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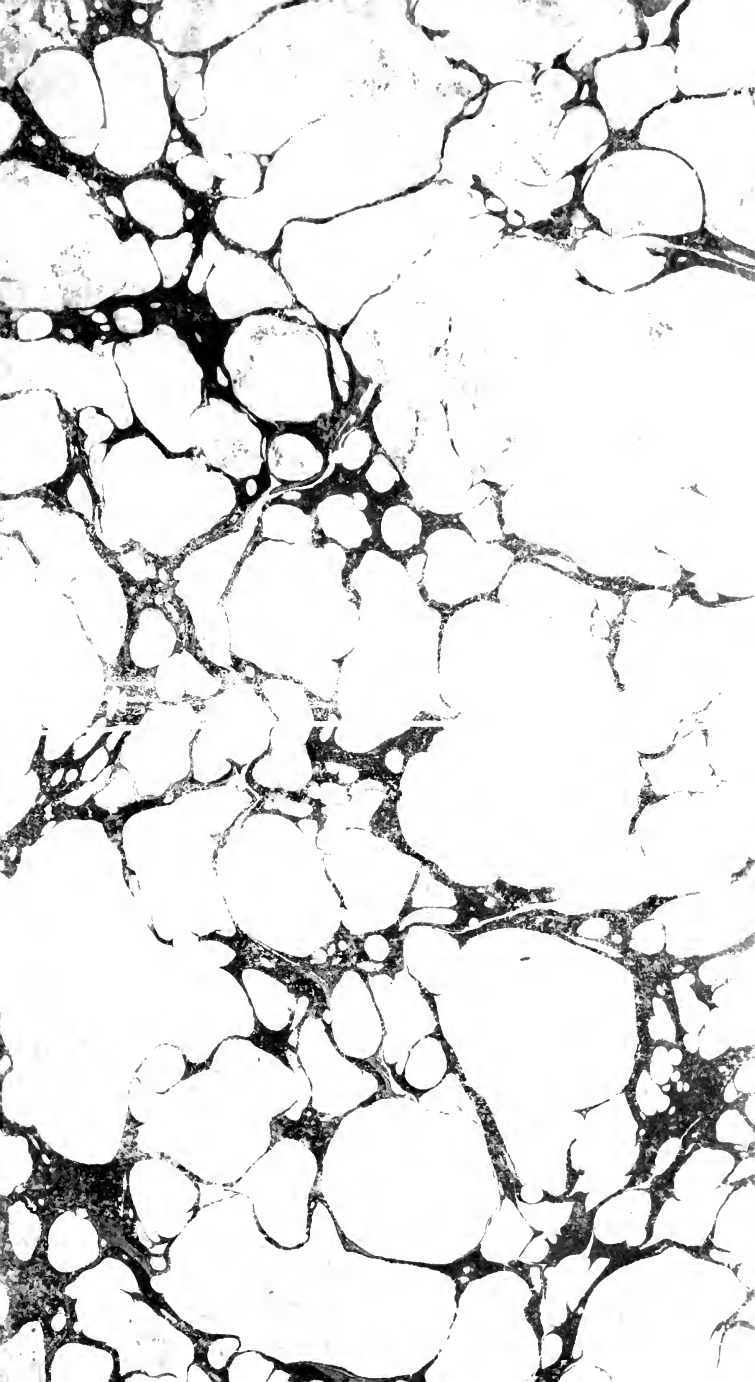
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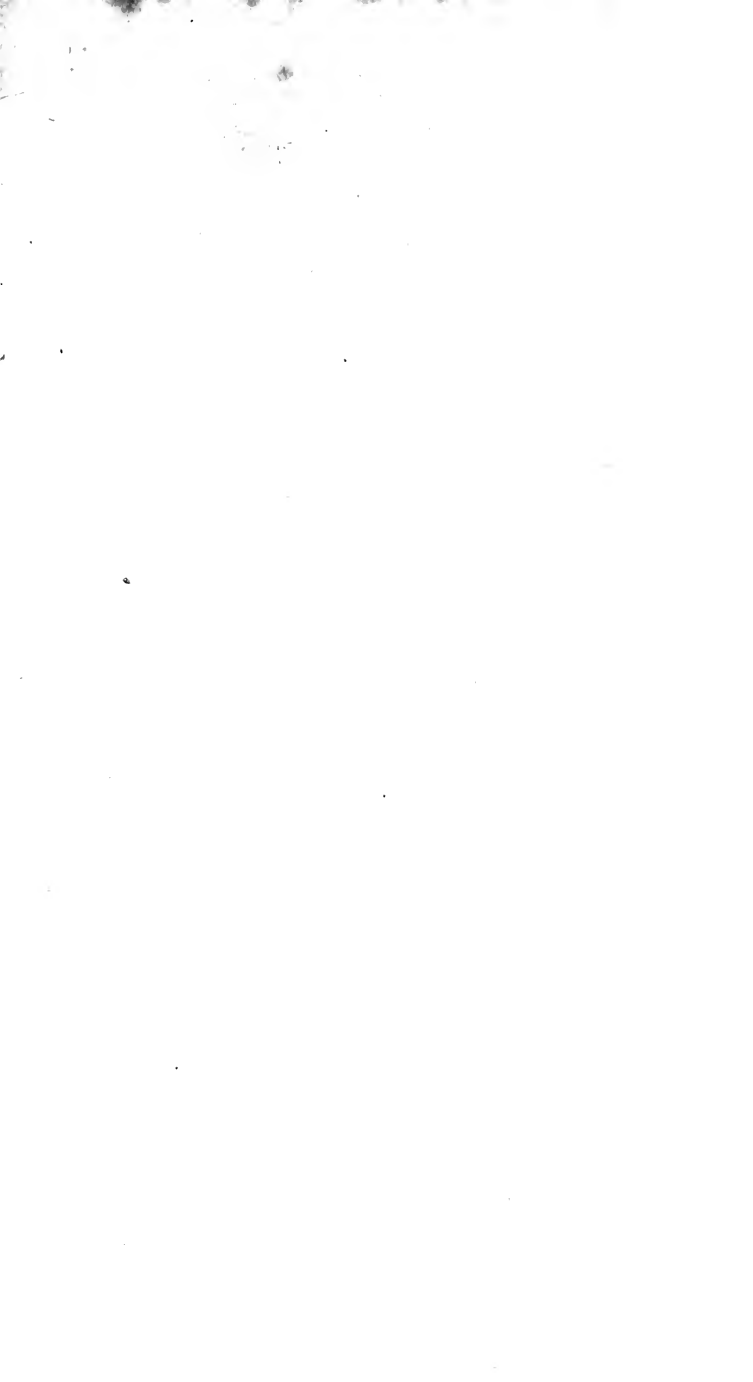
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SERMONETS

ADDRESSED TO

THOSE WHO HAVE NOT YET ACQUIRED,

OR WHO MAY HAVE LOST,

THE INCLINATION TO APPLY THE POWER OF
ATTENTION

TO COMPOSITIONS OF A HIGHER KIND.

BY

HENRY AND LETITIA-MATILDA HAWKINS

Our discourses, with scriptural mottoes affixed, are short, immethodical essays, in which the beginning can hardly be distinguished from the end.

GILPIN'S *Sermons*.

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TO
THE REVEREND
THOMAS MARTYN, B. D. F. R. & L. S.
REGIUS PROFESSOR OF BOTANY IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

THIS HUMBLE VOLUME,
WHICH MUST OWE ITS ACCEPTANCE WITH THE WORLD
TO HIS PERMITTING HIS NAME TO RECOMMEND IT,

IS,

WITH THE SINCEREST GRATITUDE FOR HIS
AFFECTIONATE FRIENDSHIP,

VERY RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY

HIS MOST OBLIGED AND

OBEDIENT SERVANTS,

THE AUTHORS.

The first years of man must make provision for the
last. JOHNSON.

Revealed religion sets forth a proper object for imitation,
in that Being, who is the pattern, as well as the
source, of all spiritual perfection. ADDISON.

Our nearest approach to the grave ought not to put an
end to our desires of spiritual improvement.

BREWSTER.



PREFACE.

THERE is a sort of artificial boldness assumed by very great cowards, which may be usefully adopted by authors of no pretensions, in preference to any show of real or feigned timidity; as it carries an appearance of spirit and cheerfulness, which, if the writer's disposition can influence the reader's, may bespeak good-humoured attention. We will not, therefore, name one of the ten thousand misgivings with which this volume is sent into the world:—we will rather talk of the uniform inclination there is in an enlightened public, to encourage any thing favourable to religion or to morals:—we will not recollect that every body is now a critic, or that, when we have passed the ordeal of the said

every-body's criticism, we must face a battery of powerful artillery, where eloquence charges and wit points the ordnance :—we must not remember how often this and its neighbour batteries have levelled, together with the hostile erections of enemies, many an humble dwelling where the weary traveller was invited to take shelter, the scientific to seek amusement, and the desponding to look for encouragement. We must brave all this, or at least tell ourselves, that, in minuteness of dimensions, there is some ground for hope of escaping.

But, though suffered to live, we may be wounded or mangled in our limbs. We must, therefore, prepare a little local armour, and, dropping figurative speech, endeavour to avert by anticipating.

Our TITLE will attract censure : we shall be justly informed, that “ Sermonet ” is a word, not only not naturalized, but never yet introduced into our language. We

shall hear of Canzonets, Barouchets, “ *et omne quod exit in*” *et*. Beside the charge of barbarism, there will be a suspicion of levity to encounter; and we shall be decried as nearly uncivilized, and little short of profane.

Our PLAN opens two doors to criticism: our choice of it will be contemned, and our imperfect execution of it will be regretted. We shall be reprehended for having done what we thought essential, and for having omitted what we supposed anomalous. When we have painted a moonlight, we shall be blamed for a monotony of tint; and when we have designed a cottage, we shall be asked, “Where is the dome?”

Our ANECDOTES will be said to convert a volume of divinity into a story-book; and religious readers will avoid us as unholy; while those who wish to free the world from the restraints imposed by revealed re-

ligion, will denominate superstitious those tenets which imply, not only a belief that God made us and this goodly world, but that by his Providence he governs it; that he sent his Son, our blessed Saviour, from Heaven, to redeem us from a state of fallen nature; and that, through Him alone, by the operation of the Holy Spirit on our corrupt hearts, we hope to enter the kingdom of Heaven.

To these foreseen objections we respectfully reply :—

For our TITLE. The adoption has not been inconsiderate. We have discussed it with those who were not satisfied with it, and have put it to them to find one less exceptionable: they have not been able to suggest any, which did not carry with it an appearance of presumption in persons of our very limited pretensions. We have ultimately referred to an authority, from which no one, it is conceived, would wish

to appeal ; and are sanctioned in our choice in this point, on the ground of *fitness* to our performances—*novelty*, which may attract attention—and *an agreeable association of ideas* with diminutives, recognised by such as are conversant with the languages of foreign nations.

FOR OUR PLAN, we have to plead, that, being too light for all other writers, it is suited to those readers who have hitherto found all serious works too heavy. This must suffice to excuse our *choice* : for the *execution* of it, we have only to say, that had we consulted our fame, rather than the interests of the cause we wish to promote, our performance might have been, at least, different. Whether we have not done our best, is another question, and perhaps, for our credit, better not discussed.

FOR OUR ANECDOTES, which we consider as endeavours to amuse and to convince by relative facts, the practice and the pre-

cept of the great Jeremy Taylor is our warrant. If the pious still call us unholy, we must console ourselves in the company of a man never yet so deemed. But to the charge of superstition we reply, in a more decided tone, that, if this be superstition, we “glory in” our “infirmity.”

But we must not expect to be let off thus easily. A heavier charge—the charge of plagiarism—is against us, and cannot be refuted, even if it assert that we have stolen our whole scheme from the “Hints for Sermons,” subjoined to the volumes of the late venerable Mr. Gilpin of Boldre. Such hints we thought wanted but little to make them more useful than any elaborate composition, to those who are not in the habit of reading a grown-up sermon; and if it be asked, how this volume has accumulated, curiosity shall be satisfied, and an accidental plagiarism acknowledged, by referring to the practice of the learned

Grotius, who made his "Commentary" his Sunday's relaxation. It may recommend some improvement in the modes of spending the day of religious industry and civil repose, if we state, that without neglecting the public or private duties of the Sabbath, or even foregoing rational pleasure, and fearfully cautious, lest, in attempting to persuade others, we might omit teaching ourselves, we have found time for the compilation of this little volume, only by forbearing to mis-use the most valuable day of the seven, either in devoting its leisure to writing letters, settling accounts, or paying unnecessary visits. Neither, it is hoped, has the employment been without some advantage reflected on ourselves, as every man who preaches to others must of necessity be one of his hearers; and it is impossible to consider truths so important, as those here insisted on, without feeling animated to the practice of laws founded on them.

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SERMONETS.

SERMONET I.

PSALM CXXVII. 1.

*Except the Lord build the house, their labour
is but lost that build it.*

DOUBTLESS much of our anxiety in this world would be abated, and much of human pride be humbled, if mankind frequently recollected, that, in all their schemes and occupations, it is the blessing of God that must be relied on for their perfection, and that, without it, man toils in vain. He may plough the field; he may commit the seed to the furrow; but it is God who giveth the increase: it is by his bounty that he is fed, and by his grace that he is directed.

To convince us of this truth, we have little more to do than to look into the

events of our own lives. How many things have happened to us wholly unaccountable on any other supposition than that of the secret workings of Providence, continually exerting its spontaneous beneficence in bestowing what is necessary or fitting for us ! in blessing with a fair return the honest labours of the humble mechanic, or in raising to riches and honours, him who in learning or talents is “ exalted above” his “ fellows !” We are led, by his unseen hand, to engage in some particular employment in preference to others offered to our choice ; or we form an accidental acquaintance, which grows into intimacy and ripens into profitable friendship : we fix our abode, with scarcely a motive to incline our caprice, in some spot which ultimately proves the best suited to our wants and wishes : and these circumstances, however ordinary in occurrence and casual in their aspect, shall perhaps lead to some of the most important events of our lives, whence our interests or our happiness take a fresh spring. It is thus, that, unless blinded by pride or ignorance, we are obliged to confess that the good provi-

dence of God has directed us, and, it may be presumed, with a benign regard to our well-being.

Again, let us recollect from how many evils and inconveniences the same kind and watchful Providence has protected us, and to which we should have been exposed, had no better counsellor than our own wisdom guided, and no stronger arm than that of our own virtue defended us:—how often we have incurred risks and exposed ourselves to dangers, from which it appeared impossible to escape unhurt; yet we have escaped, and even without our own endeavours.

Thanks be to God! the preservation of his creatures is, as much as their creation, his care; and reason and experience, as well as gratitude, call on us daily to acknowledge, with all humility, that man labours in vain unless the Lord be with him. But this care extends not merely to worldly concerns, such as are connected with our existence in the flesh; it reaches likewise to our spiritual welfare; and it is not more evident that the wisdom and

mercy of God direct and prosper our manual industry, than that his grace, and that alone, enables us to perform, however imperfectly, those duties on which his favour depends. Men may talk of the moral sense and of natural religion; but unless the frame and the propensities of the human heart, as developed from the creation of the world to the present moment, are to be considered as no evidence, it is most indisputable that no man ever existed who could reason out a perfect religion for himself; nor, even if one had been revealed to him, would he have been able to fulfil its injunctions, without the presence of the grace of God. “It is his Spirit that worketh in us, both to will and to do; and no man hath quickened his own soul.”

Let us then learn to distrust all schemes, either of religion or of morals, formed on any other basis than that of revelation. Such schemes generally have no better origin than gross ignorance, presumptuous pride, or the most despicable vanity. The doctrines of Christianity—the humility which it enjoins and inspires—the ne-

ecessity of a dependence on some superior power, which it makes us feel, are so many principles which gain strength and credit in proportion to our knowledge of mankind and of ourselves: and happy are they who do not leave to experience to teach them, as matter of dire necessity, that which Christianity would have gently inculcated, ere passion had urged them on to a precipice, whence it is difficult to recede: —who receive the precepts of the Gospel as the contrivance of Infinite Wisdom to emancipate mankind from the slavery of sin, and who, sensible of their own insufficiency to any perfect work, are willing to seek assistance from Him whose “ears are ever open,” and who will not fail, to borrow the phrase of the text, to “build the house,” if we are but disposed to establish it on the only solid foundation. H.

