, my brethren, is free, rich, and sovereign. Manasseh was a great sinner, and yet he was pardoned; Zacchæus was gone far from God, and went out to see Christ, with no other view but to satisfy his curiosity; and yet Jesus met him, and brought salvation to his house. Manasseh was an idolater and murderer, yet he received mercy; the other was an oppressor and extortioner, who had gotten riches by fraud and deceit, and by grinding the faces of the poor: so did Matthew too; and yet they found mercy.

Have you been blasphemers and persecutors of the saints and servants of God? So was St Paul, yet he received mercy. Have you been common harlots, filthy and unclean persons? So was Mary Magdalene, and yet she received mercy. Hast thou been a thief? The thief upon the cross found mercy. I despair of none of you, however vile and profligate you have been; I say, I despair

of none of you, especially when God has had mercy on such a wretch as I am.

Remember the poor Publican, how he found favour with God, when the proud, self-conceited Pharisee, who, puffed up with his own righteousness, was rejected. And if you will go to Jesus, as the poor Publican did, under a sense of your own unworthiness, you shall find favour as he did: there is virtue enough in the blood of Jesus to pardon greater sinners than He has yet pardoned. Then be not discouraged, but come unto Jesus, and you will find Him ready to help in all thy distresses, to lead thee into all truth, to bring thee from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

Do not let the devil deceive you, by telling you, that then all your delights and pleasures will be over. No; this is so far from depriving you of all pleasure, that it is an inlet unto unspeakable delights, peculiar to all who are truly regenerated. The new birth is the very beginning of a life of peace and comfort; and the greatest pleasantness is to be found in the ways of holiness. Solomon, who had experience of all other pleasures, yet saith of the

ways of godliness, 'That all her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are paths of peace.' Then sure you will not let the devil deceive you ; it is all he wants, it is that he aims at, to make religion appear to be melancholy, miserable, and enthusiastic : but let him say what he will, give not ear to him, regard him not, for he always was and will be a liar.

What words, what entreaties, shall I use, to make you come unto the Lord Jesus Christ? The little love I have experienced since I have been brought from sin to God, is so great, that I would not be in a natural state for ten thousand worlds ; and what I have felt is but little to what I hope to feel ; but that little love which I have experienced, is a sufficient buoy against all the storms and tempests of this boisterous world : and let men and devils do their worst, I rejoice in the Lord Jesus, yea, and I will rejoice.

And oh, if you repent and come to Jesus, I would rejoice on your accounts too ; and we should rejoice together to all eternity, when once passed on the other side of the grave.

Oh, come to Jesus! The arms of Jesus Christ will embrace you; He will wash away all your sins in His blood, and will love you freely.

Come, I beseech you to come, unto Jesus Christ! Oh, that my words would pierce to the very soul! Oh, that Jesus Christ was formed in you! Oh, that you would turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, that He might have mercy upon you!

I would speak till midnight, yea, I would speak till I could speak no more, so it might be a means to bring you to Jesus. Let the Lord Jesus but enter your souls, and you shall find peace which the world can neither give nor take away. There is mercy for the greatest sinner amongst you; go unto the Lord as sinners, helpless and undone without it, and then you shall find comfort in your souls, and be admitted at last amongst those who sing praises unto the Lord to all eternity.

Now, my brethren, let me speak a word of exhortation to those of you who are already brought to the Lord Jesus, who are born again, who do belong to God, to whom it has been given to repent of your sins, and are cleansed

from their guilt ; and that is, Be thankful to God for His mercies towards you. Oh, admire the grace of God, and bless His name for ever! Are you made alive in Christ Jesus? Is the life of God begun in your souls, and have you the evidence thereof? Be thankful for this unspeakable mercy to you : never forget to speak of His mercy. And as your life was formerly devoted to sin, and to the pleasures of this world, let it now be spent wholly in the ways of God ; and oh, embrace every opportunity of doing and of receiving good. Whatsoever opportunity you have, do it vigorously, do it speedily, do not defer it. If thou seest one hurrying on to destruction, use the utmost of thy endeavour to stop him in his course ; show him the need he has of repentance, and that without it he is lost for ever ; do not regard his despising of you ; still go on to show him his danger : and if thy friends mock and despise, do not let that discourage you ; hold on, hold out to the end, so you shall have a crown which is immutable, and that fadeth not away.

Let the love of Jesus to you, keep you also

humble ; do not be high-minded, keep close unto the Lord, observe the rules which the Lord Jesus Christ has given in His Word, and let not the instructions be lost which you are capable of giving. Oh, consider what reason you have to be thankful to the Lord Jesus Christ for giving you that repentance you yourselves had need of ; a repentance which worketh by love. Now you find more pleasure in walking with God one hour, than in all your former carnal delights, and all the pleasures of sin. Oh, the joy you feel in your own souls, which all the men of this world, and all the devils in hell, though they were to combine together, could not destroy. Then fear not their wrath or malice, for through many tribulations we must enter into glory.

A few days, or weeks, or years more, and then you will be beyond their reach, you will be in the Heavenly Jerusalem ; there is all harmony and love, there is all joy and delight ; there the weary soul is at rest.

Now we have many enemies, but at death they are all lost ; they cannot follow us beyond the grave : and this is a great encouragement

to us not to regard the scoffs and jeers of the men of this world.

Oh, let the love of Jesus be in your thoughts continually ! It was His dying that brought you life ; it was His crucifixion that paid the satisfaction for your sins ; His death, burial, and resurrection that completed the work ; and He is now in heaven, interceding for you at the right hand of His Father. And can you do too much for the Lord Jesus Christ, who has done so much for you ? His love to you is unfathomable. O the height, the depth, the length and breadth, of this love, that brought the King of Glory from His throne, to die for such rebels as we are, when we had acted so unkindly against Him, and deserved nothing but eternal damnation. He came down and took our nature upon Him ; He was made flesh, and dwelt among us. He was put to death on our account ; He paid our ransom. Surely this should make us love the Lord Jesus Christ ; should make us rejoice in Him, and not do as too many do, and as we ourselves have too often, crucify this Jesus afresh. Let us do all we can, my dear brethren, to honour Him.

Come, all of you, come, and behold Him stretched out for you ; see His hands and feet nailed to the Cross. Oh, come, come, my brethren, and nail your sins thereto ; come, come and see His side pierced. There is a fountain open for sin, and for uncleanness ; oh, wash, wash, and be clean. Come and see His head crowned with thorns, and all for you. Can you think of a panting, bleeding, dying Jesus, and not be filled with pity towards Him ? He underwent all this for you. Come unto Him by faith ; lay hold on Him ; there is mercy for every soul of you that will come unto Him. Then do not delay ; fly unto the arms of this Jesus, and you shall be made clean in His blood.

Oh, what shall I say unto you, to make you come to Jesus ? I have showed you the dreadful consequence of not repenting of your sins ; and if, after all I have said, you are resolved to persist, your blood will be required at your own hands. But I hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation. Let me beg of you to pray in good earnest for the grace of repentance. I may never see your faces again ; but at the day of judgment

I will meet you. There you will either bless God that ever you were moved to repentance ; or else this sermon, though in a field, will be as a swift witness against you. Repent, repent, therefore, my dear brethren, as John the Baptist, and our blessed Redeemer Himself earnestly exhorted, and turn from your evil ways, and the Lord will have mercy on you.

Show them, O Father, wherein they have offended Thee ; make them to see their own vileness, and that they are lost and undone without true repentance ; and oh, give them that repentance, we beseech of Thee, that they may turn from sin unto Thee, the living and true God. These things, and whatever else Thou seest needful for us, we entreat that Thou wouldest bestow upon us, on account of what the dear Jesus Christ has done and suffered ; to whom, with Thyself and Holy Spirit, three Persons, and one God, be ascribed, as is most due, all power, glory, might, majesty, and dominion, now, henceforth, and for evermore.
Amen.

IV

THE ALMOST CHRISTIAN

28
Thinks
'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.'—ACTS
xxvi. 28.

THESE words contain the ingenuous confession of King Agrippa, which having some reference to, it may not be improper to relate the substance of the preceding verses, with which the words are so closely connected.

The chapter out of which the text is taken, contains an admirable account which the great St Paul gave of his wonderful conversion from Judaism to Christianity, when he was called to make his defence before Festus, a Gentile governor, and King Agrippa. Our blessed Lord had long since foretold, that when the Son of Man should be lifted up, 'His disciples should be brought before kings and rulers, for His name's sake, for a testimony unto them.' And very good was the design of Infinite Wisdom in thus ordaining it. For

Christianity being, from the beginning, a doctrine of the Cross, the princes and rulers of the earth thought themselves too high to be instructed by such mean teachers, or too happy to be disturbed by such unwelcome truths; and therefore would have always continued strangers to Jesus Christ and Him crucified, had not the apostles, by being arraigned before them, gained opportunities of preaching to them 'Jesus and the resurrection.'

St Paul knew full well that this was the main reason why his blessed Master permitted his enemies at this time to arraign him at a public bar; and therefore, in compliance with the divine will, thinks it not sufficient, barely to make his defence, but endeavours at the same time to convert his judges. And this he did with such demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that Festus, unwilling to be convinced by the strongest evidence, cries out with a loud voice, 'Paul, much learning doth make thee mad.' To which the brave apostle (like a true follower of the holy Jesus) meekly replies, 'I am not mad, most noble Festus,

but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.'