NOTE.

INSTEAD of the extravagant fictions and monstrous portraitures of imagined folly, which at times are sent forth from the press to make us more credulous and more foolish than Nature intended us, it would be well, and it might in all ways be profitable, to confine ourselves as nearly as possible to truth; and, for the purpose promoted in the Psalm from whence the text is taken, to trace the silent operation of the good providence of God, as we conceive it to have ruled the destinies of men. History furnishes much food of this sort to the contemplative mind; our own daily observation will add to the store. It is attention of this sort which gives to some persons, that power of "interesting," as it is called, which all can feel and few account for. That which is the gossip of the day to an unobserving chatterer, is matter of useful conversation to a digestive mind; and the same events, related with the insipidity of a trifler, or with the rational acknowledgment and just feeling of a Christian, will produce a very different effect. There is not a village in England, there is not a street in the metropolis, which would not, if its history were revealed and properly considered, afford more genuine interest and more profitable moral than all the baby-books, and all the fancied disclosures of the secrets of our superiors, with

which young and old are satiated. If it be true that "there is a tide in the affairs of men," it is as true that there is a hinge on which the events of a whole life sometimes turn; and little do we reflect when we confess some circumstances "scarcely within the circle of probability," and others "highly romantic," that at that moment we are, without indeed the grace of candour or humility, acknowledging the marvellous acts of the Lord. Averse, as we ought to be, to claiming in trifles the attention of our Father in Heaven, we can never be beyond hope preserved from danger, or beyond expectation made happy, and omit safely the *Non nobis* of a grateful heart.

It is to be hoped that every mind left to its own perceptions, will admit the following well-authenticated fact, among the number of what are called, with too little attendant reflection, "providential escapes." The late Duke of —, when Secretary of State, going home from his office one night on foot, was attacked on Constitution Hill by two footpads, who having taken his money, demanded his watch. It was a very valuable repeater, and he had deposited it so securely, that he thought it might elude their search: but at the moment, and while the men had their hands on him, the watch betrayed itself, by striking:—and, to increase his danger and consternation, the hour was most unfortunately TWELVE! —"I heard it," said His Grace, in recounting the accident, "and I thought it never would cease striking

—I gave myself up ; but they did not hear it.” It was with an overpowering sense of his escape that the Duke related this.

Numerous are the instances of men, who having survived all the dangers of the camp and the sea, have met a premature death in drawing-rooms and on carpets. Still more striking are some preservations from dangers minute in their form, but fatal in their effects. Lord Heathfield, the brave defender of Gibraltar, when returned to his country to enjoy his well-earned honours, was invited to name a ship launched at Blackwall. A few gentlemen attended him, and nearest to him stood a man, whose country could as ill spare him. At the instant of the ship's going off, one of the supporting timbers, which had been omitted in clearing away, fell ; in descending, it wavered, as if doubtful whether to strike his Lordship or his friend—neither dared stir—each expected it—it passed between them, and, as if to show them their escape, it fell on a poor dog who was running across, and with only a moment's suffering crushed him. L

SERMONET II.

PSALM CXXX. 4.

*There is mercy with thee, therefore shalt thou
be feared.*

UNPREJUDICED observation with regard to ourselves, would convince us that we act with the best effect when least violent in our proceedings; and observation of any sort, with regard to our neighbour, shows us daily, that he acts with the greatest wisdom, who, keeping feelings and judgment apart, suffers a just moderation to regulate his endeavours. Both cases prove that vehemence is a tone of even worldly conduct, to be cautiously admitted, whether in our dealings with others or the prosecution of our own interests.

It might, were not the fact contradicted by experience, be supposed that the hasty man would be the man of the greatest dispatch, the covetous man be the soonest rich, and the man the most prone to anger the most implicitly obeyed; but though

this may be true in some few single instances, the exceptions preponderate and may be said to form the rule; for we see hasty people perpetually obliged to do their work over again, covetous people losing all they aim at, by the greediness of their grasp, and irascible people reduced to the most abasing condescensions. All this, however in appearance remotely connected, leads up to a recollection of the text, "There is mercy with thee, THEREFORE shalt thou be feared."

We must not presume to say that the Almighty might not, in his infinite power, have made us fear him, had he chosen cruelty for one of his attributes: from his conduct towards us, there can be none of those feeble or counteracting results which are found in the dealings of men; but certainly, in exercising mercy, he makes a claim on our affections, as well as on our consciences, which, converting the slavery of obedience into the free-will offering of love, holds out, by analogy, a lesson which would be advantageously practised in our intercourse with the world.

The text says, it is THEREFORE—for that cause—that God shall be feared : it does not say, *nevertheless, notwithstanding, or although* ; it is because, if we are beings at all of a generous nature, we could not, we cannot, refuse to One so forbearing towards us, that respect which love and admiration always produce ; and if we are creatures rationally attentive to our best interests, we cannot hesitate conscientiously to discharge duties, in themselves light, in the performance repaying us, and, in their intention, directed to our advantage. Permitted, as we are, to imitate, as far as human frailty allows us, the various excellencies of our Maker, let us show our good taste, by bearing in mind the beautiful expression of the Psalmist, and adopting the spirit of it in our practice. A little further consideration will prove that we cannot greatly injure ourselves, even in the affairs of this life, by the adoption of it.

It is a hard heart that would not prefer serving a kind master ; the distinction is not lost, even in our times : the common

expressions of the labourer and the hireling prove that it exists. An unkind master furnishes an excuse for those who disobey him: when once his power is faced and his violence expected, he is defied to do his best for himself, and his worst towards the object of his ill will: relying on his own brutal force, which he shows no moderation in using, he is turned over to the mechanic power of his own single arm; his justice is impeached by its excess; and his claim to any thing but what his strength can wrest and retain, is denied or contested.

But passion has no ears, vehemence has no prudence, prejudice has no policy. The man given up to violent emotions, does not see, that, even when his rage is the most tremendous, he himself may be an object of contempt. He considers nothing in the future—he makes no reserves, even for his own contingent interests: he does not see that those punish the most effectually who punish unwillingly; or that, while the persons on whom he pours the full measure of his rage, can impute any part of

it to his tyrannical temper, just so much as they refer to this source, is lost on them. Take an opposite instance, and this is evident. What is not done amongst us expressly "for the sake," as we term it, of any specific individual, seldom meets with individual gratitude. "It was not done to benefit or gratify *me*," is a reason that seems to discharge us from all obligation, at least to our fellow-creatures: the good that is unintentional towards us, is accounted caprice, accident, any thing but beneficence; and we refuse to trace the stream which is vitiated at the fountain.

And thus, in using superfluous violence towards others, all that is more than is called for by the occasion, is wasted energy; and if we overhear the murmurs of servants, the contemptuous apologies made by the poor for the privileged infirmities of the rich; if we detect the sneer of the crafty, and the derision of the insolent, we may learn, that to deserve respect, to excite reverence, to obtain willing compliance, it is prudent, nay indispensably necessary, to have mercy.

NOTE.

IN cases not merely between man and man, and even in the silent operations of nature, the lesson of moderation and mercy is taught us. The human body suffers by immoderate exertion: the brute creation deprive us of their services when treated without mercy: the animal spirits raised above their natural elevation, sink as much below it. In governments the maxim holds; in every case where power is carried beyond its due bound, it becomes weaker. An instance will occur to the recollection of every one, in the overstrained power of the Lacedæmonians at the conclusion of the Peloponnesian war, when Athens was reduced to slavery, and obliged to submit to the yoke of thirty tyrants imposed on them by their conquerors. Who would not have supposed that thirty tyrants would have been a force sufficient to keep a depressed and exhausted people in perfect subjugation?—yet it was not. Thrasybulus, with a few of his adherents, animated the Athenians to resistance; and the power of the thirty tyrants was annihilated.

A more familiar instance may be added, such as will come home to “the business and bosom” of every one. In a great commercial concern, it was necessary for one of two partners to admit to an interview and the explanation of a very unpleasant misunderstanding, a man of a low rank, and of the

most brutal manners. One of the two gentlemen at the head of the vast business of the house, being in principle a man averse from noise and vehemence, turned the conduct of the matter over to the other, whose habits made him more a match for what they had to expect. The war of words began, and victory, which would have precluded all accommodation, was inclining to the side of him who had the fewest restraints on his tongue, when the other of the principals, who had been present, though silent, interposed a few words in a gentle undisturbed tone; not by any concession relinquishing right, or submitting to abuse, but expressing the just sense and import of the matter. The ferment of blood which the equal match of the combatants had kept up, instantly ceased: the angry man listened with respect to reasoning, in substance the same as that which he had before treated with rude disdain; and the affair was amicably adjusted, and almost in a whisper.

L.

SERMONET III.

ST. MATTHEW, XXVI. 26.

This is my body.

IT may, perhaps, be truly said, that no passage in the Scripture has occasioned more difference of opinion as to its import, than that now chosen for consideration; the question whether it is to be understood literally or figuratively, having produced, not merely theological controversy between those who in the essential import might agree, but acrimonious schisms in the church of Christ, which no arguments will ever (at least as far as we may judge) avail to explain away, and no authority to heal.

Unless we are contented to renounce much for which the Protestant seceders from the Church of Rome have contended, we cannot venture to assert that the literal interpretation is the true one; for, as far as the fact can be ascertained by any one of

our senses, the bread given in the Holy Sacrament continues such without any change in the substance any more than in the form; but surely no such change or transubstantiation, or even consubstantiation, is necessary to render the text intelligible. Let us advert to the institution of the Lord's Supper, and we shall find a solution of every difficulty. We know that it was instituted in reference to the passover, Christ being the real sacrifice of which the paschal lamb was a type: the paschal lamb was required to be sacrificed, and all those who were to partake of the benefit of the passover, were required to eat of it, and the manner of eating it, was prescribed—it was to be eaten in haste. The paschal sacrifice, therefore, consisted of two parts—the death of the victim, and the eating of it by those who were to partake of the benefit of the rite.—Jesus Christ, therefore, being the sacrifice, suffered death as the propitiation for our sins; but as it would have been impossible, or, if possible, otherwise objectionable, that those who were to partake of the benefits of his death and pas-

sion, should literally eat of his body and drink of his blood, he institutes his Supper, and tells those who are permitted to partake of it, that the bread which they then eat, and the wine which they then drink, are his body and his blood; so that these elements may, in some degree, be considered as substituted in the room of the real body and blood of Jesus Christ, at least so far as the partaking of them worthily, confers upon the participant the same benefits which were conferred upon those who partook of the paschal lamb.

Our Saviour might, therefore, without any violent figure in language, say, "This is my body," when, to all intents and purposes, the bread was his body to those who ate it; neither is it necessary to suppose any change to take place in the elements, so as to make them really human flesh and human blood. To comprehend the passage aright, no greater license of interpretation is required, than such as is allowed to writers on other subjects. Had not the eating of the bread and drinking the wine been thus substituted, the ordinance would

have been deficient, it being a maxim both of Jewish and heathen institution, that the sacrifice which had been offered was always eaten by those who were to be benefited by it.

H.

SERMONET IV.

PSALM XLIX. 18.

*So long as thou doest well unto thyself, men
will speak good of thee.*

THE observations dispersed through the Sacred Writings, on the manners of men, must be either prophetic, or drawn from wisdom and experience; that is to say, they either are the result of foresight which has told what the corruptions of the world will become, or they are recitals of that which has occurred; and not unfrequently they partake of both these characters; and experience on the part of the writer, becomes prediction when directed to the reader. The Psalmist, doubtless, had seen, and he knew posterity would, ages after, see, that whilst we can keep our hold of the blessings of life, the opinion of the world is in our favour; and the court paid to greatness, and the shameless and sudden desertion of those who have fallen from it,

SERMONET IV.

which history, not of one age or one country, but of all ages and countries, records, prove he was right in supposing that his experience would be that of the generations after him, and the meaning of his axiom remain uncontradicted by any general instances of the commendations of men bestowed on those who have thrown away or lost the power of doing well unto themselves.

The persons “doing well unto themselves” would, perhaps, in the language of the present day, be described rather as those careful of their own interests; and of such, in worldly acceptance, there can be but two sorts—the selfish and the prudent.

However odious the vice of selfishness must ever appear to those who know no joy so great as that of dispensing the bounty of Providence, there will always be persons in the world, enough to admit of numbering them generally, who, if selfishness be successful, will commend the practice of it, though, perhaps, under some softer name. The “children of this gene-

ration" are so much wiser than the "children of light," that they will praise, though not on the same ground as our blessed Saviour, the shrewdness of the unjust steward: their approbation says, they would, in similar circumstances, act in a similar manner.

The fairly prudent are entitled to be spoken well of by the world, whether their prudence be attended with success or misfortune. And by those acquainted with the ingredients of virtues, if such a term may be used, something more than the common "well speaking" of the world will be granted to them; for prudence is generally compounded of discernment, wisdom, and self-restraint—at least, it dismisses all passion, and rejects all foreign impulse: it strives to do what is conducive to the end proposed; and if this end be laudable, the practice of prudence, fairly exerted, is virtuous.

It is pretending to make discoveries in an explored country, to remark, as the text naturally leads us to do, on the limitation of that term which the Psalmist as-

signs to the well-speaking of men. The stories of our infancy ; the scenic amusements of our riper years ; history, poetry, painting—and happy are we if we cannot add, our own experience—all will inform us that the setting sun has no train of followers ; and that the lofty mind of Wolsey had no more power to attract flatterers when he had drawn the royal frown on him, than the speculators of the present day, when their bubble greatness has burst by their unmeasured inflation.

We may profitably learn from the text, that, by prudence, a valuable reputation may be gained ; and common sense will teach us, that the good opinion of the best part of mankind is better worth purchasing by forbearance, than the superfluous indulgences of a capricious fancy, by the prodigal dissipation of that which was designed, by the Giver of all good, to be beneficial to ourselves, or to others. That light which our Creator has bestowed on us, to guide us to everlasting life, will clearly show us, if we are willing to be instructed, that in do-

ing our duty to Him, we do well unto ourselves, secure from all the contingencies of this world, and out of reach of that caprice which makes success the test of merit.

L.

SERMONET V.

HEBREWS, III. 13.

The deceitfulness of sin.

THIS is one of the most important texts in Scripture, and, at the same time, affords one of the most instructive lessons of human life. If Sin performed all that she promised; if her votaries could pass through life without care and without any of those evils which the virtuous are sometimes called upon to endure, then, indeed, might she boast her superiority: but the fallacy consists in this, that, whatever she may *boast*, she *performs* nothing; and, after all that she can offer to allure, the virtuous man is not only the wisest, but the happiest; and the vicious man has nothing to produce, as the fruit of his enormities, but this aphorism—that “all is vanity;” and that, were he to live his life over again, he would choose a life of virtue.

From our first parents, down to the present moment, all mankind have felt the deceitfulness of sin. No vice, no individual act of vice, ever repaid the perpetrator.

Judas Iscariot found himself deceived in any hopes of honour or happiness that he might have sought to attain; and by the sense of guilt alone, was urged to confess, that he had betrayed the innocent blood, giving up, at the same moment, the profits of his treachery. And thus is it with every one of us. If sensualists were frankly to declare what they have gained by their vices, not a human being who has departed from virtue, but must admit, that he had not found what he wished: he would be willing, were it in his power, to forego all the apparent advantages annexed to vice, but that shame, and the fear of being looked upon as the dupe of his own folly, restrain him.

For, let no one suppose, that the sinner who continues in a state of incessant violation of God's precepts—who passes year

after year, deaf to all the warnings of experience, and blind to the decay of his own bodily frame, perceptible to all but himself:—let no one suppose that a sinner of such a description as this, continues in sin from any pleasure felt or hoped for. He has brutalized himself; he has so far warped both his taste and his judgment, that he has lost all relish for any thing better; and from these causes, as well as from a sense of shame, he moves round in the same circle of satiety, vice, and insipid folly, till death, kindly interposing, prevents him, indeed, from adding new crimes and enormities to the overcharged catalogue of those already committed, but turns him over to that irreversible fate which he has either braved or disregarded.

NOTE.