But in all probability, seeing King Agrippa more affected with his discourse, and observing in him an inclination to know the truth, he applies himself more particularly to him. 'The king knoweth of these things; before whom also I speak freely, for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him.' And then, that if possible he might complete his wished-for conversion, he, with an inimitable strain of oratory, addressed himself still more closely, 'King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest them.' At which the passions of the king began to work so strongly, that he was obliged in open court to own himself affected by the prisoner's preaching, and ingenuously to cry out, 'Paul, almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.'

Which words, taken with the context, afford us a lively representation of the different reception which the doctrine of Christ's ministers, who come in the power and spirit of St Paul, meets with nowadays

in the minds of men. For notwithstanding they, like this great apostle, 'speak forth the words of truth and soberness,' and with such energy and power that all their adversaries cannot justly gainsay or resist; yet, too many, with the noble Festus before mentioned, being, like him, either too proud to be taught, or too sensual, too careless, or too worldly-minded to live up to the doctrine, in order to excuse themselves, cry out, that 'much learning (much study, or, what is more unaccountable), much piety hath made them mad.' And though, blessed be God! all do not thus disbelieve our report, yet amongst those who gladly receive the Word, and confess that we speak the words of truth and soberness, there are so few who arrive at any higher degree of piety than that of Agrippa, or are any farther persuaded than to be almost Christians, that I cannot but think it highly necessary to warn my dear hearers of the danger of such a state. And therefore, from the words of the text, shall endeavour to show these three things:

First, What is meant by an almost Christian.

Secondly, What are the chief reasons why so many are no more than almost Christians.

Thirdly, I shall consider the ineffectualness, danger, absurdity, and uneasiness which attends those who are but almost Christians; and then conclude with a general exhortation, to set all upon striving not only to be almost, but altogether Christians.

I. And, *First*, I am to consider what is meant by an almost Christian.

An almost Christian, if we consider him in respect to his duty to God, is one that hálts between two opinions; that wavers between Christ and the world; that would reconcile God and Mammon, light and darkness, Christ and Belial. It is true, he has an inclination to religion, but then he is very cautious how he goes too far in it: his false heart is always crying out, Spare thyself, do thyself no harm. He prays, indeed, that 'God's will may be done on earth, as it is in heaven.' But notwithstanding, he is very partial in his obedience, and fondly hopes that God will not be extreme to mark everything that he wilfully does

amiss ; though an inspired apostle has told him, that ' he who offends in one point is guilty of all.' But chiefly, he is one that depends much on outward ordinances, and on that account looks upon himself as righteous, and despises others ; though at the same time he is as great a stranger to the divine life as any other person whatsoever. In short, he is fond of the form, but never experiences the power of godliness in his heart. He goes on year after year, attending on the means of grace, but then, like Pharaoh's lean kine, he is never the better, but rather the worse for them.

If you consider him in respect to his neighbour, he is one that is strictly just to all ; but then this does not proceed from any love to God or regard to man, but only through a principle of self-love : because he knows dishonesty will spoil his reputation, and consequently hinder his thriving in the world.

He is one that depends much upon being negatively good, and contents himself with the consciousness of having done no one any harm ; though he reads in the Gospel, that ' the

unprofitable servant was cast into outer darkness,' and the barren fig-tree was cursed and dried up from the roots, not for bearing bad, but no fruit.

He is no enemy to charitable contributions in public, if not too frequently recommended : but then he is unacquainted with the kind offices of visiting the sick and imprisoned, clothing the naked, and relieving the hungry in a private manner. He thinks that these things belong only to the clergy, though his own false heart tells him, that nothing but pride keeps him from exercising these acts of humility ; and that Jesus Christ, in the 25th chapter of St Matthew, condemns persons to everlasting punishment, not merely for being fornicators, drunkards, or extortioners, but for neglecting these charitable offices : ' When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall He say unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels : for I was an hungered, and ye gave Me no meat ; I was thirsty, and ye gave

Me no drink ; I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in ; naked, and ye clothed Me not ; sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee ? Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment.' I thought proper to give you this whole passage of Scripture at large, because our Saviour lays such a particular stress upon it ; and yet it is so little regarded, that were we to judge by the practice of Christians, one should be tempted to think there were no such verses in the Bible.

But to proceed to the character of an *almost Christian* :—If we consider him in respect of himself, as we said, he was strictly honest to his neighbour, so he is likewise strictly sober in himself : but then both his honesty and sobriety proceed from the same principle of a false self-love. It is true, he runs not into the

same excess of riot with other men ; but then it is not out of obedience to the laws of God, but either because his constitution will not away with intemperance ; or rather because he is cautious of forfeiting his reputation, or unfitting himself for temporal business. But though he is so prudent as to avoid intemperance and excess, for the reasons before mentioned ; yet he always goes to the extremity of what is lawful. It is true, he is no drunkard ; but then he has no *Christian self-denial*. He cannot think our Saviour to be so austere a Master, as to deny us to indulge ourselves in some particulars : and so by this means he is destitute of a sense of true religion, as much as if he lived in debauchery, or any other crime whatever. As to settling his principles as well as practice, he is guided more by the world than by the Word of God : for his part, he cannot think the way to heaven so narrow as some would make it ; and therefore considers not so much what Scripture requires, as what such and such a good man does, or what will best suit his own corrupt inclinations. Upon this account he is not only very cautious

himself, but likewise very careful of young converts, whose faces are set heavenward ; and therefore is always acting the devil's part, and bidding them spare themselves, though they are doing no more than what the Scripture strictly requires them to do : the consequence of which is, that he suffers not himself to enter into the kingdom of God, and those that are entering in he hinders.

Thus lives the almost Christian : not that I can say I have fully described him to you ; but from these outlines and sketches of his character, if your consciences have done their proper office, and made a particular application of what has been said to your own hearts, I cannot but fear that some of you may observe some features in his picture, odious as it is, too nearly resembling your own ; and therefore I cannot but hope that you will join with the apostle in the words immediately following the text, and wish yourselves 'to be not only almost, but altogether Christians.'

II. I proceed to the second general thing proposed : to consider the reason why so many are no more than almost Christians.

1. And the first reason I shall mention is, because so many set out with false notions of religion; though they live in a Christian country, yet they know not what Christianity is. This perhaps may be esteemed a hard saying, but experience sadly evinces the truth of it; for some place religion in being of this or that communion; more, in morality; most, in a round of duties, and a model of performances; and few, very few, acknowledge it to be, what it really is, a thorough inward change of nature, a divine life, a vital participation of Jesus Christ, an union of the soul with God; which the apostle expresses by saying, 'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.'

Hence it happens that so many, even of the most knowing professors, when you come to converse with them concerning the essence, the life, the soul of religion, I mean our new birth in Jesus Christ, confess themselves quite ignorant of the matter, and cry out with Nicodemus, 'How can this thing be?' And no wonder then, that so many are only almost Christians, when so many know not what

Christianity is : no marvel, that so many take up with the form, when they are quite strangers to the power of godliness ; or content themselves with the shadow, when they know so little about the substance of it. And this is one cause why so many are almost, and so few are altogether Christians.

2. A second reason that may be assigned why so many are no more than almost Christians, is a servile fear of man : multitudes there are, and have been, who, though awakened to a sense of the divine life, and having tasted and felt the powers of the world to come ; yet out of a base sinful fear of being counted singular, or contemned by men, have suffered all those good impressions to wear off. It is true, they have some esteem for Jesus Christ ; but then, like Nicodemus, they would come to Him only by night : they are willing to serve Him ; but then they would do it secretly, for fear of the Jews ; they have a mind to see Jesus, but then they cannot come to Him because of the press, and for fear of being laughed at and ridiculed by those with whom they used to sit at meat.

But well did our Saviour prophesy of such persons, 'How can ye love Me, who receive honour one of another?' Alas! have they never read, that 'The friendship of this world is enmity with God': and that our Lord Himself has threatened, 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me or of My words, in this wicked and adulterous generation, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father, and of His holy angels?' No wonder that so many are no more than almost Christians, since so many 'love the praise of men more than the honour which cometh of God.'

3. A third reason why so many are no more than almost Christians, is a reigning love of money. This was the pitiable case of that forward young man in the Gospel who came running to our blessed Lord and, kneeling before Him, inquired what he must do to 'inherit eternal life'; to whom our blessed Master replied, 'Thou knowest the Commandments, Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal'; to which the young man replied, 'All these have I kept from my youth.'

But when our Lord proceeded to tell him, 'Yet lackest thou one thing; go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor'; he was grieved at that saying, and went away sorrowful, 'for he had great possessions!'

Poor youth! he had a good mind to be a Christian, and to inherit eternal life, but thought it too dear, if it could be purchased at no less an expense than of his estate! And thus many, both young and old, nowadays, come running to worship our blessed Lord in public, and kneel before Him in private, and inquire at His Gospel, what they must do to inherit eternal life: but when they find they must renounce the self-enjoyment of riches, and forsake all in affection to follow Him, they cry, 'The Lord pardon us in this thing! We pray Thee have us excused.'