SOME of the most voluptuous men of modern times, men, whose high rank and large incomes put every gratification in their power, have declared that

they did not know what it was to pass a really pleasant day ; and one of them, the late Earl of Chesterfield, has left this testimony in favour of virtue : “ Let no one think he does wisely when he imitates *us* in our vices.”

H.

SERMONET VI.

EXODUS, XX. 9.

Six days shalt thou labour.

WE have two great ends to accomplish in all that we do in this world—to avoid punishment, and to obtain reward, if reward can be claimed by performances so imperfect, as, in their best state, to require the added merits of a sinless propitiation! Every forbearance should have the one, and every action should have the other, of these motives to sanctify it.

Short, at the longest, as is our time of probation, and uncertain, as we are, whether the next moment may not end it, we might suppose, if our wants and our folly did not interfere, that man would have but one species of employment—the service of God, varied only by the alternative of acts of devotion and deeds of charity; and could the inhabitant of another world survey our occupations, we must be deemed

lower in understanding than the brutes that perish, when we are discovered either idle or vainly employed.

The commandment including the prohibition of labour on the sabbath, is seldom referred to as containing a positive injunction to labour on the other six days of the week : we read it in the sense of, “ *If* you labour on six days, do not on the seventh.” But surely, “Six days shalt thou labour,” is a commandment distinct from that ordaining rest on the sabbath. And as all the tenour of the Gospel admonition, all the exhortations of the Apostles, and all that advice which is founded on the experience of mankind, are in favour of labour and industry, as preventing evil and leading to good, it is fair to suppose this a repetition of that sentence, which, at the fall, was denounced against sinful man. The necessity of labour was imposed; it became a duty, and he who should have refused to fulfil it, would have appeared as much a rebel as Adam himself.

The changing fashion of the world seems to have dispensed with this law as to one

half of its inhabitants; but let us beware how we misunderstand the dispensation. We may be allowed leisure; but the stigma is not removed from idleness: are we quite sure that the punishment of it will be found attached to only a dormant law, which the wisdom or mercy of our Judge will certainly not now put in force?

Let it not be supposed however, that, to fulfil this commandment in its strict sense, it is requisite that every one should have a manual occupation. There are "spirits finely touched," whose pursuits and whose delights are contemplative; and man, in silence and inaction, may, by the imperceptible labour of the brain, or, perhaps, we may more correctly say, by the operation of that emanation of the Divinity called the soul, be advancing himself in that refinement from the grosser part of his nature, which is necessary to entitle him to approach the footstool of the Almighty: and, on the contrary, those who have little rest and no leisure, who toil to excess, and literally fulfil the injunction derived from Adam, may prove of that description of idle

persons whom St. Paul scarcely allows to have a right to eat.

Perhaps the utmost stretch which the commandment may now bear, the utmost that will be conceded to remonstrance, is, that every one should have an employment. It needs surely not any thing so authoritative as the word of God to prove this; since the nuisances, the pests of society, which persons destitute of employment show themselves to be, would fully answer the purpose of disgusting the rational with idleness.

Look now round the world, and see how many there are, who seem, neither in one way nor the other, to understand the commandment: some, happy in being exempt from the *necessity* of labour; others, to whose well-being, nay, to whose existence, it is almost indispensably and unremittingly requisite; and a third class, seeking happiness in vain occupations possessing neither the grace of labour or rest, and not knowing that it is to be found only in the duty they shun, but all, all acting just as if the commandment had never been given

us, and natural inclination or caprice were the only guide we could take.

See the labours of the dissipated; to what do they amount? to the preparation for inane pleasures; the insipid realization of them—for it cannot be called enjoyment; and the vapid, or perhaps nauseated, recollection of them. Are they ever heard to say, “I was happy: it was a real pleasure which I enjoyed; it was a satisfaction that I shall not soon forget?” No: their language rather expresses disgust and disappointment. You hear them resolve to “go no more;” yet, the next hour, not indeed allured by the hope of something better, but dreading something worse—the being left to themselves—they enter again on the same satiating round.

The labours of a less despicable class are, alas! hardly entitled to more mercy; those whose daily circuit centres in themselves; and who, living a sort of fly’s life, prescribed by their rank, their situation, and the habits of others, seem to themselves blameless. But, in either case, a serious question may be asked: “What is achiev-

ed?" that is to say, "What have you to show as the product of your day?" Neither driving nor riding; neither reading newspapers nor writing billets; neither frivolous visits nor useless purchases; neither watching the transfer of property at an auction, nor gaining an admission to splendid modes of life; neither the assumption of an interest in politics, nor the affectation of taste, leave behind them "a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit." To escape this wretched desolation of time, let us, each one, endeavour to have something positive to do; something that shall be *our* pursuit, *our* labour: and if we would not have a disgraceful reckoning at last, let us adopt the good custom of daily reckoning with ourselves. L.

SERMONET VII.

JOB, v. 7.

Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward.

WE need not stop to inquire whether the original word be rightly rendered "trouble," or whether it should have been simply "labour;" but as trouble implies a greater degree of suffering than mere labour, we will assume it for granted, that the sense, given in the above passage, is correct.

And before any one takes upon himself to condemn his hard fate, it may be reasonable that he should ask, whether, according to the constitution of the human mind, and to what is passing every day before us, we have any reason to suspect that man's happiness, either that of individuals or of society at large, would be increased by the total absence of all "trouble;" that is to say, for instance, that man had no one for whose well-being he felt anxious, no

father, no mother, no brother, no sister, nor wife, nor children, nor friend ; that he had, in his own pursuits, no care, no labour ; that certain and infinite success attended him in his vocation ; that the book of all knowledge were open to his comprehension, without the toil of study ; and that, in other things, he had only to feel the wish to possess, and full possession would be immediately consequent.

Yet, with all this, we will venture to say, man would not be happy ; and those who suppose the contrary, do not know the delight that arises from the hopes which can only exist in the previous supposition that there are fears which animate the human mind to the best and noblest exertions ; our success in which, we afterwards contemplate with increased satisfaction, from the consciousness that we were, in some measure, instrumental in the attaining it.

Let us observe those placed in the *most certain state* of success and prosperity, whose lives wear the least appearance of difficulty or of trouble, and who, as far as human sight can penetrate, seem fixed

in immovable prosperity; are they, generally speaking, wiser or better than the rest of the world? or, which is more to our present purpose, are they happier? or are they more beloved or more esteemed? They may indeed have more of the *homage* of the *world*; but that is no proof of their possessing any one of those qualities which are necessary to constitute happiness.

In most cases, we perceive in these favourites of fortune, an insipidity and languor, testifying, that, whatever may be possessed, very little is enjoyed; they are frequently put to as much trouble to find amusement, as any one whom they may despise; and unless they will consent to live in many respects like those who feel both hopes and fears, their wealth, their grandeur, their prosperity, will not be able to achieve much towards rendering them objects of any other feelings than those of compassion.

And hence arises the importance of that state of mind, which, however essential to our comfort and happiness, is one of the last which men acquire; I mean that state

which teaches us to be content in that situation, and with that portion of the good things of this world, which Wisdom that cannot err, and Goodness that cannot fail, sees fit for man in his present state—in a world where nothing is perfect, and which is only preparatory to our promotion to another—a better, a perfect state—where sorrow shall be no more; where the secret counsels of God and his providence towards man shall be understood; and when it shall be plain to all, that in his dispensations, however severe they seemed, God still pitied us “as a father pitieth his own children.”

H.

SERMONET VIII.

PSALM XC. 11.

For even as a man feareth, so is thy displeasure.

A VERY superficial acquaintance with human nature will teach us, that the good and evil of this world are not to be estimated in their operation on others, as they are in the abstract, or even, perhaps, as they affect ourselves. That is intolerable to one person which is scarcely disagreeable to another; that is pleasant to one, which is worse than indifferent to another; that is laborious exertion to one, which is the usual habit of industry to another; and that is indispensably necessary to some people, which to others would be an incumbrance. Omitting the trite observation on the caprice of palate and the judgments of our corporal faculties, there are, it will be found, few things, short of extreme suffering, on which mankind are agreed. Nay, to such an extent

may this difference of taste and opinion be detected, in the artificial perversions of a corrupt world, that a stranger to them might fancy the overwhelming misfortunes of some of their neighbours coveted as amusements by others; for on this ground alone is it possible to reconcile, for instance, the ruin of a family, the loss of importance, of credit, of character, with the apathy, nay, the hilarity which has so often been manifested or affected, by the bankrupt-personages of what is called fashion, of our age and country. The evil foreseen at a distance, and in time to be averted, had not the will been wanting, has not appalled; the occupation of an invaluable house by the messengers of the law, has not abashed; the misery of the nearest relatives has not awakened the stupified senses of the man of taste, of sentiment, of pleasure!

The same species of misfortune, perhaps far less merited and not so great in degree, has, on the contrary, when befalling a man of different frame of mind, been considered as insupportable, and, in his estimation, to be opposed only by means the most direful,

the only means that can preclude hope of the intervention of Providence to save us! Disgrace, probable want, the share of others in their ruin, have been pleaded in justification and admitted, by the common consent of mankind, as more than sufficient to wipe off the charge of cowardice or audacity, one of which, perhaps both, must be the stimulative to deeds of desperation.

Nor is this variety of opinion always to be sought in different persons: the same person will prove himself as inconsistent as any two. To-day that is braved, which yesterday was feared; to-morrow that shall seem an ideal evil, which to-day was deplored as the severest blow in the power of the world's deity, Fortune. Catching at every aid that can save us, we look on what we call Chance, as a thing we can command; but when wounded by that on which we had presumptuously relied, our pusillanimity is the preponderating counterbalance to our ill-founded arrogance. All this we daily see in the world.

But there is, beyond this world, something which ought not to be treated by us with

this waywardness; something not subject to the interventions of chance, fortune, or accident; something whose positive existence is known to us, whose proceeding is regular, and whose effects are certain. Of this therefore we ought all, and always, to have the same apprehension, be our natural conformation of body or mind what it may. There is no courage that can gain credit by braving infinite power to destroy; there is no despondency that can claim pity in neglecting infinite power to save. This therefore, which is the fear of the Lord, should be a consistent habitual feeling of our minds; and were it commensurate with that which excites it, it would, in time, purify them from those erroneous estimations which almost remove us from the rank of rational creatures.

But the considerations which call our attention from the world to the Maker of it, are, we may plead, still more remote than those claims on our understanding to which we refuse to listen. If immediate ruin cannot scare us, shall denunciations that have, we trust, years to run ere they overtake us,

influence us? If we are negligent when punishment threatens, shall we be attentive to a hope of distant reward?

There is a tone, a nod, a look, that says more than the tongue: there is a way of telling our hearers that we are not to be contradicted, which will prevent contradiction: persons successful in the use of these substitutes for truth, have purchased by authority the right of continuing unmolested in error. The still small voice of him who in deep abasement whispers to himself his well-founded conviction, that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;” who, on hearing the comparative calculation on *now* and *hereafter*, recollects, that “in the sight of God a thousand years are but as yesterday,” will not disturb the confident disputant; and, averse to unprofitable argument against convenient prejudice, he will leave his adversary to learn in his last moments, that it seems scarcely an hour since he defied, as out of the reach of him, that judgment which now stares him in the face, and which is to decide his destiny for ever.

Let us, who have no such convenient prejudices to warp our faith, remain uniformly convinced, that the displeasure of the Lord ought to be regarded as it is, not as we may chance to feel it; that it is a storm that may overwhelm us, a mountain that may fall on us, whether it appear so or not to our short-sighted perceptions. Let us infer from what we see daily in the world, the necessity of a rule of life, a standard of judgment, by which we may supply our natural deficiency of power to discern good from evil; and let us reflect on the gratitude we owe to the beneficence of the Divine Being, who would make the timely fear of Him whose favourite attribute is mercy, and the love of Him, in whose hand are our destinies, the dehorting and exhorting, the efficient and final causes of all our actions.

Let not the mean inconsistency that brands our dealings with the world, vitiate our performances towards our Maker: let not tastes, sentiments, feelings, require to be consulted before we can decide whether we shall love "the Giver of all good," or fear the tremendous "Judge of the whole

earth:" let not the displeasure of the Almighty be ever out of sight in the vehement pursuit of our own fancied happiness, or the fear of it be silenced by the mad resolution to remove the barrier which we cannot pass.

Let us mark the operation of this holy fear on the religious man; let us ask him how he receives it, he will tell us it is the only fear that can give real courage; he will call it a welcome restraint, a constant monitor, a protecting guardian, a sure guide, an invaluable friend.

If, from so delightful a contemplation, we turn—reluctantly it must be—to survey a mind of opposite description, in vain shall we look for the same effects: most probably, unless the merciful severity of an offended Deity has begun to punish, the existence of any such fear is denied, or, if admitted, derided; it is either not known or not understood, and consequently contemned, and its comforts are as little heeded as its warnings. But should the justice of the Deity require the submission of his mercy; should there be no place for penitence; how

horrible will be the subject of our speculation! Grown bold in iniquity, practised in hardness of heart, acting on his own warrant, and ready to take any responsibility on himself, the thundering and the threatening of the Almighty are, to such a man, vain. In the storm and tempest, even of his own thoughts, he still asks, "Who is the Lord, that we should fear him?" and only in the moment of quitting this world, becomes sensible to his tremendous concern in that on which he is entering. From such insane bravery and deplorable ignorance, may the grace of God, added to our own weak endeavours, preserve us!

NOTE.

To prove the different effects produced on two *great minds*, by similar misfortunes, two examples are at hand. "Thank God," said Lady —, on hearing that there was an execution in the Earl's town-house, "then we shall get rid of those ugly chairs." But Mrs. —, when told that her husband had settled his gaming-debts with a pistol, recovering from the shock, replied to her informer: "I really thought you had been going to tell me the goods were seized."

SERMONET IX.

ST. MATTHEW, VI. 13.

Lead us not into temptation.

THAT every man, in his progress through the world, is exposed to various temptations, we have our own experience and the authority of Scripture to inform us. The seducer, who is the author and primary source of those temptations, is, in the language of Holy Writ, described as a wild beast, going about, “seeking whom he may devour;” and if we take the words of our Saviour in their literal sense, when he tells St. Peter that he has prayed for him that Satan might not draw him away from his duty, we are justified in saying that it is by the grace of God alone, that man is enabled to resist the arch-enemy of mankind.

We might suppose that the natural lights which a man possesses, aided by a general tenour of conduct long pursued, might have been sufficient to secure him against delu-

sion; but, unfortunately, the reverse has often proved true! Hence we read of the wise king, who reared a temple to the worship of the true God, himself becoming, through uxorious imbecility, an idolater;—the man, the most after God's own heart, becoming a murderer and an adulterer;—and the pious, the fervent disciple denying his Master.

These are instances of temptation. But, in other cases, we may rather be said to have tempted the temptation, and to have been ourselves the seducer. Let us trace the first impulse to illicit gratification: did we not lay ourselves open to any train of ideas, to any delusive suggestions, that our adversary might present to us? were not these ideas at that moment agreeable to us? did we not cherish them? and, when compelled to rouse from our reverie, did we not wish for their return? till, at last, the mind was not startled at any enormities attending the gratification, but, on the contrary, learned to consider it as essential to its happiness? Were we honestly to penetrate into the recesses of the mind, we

should frequently discover that we had had no enemy but ourselves; that we might have stood, had not our own passions betrayed us; that the tempter only came, because he was invited, and, consequently, no one but ourselves is to blame in our fall.

Hence arises the necessity of fortifying our minds by good principles and good pursuits; by those principles which, being founded on the basis of eternal truth, are an infallible guide, and by those pursuits which, having a tendency to cultivate the intellect without inflaming the passions, enable us *at all times* to live innocently, and *generally* beneficially to others and to ourselves.

In the hours which a man necessarily devotes to his calling or profession, his employment is regulated for him: it is from his relaxations, from his pleasures, that the danger is to be apprehended; it is then that he is most open to the allurements of the specious; and against *this* period must he provide, by addicting himself to those amusements only which may refresh his wearied faculties, without involving him in

any thing derogatory to that exalted sense of purity and rectitude, to attain or to preserve which should be the primary object of every moral, every intellectual being. Let us betake ourselves to those occupations which do not desert us in old age, but which, when we are no longer able to pursue them, afford us pleasure in the recollection, and which, filling the mind with ideas that rescue us from the misery of a mental vacuum, enable us, to the latest moment of our lives, to make some progress in wisdom or in virtue, and allow us to hope that our existence is not, by our fault, prolonged in vain.