But is heaven so small a trifle in men's esteem, as not to be worth a little gilded earth? Is eternal life so mean a purchase, as not to deserve a temporary renunciation of a few transitory riches? Surely it is. But however inconsistent such a behaviour may be, this inordinate love of money is too evidently the

common and fatal cause why so many are no more than almost Christians.

4. Nor is the love of pleasure a less uncommon or a less fatal cause why so many are no more than almost Christians. Thousands and ten thousands there are who despise riches, and would willingly be true disciples of Jesus Christ, if parting with their money would make them so ; but when they are told that our blessed Lord has said, ' Whosoever will come after Me must deny himself,' like the pitiable young man before mentioned, ' they go away sorrowful ' : for they have too great a love for sensual pleasures. They will perhaps send for the ministers of Christ, as Herod did for John, and hear them gladly : but touch them in their Herodias, tell them they must part with such or such a darling pleasure, and with wicked Ahab they cry out, ' Hast thou found us, O our enemy ? ' Tell them of the necessity of mortification and self-denial, and it is as difficult for them to hear, as if you were to bid them ' cut off a right hand or pluck out a right eye.' They cannot think our blessed Lord requires so much at their hands, though an

inspired apostle has commanded us to 'mortify our members which are upon earth.' And who himself, even after he had converted thousands, and was very nearly arrived to the end of his race, yet professed that it was his daily practice to 'keep under his body, and bring it into subjection, lest, after he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway.'

But some men would be wiser than this great apostle, and chalk out to us what they falsely imagine an easier way to happiness. They would flatter us, we may go to heaven without offering violence to our sensual appetites; and enter into the strait gate without striving against our carnal inclinations. And this is another reason why so many are only almost, and not altogether Christians.

5. The fifth and last reason I shall assign why so many are only almost Christians, is a fickleness and instability of temper.

It has been, no doubt, a misfortune that many a minister and sincere Christian has met with, to weep and wail over numbers of promising converts, who seemingly began in the Spirit, but after a while fell away, and

basely ended in the flesh ; and this not for want of right notions in religion, nor out of a servile fear of man, nor from the love of money, or of sensual pleasure, but through an instability and fickleness of temper. They looked upon religion, merely for novelty, as something which pleased them for a while ; but after their curiosity was satisfied they laid it aside again : like the young man that came to see Jesus with a linen cloth about his naked body, they have followed Him for a season, but when temptations came to take hold on them, for want of a little more resolution, they have been stripped of all their good intentions, and fled away naked. They at first, like a tree planted by the water-side, grew up and flourished for a while ; but having no root in themselves, no inward principle of holiness and piety, like Jonah's gourd, they were soon dried up and withered. Their good intentions are too like the violent motions of the animal spirits of a body newly beheaded, which, though impetuous, are not lasting. In short, they set out well in their journey to heaven, but finding the way either narrower or

longer than they expected, through an unsteadiness of temper, they have made an eternal halt, and so 'returned like the dog to his vomit, or like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire!'

But I tremble to pronounce the fate of such unstable professors, who, having put their hands to the plough, for want of a little more resolution, shamefully look back. How shall I repeat to them that dreadful threatening, 'If any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him'; and again, 'It is impossible (that is, exceeding difficult at least) for those that have been once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and the powers of the world to come, if they should fall away, to be renewed again unto repentance.' But notwithstanding the Gospel is so severe against apostates, yet many that begun well, through a fickleness of temper (oh, that none of us here present may ever be such!), have been by this means, of the number of those that turn back unto perdition. And this is the fifth, and the last reason I shall give, why so many are only almost, and not altogether Christians.

III. Proceed we now to the third general thing proposed, namely, to consider the folly of being no more than an almost Christian.

1. And the *first* proof I shall give of the folly of such a proceeding is, that it is ineffectual to salvation. It is true, such men are almost good ; but almost to hit the mark, is really to miss it. God requires us ' to love Him with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our strength.' He loves us too well to admit any rival ; because, so far as our hearts are empty of God, so far must they be unhappy. The devil, indeed, like the false mother that came before Solomon, would have our hearts divided, as she would have had the child ; but God, like the true mother, will have all or none. ' My son, give Me thy heart,' thy whole heart, is the general call to all : and if this be not done, we never can expect the divine mercy.

Persons may play the hypocrite ; but God at the great day will strike them dead (as He did Ananias and Sapphira by the mouth of His servant Peter), for pretending to offer Him all their hearts, when they keep back

from Him the greatest part. They may perhaps impose upon their fellow-creatures for a while ; but He that enabled Ahijah to cry out, 'Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam,' when she came disguised to inquire about her sick son, will also discover them through their most artful dissimulations ; and if their hearts are not wholly with Him, appoint them their portion with hypocrites and unbelievers.

2. But, *secondly*, What renders a half-way piety more inexcusable is, that it is not only insufficient to our own salvation, but also very prejudicial to that of others.

An almost Christian is one of the most hurtful creatures in the world : he is a wolf in sheep's clothing ; he is one of those false prophets our blessed Lord bids us beware of, in His Sermon on the Mount, who would persuade men that the way to heaven is broader than it really is ; and thereby, as it was observed before, 'enter not into the kingdom of God themselves ; and those that are entering in they hinder.' These, these are the men that turn the world into a lukewarm Laodicean spirit ; that hang out false lights,

and so shipwreck unthinking benighted souls in their voyage to the haven of eternity. These are they who are greater enemies to the Cross of Christ than infidels themselves: for of an unbeliever everyone will be aware; but an almost Christian, through his subtle hypocrisy, draws away many after him; and therefore must expect to receive the greater damnation.

3. But, *thirdly*, As it is most prejudicial to ourselves and hurtful to others, so it is the greatest instance of ingratitude we can express towards our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. For did He come down from heaven, and shed His precious blood, to purchase these hearts of ours, and shall we only give Him half of them? Oh, how can we say we love Him, when our hearts are not wholly with Him? How can we call Him our Saviour, when we will not endeavour sincerely to approve ourselves to Him, and so let Him see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied!

Had any of us purchased a slave¹ at a most

¹ Whitefield himself bought in 1747, towards the support of his orphan-house, a plantation and slaves in South Carolina.

expensive rate, and who was before involved in the utmost miseries and torments, and so must have continued for ever, had we shut up our bowels of compassion from him ; and was this slave afterwards to grow rebellious, or deny giving us but half his service ; how, how should we exclaim against his base ingratitude ! And yet this base ungrateful slave thou art, O man, who acknowledgest thyself to be redeemed from infinite unavoidable misery and punishment by the death of Jesus Christ, and yet wilt not give thyself wholly to Him. But shall we deal with God our Maker in a manner we would not be dealt with by a man like ourselves ? God forbid ! No. Suffer me, therefore,

To add a word or two of exhortation to you, to excite you to be not only almost, but altogether Christians. Oh, let us scorn all base and treacherous treatment of our King and Saviour, of our God and Creator. Let us not take some pains all our lives to go to

He defended on biblical grounds the lawfulness of slaveholding. (See *Dict. Nat. Biog.* lxi. 90 ; and see Stevens's *The Slave in History*, pp. 154-5.)

heaven, and yet plunge ourselves into hell at last. Let us give to God our whole hearts, and no longer halt between two opinions: if the world be god, let us serve that; if pleasure be a god, let us serve that; but if the Lord, He be God, let us, oh, let us serve Him alone. Alas! why, why should we stand out any longer? Why should we be so in love with slavery, as not wholly to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil, which, like so many spiritual chains, bind down our souls, and hinder them from flying up to God? Alas! what are we afraid of? Is not God able to reward our entire obedience? If He is, as the almost Christian's lame way of serving Him seems to grant, why, then, will we not serve Him entirely? For the same reason we do so much, why do we not do more? Or do you think that being only half religious will make you happy, but that going farther will render you miserable and uneasy?

Alas! this, my brethren, is delusion all over; for what is it but this *half piety*, this wavering between God and the world, that makes so many, that are seemingly well disposed, such

utter strangers to the comforts of religion? They choose just so much of religion as will disturb them in their lusts, and follow their lusts so far as to deprive themselves of the comforts of religion. Whereas, on the contrary, would they sincerely leave all in affection, and give their hearts wholly to God, they would then (and they cannot till then) experience the unspeakable pleasure of having a mind at unity with itself, and enjoy such a peace of God, which even in this life passes all understanding, and which they were entire strangers to before.

It is true, if we will devote ourselves entirely to God, we must meet with contempt; but then it is because contempt is necessary to heal our pride. We must renounce some sensual pleasures; but then it is because those unfit us for spiritual ones, which are infinitely better. We must renounce the love of the world; but then it is that we may be filled with the love of God: and when that has once enlarged our hearts, we shall, like Jacob when he served for his beloved Rachel, think nothing too difficult to undergo, no hard-

ships too tedious to endure, because of the love we shall then have for our dear Redeemer. Thus easy, thus delightful will be the ways of God even in this life. But when once we throw off these bodies, and our souls are filled with all the fulness of God, oh, what heart can conceive, what tongue can express, with what unspeakable joy and consolation shall we then look back on our past sincere and hearty services! Think you then, my dear hearers, we shall repent we had done too much; or rather think you not, we shall be ashamed that we did no more; and blush we were so backward to give up all to God; when He intended hereafter to give us Himself?