H.

SERMONET X.

ST. MATTHEW, v. 5.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

THE reward held out here as the encouragement to the practice of a virtue extremely important in the Christian character, can be no otherwise understood than by comparing it with expressions familiar to us.—The Scriptures never demand the renunciation of our common sense; though many circumstances combined may render their meaning occasionally obscure. They do not exact of us a literal belief that, when we have obtained the grace of meekness, we shall find ourselves and those of the same pretensions, in possession of the fee-simple of the globe; but, as far as regards ourselves, we may believe that by the practice of meekness, we shall obtain that which others of a contrary character will fail to gain; and perhaps we are far-

ther to understand, that at the second coming of our Lord, "when he shall have put all things in subjection under his feet," those distinctions which the arrogant have challenged to themselves, will be awarded to the meek.

Confining the sense within the bounds that our interests touch, we have to observe, that, in the course of this world's ordinary government, we daily see the truth of the prediction: persons of the most violent tempers are not those in whom the greatest confidence is placed: in times of turbulence, they may be the tools of a mob or a faction; but when commotion ceases, they are generally left out in the division of power, even if they survive to put in their claim; but how often do we see them the victims of an earlier fate, and destroyed by each other! We cannot suppose the man most eminent for meekness would have been appointed by Infinite Wisdom to conduct a people proverbially stiff-necked, had there not been something in the character of the virtue peculiarly fitted to the purpose. The faults of those led were to be *counteracted*,

not *overpowered*; and Moses accomplished that by mildness, in which the impetuosity of Saul might have failed.

We may, indeed, pass through life, by the blessing of God, without witnessing popular tumult, and can never be called on to fill the office of Moses; but let us consider how a meek spirit may be made useful to ourselves. That it is essential to our highest interests, needs no proof; whatever qualifications the Almighty has judged necessary to our admission into "the society of just men made perfect," must, in their nature, be of the first consequence to us; and the pattern set us by our Saviour, at once shows the beauty and value of meekness; but in the world and our dealings with it, its use may not be so obvious or indisputable; and there are many vulgar axioms to lower its authority, and render it contemptible. And to vulgar apprehension it must appear a despicable virtue, for shortsightedness is one of the distinctions of vulgar intellects; and nothing would convince them of what is, however, an irrefragable truth, that the meek in this world can lose nothing that is

not more than repaid to them in that present Heaven, an approving conscience, and will not be a thousand-fold restored by the sentence of Him who taught us, by precept and example, to endeavour after meekness.

But whatever may be the gross perceptions of those who know no good that is not tangible, meekness has its use in daily intercourse. The want of it is an obstacle even in the attainment of our own wishes. Those of a submissive, meek temper, will acquire knowledge much better and much faster than those who lose their time and waste their attention in arrogant cavil: every virtue of society is easier in its practice to an humble mind; the violent will often yield to the gentle, in preference to those who have more resembled themselves; and the utmost extremity of rage has been disarmed by a meek expression,

Yet we must not think a perverse extreme the point of excellence we are to aim at, in this or other virtues. Moderation is a truly Christian quality. We are not to

take the spring from our actions, and cast them at the feet of the Almighty, saying, "Lo! thou hast that is thine!" Our duty is to oppose our inclination to do wrong, not to indulge, to culpable excess, in an erroneous notion of right. We are to be wise as serpents, while harmless as doves; and we are not to tempt our neighbour to sin by laying ourselves open to him.

NOTE.

THE perverse practice of the virtue here recommended, is seldom attained in perfection till we have reached what is called the age of reason, or years of discretion. Some fine specimens of it have occurred in conjugal life; and a man with a wife so gifted, may be compared to a traveller with a troublesome yelping dog, who is incessantly staring him in the face, to see which way he will go, and at the same time, by crossing his path, either preventing his moving, or hazarding his falling. There is a silent libel in some families, that, by artifice not always suspected, points to an individual; and the affectation of trembling can never fail to excite the supposition that there is a tyrant. Like all other affectation, it is better dismissed: the practice of it has led to effects little short of direful: it

wearies, even if it be not detected ; it wounds, if it does not insult ; it alienates ; it makes something, perhaps worse, appear preferable. It is better to have honest feelings, and to do our duty to the best of our power, in the best way a cheerful sense of duty directs.

L.

SERMONET XI.

ST. MATTHEW, VI. 34.

Take—no thought for the morrow.

DOUBTLESS a religion that makes it a fundamental principle of morality to banish anxiety and care, must be admitted to possess, to a careless world, great recommendations; and as, from the earliest ages, we have been accustomed to hear mankind complain of the cares, the misfortunes, the vexations and troubles of life, we might be induced to suppose that a religion which assures us that every event which happens, is directed by infinite power, infinite wisdom, and infinite goodness, would, as soon as its maxims were made known, find all ranks and conditions of men ready to receive it; and that those who had received it would, merely as they preferred peace of mind before restlessness and disquietude, gladly repose that trust and confidence in the Deity, to which he is entitled by every attribute that he pos-

esses: but if we look into the world, do we find this to be the fact? do we not every day hear the necessary checks which avarice or ambition experiences, complained of as positive misfortunes or deprivations, and the goodness of God called in question, because this man has not got a high office, and another has not amassed as much money as he wished? Do we not hear the querulous complaining that some adverse accident has blasted all their hopes, and that nothing now remains for them but despair? and do we not frequently see that those slight disappointments which overwhelm us with sorrow or dismay, in the end are productive of some of the greatest blessings that we enjoy, when the Deity

“From seeming evil draws forth certain good?”

By indulging this ungrateful and unbecoming distrust of Providence, and considering our own imperfect view of things as sufficient to enable us to judge what is best for us, we do not err more from the right path of religion and virtue, than from that of peace of mind; and, indeed, it may

be truly said, that no deviation can be made from duty, but which leads us as much astray from the path of happiness, even in this world.

The resignation here recommended, is, happily, one of the many virtues that any of us, even without great heroical fortitude or supereminent talents, may practise. It requires not the zeal of a missionary, or the courage of a martyr; and it, moreover, possesses this advantage, that, as soon as we begin to exercise it, we are sensible of its advantages.

Let him who is inclined to arraign the bounty or the justice of Providence, recollect the ten thousand mercies that he daily receives; let him reflect, that were it not for the gracious promise, that whatever may be the sins of the world, yet, “while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease,” “the fruitful land might have been made barren for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.” Let him ask himself, whether he has been as mindful of his baptismal covenant as God

has been of the promises which he has, from time to time, made to man. Let him ask himself, which of God's mercies he can claim as his right, or which of them he would consent to relinquish as needless to him.

Before he repines that more is not given him, let him learn to appreciate that which he has, and be thankful. "Look at the generations of old, and see, did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded? or did any abide in his fear, and was forsaken? or whom did he ever despise that called upon him?"

H.

SERMONET XII.

ST. JAMES, I. 26.

If any man—bridleth not his tongue—this man's religion is vain.

IT is matter of common consent, that the major includes the minor; the text, therefore, addresses itself to that part of the creation, who, without any intended disparagement to their natural endowments, but perhaps rather in a strain of compliment, may be said to need this hint the most. For, as vivacity of intellect is one of the diagnostics of the female mind, the very tender balance on which the tongues of women are sometimes hung, is a concomitant circumstance, and, when not culpably perverted, as little to be considered a subject of disgrace, as quickness of sight or hearing. If our eyes are misemployed in prying into our neighbours' houses, or our ears engaged in listening to detraction, they are as faulty as our tongues in the exercise of loquacity.

When, on the contrary, we use our eyes to inform us how we shall best assist in the relief of misery, our ears in hearing of sorrows or oppressions, with a view to mitigate them, and our tongues to plead the cause of the poor and needy, we are required only to do all this with discretion; and it is then not only blameless, but laudable.

The ways in which, as the Apostle suggests, the want of bridling our tongues renders our religion vain, are many; so many, that they must not here be enumerated. But, as it is perhaps the readiest direction to a traveller to keep the high road, rather than to say, You will find a turning at the first mile-stone to the right—take not that; then another a little farther on the left—pass that: so it may answer all purposes, to advise a constant habit of watchfulness—a disposition, which will soon be part of our mind, to think before we speak, and a cultivation of the accomplishment of silence, just so far as to make us prefer saying nothing, to that which will injure our neighbour and cause repentance in ourselves.

There is always danger in reporting, un-

less we could repeat words, tones, gestures, and looks ; therefore it is better not to forward reports unnecessarily ; and when they are called for, the strictest accuracy, the most candid disposition to give, not only the words, but the spirit of the former speaker, must guide us.

In passing judgment on others, the greatest heed is necessary to keep ourselves safe from the retribution promised in the Sermon on the Mount.—And, we may add, that even in praising we should be cautious, if we would preserve the respect for our opinion that may enable us to assist the helpless. In vehement praise we not unfrequently raise expectations which nothing can fulfil, even if we do not rouse the contradictory spirit of some one ; and if—for who but our blessed Lord ever yet knew what is in the heart of man?—a blind prejudice has misled our affection, we may, however innocent in our intentions, repent of not having bridled our tongue.

On the whole, it would be well if “glory to God, peace on earth, and good-will to-

wards men," formed the limits of our conversation; and with this bridle on our tongues, many of us would be far more agreeable, and some less dangerous, than in the present range we allow ourselves.

L.

SERMONET XIII.

ST. MATTHEW, XXIII. 6.

And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues.

No fashion of thinking, or perversion of opinion, can recommend to us an imitation of the practices of the Pharisees of our Saviour's time. Their hypocrisy, and the vices it was intended to conceal, seem to have excited more anger in his forbearing mind, than any thing which he found "in the heart of man" besides. We are certain that the weaknesses of human nature met more compassion from him, and that he could forgive his own death, and the infamous means by which it was accomplished, much more readily, than the silent crimes of those who "made long prayers," and "devoured widows' houses."

Precedence was one of the demands made by pharisaical pride; and if it had confined itself to "feasts," the code of mo-

dern politeness might have superseded the necessity of caution in imitating them; but they demanded it in the synagogue; and in our synagogues the code of politeness can have no interference.

We would hope it is more owing to thoughtlessness, than to any ambition of copying the Pharisees, that a very great error has, of late years, crept into the decorum of our churches, and “even unto the horns of the altar.” In a place where, if in any in the world, the great should despoil themselves of their privileges, while contemplating those offered to the good by Him who “dwelleth in the heavens over all,” it is melancholy to perceive, ideas of rank have intruded; and at many of the most fashionable places of elegant worship in our metropolis, it is, without the index of coronet or armorial bearing, very easy to guess where may be found the persons claiming them, or nearest to a claim. This corruption might be duly stigmatized as paltry, mean, and whatever is contemptible, and, perhaps, with a better chance of attention; for it would oppose

one sort of pride to another. But we must not “through Beelzebub cast out Beelzebub:” the means, as well as the end, must be regarded, when the service of God is in question; and the vain-glorious of this world must be told, in plain language, that they are wrong—that they put themselves in danger, or, at least, add to the sins that must make work for repentance on a death-bed—and that our Saviour, not only has expressly pointed at the practice, but has as explicitly said, that “if” our “righteousness does not exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees,” we “shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Can there be a fairer warning? Can any thing admit less of a question? How, with this before us, could such an error creep in amongst us? The contrary extreme, one might rather have expected, as the point of affectation.

If these challengers of precedence at the gate of heaven, had any true taste, they would seek its indulgence by putting themselves in situations where surprise would increase the pleasure of meeting them; and

the sentiment of the beholder would add to the catalogue of their graces that of humility: it is painting their portraits on a bad back ground; it is drowning melody in harmony; it is, in short, an error in every way, and the sooner got rid of the better. “*Medio tutissimus ibis,*” was the admonition of a heathen poet: let it be adopted in the conduct of a Christian; and let persons of rank, disclaiming their rights, and disdaining affectation, content themselves with being, for a few minutes, in that situation which the best judges have always thought the safest—the middle station.

L

SERMONET XIV.

ST. MATTHEW, XII. 36.

Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

IN expounding the texts of Scripture, as well as the writings of profane authors, it seems safest, as well as most candid, to take expressions in their natural and obvious sense, as it would be difficult to set bounds to the suggestions of human imagination, were any other mode adopted. And, therefore, though we frequently meet with very lax interpretations given to the offence above stated, which is to bring a man into judgment, we shall consider the phrase "idle word" precisely as the same phrase might be adopted by any other person than an apostle or a teacher of righteousness.

These words, then, will be found to mean all frivolous discourse, or such dis-

course as produces no benefit to him who uses it, or to him to whom it is used. More atrociously criminal discourse, such as profane swearing, lying, slandering our neighbour, are prohibited by other texts of Scripture. The divine Author of our text treats only of "idle words;" of such words as, considering man as an intellectual and rational being, it is *beneath him* to use. In understanding the term "idle," in its strictest sense, we prohibit no use of speech, that the necessities or the well-being of society may require. We mean merely to restrict it within its due bounds, and show that, as it is criminal to trifle away our time, so, by parity of reason, it is equally criminal to trifle with another of God's gifts, given for the noblest purposes, speech. Men may, without censure, converse about their necessary business: they may, with equal innocence, converse on matters of science or intellectual improvement, through all the various departments where taste and genius may conduct them. Neither are the minor duties of social life to be neglected; the claims of courtesy, and still less the

tender offices of kindness and humanity ; because, by all these, the human mind is either enlarged in its capacity, or strengthened in its powers of exertion ; or a better spirit towards our neighbour is cultivated.

But the prohibition is directed to such conversation as, unfortunately, too many of us are apt to indulge in, that inane and useless impertinence which produces no good whatever ; where men themselves talk and listen to others without the smallest assistance from reason or intellect ; where the adult is as uninformed as the child, and the wise as ignorant as the fool.

How disgraceful is it that he, whom Providence has blessed with a mind capable of acquiring knowledge, and with opportunities of improving it, should thus spontaneously stultify himself, and forego the advantages held out to him, without even the hope of gaining any thing as a compensation for what is thus foolishly lost !

Idle conversation can never be indulged in, without loss of time and estimation : it can never be otherwise than injurious to the mind, nor can it be the resource of any one

disposed to make the most of the passing hour. He who recollects the slow degrees by which knowledge and wisdom are accumulated, will need little to convince him, that whatever, either of our time or our conversation, is sacrificed to folly, is so much subtracted from virtuous pursuit, and a misuse of God's good gifts, of which every man must render account in the day of judgment.

II.

SERMONET XV.

ST. JAMES, I. 22.

Deceiving your own selves.

TO a mind disposed to honesty, there is nothing more mortifying than the extreme difficulty of preserving ourselves from self-deception. To the cursory observers of themselves and their own conduct, this may not, at first, be very evident; but a close attention, and the improvement in nicety of performance consequent on close attention, will, in a very short time, teach us, that not a day, nay, scarcely an hour passes, in which we do not deceive ourselves. We deceive ourselves by the loss of time, by suffering it to glide away from us, without effort on our part, or profit obtained from it. We deceive ourselves in undertaking to do more than we even endeavour to accomplish. We deceive ourselves in comparing the little we have done, with the less that has been achieved

by others, and thence forming a false estimate of our own proficiency in Christian virtues. We deceive ourselves by the hope, that a time will come, and an inclination will accompany it, to do more than we have hitherto done. We deceive ourselves, by fancying external obstacles, when the obstacle within is our greatest hinderance. Nay, there is no end of enumerating the many ways in which we deceive ourselves.

But there is none more dangerous than that self-deception attending the complacent feeling of having been unquestionably right. We say to ourselves, "If I never spent any day before to the satisfaction of my conscience, yesterday was a day on which I can look back with perfect assurance;" or, "If no other action of mine was ever good, this which I have just performed, is unalloyed by the corruption of human nature." 'Tis hard—it seems severe; but it is not only wholesome, but necessary severity, when we are bid again to review the day or the deed, and, even when we have again pronounced the sentence of self-acquittal, consider it as error.

Were it possible for us to do deeds of unalloyed goodness, or to spend any one day free from cause for repentance, the very feeling of self-complacency would vitiate the act, and deform the day. We are told to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling;” which must not be understood as a condemnation to incessant misery, but as an injunction to caution:—we are to exercise that care and circumspection which a slippery path or a dangerous precipice demands, in our journeys on earth:—we are to be always on our guard; and, when once this is our habit, it would be unpleasant to be otherwise; and, so far from making us feel miserable, it is the only one that can make us feel safe.