Let me therefore, to conclude, exhort you, my brethren, to have always before you the unspeakable happiness of enjoying God. And think withal, that every degree of holiness you neglect, every act of piety you omit, is a jewel taken out of your crown, a degree of blessedness lost in the vision of God. Oh, do but always think and act thus, and you will no longer be labouring to compound matters between God and the world; but, on the

contrary, be daily endeavouring to give up yourselves more and more unto Him ; you will be always watching, always praying, always aspiring after farther degrees of purity and love, and consequently always preparing yourselves for a fuller sight and enjoyment of that God, in whose presence there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore. *Amen ! Amen !*

V

GLORIFYING GOD IN THE FIRE

‘Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires.’—ISAIAH
xxiv. 15.

YOU have oft, my dear hearers, let me tell you, met with affliction ; and I believe you may persuade yourselves affliction is at hand, which makes such deep impressions, when sent and blessed by heaven, as to thaw the very heart. Faith, like some glasses to view objects near us, sets them in so strong a light, that we cannot help being affected with the weight of the impression ; hence the prophets, when under a divine impulse, foresaw things at a distance ; spoke and wrote of them as though actually present. ‘They sung both of judgment and mercy,’ in such strong and persuasive strains, as to convince of the reality of their existence.

Isaiah, who had a courtly education, being probably brother to a king, seems to excel in

this kind of speaking ; a person of good natural, as well as acquired abilities, which being tempered by the Holy Ghost, made him a kind of an angel, of an orator, of a writer, and a prophet. When he penned this chapter, he probably foresaw the dreadful calamities coming on the land ; and so strong was his persuasion, that he writes as though he saw the things taking place. ‘Behold (says he), the Lord maketh the earth empty, maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof.’ How much is expressed in a few words ! ‘As with the people, so with the priests,’ who, perhaps, on account of their situation in the Church, might think they should be exempted ; but if the priests sin with the people, they shall be punished with the people. ‘As with the servant, so with his master ; as with the maid, so with her mistress ; as with the buyer, so with the seller ; as with the lender, so with the borrower ; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him.’ So you see that the visitation would be universal ; that it should fall on all sorts of people.

Ver. 3. 'The land shall be utterly emptied and utterly spoiled': probably, by a foreign foe taking advantage of the domestic confusions, who shall destroy the fruits of the earth. Some may think, perhaps, that this will never come to pass; but saith Isaiah, 'The Lord hath spoken it.' It pleased God the nation should be devoted to a dreadful stroke: 'The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish,' whose crimes, one would think, would never be brought to punishment, on account of the eminence of their stations; they thought themselves out of danger, but they shall feel the common scourge: 'For the earth also,' as in the fifth verse, 'is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinances, broken the everlasting covenant.'

God did not strike without a cause; for the earth groaned, as it were, under the sins of the inhabitants, for their neglect of religion, for disowning God, for turning their back on the Most High. 'Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein

are desolate' (ver. 6). He does not say it shall be, but it is done. 'The inhabitants of the earth are burned,' with dreadful fire of consuming vengeance, 'and few men left.' All the merry-hearted, that minded nothing but jollity and mirth, even 'they do sigh. The joy of the harp ceaseth; they shall not drink wine with a song; strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it. The (very great) city (the metropolis) is broken down; every house is shut up, that no man may come in.' The inhabitants forsake it, their houses are left, shut up, because they are afraid some foreign power should come to their destruction. 'There is a crying for wine in the streets; all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone': no plays, no routs, no assemblies now; 'the city is left desolate,' the court not excepted; desolation herself takes her seat, and ravages there. 'The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again.'

What an amazing scene is this! Enough

to fill us with horror, even at this distance of time and place! But is there no way for escape? Is there no light breaking through this dark shade? Blessed be God, there is; look at ver. 13, you will find in the midst of dangers, God shall lend His presence. 'When thus it shall be' (pray mind that) 'in the midst of the land among the people,' what follows? 'there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done'; there shall be a few godly people left, let the devil do what he will; but there will be but few. You know, after the people have gathered the fruits from the tree, they shake it to bring down the remainder; and after reaping of corn, there are a few gleanings: so the Lord says, it shall destroy most people, yet in so discriminating a way, that God's people should be safe.

I cannot well recollect how Archbishop Usher applies this; but this I am sure he says, there will certainly come a time when the world will undergo the greatest scourge that ever it felt, which shall chiefly fall on the outward-court worshippers, upon those that

know not God ; God will take particular care of securing His own ; and when the wicked are all destroyed, the Christians shall go to a little city, and there shall dwell in Goshen, till God shall call home His ancient people the Jews.

So God will take care of His people, that they shall be safe : pray look to ver. 14, ' they shall lift up their voice ' ; what, to cry ? No, they have done with prayers, they have done with fasting ; they have lifted up their voice, and often exhorted their neighbours to ' flee from the wrath to come ' ; but now they shall sing for the majesty of God ; when all people are mourning, they shall rejoice. And at the great day, when Jesus Christ pronounces the wicked damned, ' Depart, ye cursed,' God's people will then lift up their voices with majesty and triumph.

Some years ago, being present at the trial of a very vile person at the Old Bailey, and being in suspense whether he would be brought in guilty or no, when the word ' guilty ' came, and the people heard of it, they did in effect give an eclat to it. Whether just or unjust, I thought

it was an emblem of that awful day, when all the angels of God and His saints shall say Amen; when God consigns the wicked to hell: God grant this may not be any of your case!

Says the prophet, 'They shall cry aloud from the sea': some of them may be on the other side of the water, gone abroad, while others stay at home; but whether at home or abroad, though they have been banished by persecution, though they have been driven to the other side of the water, which has been the case of many persons before now, 'yet they shall cry aloud'; they shall find the same God abroad as they did at home.

A judge said to a good old Christian that was persecuted in Charles II.'s time, 'I will banish you to America'; says she, 'Very well, you cannot send me out of my Father's country.' They shall cry aloud from the sea, 'Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires'; if this is the case, the prophet draws the inference: what must they do under these circumstances? why, they must study how to glorify God in the fires, not how to escape or run away from Him,

but how to glorify Him ; ' wherefore,' saith He, ' glorify Me,' glorify Me, the Lord, ' in the fires'; not the fire, in the singular number, but in the plural number, fires.

We are, my brethren, very much mistaken, if we allow ourselves to think we have but one fire to go through.

These words imply, in order to bring them home to ourselves, that all God's people must be put into the fires. Fire sometimes denotes the love of God, sometimes the work of the Holy Ghost, and very often it denotes affliction ; therefore the apostle talks of a ' fiery trial'; and let it be of whatever kind it will, let it be upon mind, body, or estate ; whether it comes from friend or foe, or whether it comes immediately from the hand of God Himself upon the soul, it may well be compared to fire, for you all know that fire scorches : God expects, when He strikes, that we should feel. Of all things in the world to be avoided, a stony heart, or a stupidity under God's afflicting hand, is most to be deprecated. I suppose you have heard of the Stoics, with whom the Apostle Paul disputed in the place of public

traffic in Athens. Paul did not take a walk to Change to talk on trade ; he went to talk about Jesus Christ, if he could meet with one to talk with. I wish the clergy took no other walks but these.

Everything is to be tried by fire ; we may talk what we please, but we shall never know what metal we are made of, till God puts us into the fire. It is very easy talking what we can bear, and what we can do, but let God lay His hand on us, and we shall see what we are. We are apt to find fault, and be peevish with our friends and relations, under such circumstances ; they are apt to say, You should be patient, and patient, and patient ; ah ! put these reprovers into the same furnace, and see how patient they will be : they say, There is no putting old men's heads upon young men's shoulders ; and there is no putting old heads upon souls young in experience. The devil knew very well how it was when he said, ' Hast Thou not made an hedge about Job, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side ? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is in-

creased in the land ; but put forth Thy hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face.' So we should all do, if God were to leave us to ourselves, and our faith is not of the right sort.

How shall we know if our faith is good ? We often pray, Lord, give us Abraham's faith, but never pray, give us Abraham's trial at the same time. I was once in Scotland, at a great man's house, where several rich people were, that knew Jesus Christ : God having blessed my labours at a former visit, I was desired by the nobleman to pray ; and I remember, I prayed the Lord to give us great faith and patience :—' Oh,' said Satan, as strong as if he had spoke to me, 'do not pray for that, for thou shalt have great trials.' ' Oh,' said I, 'if that be the case, I will turn the devil's prayer against himself' ; and I prayed, ' O Lord, give us great grace, and never mind what trials.' Often, when we are under temptations, God takes us at our words : ' Oh,' says one, ' what a prayer I had, I prayed for faith and patience ; I was upon the mount, and never thought of coming down, and feeling a storm again.'

Fire, my brethren, not only burns and purges, but you know it separates one thing from another, and is made use of in chemistry and mechanical businesses. What could we do without fire? It tries metal, to purge it. God Almighty knows, we are often purged more in one hour by a good sound trial, than by a thousand manifestations of His love. It is a fine thing to come purified, to come pardoned, out of the furnace of affliction; it is intended to purge us, 'to separate the precious from the vile, the chaff from the wheat'; and God, in order to do this, is pleased to put us into one fire after another, which makes me love to see a good man under afflictions, because it teaches something of the work of God in the heart.

I remember, some years ago, when I first preached in the north of England, at Shields, near Newcastle, I went into a glass-house, and standing very attentive, I saw several masses of burning glass, of various forms. The workman took one piece of glass and put it into one furnace, then he put it into a second, and then into a third. When I asked him, 'Why

do you put this into so many fires?' he answered, 'Oh, sir, the first was not hot enough, nor the second, and therefore we put it into the third, and that will make it transparent.'

Taking leave of him in a proper manner, it occurred to me, this would make a good sermon. Oh, thought I, does this man put this glass into one furnace after another, that we may see through it? Oh, may God put me into one furnace after another, that my soul may be transparent; that I may see God as He is! My brethren, we need to be purged. How apt are we to want to go to heaven upon a feather bed! many go lying upon beds of pain and languishing, which is the King's highway thither. You know there are some ways in London called the king's road, and they are finely gravelled, but the King's road to heaven is strewn with crosses and afflictions. We are all apt to think well of being Christians; it is very pretty talking of being Christians, till we are put into one furnace after another. 'Think it not strange,' saith the apostle, 'concerning the fiery trial which is to try you.' What must I do? Why, since I must be in

the fire, I must thank my corruptions for it ; God will not put you or me into the fire if there were not something to be purged away ; the grand thing is to learn to glorify God in the fire. ' Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fire.'

When do we glorify Him ? When we endeavour to get such grace from the Lord that we may not dishonour Him when we are under the cross, and therefore we glorify God in the fire when we quietly endure it as a chastisement for our sins. If you keep watch now, and live near to God, you will never find that you are put into a fire, but you first brought yourselves into it ; and I do verily believe from my heart that our sin is always to be seen in our punishment. If any man part from a child that he loves dearly, upon examination he will say, ' I find, now the creature's gone, that the ivy twined too much about the oak.' And then he turns off ; ' Ah !' says he, ' God has met with me now.' And you will find in all the Old and New Testament, that the afflictions of God's people were suitable to their faults : Jacob was over-per-

suaded by his mother to get the blessing by a lie; but he was a simple-hearted poor creature. Some persons think nothing of a lie; if they can but get by it, they do not mind it; but an honest man will shun it. Jacob argues with his mother against it; 'Oh,' says she, 'the curse be on me, my son!' Oh, dreadful! for a good woman to say so. Doubtless, she was persuaded God would give Jacob the blessing, but she took a wrong way to obtain it; she might have waited for the blessing to come with a blessing. How did God punish Jacob? Why, in a night afterwards poor Jacob was imposed upon by a wrong wife, he got a Leah instead of a Rachel. The poor creature was imposed upon there, and so all along almost to the end of his life; he had a furnace of affliction. Happy they who pray in the furnace, 'Lord, let me know why Thou dost contend with me.' Therefore God sends this message to Eli by Samuel, 'The thing that thou knowest,' seems to me to refer to his too great lenity to his sons: 'the thing that thou knowest'; thou dost not act like a magistrate. These sons were the means of bringing a judg-

ment on his house, and breaking their father's neck. God Almighty keep us from bringing a rod upon ourselves!

We glorify God in the fire, when we bear it patiently. It is a dreadful thing when we are saying with Cain, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear'; but the language of a soul that glorifies God in the fire is this, 'Shall I, Lord, shall I, a sinful man, complain for the punishment of my sins?' It is a glorious thing when we can say with a good man, one of whose particular friends told me more than once, that when he was racked with pain, and groaning all night with trouble, he would often say, 'Lord, I groan; Lord, I groan; Lord, I groan; but, Lord Jesus, I appeal to Thee, Thou knowest I do not grumble.' Then we glorify God in the fire, when, though we feel pain and anguish, we at the same time say, 'Lord, we deserve this and ten thousand times more.'

We glorify God in the fire also, when we are really and fully persuaded, God will not put us in the fire but for our good, and His own glory. I am afraid some people think God

does as some cheating apothecaries, that bring five things when they need not bring but one, especially when they have some silly patients that love to be taking physic ; they send one after another, when, perhaps, the best thing would be to throw them all away. So we think of God ; but it is a mistake ; He never sends one but what is necessary, and something to be purged away.

We glorify God in the fire, when we say, 'Lord, do not let the fire go out till it has purged away all my dross.' Then we glorify God when we wish for the good of the fire, and not to have it extinguished ; when the soul can say, 'Here I am, my God, do with me as seemeth good in Thy sight. I know I shall not have one stroke but Thou wilt give me a plaster, and let me know wherefore Thou contendest with me.'

We glorify God in the fire, when we are content to say, 'I know not what God does with me now, but I shall know hereafter.' Do you tell your children that are five years old the reason of things? No. And do you think God will tell us? 'What shall this man

do?' said the disciple; 'What is that to thee?' saith Christ, 'follow thou Me.' You glorify God in the fire, when you are content to walk by faith, and not by sight.

You glorify God in the fire, when you are not grumbling, but humbly submitting to His will: a humble spirit walks not in sulkiness and stubbornness. There are some spirits too stout, they will not speak. When that awful message was brought to Eli, what does he say, 'It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good'; let my children be killed, whatever be done, it is the Lord's doing; only, Lord, save my soul at last.

We glorify God in the fire, when in the midst of the fire we can sing God's high praises. Thus the children of Israel glorified the Lord; the song of the three children in the fiery furnace is a sweet song, as are all that are made in the fire: 'O all the works of the Lord, praise and magnify Him for ever!'

Then we glorify God in the fire, when we rejoice in Him, when we not only think, but know it best, and can thank God for striking us; can thank God for whipping us; can bless

God for not letting us alone ; thank God for not saying, ' Let him alone ' : this is to glorify God in the fire. ' Not only so,' saith the apostle, ' but we glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience.'

In a word, we glorify the Lord in the fire, when we have in exercise, patience, meekness, humility ; learning more to distrust ourselves, having a deeper knowledge of our own weakness, and of God's omnipotence and grace. Happy when we can look back and say, ' Thus have I been enabled to glorify God in the fire.' Who can put his hand to his heart, and say, ' I have glorified God in the fire as I ought?' Instead of that, I am afraid the soul must say, that instead of being thankful and resigned, ' I have been fretful ; and because I will not find fault with myself, nor let the world know I find fault with God, I find fault with all about me.' Did you never find yourself in such a humour when your spirits were low ? I heard a good man once speak on those words, ' They shall bring forth fruit in old age': ' Oh, the fruit,' said he, ' is peevishness'; I thought it was the infirmity of old age, the fruit of which ought to be

heavenly-mindedness, deadness to the world, and a liveliness to God.

My brethren, let us humble ourselves to-night, and let us be ashamed and abashed before God, and wonder He hath not struck us into hell when we have been complaining the fire was too hot. Let us weep, let us weep, let us weep for our stubbornness. Happy they who are used to be put into the fire betimes ! ' It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth.' Some years ago, when I was at the Orphan-house, they told me they were going to yoke two steers together, one sturdy and old, the other a little one ; on which they no sooner put the yoke, but he kicked once or twice, and then bore it very well. Oh, thought I, it is a good thing to have the yoke betimes.

Are any of you now in the furnace, are any of you troubled, or can any of you say, ' I have no trouble ? ' A calm is sometimes the forerunner of a storm ; thank God, you are not in the fire ; surely you have been in the fire. There is the devil's fire, the fires of ' the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life ' ; God help you to come out of these fires,

lest they damn your souls for ever. You must be put either in the devil's fire or God's fire, and the devil's fires are hottest, because there is no God to support under the trouble they bring upon the soul. Oh, what a dreadful thing it is to be in the devil's fire continually, and to go out of the fire of the devil here to burn with the devil in hell hereafter!

If there are any of you in this case, Lord Jesus Christ shorten them, Lord Jesus Christ sanctify His afflictions to His people, as He did to one of the prisoners last Wednesday! How sweetly he behaved! While the others were cursing and swearing, tossing up who should sit on the right hand in the cart, he was glorifying God, thanking God he was sent there, and going to be executed. 'God,' saith he, 'hath stopped me; I might have gone on in sin to ruin. Oh, send to my father, go to him, warn him to "flee from the wrath to come."' Oh, remember, fire hardens as well as softens; and if you are not better by afflictions, you will be worse; and, indeed, you will know you cannot come out of the furnace as you went in, you will either be hardened or else be

purified ; and if this be the case, the Lord Jesus Christ help you to bear the fire now, that you may never be cast into the fire of hell. God haste you ; hasten, you that are out of the devil's fire, to flee ; flee, ye weary souls, to Jesus Christ ; flee to the Lamb of God, from hell to heaven, as far as you can from these hellish fires, to the fire of His blessed merit and love.