Let us, then, be persuaded to prefer a modest diffidence of our own powers, and a qualified opinion of our own performances, to any feeling of satisfaction that might abate our vigilance, or introduce counter-vailing presumption. Let us, at the same time, keep at an equal distance from that desponding self-condemnation which weakens our physical powers. We must re-

collect, if we have lived in the exertion of industry becoming rational creatures and disciples of Him who "went about doing good," many cases of success in our manual attempts, when we have thought ill of our chance for it, and of failure where we thought ourselves sure. The most diffident in common things are not always the most unfortunate; and we are incompetent judges of our own works: that has been praised, for which we have expected blame; and that, on which the expectation of fame has been founded, has sometimes brought nothing better than ridicule. We must be content to do our best, and still to doubt whether it will be received as our best: the exertion which we make, must be the utmost we can make; and, instead of seeking self-satisfaction, we must humbly rejoice in feeling disposed to say, that "all our doings are nothing worth." L.

SERMONET XVI.

ST. MATTHEW, VI. 19.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth.

IT is to be suspected, that, in many minds, a prejudice arises against religion, from the contemplation of the privations which it enjoins, and the sacrifices which a man is required to make, before he can be called virtuous. But no great powers of reasoning are demanded to show, that such a prejudice must arise from an erroneous notion of the nature of Christianity, and as erroneous an estimate of its influence on society; for, to ascertain its claim to our reverence, we must view it in all its parts; and while we consider the privations which are enjoined, we should reckon likewise the benefits, the ten thousand blessings, which it bestows.

It strongly prohibits the indulgence of the violent passions; it prohibits anger, avarice, ambition, revenge, and every species of

evil concupiscence; feelings, all of them as hostile to man's peace, as they are contrary to his duty. But, as a compensation for what he is thus called upon to relinquish, it gives him, besides the approbation of his Maker, besides security from the vengeance of the laws of his country, which he might violate in the gratification of any of these passions—it gives that peace of mind which the world cannot give.

Religion says, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth:” but it does not require the mind to pine in languor and listlessness for want of a due object of attention; it subjoins a reason for the precept—because such treasures “the moth and rust doth corrupt, and thieves steal.”—“But lay up treasure for yourselves in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do *not* break through nor steal.”

What is this but saying, “Disdain the smaller good, and I will confer on you the greater?”—language far different from that of an austere ruler, who exacts from his servants the full measure of labour with-

out bestowing any thing to cheer their toil, or alleviate their sufferings.

As for those who have ventured to make the experiment how gracious a mistress Religion would prove to such as, with honest and zealous endeavours, enter into her service, the result has shown that she is ever willing to reward those who diligently seek her; that her yoke has been easy and her burden light;—that those who obeyed her precepts, were enabled to avoid numberless disasters, and went “on their way rejoicing.” These have, in all the warmth of friendship, recommended to others the same course that they themselves had pursued;—a course, in which no one was ever known to complain, that in the account given to him of what he might expect in her service, he had been deceived.

II.

SERMONET XVII.

EXODUS, XX. 5.

I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.

THIS declaration must not be understood as of such jealousy as *we* feel. It is that jealousy which extends only to care for honour and authority in a paramount power: it is a cautious preservation of the integrity of a claim, and, as such, entitled to respect not to be demanded by even the most excusable or justifiable of human passions.

Admitting what we have neither right nor cause to deny, that the conduct of the Deity in governing us, is founded on his knowledge of what is most conducive to our best interests, we ought to regard this jealousy as watchfulness for our advantage, on the same principle as that which renders the high character and entire power of a patron or protector, of importance to the interests of those whom he patronizes

or protects. And, uniting our jealousy for the honour of our Maker to that which he expresses for his power, we ought never, in ourselves or others, to admit any thing derogatory to his majesty, might, or dominion. No resentment can be more honourable, none can be less in danger of transgressing its just bounds, than that which is excited by any offence committed against Him, whom it is equally folly and wickedness to offend.

With our attention thus awakened, we can never see an act of irreverence towards God, or hear a profane expression, unmoved. It is prudent to be blind to some follies, and deaf to some vexations, as far as they respect ourselves alone; but we have no right to connive at an insult to a worldly benefactor; and, where One so much more entitled to homage is concerned, our feeling should be, in proportion, alert. We may discourage and correct, in our own circle, by a very few words and very little anger, if we are but respectable ourselves.

L.

SERMONET XVIII.

PHILIPPIANS, IV. 8.

Whatsoever things are of good report.

CHRISTIANITY having been designed as a rule of conduct for those who were to live in the world, it adapts itself with wonderful wisdom, to that which the interests or the necessities of society require. It does not enjoin the solitary duties of the hermit; though to him who is necessarily removed from the busy haunts of men, it affords all possible consolation by suggesting to him the most profitable ideas of true virtue and holiness: neither does it require one state of mind to the prejudice of all others; but tells us, that "whatever things," evidently meaning occupations or pursuits, "are of good report," are inoffensive in the eyes of God.

· Correctly understanding this text, we may suppose, that not only the divine, the minister who officiates at the altar, may

be the preacher of righteousness, but that all others, the result of whose occupation recommends to our attention the wisdom or the goodness of God, may be regarded as promoting his honour and his glory, and as serving, in the most essential manner, the best interests of man.

Thus, the mathematician, while he shows that all things are formed "by number, weight, and measure," produces the strongest evidence of the order and design manifested by the grand Architect of the universe.

The poet may, by language and imagery the most fascinating, and, at the same time, the most impressive, recommend the precepts of virtue, and stimulate mankind to the highest actions that the human mind can conceive.

The painter, nearly akin to the poet, may, by his pencil, kindle a flame not less vivid in the minds of those who might be more alive to the impression made by what is seen, than to that which is addressed to the ear.

The musician may, by the science of

sound, awaken the sensations of piety towards God, or sweet affection towards our species. And thus, every profession or occupation, that is "of good report," may be subservient to the cause of truth and virtue.

We see, then, the close connexion that exists between our common occupations as men, and our duty, as rational creatures, to God, provided the pursuit be directed in its due course, and not perverted by vice or folly.

Instances might be increased without end: the surgeon, the physician, the botanist, the mineralogist, might each be appealed to, to give his testimony to that knowledge which the art of each supplies; but it may suffice to say, that whenever, and in whatever form, the investigation shall take place, it will be found that piety and the best interests of society, even in this life, are inseparably blended, and that he who subtracts from the one, necessarily injures and impairs the other.

H.

SERMONET XIX.

PSALM IV. 4.

Commune with your own heart.

IN reading the Psalms, and making use of them as spiritual exercises, many of them may be passed over as unfit for the purpose, by those who, considering “the ungodly,” under whatever designation they are presented to our view, as merely the enemies of the writer, can only lament, that one so deserving the good-will of his fellow-creatures, should be so much the object of their persecution. But as it is very repugnant to the feelings of any one sensible of the value of any thing, to misapply or waste it, it may be gratifying to persons possessed of this feeling, to know how these admirable compositions may be best turned to their advantage.

If, then, these enemies of the Lord’s Anointed be regarded, as we ought to regard our own worst enemies, the inmates

of our bosoms, we may, with propriety and advantage, join the Psalmist in beseeching the intervention of the Most High, in repressing or destroying them, or in rescuing us from their power; and we should soon find the imaginary waste of complaint much decreased. Almost every evil disposition of our nature, every folly that leans to impiety, every clinging corruption which our own strength does not suffice to cast off, will meet its form of prayer and its conscientious mode of opposition. We must have “communed with” our “own hearts” to very little purpose, if this alteration of object be attended with any difficulty. God knows, even if we do not, that we have enemies enough *within*, to represent every class of those *without* us—and enemies, whose machinations need far more vigilance than a host of embodied foes. Happy is it for us, that we may, in our resistance to them, and our defence of ourselves, rest assured that nothing is wanting but the grace of God, which we know how to obtain. We are sure of the victory, if we will but fight as we ought to do, and

as we should do in any matter regarding our worldly interests. The lion is assigned as the similitude of Judah; and the strength of a lion has been found in those who have relied on the protection and aid of his divine Descendant. We are enrolled under the banner of one "mighty to save:" we must acknowledge ourselves his soldiers, and consider as our enemy whatsoever opposes his dominion over our hearts and affections.

NOTE.

WITHOUT superstition or fanaticism, it may be said of the Sacred Writings—and it will apply to no other—that they possess a recondite sense, which, whenever read with attention, makes them new to us. Thomas à Kempis has said: "That which thou dost not understand now, thou shalt understand in the day of thy visitation:" and this consoling prediction will be found verified whenever our distaste for this world's vain eloquence, sends us to "listen to the words of life."

L.

SERMONET XX.

DEUTERONOMY, VI. 7.

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

THIS enumeration of the times, and seasons, and circumstances, under which the Israelites were to recollect and to communicate the commands of the Deity, includes nearly all the situations in which human beings can be placed; and we are to infer from it, that no opportunity was to be lost of impressing their own hearts, and those of their children, with a sense of the great things God had done for them, and the gratitude demanded from them.

Equal, nay, far greater obligation lies on us Christians, to bear in mind not only

these, but also the additional mercies vouchsafed us by the mission of our blessed Lord: and, if it was incumbent on the Jews to think and speak, at every hour of the day, of their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, and of the promised possession of a land flowing with milk and honey, we ought, to preserve any proportion in our gratitude, to say, with David, "At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee!"

It cannot be supposed that any advocate for the cause of religion would intentionally abate the respect due to this precept in the text, or attempt to destroy its influence over us. But it may be considered safely with that modification which will best preserve its use free from abuse.

And, to this end, it must be recollected, that it was highly necessary to make the Jews, thus early in their theocracy, deeply sensible of the importance of keeping in their minds the laws and the considerations which were to guide and influence them; and nothing short of this repeated conversation, we may be assured, would have sufficed for the great purpose of making them

the depositaries of so invaluable a tradition: Beside, there was no fear, that, in *their* conversation on events so important and so striking, there should be any abatement of the veneration due to their Lawgiver.

But in the present corrupt state of the world, and in the extreme license challenged by the tongue, the pen, and the press, it becomes prudent to restrain any practice, however in itself good, which by facility defeats its intention; and it must be recollected by *us*, when inclined to speak, “in season and out of season,” on serious subjects, that what is done, out of season, is frequently productive of mischief proportioned to the good attending its seasonable use. And this conviction it is which operates on the minds of pious people, when, seemingly in contradiction to the injunction in the text, they will not suffer topics connected with religion, to be lightly intermingled with the ordinary discussions of frivolous society.

In the early ages of religion, the name of God could not be too often mentioned. In the present age, it cannot be too seldom

pronounced, provided the abstinence result, as did the former habit, from the sincere wish to promote the respect due to the Almighty. And every familiar gossipping conversation on spiritual affairs, every slight mention of the ceremonies connected with them, is an act of irreverence. It is wounding to some indescribable feeling to hear any one, even with honest intentions, mention the Holy Communion as an obstacle to some trifle, in the familiar terms of, "It is Sacrament-day at our church, and therefore I cannot:" or to find the merits of the yesterday's sermon discussed together with the right and title to the advantages of a card-table.

NOTE.

IT must be recollected, that this mode of perpetuating remembrance was indispensably necessary to the Jews, as no place of public religious instruction amongst them, existed till after the Babylonish captivity.

L.

SERMONET XXI.

ST. MATTHEW, XXVI. 39.

*O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup
pass from me.*

IN considering the words of the text, no difficulty exists in ascertaining their meaning; for surely no intellect can be so obtuse, no heart so unfeeling, as not to comprehend the import of the ejaculation, and to sympathize in the sufferings which produced it. It is not with a view to elucidation, that the attention is now called to the passage above quoted, but merely to show the reason why the words were uttered, as far as may be given to mortals to know the reason of any of the words of their divine Author.

We live in a time when it is the fashion, and doubtless, to many, a very convenient fashion, as it annihilates much of the culpability of sin, to detract from the character or the attributes of the Redeemer of

mankind. Socinus, long since, taught, that during his abode on earth, he was not to be considered as a Deity; and refused to him all worship. Since the time of Socinus, others, not pre-eminently gifted, nor better instructed than those around them, have more decidedly asserted that Jesus Christ was mere man—that his death was not for an atonement for sin, because, say they, no atonement was necessary—and that, however virtuous he might be in his life, he was but of human nature; and, as some have contended, weak and fallible as the rest of mankind.

With such a disposition in the world, we can easily conceive that many a speech and many a miracle proceeding from Jesus Christ, would, by those who foresaw such a disposition, be preserved in the Sacred Writings, as guides for the true and honest believer—for him, who, with an humble and suitable spirit, should be desirous to make the revealed will of God the rule of his faith and of his practice. And, if we advert to the general complexion of our Saviour's deportment, we shall see this will-

ingness to afford us a guide, fully exemplified.

In the earlier part, then, of our Saviour's life, when it was notorious that he was the son of Mary, and that, in his infancy, he stood in need of the assistance, the care, and attention of his mother, nothing was necessary to prove, to those around him, the *human* part of his character: the thing to be proved was, that part of it was divine. Accordingly, it is related of him, that, at twelve years of age, he was sitting in the temple, and, with preternatural wisdom, disputing with the doctors, and propounding questions to them. At a later period, we find him performing miracles—converting water into wine—healing the sick, and raising the dead; whilst his very enemies bore testimony to the miracle, though they ascribed it to a wrong power; “he casteth out devils by Beelzebub.”

But when, towards the latter end of his life, he had, by the numberless miracles which he had performed, proved the divinity of his mission; and when it may be supposed, in the course of nature, that

Many of the witnesses of his birth, and of his earlier years, were dead, it was necessary again to show the *human* part of his constitution; and hence we have the agony in the garden: "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" and the words of the text, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Many other expressions of the same kind might be adduced; and events in our Saviour's life are not wanting, calculated to prove, as his miracles had demonstrated his divine nature, that the nature of man, its passions and its sufferings, were not absorbed by the superior attribute of the Godhead.

The passages above quoted or alluded to, must, to a candid and impartial reader, supply indubitable evidence of the twofold nature of Jesus Christ. It is shown, that he had something of human in his composition, and this his enemies admit: from his enemies, at least from those of his own day, his miracles, of which they themselves bore witness, derive their proof and authenticity; those enemies, perhaps, were not aware, that, at the

time they cavilled at those miracles, they were affording evidence of their existence. Whether they were done by the aid of Beelzebub, or by his own power, is a matter of secondary consequence; the miracle must have been performed, before men would have thought of inquiring by what power it was accomplished.

Thus it is conceived, that not only the events of our Saviour's life, and his miracles, declare him to have been both God and man, but that the evidence of each proposition has been so arranged to suit the circumstances of those, among whom he was sent, as that, at no time, could it have been otherwise than certain that Jesus Christ was God and man.

To the modern sceptics as to the divinity of our Saviour, the only answer is, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe, though one rose from the dead."

Happy, thrice happy, are they, who, having no passions, no prejudices to subdue, are contented to receive the Scriptures with that simplicity of heart, which,

not seeking after vain things because they are new, is contented with that interpretation which the general tenour of Scripture justifies or requires;—who, disdainingly to mutilate God's holy word as new theories may suggest, read, with pious gratitude, that man is a frail and sinful being, but that, through the merits of a crucified and reviled Redeemer, he may still hope to be admitted to the mansions of eternal happiness, where the "secret things" of God shall be fully revealed, and where error and unbelief shall be no more.

H.

SERMONET XXII.

JOSHUA, XXIV. 15.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

THE sentiment of the noble-minded Joshua ought to be that of every master of a family in the present day; and the general practice ought to declare the adoption of the sentiment. Without the affectation of superior righteousness,—without distinguishing ourselves by appellations which, if they do not directly exalt us, serve the purpose, quite as well, by degrading others, we should, as Christians, unseduced by the idleness or as idle occupations of others, regularly and consistently stand firm in the practice of serving the Lord, and take care that those whom we have the power to influence, do so likewise.