Happy you that have got into Christ's fire ! Happy you that have found His fires in your souls ! I believe many souls have ! The Lord Jesus Christ help you to glorify Him in whatever fires He shall be pleased to send you, and into whatever furnaces He shall be pleased to put you. We shall then sing 'the Church triumphant,' much better than we sing to-night ; we shall see Jesus Christ ready to help us when we are in the furnace. Oh, that this thought may make every poor sinner say, 'By the help of God, I will be a Christian ; by the help of God, if I must burn, it shall be burning with the love of Christ. I will say then, O Lord, glorify Thyself by snatching me as a brand from the devil's fire.' Oh, that this might be the cry of every heart !

I am going to ask a favour of you to-night which I never did before, and perhaps, may not again for some time. I have had complaints made to me by the persons that take care of the poor, that the poor's stock is very low; though I cannot speak on Sunday night, yet I will speak a word to the poor on Wednesday evening. There are numbers of poor that are ready to perish, and if you drop something to them in love, God will take care to repay you when you come to judgment. We shall not only glorify God by a submission to His will when He is putting us in the fire, but in doing any good, when we lay all the glory at the foot of Jesus; which God grant for Christ's sake. *Amen.*

spend a moment

VI

JACOB'S LADDER : A FAREWELL SERMON

And he dreamed
And behold

‘And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven : and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac : the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed ; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south : and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land ; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.’—GENESIS xxviii. 12-15.

THE wise man observes, that ‘in the multitude of dreams there are many vanities,’ being often the effects of a peculiar disorder of body, or owing to some disturbance of the mind. They whose nervous system has been long relaxed, who have had severe domestic trials, or have been greatly affected by extraordinary occurrences, know this to be true by their own experience. But however this may be, there have been, and possibly may be still, dreams

that have no manner of dependence on the indisposition of the body, or other natural cause, but seem to bring a divine sanction with them, and make peculiar impressions on the party, though this was more frequent before the canon of Scripture was closed than now.

God spake to His people in a dream, in a vision of the night; witness the subject of our present meditation, a dream of the patriarch Jacob, when going forth as a poor pilgrim with a staff in his hand, from his father's house, deprived of his mother's company and instruction, persecuted by an elder brother, without attendants or necessaries, only leaning on an invisible Power. I need not inform you in how extraordinary a way he got the blessing, which provoked his brother to such a degree, as determined him to be the death of Jacob, as soon as ever his aged father had dropped. To what a height did this wicked man's envy rise when he said, 'The days of mourning for my father will soon come.' And what then? 'Why, though I have some compassion for the old man, and therefore will not lay violent

hands upon my brother while my father is alive, yet I am resolved to kill him before my father is cold in his grave.' This is the very spirit of Cain, who talked to his brother, and then slew him. This coming to the ears of his mother, she tells the good old patriarch her husband, who, loving peace and quietness, takes the good advice of the weaker vessel, and orders Jacob to go to his mother's brother, Laban, and stay a little while out of Esau's sight (perhaps out of sight, out of mind), and by and by probably, said he, thou mayest come to thy father and mother again in peace and safety. Jacob, though sure of the blessing in the end, by his father's confirmation of it, yet prudently makes use of proper means; therefore he obeyed his parents: and woe, woe be to those who think a parent's blessing not worth their asking for! Having had his mother's blessing, as well as his father's, without saying, 'I will try it out with my brother, I will let him know that I am not afraid of him,' he views it as the call of God, and, like an honest, simple pilgrim, went out from Beersheba towards Haran. Was it not

a little unkind in his parents not to furnish him with some necessaries and conveniences? When the servant was sent to fetch a wife for Isaac, he had a great deal of attendance; why should not Jacob have it now? His father might have sent him away with great parade; but I am apt to believe this did not suit Jacob's real pilgrim spirit. He was a plain man, and dwelt in tents, when, perhaps, he might have dwelt under cedar roofs; he chose a pilgrim's life, and prudence directed him to go thus in a private manner, to prevent increasing Esau's envy, and giving the fatal blow.

Methinks I see the young pilgrim weeping when he took his leave of his father and mother. He went on foot, and they that are acquainted with the geography of the place, say that the first day of his journey he walked not less than forty English miles. What exercise must he have had all that way! No wonder, therefore, that by the time the sun was going down, poor Jacob felt himself very weary, for we are told, ver. 11, 'that he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set.' There is a particular

emphasis to be put upon this term, 'a certain place'; he saw the sun going down, he was a stranger in a strange land.

You that are born in England can have very little idea of it, but persons that travel in the American woods can form a more proper idea, for you may there travel a hundred and a thousand miles, and go through one continued tract of tall green trees, like the tall cedars of Lebanon. And the gentlemen of America, from one end to the other, are of such an hospitable temper, as I have not only been told, but have found among them upwards of thirty years, that they would not let public houses be licensed, that they may have an opportunity of entertaining English friends. May God, of His infinite mercy, grant this union may never be dissolved!

Well, Jacob got to a certain place, and perhaps he saw a good tree that would serve him for a canopy. However, this we are told, he tarried there all night because the sun was set, and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillow, and laid down in that place to sleep; hard lodgings for him who

was used to lie otherwise at home ! I do not hear him say, ' I wish I were got back to my mother again, I wish I had not set out ' ; but upon the hard ground and hard pillow he lies down. I believe never poor man slept sweeter in his life, for it is certainly sweet sleep when God is near us ; he did not know but his brother might follow and kill him while he was asleep, or that the wild beasts might devour him. In America, when they sleep in the woods—and I expect to have some such sleeping times in them before a twelvemonth is over—we are obliged to make a fire to keep the beasts from us. I have often said then, and I hope I shall never forget it, when I rise in the morning, this fire in the woods, that keeps the wild beasts from hurting us, is like the fire of God's love, that keeps the devil from hurting us. Thus weary and solitary he falls asleep, and sweetly dreams—' and behold.' I do not remember many passages of Scripture where the word ' behold ' is repeated so many times in so short a space as in the passage before us. Doubtless, the Lord would have us particularly take notice

of it, even us upon whom the ends of the world are come. 'Behold, a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And behold the Lord stood above it'; so here are three 'beholds' in a very few lines. Was there anything very extraordinary in that? Perhaps the deists would say, 'Your patriarch was tired, and dreamed among other things of a ladder.' Yes, he did; but this dream was of God; and how kind was He to meet him at the end of the first day's journey, to strengthen and animate him to go forward in this lonesome pilgrimage!

This ladder is reckoned by some to denote the providence of God. It was let down as it were from heaven, particularly at this time, to poor Jacob, that he might know that, however he was become a pilgrim, and left his all, all for God's glory, that God would take care for his comfort, and give His angels charge over him, to keep him in all his ways, which was denoted by the angels ascending and descending upon the ladder. Some

think that particular saints and countries have particular guardian angels, and therefore that the angels that ascended were those that had the particular charge of that place, so far as Jacob had come; that the angels that descended were another set of angels, sent down from heaven to guard him in his future journey; perhaps this is more a fancy than the Word of God. However, I very much like the observation of good Mr Burkitt,¹ 'Why should we dispute whether every individual believer has got a particular angel, when there is not one believer but has got guards of angels to attend him?' which are a great deal better than a great many servants, that prove our plagues, and, instead of waiting upon us, make us wait upon them.

But, my dear hearers, I do not know one spiritual commentator but agrees that this ladder was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that as Jacob was now banished from his father's house, and while sleeping upon

¹ The Rev. William Burkitt (1650-1703), whose *Expository Notes, with Practical Observations on the New Testament*, published in 1724, were frequently reprinted during Whitefield's life.

a hard, cold stone, God was pleased not only to give him an assurance that He would be with him in the way, but gave him a blessed sight of Jesus Christ, in whom Jacob believed.

A ladder, you know, is something by which we climb from one place to another; hence, in condescension to our weak capacities, God ordered a ladder to be let down, to show us that Christ is the way to heaven; 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; I am the door,' says He; 'neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved.'

The deists, who own a God, but deny His Son, dare go to God out of Christ; but Jacob is here taught better; how soon does God reveal the Gospel unto him! Here is a ladder, by which God preaches to us. If you have a mind to climb from earth to heaven, you must get up by the Son of God; no one ever pointed out a proper way to heaven for us but Himself. When Adam and Eve fell from God, a flaming sword turned every way to keep them from the tree of life; but Jesus alone is a new and

living way, not only to the holy of holies below, but into the immediate presence of God; and that we might know that He was a proper Saviour, the top of it reached to heaven. If it had stopped short, Jacob might have said, 'Ah! the ladder is within a little way of heaven, but does not quite reach it; if I climb to the top, I shall not get there, after all.' But the top reached to heaven, to point out the divinity and exaltation of the Son of God; such a Saviour became us, who was God, God over all, blessed for evermore. And therefore the Arian scheme is most uncomfortable and destructive; to talk of Christ as a Saviour that is not God, is no Christ at all. I would turn deist to-morrow, if I did not know that Christ was God: 'but cursed is the man that builds his faith upon an arm of flesh.' If Christ be God, the Arians and Socinians, by their own principles, are undone for ever; but Jesus Christ is very God and very man, begotten (not made) of the Father: God, of His infinite mercy, write His divinity deep in our hearts!