The external acts of this service are, an attendance on public worship, uninterrupted by engagements for the Lord's day, and

as regular as health and an attention to the reasonable comforts of others, will permit; reading prayers to our households; instructing the ignorant, whenever opportunity offers; and showing by our conduct, that the will of God, not our own unruly wills and affections, governs us: abstinence from all profane expressions or light allusions to subjects of religion, or witty quotations and perversions of Scripture-phrase; asking a blessing on, and returning thanks for, our daily meal; and, in short, conducting ourselves in such a manner, as might lead an uninformed spectator to suppose us under the eye of a superior.

The origin of all this, must be in the heart; and the practice of it will, to any one adopting it, soon prove the most delightful liberation that can be experienced from innumerable cares. The world gives us many masters, who issue orders contradictory, obscure, imperfect, arbitrary, and oppressive. Heaven affords us One, paramount to all, whose commands, never grievous, have our advantage for their object, whose "yoke is easy," whose "burden

is light," and who will never lay upon us, more than he will enable us to bear.

Of no master passion, of no favourite vice, of no habitual indulgence, can this be said. Imbecile as these task-masters are to serve us, they are tyrants possessing and exerting unlimited power of oppression. Neither body nor mind can escape their subjugation; they require more than our strength can accomplish, and, at the same moment, unnerve us.

It might be the expectation of the inexperienced, but it can be of none other, that a life of thoughtless pleasure would diffuse an appearance of being pleased over the countenance and deportment of any one so fortunate as to have had the power "*vivere voto suo.*" But see who are the gloomy, morose, repelling scarecrows of society. Certainly not those, who, with Joshua, have resolved to serve the Lord: his light service does not plough such furrows in the human countenance; he does not give the eye its suspicious fearfulness; he does not bend the muscles to the odious expression of discontent with ourselves, and contempt

for others ; he does not tune the voice to accents of complaint ; he does not teach us to curse the day of our birth. The service of the Lord is accompanied with all those circumstances that show alacrity and cheerfulness : these give a spring to our step, a glow to our cheek, a smile of encouragement, a tone of good-will, when we listen or speak : they can give beauty to the homely, grace to the awkward, and dignity to the inconsiderable.

NOTE.

THE cheerfulness attendant on the practice of religion has never wanted examples, nor ought it ever to want advocates : the man, of all others, in this kingdom, whose exalted goodness would have justified a contest with Scipio Nasica, for the distinguished preference given to him, will be long remembered, not only as one of the most perfect disciples of the Gospel, but as embellishing and recommending its divine precepts, by a colloquial hilarity and an uninterrupted cheerfulness, leaving, far behind, all the pretensions of the professors of mirth and conviviality, who depend on the palate of the cook, and the elaborate attention of the importer of their wine. It may, and it will be replied, that any man may be cheerful with

all the blessings of life—health, wealth, domestic happiness, and popular favour. True; but in the instance quoted, the first is wanting; and the sentiment of the world has, however precipitately and erroneously, told us that nothing is to be enjoyed without it. Mr. ***** would be what he is, in sickness, poverty, domestic affliction, or the loss of public favour: the fountain might not play so high, but the spring would be as constant, as pure, and as copious as ever.

When recommending abstinence from light allusions to, and witty quotations from Scripture, the Gentleman's Magazine for August 1813, had not come under observation. It is a work entitled to respect; for it has a long existence to plead, and has certainly been the mean of distributing knowledge, and promoting inquiry: but unless a hoary head give a license to transgress, the Magazine for the month referred to, must be content to receive a little gentle reprehension, and to be told, that in a review, otherwise well written, of a little work, which as described by the critique, seems not unlike the volume now in the reader's hand, it ought not to have admitted a comparison to "a mess of pottage," if it was impossible to stop short of an allusion to that mentioned in the book of Genesis. There was no intention of being serious; therefore the transgression of *good manners* cannot be justified; it was designed to make the

reader laugh, therefore it is inexcusable, and well deserving the severe reproof bestowed once on the writer of this note, who, in a moment of idle levity, presuming to ask for a ruler to draw a straight line with, by the name of "little Benjamin," was answered, in the gentlest manner, by the conscientious son of one of the most pious of Johnson's friends, "I never indulge myself in such liberties with the Bible." There has been no need to repeat the reproof; disgust and offence have been the uniform feeling succeeding to shame and repentance. May it be so with the reviewer at St. John's Gate!

L.

SERMONET XXIII.

I PETER, III. 3.

Let it not be that outward adorning.

How is it possible to reconcile the solicitude evident even in some of the most respectable females among us, about their dress, with any attention to, or respect for, this injunction of the Apostle? And, above all, what ought to be their serious reflections, not on others, but on themselves, when this solicitude extends to adopting practices that are unjustifiable, and to following fashions of a description not less evil "for the multitude" that follow them?

If dress presented itself to the thoughts without this vain solicitude;—if it came to be considered as "matter of right and wrong;"—no injury, to external appearance, would ensue, but great advantage to something preferable to appearance.

A disregard to dress, a contempt for the opinion of others on this point, is neither

meritorious nor prudent. Dress comes under the head of "things of good report;" and women are bound, by every rational consideration, to be so far studious of their appearance, as not to disgust, to vex, or to mortify those who feel an interest in their estimation. There are circumstances and characters belonging to it, which must be regarded.

First, cleanliness of apparel, and neatness in the use of it. "To be without spot," as it is desirable, were it attainable, in our moral and religious conduct, is a very laudable emulation in dress: it preserves a nice sense; it demands caution and forbearance, always salutary to us; and, as what is right, practised in trifles, leads to the practice of it in things of importance, it is good to be pure in dress, that we may, in time, attain purity of mind. On this principle, to such as can indulge in cleanliness, the garment that gives the quickest alarm on being sullied, is the most proper: to choose, without necessity, that which shall hide its spots, is too much of kin to the being content with a Pharisaical clean-

liness. But, to the many whom occupation or narrow circumstances will not suffer to be thus scrupulous, the best advice is, that which may equally be applied to the conscience—to preserve themselves “unspotted.” There is more merit and real neatness in wearing our clothes clean, than in changing them often.

Secondly, apparel befitting the various situations in life, and the different ages of it, should be chosen. Those are much mistaken, who imagine they obtain respect by extravagance, or admiration by deceit; no one will speak in their presence, but no one forbears to speak when they are withdrawn. And, in the lower classes, the ambition of dressing so as to pass for something superior to their own rank, has been the cause of ruin to more young women than any other folly. The men soon notice it; they consider it as a license to them; such “foolish virgins” they will not take for wives, unless they are equally fools; but they are exactly suited to their views of seduction: they are seduced and deserted; the taste for dress cannot be given

up even in poverty; there is a way to indulge the one and avert the other:—the streets are open to all comers, and we hear no more of these wretched professors of vice and folly. It does not follow that there is no more to be heard: would that the death-beds of these first betrayed, and then betraying, pests of society, were brought into the public streets! There is, perhaps, no want of friendship or kindness among them; every one knows it will be her turn, and is ready with the cordial, and her observations on the folly of taking any thing to heart, to help her friend into those regions of never-ending agony and never-abating horror, which she cannot presume to hope she shall escape herself.

And, in the higher ranks, what mischief has not the love of finery produced? How many women have contributed to the ruin of their husbands, by their senseless decoration of their own persons, when, after all, some good girl, without money or vanity, frugal, neat, simple in her apparel, shall have attracted the notice sought, and the respect they disdained to seek!

Thirdly, the time of life ought to regulate the choice of women in the middle and upper classes, in their dress. There are becoming modes for every station and every age; and she succeeds best whose taste is the most discerning in this discovery. It is as improper to affect to appear ninety at the half of that period, as to endeavour to look twenty. There would be as much good sense in trying to be tall or short. No unfair attempt is respectable: none are deceived for more than a short time; and the discovery that we are deceived, does not render us kindly affectioned.

In short, the whole advice to be given on the subject may be reduced to this: let women govern themselves, as far as they can, by the precepts of the New Testament; and, if they have any remaining doubt, let them be assured, that to be very clean, and to look agreeable, with as little expense of time, thought, and money, as possible, is the perfection of their attire.

NOTE.

AN inquiry, made in one of the most fashionable shops in London, as to the respectability of a lady who was buying in it, was answered by an observation, that “No lady of respectability would be so expensively dressed.”—How very mortifying to those who fancy that public opinion of their taste, their wealth, or their rank, must be proportioned to their disbursements! When Mrs. **** bragged of the price of her drawing-room chairs, a great personage did infinite good by replying, “I got mine for much less.”

L.

SERMONET XXIV.

1 KINGS, XVI. 31.

He took to wife Jezebel.

THE wife of Ahab, king of Israel, has never yet found an advocate to plead her cause, or a friend to offer an excuse for her failings. She is regarded as a solitary example of enormous wickedness, and as out of the pale even of Christian charity: her name has grown into a proverb; and, if we mean to describe a woman influenced by every bad motive, and stopped by nothing in the accomplishment of her purposes, we call her a Jezebel; and if we would add the idea of a taudry, meretricious appearance, we recollect that Jezebel “painted her face and tired her head, and looked out at a window,” when Jehu was coming.

Yet history and experience leave room to suspect, that, had she been fortunate in a biogrâpher, or had her errors been less crowded on the page, she would not appear

so novel or so odious a character. Let us collect what may be said in her defence.

She was the daughter of an idolatrous king; therefore, all her spite to the prophets and the worship of the true God, was consistent. She seems to have been an obliging wife; for she had only to know her husband's pleasure, and her most powerful services were at his command: she put him in possession of that which he knew not how to obtain without her; and, in short, they seem to have been a very happy couple, and well suited to each other: he went to the house of Baal; nay, he built an house and an altar for Baal, the deity of her countrymen, the Zidonians; and she, in complaisant return, struck out a most ingenious plan for getting rid of Naboth, and accommodated her royal consort with the vineyard which he wanted for the important cultivation of basil and sweet-marjoram! Ahab appears to have been inferior to her in what is called *spirit*; that is to say, the daring to do whatever he was inclined to; but his inclination certainly was not deficient: he was as ready to take

advice, as she to give it; and she seems to have found servants very prompt to execute whatever her ingenuity planned.

But Jezebel is no anomaly. Not only before, but since, the promulgation of Christianity, there have been many Jezebels, who have added to the enormities of the Israelitish queen, others, in which, their husbands having no participation or interest in them, the credit was all their own: and since, long since, the angels sung "glory to God, peace on earth, good-will towards men," wives, mothers, mistresses, intrusted with, or usurping the reins of government, have done things which would have taught even the ingenuity of Jezebel.

Nor is it to royalty, that the imitation or the information is confined. There have been wicked women of all ranks and classes, who have suggested the deeds of villany, for which men have paid the forfeit of their lives. When Jezebel lived, she might be a wonder; but Jezebel, were she now living, might exercise arts that would disguise even *her* wickedness, and persuade us, as we are too apt to be persuaded, that,

possessing the power to flatter and to gratify, her vices were "her own concern."

But let no such palliatives be accepted. While we feel and cultivate a genuine unaffected sorrow for the depravity of mankind, and grieve for the follies and vices of those who obtrude themselves on censure, let us remember that there is more certain danger attending every departure from virtue, than there is certain security in an adherence to it: the demerit of a bad action is decisive: no one can doubt the motive to a deed of murder and rapine; but the motive to the best action that can be performed may be questionable. There is no commutation for crimes: Jezebel might have spent every hour of her life well, except those in which she exercised her spite to Naboth, and her wicked influence over her wicked husband; yet still she would have been a by-word and a proverb; and, in lower life, a proportionable share of obloquy and dreadful retribution may be looked for, by all those who suffer wicked inclinations and a disposition to culpable compliances, to mark out their path for

them. The influence of a woman ought never to be exerted over the mind of man, but for the most equitable purpose: to soften just resentment—to use the moment when anger is beginning to subside,—and then to represent fairly that which, in the heat of passion, is forgotten—this is the office of a woman. The Sacred Writings, particularly the Proverbs, have many useful axioms on this subject, which will prepare the mind, by convincing the reason, for the reception of those positive injunctions the Apostles have founded on their personal knowledge of the will of our blessed Lord.

The fate of Jezebel, familiar as it becomes by frequent and often inattentive perusal, has been only that of subordinate transgression written in a larger character. History records circumstances of the death of a mistress of a king of France, so similar as to excite horror; and, when we contemplate the fearful distance from virtue of every kind, at which some women, originally, perhaps, “more sinned against than sinning,” have arrived at last, every civil

disability, under which females labour, will be acquiesced in as the decree of Infinite Wisdom; every required submission to mild authority, will be gratefully considered as the condition on which protection is afforded; and it will be left to the vulgar, the licentious, and the unsexed, to contend for “the rights of women.”

L,

SERMONET XXV.

PROVERBS, XV. 1.

A soft answer turneth away wrath.

WHOEVER would estimate properly the wisdom expressed in the text, should consider the inconveniences, not to say the absolute sinfulness, of anger; for it happens with this, as it does with most other maxims of virtue, that there is in it as much of good sense, referable to this world, as there is of goodness or virtue, with respect to the world to come.

That anger is odious, that the character which it assumes is repulsive, are truths which cannot be controverted; and these, perhaps, might, with refined understandings, be a sufficient dissuasive from suffering ourselves to be transported with it; but there are, likewise, objections addressed, not to the elegant and the refined, the dignified and the cultivated, but to the plain man of the world. To him who would

seek to turn away the wrath of his opponent by equal anger on his part, to him the text addresses itself; and by it he is taught, that if he would “turn away wrath,” his most potent weapon is mildness,—is meekness,—is a soft answer. In order that he may comprehend this, let him recollect how little the angry man is master of himself, and of his own intellects; and, while he means only to be *angry*, how probable it is that he may likewise be *foolish*. Solomon says, “He that is slow to wrath, is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit, exalteth folly.” “He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly.” Let him recollect the impotence of anger; that what may be willingly conceded to the claims of pity, of generosity, of friendship, or of love, will never be extorted by anger. The superiority of wisdom is in nothing, perhaps, more evident, than in the power of that deportment which is regulated by it, to defeat the effects of that which has its foundation in folly, or, in other words, in the efficacy of a plain, simple, moderate answer, to silence the

roarings of rage and the turbulence of invective.

Of the importance of the truth here contended for, the life of every man might furnish abundant proof; but we will refer to higher authority. It would be to weaken the argument, to quote merely a desultory answer, given in an individual instance to an angry man; the appeal may be made to the uniform tenour of a whole life. Let any one contemplate the conduct of Him, whose whole progress through this world was a continued state of suffering and of insult, but who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; who, when he was reproached with the worst of crimes, answered those reproaches, and silenced those who made them, not with taunt or anger, but by a plain appeal to indisputable fact and incontrovertible reasoning: "If I cast out devils by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out?"—"If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?"—The same spirit was found in Moses and in the Apostles, and for the same reasons; for,

by the softness and the moderation of their answers, they silenced their adversaries, who felt how little their rage was able to avail against those, who were not to be provoked to abandon the dignity which moderation possesses.

Let no one, therefore, imagine, that because his enemy is angry, therefore he himself ought to be angry likewise. Let him recollect, that anger is misery to him who feels it, and may excite contempt in those towards whom it is exercised.

Perhaps there is scarcely any infirmity to which human nature is prone, against which Solomon has given so many warnings, as against anger in all its various shapes and bearings:—whether as the answer to the wrath of another, or in hastiness to resent an offence, or in that petulant waspishness which occasions disgust. “The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.”—“A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment.”—“A froward man soweth strife.” These are only some of the many texts which might be produced to show the

folly of anger. Nothing has been said on the foundation of those precepts, which were delivered as part of a more sublime system of ethics, by Him who said, "Be angry, and sin not;"—"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." The text has been considered solely as far as related to the expediency of indulging in anger, with reference to our conduct in this world; and, perhaps, no better test can be produced of the wisdom of the maxim, than that, in addition to the breach of it being highly offensive to God, it, even in *this* world, defeats the purpose for which such a violation of God's laws would be practised.

H.

SERMONET XXVI.

ECCLESIASTES, I. 2.

All is vanity.

IT requires some discretion to ascertain the precise import of the above maxim—how far the author might intend it to influence the œconomy of human life—or whether he might not wish simply to show how poor and vapid are the occupations to which men are inevitably doomed, by their destiny in this life.

Thus much, however, may be certain, that he did not purpose to dissuade men from the pursuits of honest industry, on the consideration that industry might be rewarded by wealth, which he that had earned it, might not live to enjoy. As little should we be inclined to suppose that he might wish to censure the acquisition of knowledge, because he has elsewhere said, “He that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow;” since, were Industry to desist from

her labour, and Knowledge, like Astræa, to quit the earth and return again to the skies, human society could not exist.

But we perhaps may, without the least impropriety, annex to the text a meaning which seeks not to disparage human exertions, ordained and regulated by God himself, nor yet to exalt them to undue and visionary importance.

We will consider the vanity here spoken of, as expressing that short-sightedness of man, which prevents him from seeing the end or tendency of any of those pursuits in which he is engaged: he labours, but he knows not who shall inherit his wealth; he wearies his body and his mind to acquire knowledge, but he sees no immediate effects arising from that he has thus painfully acquired. Perhaps ages must elapse before his discoveries in science shall affect the state of mankind at large, or remove one evil or inconvenience, under which a whole nation has groaned; or before those who have reaped the benefit of his exertions, shall consent to acknowledge him as their benefactor.

Such is the state of human existence! But still *some* comfort remains; and, though the occupations of men must be vain, and man is decreed to labour, lest “the earth” should not “bring forth her increase,” and to acquire knowledge, that he may aid his own weakness by the experience of others; yet the Christian must recollect, that, by the faithful discharge of the duties which are enjoined him, he may acquire a reward that is *not vain*—“a glory incorruptible, eternal in the heavens,” where “the patient abiding” of the adverse events of this life, will be remembered and rewarded; where He that has seen “in secret, shall reward openly.” The necessary and inherent *vanity* of all pursuits should operate with us as a reason for not engaging in those which are *needlessly* light and frivolous. What little of dignity may still remain with us, let not man obliterate or forfeit: let every one, according as he is able, fight strenuously against the world, the flesh, and the devil, until the fashion of this world shall pass away; “when this

corruptible shall put on incorruption," when "the *glory* of the Lord shall be revealed," and man shall be clothed in everlasting righteousness.

H.

SERMONET XXVII.

 PROVERBS, XVIII. 14.

A wounded spirit who can bear?

A QUESTION, thus put, always carries with it a notion of extreme difficulty, if not of impossibility; and, put by Solomon, whose wisdom and experience must have given him the highest right of decision, it leaves us only to acquiesce in that which seems his opinion, that “a wounded spirit” no one can bear.

But, before we subscribe entirely to his judgment, another question remains to be solved, and this respects the meaning of the term, “a wounded spirit.” Considered as meaning a wounded conscience, the difficulty of endurance cannot be denied: but translating “spirit” by “heart,” we, perhaps, are not justified in thinking exactly as Solomon did. Understood, as it frequently is, a wounded pride veiled under the specious name of honour, there may be

correctives to the impatience by which such a wound is inflamed; the most efficacious is that which comes near demurring to the authority under which we are punished. But let us consider the three meanings—a wounded conscience, a wounded heart, a wounded pride.

It would be no employment fit for virtue, to teach mankind that they may bear a wounded conscience; it is, in truth, so intolerable, that, in its wounded state, it cannot be borne; yet, as nothing, under the merciful dispensations of a God of mercy, can justify despair, mankind are to be informed that their honest endeavours to heal the wounds of conscience, will never fail of good effects to them. Repentance, contrition, restitution where a possibility exists, thorough amendment of life, our utmost endeavours to preserve others from following our ill example, are balsams and unguents not to be neglected; and their efficacy, under the gracious scheme of the Gospel, leaves still to every man, tormented by “a wounded spirit” of this descrip-

tion, the power to become whole, and to enjoy peace at the last.

The wounds of conscience are the rebound of sin; but wounds of the heart have, in general, the comfort of innocence, and claim the pity of mankind; yet the affliction attending them, is deaf and regardless: innocence is no comfort; pity is aggravation; and, unless religion and foresight have been our companions, the sufferer is consigned to all the misery of human weakness, unsupported, unaided.

Most justly might any monitor be charged with ignorance and cruelty, who should presume to underrate the wounds of the heart. Whether occasioned by violence offered to ties formed by nature, or those we make for ourselves, while they are not founded in, or fostered by vice or folly, they who suffer under them are respectable and amiable; and it must be matter of regret, but not of reproach, that the frail tenure of human happiness was not previously taken into our account, and the mind early intrusted with the sad secret, that "all is vanity." It seems to require a sort or a

degree of courage, few people possess, to tell young persons how subject they will be through life to disappointments, and those, not only grievous in their nature, but intolerable in their weight, if any earthly objects are allowed in our minds too potent an authority. If friendships are formed, if attachments are entered on, nay, if natural affection is indulged in, without considering that the friend, the lover, the husband, the wife, the child, the brother, the sister, may to-morrow die, or make us wish ourselves dead; we may be at once injured, wounded, shocked, and stunned. If our connexions were originally formed for the short lease of this life, we have no resource in case of accident.

But the wounds of the heart are not intolerable to those who have considered the fashion of this world. Its perfidies cannot surprise those who are acquainted with fallen nature; its privations cannot render naked those who have clothed themselves with the promises of the Gospel; and, whatever may be the influence of accidents upon sublunary happiness, they cau-

not affect those who have calculated theirs for a brighter region—who know that what has power to postpone, has yet none to annihilate. The friends, the lovers, the kindred, may be severed here; but, if worthy of partaking of happiness, may be restored to each other again.

Of that wound of the spirit which is given to our pride, and which we transfer to our honour, it is beneath Christianity to take account, were not her ears open, even to the complaints least meriting her attention: wounded honour must be wounded conscience, to make a wise man uneasy. He who knows what the opinion of the world is worth, may sleep very sound without obtaining its praise, if unassailed from within. Wounded pride ought to find its own remedy. Let us humble ourselves before God, and we destroy the authority that vexes us.

On the whole, then, taking the matter in this confined view, or in an extent ever so large, it will be found and felt by all who judge rightly, that it is not in the power of any thing, but vice, to wound the

spirit deeply, unless we have set up in our hearts other gods than Him who brought our forefathers out of the bondage of Egypt, and who will, if we do not oppose him, release us from a bondage still more severe. But if those who have wounded their spirit by sin, will not repent and amend; if those who have been warned, times without number, of the thread by which they hold this world's dearest possessions, will wound their hearts by forgetfulness; if those whose pride is their spirit, will make a god of this world—wounded spirits, and intolerably wounded spirits, there must be; but it is not the intention of the Almighty; he has provided a remedy for all wounds: we cannot say, “Is there no balm in Gillead?”

NOTE.

It is to be wished that all fathers would, in similar circumstances, do, as did the pious B——L——, when asked by his son to give his approbation and concurrence to a proposal of marriage he was desirous to make, and the success of which, in every way, was most justifiably matter of anxious so-

licitude : “ You have,” said he, “ my full approbation, and shall have all the assistance in my power ; but only on condition, that, if you are refused, you bear the disappointment like a Christian.”

Could the young be persuaded, that readiness to resign pleasure increases the enjoyment of it, how much would it improve their happiness ! The thorns of their path through this world, would be turned into palm-trees, reaching to Heaven, and affording a refreshing shade upon earth. It was this early conviction, that enabled Lady **** to say, “ No one can enjoy life more than I do ; no one has more cause to be thankful :—but if there is any instance of God’s goodness, more claiming my gratitude than another, it is, that he has given me grace to feel that I could, this night, resign my soul into his hands, relying on the merits of our Blessed Lord for pardon of my sins, and on the promises of the Gospel, for a life of eternal felicity.”

L.

SERMONET XXVIII.

EXODUS, XX. 7.

*For the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that
taketh his name in vain.*

IF we may infer the state of information in some persons from their practice, the commandment forbidding profaneness of speech is very imperfectly understood; for the great license assumed by those who, without scruple or decency, break it, seems excused even to themselves, by a conviction, that nothing short of legal perjury is meant by it.

One mean of getting at the sense, would be, to compare the phrase, “taking in vain,” as applied to the name of God, with that we affix to it when applied to any thing else.

To “take pains” in vain; to “take heed” in vain; to “take up the defence of another” in vain; nay, to “take measures” in vain, are phrases, each of which means

to do something, supposed fully sufficient to a wished-for effect, and to do it to no purpose. "In vain" has no other meaning but that which describes an effect not following a cause.

Cause being inseparable from instrumentality, we may consider the name of God as the instrument we use, at one time, to obtain belief, or, at another, if such folly can be practised, to adorn our conversation. For the first purpose, it may, on great occasions, and with due reverence, be used without a breach of the commandment: the depravity of mankind leaves nothing else on which men can rely: but, for the second, there can be no excuse or palliation; because, if "taking any thing in vain," has any meaning, "taking the Lord's name in vain" must have exactly that of degrading an instrument of the most awful power, to the most frivolous, inadequate, and disproportionate purpose. Perjury, it must be granted, is the extreme degree of this heinous sin; but the habitual custom of calling on God, or alluding to his attributes, or any circumstance respect-

ing him, may differ from the atrociousness of one act only, as a habit of repletion, which at length kills, differs from the suffocation of a single act of inordinate gluttony.

L.

SERMONET XXIX.

I TIMOTHY, IV. 1.

Some shall depart from the faith.

THAT persons not instructed in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures should keep aloof from that faith by which we of the church of God hope to be admitted to a life of eternal happiness, must be rather matter of sorrow than of wonder. That such as have made obstacles of their own errors, should postpone an acquaintance with it, is, to us who know the danger of delay, cause of melancholy astonishment. But that those who have neither ignorance to oppose to conviction, nor vices to obstruct it, and who have once been acquainted with it, should ever depart from it, is almost incredible. In cases of worldly prudence, it is common to hear men declare that they choose to be on the safe side. One man insures his house, though in no probable danger from fire, because it can do

no harm to be on the safe side. Another redoubles his precautions against thieves and robbers, because a lock or a bolt too much can do no harm, and it is best to be on the safe side. How many things do mothers, nurses, and those who educate youth, do that appear optional, because they will be on the safe side! What precautions are taken in investing our money, and in every transaction of human interest, that we may be on the safe side! And how often do our judgment and inclinations, our self-will and self-complacency, yield—and all that we may be on the safe side!

But this commendable circumspection is, alas! all discarded when religion is concerned; and those whose parents and instructors have done all in their power to guard them against the unsafe side, in many lamentable instances, when left to the vanity of human wisdom, or the presumption of human folly, without the shadow of reason or excuse, and, as it were, merely to use their liberty of destruction, have left the only side that is safe, and, departing from the faith, have staked, not

indeed this world, but that which alone gives value to this world, on the chance of their being wiser in their construction of a sentence, than the many who have died to testify their opinion, and the many more who have lived to give to it every confirmation that truth, learning, and the grace of God can afford. How this blindness is obtained, is not so much the purpose of the present consideration of the text, as the gain to be made of this artificial, this fatal, and, it is to be feared, this scarcely pardonable blindness.

There are risks in the life of a soldier, of a sailor, of a professor of medicine, which he must run. There are risks which tempt the covetous, and make swine of the intemperate: the passions have their risks; every thing has its risk; but it is the choice of a wise man to lessen the number and importance of these risks; and a life of risk is by all considered as a life of madness. No risk is ever excused but that which holds out a great advantage; none can be praise-worthy that does not turn the danger on ourselves, the advantage on another.

But for risking our souls by departing from the faith, what shadow of plea or excuse can we find? Is the submission of our judgment here, even if we are hard to be convinced, attended with any danger? Is not the risk all on the other side? Supposing any one disposed to forego all the comforts and advantages of revelation, and merely acknowledging that he had a Creator to whose will obedience is due, should stop short in his belief, and deny the Christian dispensation; surely he would not, entirely on his own caprice, take up his opinions; he would endeavour to learn how it had fared with persons acting on this persuasion; and if he heard the truth, he must be informed that many are the sad instances of death-bed remorse which it has occasioned; whereas not one instance can be produced, except attended with such circumstances as would take away all inclination to follow the example, of any person's expressing a disposition to repent at the last, of faith in the Christian religion.

All disingenuous affectation of fear in

admitting the light of the Gospel, lest we should pay to another the homage due to one God alone, is done away by the very character of the Deity. He is not a Being to be propitiated by human sacrifices, or who delights in vengeance. Even did we err in accepting revelation as of divine origin, we cannot pretend to believe he would avenge himself on us as wilful idolaters. There is not a precept in the Gospel that militates against any idea we can have conceived of him. There is nothing in it that is not to his glory. At least, we might receive it with this mental reservation, "If indeed it be thine, which we humbly infer it to be," what harm could this do us? Is not this being on the safe side? And is not the contrary being entirely on the unsafe side? And from that side may the grace of God turn, ere it be too late, all those who through prejudice, or persuasion, or mental blindness, have become "of this evil heart of unbelief."

L.

SERMONET XXX.

JOB, IV. 8.

*Even as I have seen, they that plough iniquity
and sow wickedness, reap the same.*

SUCH were the words of a man who, at the time when he uttered them, had seen much of the world, and who, consequently, to that natural piety which formed the most prominent feature in his character, added that experience which cannot be learned but by intercourse with men. Every member of the sentence is of importance; for he not merely delivers a moral aphorism, but he pledges his own observation of life and manners in support of the truth of that aphorism: “Even as *I have seen*, they that plough iniquity and sow wickedness, reap the same.” And doubtless the maxim cannot be too deeply impressed on the minds of us all: for who is there among us whom it does not concern to know that which the text inculcates, that he who sows iniquity,

or, in other words, who leads a vicious life, must expect, not that which sin promises, happiness, but misery and disgrace? misery as to a man's own feelings, and disgrace as to the world around him! It is with sin as with all transactions between man and man; we must look not to what is promised, but what is performed.

Every one, on entering the busy world, should recollect the words of Omnipotence, "Behold, I have set before you good and evil;" and let him well consider, for it is a matter of no slight import, whether it be best for him to "plough iniquity, and sow wickedness," and in the end to "reap the same," or to adopt those rules for his conduct which bring a man peace at the last.

We do not mean to contend that worldly prosperity is, under the Gospel dispensation, as immediately and as certainly the reward of virtue as it was under the law of Moses, when the doctrine of a future state was not so forcibly impressed on the mind, as afterward, by Him who "brought life and immortality to light;" but we certainly say,

that a conformity to the doctrines of the Gospel, enables us to avoid many adverse accidents, and those which we cannot avoid, it enables us to endure with more firmness, more dignity of character than would be possible without it; an advantage which the infidel and the voluptuary never had the presumption to boast.

To expect the harvest to be happiness when the seed sown is iniquity and wickedness, we perceive, from the text before us, to be directly contrary to the nature of things. It is not more true when applied to the produce of the earth, than when applied to morals, that the seed and the fruit, the cause and the effect, have always a relation the one to the other. The world exists by system; every thing is order and regularity as constituted by the wisdom, the power, the goodness of the Creator. The sophism, that happiness, or good of any denomination, may be produced by sin, forms no part of philosophy. There may be some to whom it may be convenient to believe that it does; and such persons as they, may likewise wish to make other people believe

it: but philosophy is not founded on *convenience*, at least on such convenience as seeks to banish from the world the fundamental truths on which every thing valuable to man is founded.

To those whose conduct makes it necessary to controvert the maxim of the text, we leave the task of finding arguments in support of their opinions. The real Christian, we hope, will recollect with due gratitude, and certainly more gratitude cannot be felt than the benefit calls for, that he is not left in a slavery to sin for want of that instruction which is to make him free; neither is he doomed to the observance of an austere or ritual worship, formed of maxims which derive their force from being enjoined for our observance, but which in no wise affect our passions or our principles: but a law is given to us, becoming the wisdom of Him who gave it, and accommodated to the wants of those for whom it was designed: calculated to lead man, through the merits of his Saviour, to everlasting happiness, by making him, in this world, useful to society a large, and estimable to those with whom he is

connected; and giving him that peace of mind which, as the world cannot give, so the world cannot take away.

From the testimony of Job, as stated in the text, and from many other passages of Scripture, equally declaratory of the folly and the deceitfulness of sin, arises one maxim founded on the same high authority—the will of a wise and merciful God revealed to man. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter—Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” Man’s duty to his Maker, to his neighbour, to himself—man’s duty to enable him to enjoy the numberless benefits which are placed within his reach, each of them designed to make him a more useful, a more energetic creature in his relations to society—a more pious, a more resigned creature to the will of his Maker, deriving from this dependence an inward strength, a consolation which enables him, after a life thus spent, unrepining to say in his latest moments: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,—for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

II.