The bottom of the ladder reached to the earth; this points out to us the humiliation of the blessed Lord. For us men He came down from heaven; we pray to, and for, a descending God. All the sufferings which our Lord voluntarily exposed Himself to were that He might become a ladder for you and me to climb up to heaven by. 'Come down from the cross,' say they, 'and we will believe Thee'; if He had, what would have become of us? Did they believe on Him when He was dead, buried, and risen again? No. Some people say, 'If Christ were here, oh dear, we should love Him': just as much as they did when they turned Him out of doors, when He came down before. If He had come down from the cross, they would have hung Him up again. Oh, that you and I might make His cross a step to glory!

As the top of the ladder pointed out His exaltation, the bottom His humiliation, the two sides of the ladder being joined together, point out the union of the Deity and manhood in the person of Christ; and that as this

ladder had steps to it, so, blessed be God, Jesus Christ has found out a way whereby we may go, step after step, to glory. The first step is the righteousness of Christ, the active and passive obedience of the Redeemer ; no setting one foot upon this ladder without coming out of ourselves, and relying wholly upon a better righteousness than our own. Again, all the other steps are the graces of the blessed Spirit ; therefore, you need not be afraid of our destroying inward holiness by preaching the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness ; that one is the foundation, the other the superstructure ; to talk of my having the righteousness of Christ imputed to my soul, without my having the holiness of Christ imparted to it, and bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit as an evidence of it, is only deceiving ourselves. I would never preach upon imputed righteousness, without speaking of inward holiness, for if you do not take a great deal of care, you will unawares, under a pretence of exalting Christ, run into Antinomianism, depths that Calvin never went into ; probably you will imbitter other spirits that do not agree with

you, and at the same time hurt the fruits of the Spirit. May God give you clear heads, and at the same time warm hearts.

On the ladder, Jacob saw the angels of God ascending and descending. What is that for? To show that they are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation; therefore we find them attending upon Christ. We do not hear much of them after the canon of Scripture was closed; but as soon as ever Christ was born, the angels sang. Till then we never hear of their singing below, as far as I can judge, since the creation. Then the sons of God shouted for joy. When Eve reached out her hand to pluck the fatal apple, and gave to Adam, earth groaned, and the angels hung, as it were, their harps upon the willows; but when Christ, the second Adam, was born, the angels sang at midnight, 'Glory to God in the highest.' I pray to God we may all die singing that anthem, and sing it to all eternity.

After His temptation, they came and ministered to Him, as some think, food for His body, and wished Him joy and comfort in His soul:

and in His agonies in the garden an angel strengthened Him. After His resurrection, two appeared again, one at the head and another at the foot of His sepulchre, to let those that looked into the sepulchre know that they would not only wait upon the head, but the foot ; and the angels are glad to wait upon the meanest of the children of God. When our Lord departed, a cloud received Him out of their sight, which probably was a cloud of angels. Having led His disciples out of the city, He blessed them, and then away He went to heaven ; may that blessing rest upon you and your children !

This intimates that God makes use of angels to attend His people, especially when they are departing into eternity. Perhaps, part of our entertainment in heaven will be, to hear the angels declare how many millions of times they have assisted and helped us. Our Lord says : angels do there behold the face of the Father of His little ones ; and therefore I love to talk to the lambs of the flock ; and why should I not talk to them whom angels think it their honour to guard ? And if it were not for this, how

would any children escape the dangers they are exposed to in their tender age? It is owing to the particular providence of God that any one child is brought to manhood; therefore I cannot help admiring that part of the Litany, in which we pray, that God would take care not only of the grown people, but of children also: God take care of yours both in body and soul.

But what gave the greatest comfort to Jacob was that the Lord was on the top of the ladder; which I do not know whether it would have been so, if Jacob had not seen God there. It comforts me, I assure you, to think, that whenever God shall call for me, I shall be carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. And I have often thought that whenever that time comes, that blessed, long longed-for moment comes, as soon as ever they have called upon me, my first question will be to them, 'Where is my dear Master? Where is Jesus? Where is that dear Emanuel, who has loved me with an everlasting love, and has called me by His grace, and has sent you to fetch me home to see His face?'

But I believe you and I shall have no occasion to ask where He is, for He will come to meet us ; He will stand at the top of His ladder, to take His pilgrims in ; so God was at the top of the ladder, pray mind that. He appears not sitting, as He is often represented in heaven, but standing : as much as to say, ' Here, here, Jacob, thy brother wants to kill thee ; here thou art come out without a servant, art lying upon a hard bed, but here I am ready in order to preserve thee ; I stand above, and I see thy weariness, I see the fatigue and hardships thou hast yet to undergo, though thou dost not see it thyself ; thou hast thrown thyself upon My providence and protection, and I will give thee the word of a God, that I will stand by thee.' ' The Lord stood above ' ; if He had said nothing, that would have been enough to have shown His readiness to help.

But God speaks, *behold* : well might this be ushered in with the word *behold* ; a ladder set on the earth, and *behold* the angels of God ascending and descending on it ; and, above all, *behold* God speaking from it ! What doth He say ? ' I am the Lord God of Abraham thy

father. Oh! happy they that can say, 'The Lord God of my father'; happy you that have got fathers and mothers in heaven.

I remember, about twenty-five years ago, as I was travelling from Bristol, I met with a man on the road, and being desirous to know whether he was serious or not, I began to put in a word for Christ (and God forbid I should travel with anybody a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them). He told me what a wicked creature he had been; 'But, sir,' says he, 'in the midst of my wickedness, people used to tell me, you have got a good many prayers upon the file for you; your godly father and mother have prayed very often for you.' And it was the pleasure of God he was wrought upon, and brought to Christ. Lay in a good stock for your children, get a good many prayers in for them; they may be answered when you are dead and gone.

'I am the God of Abraham thy father,' not thy grandfather; to put him in mind what an honour God would put upon him, to make him as it were the father of the Church. Though you may have instructors, says Paul, you have

but one father: 'and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed.' Amazing, amazing! you know very well, when persons buy or come to an estate, they usually take possession of it by some ceremony, such as receiving or taking up a piece of dirt, or twig, in their hand, as a sign of their title. Now, says God, 'Poor Jacob, thou dost little think that this very spot of ground that thou liest on to-night, cold and stiff, I intend to give to thee, and thy posterity, for an inheritance.'

Oh, my brethren, give all to God, and God will give all to you. Who would have thought of this? probably Jacob did not. It is as if God took a pleasure in seeing His dear children lie on such a hard ground. If he had been on a feather bed, he might not have had such a visit. Thou shalt have now a God to lean upon, 'to thee will I give it, and to thy seed, which shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south; and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' Thus did

heaven balance the loss of the comforts of his father's house, by the discovery of his and his offspring's prosperity, by an interest in the promised seed.

My particular circumstances call me to observe, and I believe God has done it on purpose to encourage me, that faith, resting on the promise, is easily resigned to the loss of present good ; whereas worldly hearts consider prosperity as a portion ; they do not care if the devil take them hereafter, so they have it now ; and that makes carnal people wonder how we can give up things in this world, for the sake of those not yet born ; but it is to glorify God, and lay a foundation for others' happiness. Here God gives Jacob to know, that hereafter his seed should spread on the east, west, north, and south, his branches should multiply, and at last from his loins should Jesus Christ come ; what for ? ' In whom all the families of the earth should be blessed ' : God Almighty grant we may be blessed in Him !

Then if Jacob should say in his heart, hast thou no promise for me ? here is another *behold* comes in : ' Behold, I am with thee, and will

keep thee in all places whither thou goest.' What a word is this! thou hast nobody with thee, nothing but a staff (he could not carry much upon his back, like a poor soldier with a knapsack behind, and a little bread in his pocket). Well, saith God, 'I do not despise thee because thou art destitute, but I love thee the better for it; thy brother Esau longs to kill thee, but if Esau stabs thee, he shall stab thy God first; I will not only be with thee now, but I will watch every step thou takest, I will be with thee in all places whither thou goest.' As much as to say, 'Jacob, thou art a pilgrim, thy life is to be a moving life, I do not intend thou shall settle and keep in one place; thy life is to be a life of changes, thou art to move from place to place, but I will be with thee in all places whither thou goest, and thereby it shall be known that I am Jacob's God, and also by My bringing thee again into this land.' He not only assures him of a successful journey, whither he was now going, but promises to bring him back once more to see his dear father and mother, and relations, again: 'I will bring thee back to this land';

and to confirm his faith and hope, the great God adds, 'I will not leave thee till I have done that I have spoken to thee of'; that is, all the good He had just now promised. Some people promise, but they cannot do it to-day, and they will not do it to-morrow. I have known the world, and have rung the changes of it ever since I have been here; but, blessed be God, an unchangeable Christ having loved His own, He loved them to the end; 'I will not leave you till I have performed all things I have promised you': may this promise come upon you and your children, and all that God shall call.

Thus spake the great Jehovah to poor Jacob, just setting out to a strange land, knowing not whither he went. But now God speaks not only to Jacob, but He speaks to you; and, blessed be the living God, He speaks to me also, less than the least of all; and as my design is (though I cannot tell but this may be the last opportunity) to speak something to you about my departure; yet, brethren, my grand design in preaching to you is, to recommend the Lord Jesus Christ to

your souls ; and before I go, to make a particular personal application. Give me leave, therefore, to ask you, it may be the last time I may ask many of you, Whether you have ever set your foot upon this blessed ladder, the Son of God? I ask you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, did you ever set your foot, I say, upon this ladder? that is, did you ever yet believe on Jesus Christ, and come to Him as poor lost sinners, relying upon no other righteousness than that of the Son of God?

Perhaps, if you were to speak, some of you would say, 'Away with your ladder'; and what will you do then? Why, say you, 'I will climb to heaven without it.' What ladder will you climb upon? 'Oh, I think to go to heaven because I have been baptised.' That ladder will break under you; what, a ladder made of water, what are you dreaming of? No: 'Oh, I think I shall go to heaven, because I have done nobody any harm.' What, a ladder made of negative goodness! No: 'I think to go,' you will say, 'by good works': a ladder made of

good works, that has not Christ for its bottom, what is that? 'I think,' say you, 'to go to heaven by my prayers and fastings.' All these are good in their place ; but, my brethren, do not think to climb to heaven by these ropes of sand. If you never before set your foot on Christ, this blessed ladder, God grant this may be the happy time.

I have been praying before most of you were up, I believe, that God would give me a parting blessing. I remember, soon after I left England last, that a dear Christian friend told me that there was one woman, who came only out of curiosity, that dated her conversion from hearing my last sermon. And, I bless God, I never once left England, but some poor soul has dated their conversion from my last sermon. When I put on my surplice, to come out to read the second service, I thought it was just like a person's being decently dressed to go out to be executed. I would rather, was it the will of God it should be so, than to feel what I do in parting from you, that death would put an end to all ; but I am to be executed again and again, and nothing will support me under

the torture, but the consideration of God blessing me to some poor souls. Do pray for me, ye children of God, that God would give us a parting blessing. God help you, young people, to put your foot on this ladder; do not climb wrong. The devil has got a ladder, but it reaches down to hell; all the devil's children go down, not up: the bottom of the devil's ladder reaches to the depths of the damned, the top of it reaches to the earth; and when death comes, then up comes the devil's ladder, to let you down. For God's sake, come away from the devil's ladder; climb, climb, dear young men. Oh, it delighted me on Friday night at the Tabernacle, when we had a melting, parting sacrament; and it delighted me this morning to see so many young men at the table; God add to the blessed number! Young women, put your feet upon this ladder; God lets one ladder down from heaven, and the devil brings another up from hell. 'Oh,' say you, 'I would climb up God's ladder, I think it is right, but I shall be laughed at': do you think to go to heaven without being laughed at? The Lord Jesus

Christ help you to climb to heaven. Come, climb till you get out of the hearing of their laughter. Oh, trust not to your own righteousness, your vows, and good resolutions.

Some of you, blessed be God, have climbed up this ladder, at least are climbing. Well, I wish you joy ; God be praised for setting your feet on this ladder ; God be praised for letting down this ladder. I have only one word to say to you : for Jesus Christ's sake, and your own too, climb a little faster ; take care the world does not get hold of your heels. It is a shame the children of God do not climb faster ; you may talk what you please, but God's people's lukewarmness is more provoking to Him than all the sins of the nation. We cry out against the sins of the land, would to God we did cry out more of the sins of the saints ; ' I will spew you out of my mouth, because you are lukewarm,' says Christ. If any of you say you cannot climb because you are lame-footed, look to Jesus Christ, my dear friends, and your affliction shall make you climb. And if any of you are coming down the ladder again, the Lord Jesus Christ bless

the foolishness of preaching to help you up again. 'Oh,' say you, 'I am giddy, I shall fall'; here, I will give you a rope, be sure lay hold of it; just as the sailors do when you go aboard a ship, they let down a rope, so God lets down a promise. Climb, climb, then, till you have got higher, into a better climate, and God shall put His hand out by and by, when you get to the top of the ladder, to receive you to Himself. Blessed be the living God, I hope and believe I shall meet many of you by and by.

And now, my brethren, it is time for me to preach my own funeral sermon; and I would humbly hope that, as a poor sinner, I may put in my claim for what God promised Jacob; and I do put it in, with full assurance of faith that God will be with me. I am now going for the thirteenth time to cross the Atlantic. When I came from America last, I took my leave of all the Continent, from the one end of the provinces to the other, except some places which we had not then taken. I took my leave for life, without the least design of returning there again, my health was so bad;

and the prospect of getting the Orphan-house into other hands made me say, when I first came over, 'I have no other river to go over than the river Jordan.'

I thought then of retiring, for I did not choose to appear when my nerves were so relaxed, that I could not serve God as I could wish to do; but as it hath pleased God to restore my health much, and has so ordered it by His providence, that I intend to give up the Orphan-house, and all the land adjoining, for a public college, I wished to have had a public sanction, but his grace the late Archbishop of Canterbury put a stop to it. They would give me a charter, which was all I desired, but they insisted upon, at least his grace and another did, that I should confine it totally to the Church of England, and that no extempore prayer should be used in a public way in that house, though Dissenters, and all sorts of people, had contributed to it. I would sooner cut my head off than betray my trust, by confining it to a narrow bottom; I always meant it should be kept upon a broad bottom, for people of all denominations, that their

children might be brought up in the fear of God.

By this means the Orphan-house reverted into my hands; I have once more, as my health was restored, determined to pursue the plan I had fixed on; and, through the tender mercies of God, Georgia (which about thirty-two years ago was a desolate place, and when the land, as it was given me by the House of Commons, would have been totally deserted, and the colony have quite ceased, had it not been for the money I have laid out for the Orphan-house, to keep the poor people together), that colony is rising to a most amazing height. I had news last week of the great prosperity of the negroes; and I hope by the twenty-fifth of March, which is the day, the anniversary day, I laid the first brick, in the year 1739, I say, I hope by that time all things will be finished, and a blessed provision will be made for orphans and poor students that will be brought up there; it will be a blessed source of provision for the children of God in another part of the world.

This is a grand design I am going upon;

this is my visible cause. But I never yet went to them, but God has been pleased to bless my ministration among them; and therefore, after I have finished the Orphan-house affair, I intend to go all along the Continent by land (which will keep me all the winter and spring), and when I come to the end of it, which will be Canada and New England, then I hope to return again to this place. For, let people say what they will, I have not so much as a single thought of settling abroad, on this side eternity. And I am going in no public capacity; I shall set out like a poor pilgrim, at my own expense, trusting upon God to take care of me, and to bear my charges; and I call God to witness, and I must be a cursed devil and hypocrite, to stand here in the pulpit, and provoke God to strike me dead for lying, I never had the love of the world, nor ever felt it one quarter of an hour in my heart, since I was twenty years old. I might have been rich: but though the Chapel is built, and I have a comfortable room to lie in, I assure you I built it at my own expense, it cost nobody

but myself anything. I have a watch - coat made me, and in that I shall lie every night on the ground, and may Jacob's God bless me!

I will not say much of myself, but when I have been preaching, I have read and thought of those words with pleasure, 'Surely this is the house of God. And I will bring thee again to this land.' Whether that will be my experience or not, blessed be God, I have a better land in view. And, my dear brethren, I do not look upon myself at home till I land in my Father's kingdom; and if I am to die in the way, if I am to die in the ship, it comforts me that I know I am as clear as the sun, that I go by the will of God: and though people may say, 'Will you leave the world! Will you leave the Chapel?' Oh, I am astonished that we cannot leave everything for Christ; my greatest trial is, to part with those who are as dear to me as my own soul; and however others may forget me, as thousands have, and do forget me, yet I cannot forget them.

And now may Jacob's God be with you; oh, keep close to God, my dear London friends;

I do not bid you keep close to Chapel ; you have done so always. I shall endeavour to keep up the Word of God among you in my absence : I shall have the same persons that managed for me when I was out last, and they sent me word again and again, by letter, that it was remarkable that the Tottenham Court people were always present when ordinances were there.

You see I went upon a fair bottom ; I might have had a thousand a year out of this place, if I had chose it : when I am gone to heaven you will see what I have got on earth.¹ I do not like to speak now, because it may be thought boasting ; but I am sure there are numbers of people here, if they knew what I have, would love me as much as they now hate me. When we come before the great Judge of quick and dead, while I stand before Him, God grant you may not part with me then, it will be a dreadful parting then, it will be worse

¹ Whitefield died worth about £1400, mainly derived from legacies. He left £1330 in legacies to various friends and servants. The Orphan - house, the Tabernacle, and the Tottenham Court Road Chapel were regarded as only held in trust by him. (See Tyerman, ii. 608-9.)

then, to go into the fire, to be among the devil and his angels ; God forbid it ! God forbid it ! God forbid it ! Oh, remember that my last words were, come, come to Christ ; the Lord help you to come to Christ ; come to Christ, come to Jacob's God ; God give you faith like Jacob's faith.

You that have been kind to me, that have helped me when I was sick, some of whom are here, that have been very kind to me, may God reward you, my friends, and God forgive my enemies ; God, of His infinite mercy, bless you all. You will be amply provided for, I believe, here. May God spread the Gospel everywhere ; and may God never leave you, nor forsake you. Even so, Lord Jesus. *Amen* and *Amen*.

THE END.

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