SERMONET XXXI.

JOB, x. 12.

*Thou hast granted me life and favour; and
thy visitation hath preserved my spirit.*

IN making use of that treasure intrusted to our discretion, the Holy Scriptures, it is loss of time and perversion of purpose, when those who are under no obligation to the inquiry, but who have simply to make their practice conform to precepts, assume the office of critics and commentators; when, before they listen to the words of wisdom contained in the sublime book which bears the name of Job, they must satisfy themselves whether his character and misfortunes be a fiction framed for the purpose of instruction, or a recital from which we may obtain it.—Does it appear very probable that Job would have been named by the mouth of the Almighty, conjointly with Noah and Daniel (Ezekiel, xiv. 14, 20), of whose existence we enter-

tain no doubt, if he were merely an imaginary example?

But, in either view of this elevated composition, the texts it furnishes are equally important, as they are founded in truth, if not in experience; and from them, if we are so disposed, we may extract much of that inestimable knowledge which will in the end "make" us "wise unto salvation."

Of these fertile texts, one of the most remarkable is that now chosen for consideration. There are few of us who have known the common alternations of good and evil in the world, who may not acknowledge with Job, that they are indebted to God for life and favour, and to his visitation for the preservation of their spirit.

Without confining ourselves to what may be the precise meaning of the Hebrew or the Greek, let us see what we may understand from the text, as given by our English translators.

That life and favour are blessings, and that the visitation of God may be turned to our preservation, is matter of experience: that we have our choice in our use

of them, is equally true ; and that they are pervertible by human corruption, is subject of regret and mortification.

Let us consider how we are to regard life and favour as subjects of thankfulness, and how the visitation of God may tend to the preservation of our spirit.

If opportunity be of value, life is so : it is the opportunity afforded us of obtaining that reward which it is in the will of God to dispense or withhold ; and if to be allowed a place amongst competitors for a prize, if to have a chance amongst many, if to have our names entered in a list of select few to whom good fortune may incline, is in this world called a privilege, and the means to obtain it are sought with avidity, on the same principle we must regard life as a grant from the Almighty, for which we ought to be thankful.

But the parallel does not quite hold. In all admissions to competition in the world, be the prize something which only one can obtain, or which many may share, our endeavours cannot ensure success ; but in the race in which we are allowed by our

merciful Ruler to engage, we must want inclination if we fail.

In this view of life, it is evidently a privilege granted to us, not a necessity imposed on us ; and as the benefit to be derived from it, is, with the grace of God, which we know how to obtain, at our own disposal, it is the excess of folly to misuse it, and of impiety to consider it as the inflicted cruelty of an arbitrary master. Be life to each of us individually, what it may, as its end and purpose are to lead us to eternal happiness, life is matter of thankfulness, and not to be treated safely with the insolent contempt of the shortsighted half-thinkers, who boasting themselves Deists, are not far from Atheists.

The "favour" spoken of in the text, admits not of so confined and precise a sense as "life:" it may be the favour of God, or the favour of our fellow-creatures. Let us take it in the latter acceptance.

Notions of independence, of what is due to ourselves, of freedom from obligation, and reliance on our own powers, very ill accord with what we are taught in the re-

vealed word of God; and as there can be no question as to the prudence of listening rather to the instructions of Omniscience, than to the dictates of our foolish pride; the favour of our fellow-creatures must be considered as a blessing, inasmuch as it ensures to us their disposition to assist us, and confers on us the invaluable power of assisting them. Setting aside all the agreeable circumstances attendant on what is called "standing well in the opinion of the world," to conciliate by fair means its favour, is a part of social duty; and to obtain it and make a laudable use of it, is to fortify ourselves against much evil, and to entitle ourselves to a satisfaction not easily snatched from us. No good ever resulted from contempt for the opinion of mankind in general: no harm, we may be assured, can result from an honest deference for it, since it is recorded of our blessed Lord that he obtained it.

All that has been said may be readily granted: it wants no argument to prove its truth; but the latter part of the text, "thy visitation hath preserved my spirit,"

requires to be considered. It will be said by those who may grant "visitation" to mean, as in common language, and by common consent, chastisement or affliction, that the severe dispensations of the Almighty tend rather to break than to preserve the spirit; but this cannot be urged by any who have seen, or who will believe, that often when we, in our rash judgment, censure the dealings of the Creator with his creatures as most cruel, they are the most merciful.

The visitation that preserves the spirit is, indeed, sometimes that which most grievously affects the body; and the spirit of such weak creatures as ourselves, may fail under it; but the "spirit" which the text means is not that which can fail. It is that immortal part which nothing can touch, and whose infinite value, when weighed against the body and its interests, is so preponderating as to make the corporeal afflictions of this life dust in the balance. All who can judge on this point—all who can, if finite judgment may comprehend what is infinite—compare the sufferings of a few years with the enjoyments of

a blessed eternity, will remit cheerfully every concern of the mortal body to the will of its Creator, and submit to any visitation that will tend to the preservation of their immortal spirit.

L.

SERMONET XXXII.

GENESIS, XXII. 10.

*And Abraham stretched forth his hand—to
slay his son.*

IN the use which we make of the Bible, it is very much to be wished, that, considering it is a book unlike all others, we should treat it and read it with distinguished reverence, but yet with not so much distance of mind, as to lose the benefits of its instruction, or the power of applying to ourselves and our own advantage, its lessons of virtue or its historical facts. The event recorded in the chapter from which the text is taken, partakes of both these characters: it is an historical fact, from which great advantage is to be reaped; and it is a lesson of virtue even to those who may not be in the relative situation of Abraham.

To parents, however, it must be more highly interesting than to any other de-

scription of persons ; and to their hearts peculiarly must every circumstance recorded by the sacred historian, reach. None but a parent, perhaps none but a father, can know what is the earnest longing for a son—the representative of a family—the heir to its possessions—the companion of a father's manhood—the protector of his second childhood. For this blessing Abraham had waited, without even probability sufficient to justify hope:—at one time mortified with the apprehension that his servant must be his representative ; then compelled to fix his affection on the son by his handmaid, and at last required to stretch his faith beyond the bounds of nature, and to look for the possession of a treasure which would be rendered more valuable by the extraordinary circumstances under which it was obtained.

Let us figure to our imagination the new bent given to Abraham's thoughts by the prospect of a legitimate son—a son, the annunciation of whose birth promised that in him every wish of a fond parent's heart should be realized. Isaac was heir to the

distinguished lineage of the man whom the Deity had undertaken to protect, to bless, and to advance:—in natural station, in wealth, he was a prince—he was the only son of his mother: Abraham does not appear to have thought on any recompense; and a second miracle they had no reason to expect. Perfect in faith, and taught by the event to rely on God, Abraham must, when Isaac was promised to him, have considered all care for the perpetuation of his family and the regular transmission of his wealth, as superfluous, but yet as depending on the life of Isaac.

If there are feelings which we may say we cannot renounce, they must be those of Abraham; if there is a privation that can make this world's goods seem nothing unto us, it must be that which now threatened Abraham. He is commanded, not to *send*, but to *take* the ingenuous lad to the place of sacrifice: and let it be considered as a bitter aggravation of the trial, that the place of Abraham's abode was so distant from the mountain of Moriah, where this tragic scene was to take place, that, on

the third day of the journey, it was only in sight—it was, even then, afar off.

Now let any one who knows what it is, in the common occurrences of life, to lie down at night with a heavy heart, and to wake from disturbed sleep with some recollection of misery, at first indistinct, but clearing up gradually into dread and anguish, let it be but the dread of common bodily pain, or the anguish of an every-day misfortune—think what it was for Abraham, for there is no occasion to decorate the truth, to lie down twice, and rise twice, with a weight so oppressive on his mind. If Isaac slept near him, fear that he might betray in his sleep that which tortured his feelings, must have added to his sufferings. And on their way, when Isaac, in the innocency of his heart, asked questions or made observations, how must his paternal bosom have been agonized in recollecting how few hours would silence that tongue, and leave his fond parent no companion to solace his woe: none but one to whose, perhaps, more clamorous grief he must ad-

minister that comfort he had not for himself.

But Abraham did not hesitate: he took his son, and clave the wood, and prepared the fire and the knife; and possessing himself, even at the end of the journey, sufficiently to preclude the probable tenderness of his servants from obstructing his obedience, instead of asking human assistance or support, he prepared to meet, unaided and in solitude, the horrors he was to inflict on himself. Even the heart-rending question of Isaac, "Where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" he meets by an evasive but collected answer—an answer which imports the deep feeling of his bosom—"God will provide himself a lamb."

It was a lamb indeed that the Almighty provided; but it was far more valuable, far more necessary to its owner's comfort, than that represented in the words of Nathan, and whose endearing qualities claimed forbearance and compassion. If it was more than ought to have been asked of a man, to give up an animal he had reared and fondled, it was because it might have been

supposed that the feelings of human nature could not endure such violence. Abraham's feelings sustained far greater.

The use to be made of the historical circumstance is most important; and the subsequent experience of mankind shows, that what it teaches, it is, with the blessing of God, within our power to practise. It teaches us, and innumerable examples prove, that with God all things are possible. "If God be for us," we may boldly ask, "who can be against us?"

It is good, even in the calm and security of domestic peace, to look forward to those accidents which may deprive us of its comforts, that we may not add to natural calamity by the confusion of mind into which surprise throws us. There is no reason for embittering our present enjoyments, by a gloomy contemplation of the frail tenure by which they are held: our sensibility to them might rather be increased, if we rightly considered what it is, according to St. Paul, the purpose of the sacred historian to enforce—the possibility of finding in "the arm of the Lord," that supernatural

strength, and in his support, that spiritual fortitude, which, whatever our trials or our weakness, will enable us with patience, with resignation, and even with satisfaction, to say, “ Be it unto me even as thou wilt.”

L.

SERMONET XXXIII.

PSALM XC. 2.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made, thou art God from everlasting, and world without end.

TO a superficial reader of Scripture, the words of the text, as, indeed, every other declaration of the greatness of the Deity, may appear little more than a mere display of magnificence that cannot be exceeded, or of power that cannot be resisted. Descriptions of that magnificence, and of that power, occur in numberless instances in the Psalms, all tending to elevate our ideas of the Supreme Being, and to show us how far above all human comprehension are his glory and his majesty. But, to the reader who studies the Sacred Writings with an honest and discerning mind, and whom we therefore oppose to the superficial reader, it will appear that the words

of the text, and all other similar passages, are the language of wisdom ; for if we are required to believe in him, to fear him, and to obey him, what can be more useful to show the superiority of the true God over all false gods, than those declarations of his power so frequent in the Sacred Writings? or what can be more proper to aid our faith, than the contemplation of God's attributes, as the basis on which to found all those derivative ideas which ought to exist in the mind of a Christian?

For Christianity does not, nor indeed did Judaism, require faith and obedience without some primary principle on which either the one or the other should rest. The Jews were incessantly reminded of the miracles that had been wrought in their favour, and of God's patience with them in their secret murmurings, or open rebellions ; and Christians are, at this day, reminded of what is due from them for the sake of Him who laid down his life as the ransom for many. But the miracles which were performed for the Jews, and the atonement that was made for sin, by the death

and sufferings of Jesus Christ, owe all their influence on the human mind, to the power, the glory, the majesty, the wisdom, and the goodness of God. Deprive the Deity of any one of these attributes, and he is immediately divested of that which is essential to his government of the world, and, consequently, to our faith.

From the propriety of expressions stating the greatness of the Deity, arises the expediency of preserving and improving, as far as we are able, all sentiments in our own hearts which tend to elevate our ideas of him—of considering him as he really is, and as he is represented in Scripture, as above us all, and in us all; as governing every thing according as is best, and as never leaving those to perish, who call on him faithfully. “And they that know thy name, will put their trust in thee; for thou hast never failed them that seek thee.”

From what has been said, though it may be scarcely necessary to make the observation, we plainly perceive the folly and the guilt of indulging such ideas as have a

tendency to efface from our minds the recollection of the greatness or the goodness of God. All frivolous conversation on serious subjects, and more especially all profane swearing, cannot be too pointedly censured, as no practice can more conduce to eradicate all good dispositions. 'Tis true, the mind may not, at the instant of uttering a blasphemy, be sensible of any great degree of depravation; but depravity it certainly is, and, like all other sinful habits, brings with it more crimes than itself.

Search among the lowest orders of the people, and see how many there are who have laboured under inconceivable misfortunes, from the profligacy of their lives, originally produced by a disregard of things holy. And in how many of these instances might all the misfortunes, and all the consequent misery, have been avoided, had the mind been impressed with a fit sense of the reverence due to God's holy Word, or to his glory and majesty, and all his other divine attributes!

Let no one, therefore, suppose that the levity of mind, with which a sin is com-

mitted, does away the sinfulness or the folly of it. We may rest assured that the glory of God would not have been so often alluded to, or so unremittingly enforced upon our minds, had not some good reason required it; and what reason so becoming Him, whose glory is thus promulgated, or so necessary to the well-being of an infirm creature like man, as that which we have been stating, namely, that it might be the basis of his faith and of his practice?

If any will presumptuously contemn the admonitions thus vouchsafed, theirs is the peril. Christianity can but set forth the hopes of eternal happiness to all: it leaves man to accept or to reject the proffered terms: it offers its assistance, by teaching its votaries to discipline their passions, to purify their hearts, to elevate their ideas, by placing before them, as the object of their worship, a Being far exceeding, in purity and in dignity, every thing which the warmest imagination of ancient or modern genius ever devised or depicted. Finally, it allures them, by holding out to all, "who, by patient continuance in well-

doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life." These are the offers which Christianity makes; and may all who hear them, so duly appreciate them, that they may do, as did the Israelites of old, when they heard the law at Sinai: "And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do."

H.

SERMONET XXXIV.

PROVERBS, XII. 17.

*He that speaketh truth showeth forth
righteousness.*

IT seems almost as unnecessary to recommend the practice of truth in society, as to recommend the care of health, to an individual. The cause of the many, when allotted and apportioned, becomes that of every one; and the good resulting to the world from an observance of truth, is but an effect, the origin of which rests with us, and the motive to which must be sought in regard for ourselves.

But in our respect for this excellent and indispensable quality, we must not lose sight of the corrupted state of human nature, by treating it as a feature of mind, which we may be justly disappointed and angry to find wanting in the young and the ignorant. After all the eulogiums that can be passed on the attractive beauty of truth;

may, if we can boast of ourselves as never, from our earliest years, having been deficient in our respect for, or our practice of it, all who have had the conduct of children, or dealings with the lower classes, must acknowledge that it is not a character inseparably connected with that of mankind. There may be some examples of infants and ignorant persons, whom nothing could induce to shelter themselves by falsehood; but the instances are rare; perhaps as infrequent as those of a taste for the arts or sciences discovered in the cradle. And when parents flatter themselves, that, whatever may be the custom in other nurseries, in theirs nothing like a departure from truth can be heard, the child gains encouragement in the practice of deception, and those who have the care of it, add contempt to effrontery.

If this be true—and the most sensible parents and masters are beginning to discover that it is so—it is a species of information that should teach patience and industry. What is the wretched, corrupt state of our fellow-creatures in general,

must not be revenged or lamented as singular depravity : we must, by degrees, eradicate the evil, and, with all our vigour, fill its place with good. We must punish ; we may pity :—we must wait ; we may hope :—we must endeavour ; and we may rely on the assistance of Him who is the God of Truth.

But even in the exertions of industry to root out the habit, we must not consider ourselves as having passed the previous climates of forbearance and patience. Violent measures may suit best those who know themselves incapable of steady, persevering conduct ; but, should they fail, what is left ? Our industry must never lose its forbearance or its patience, if it is to be efficacious in removing a moral evil.

Towards such as are known not to possess a courageous preference of truth, no authority that can frighten into falsehood, should ever be exercised, while under cure of this cowardice. Lies, at least those told in families, are almost always the effect of fear : the punishments due to negligence or want of care, must, therefore, be fore-

gone, for the sake of encouraging to virtue: and we must take cheerfully the spoiling our goods, if we regard the eternal well-being of a fellow-creature as of more importance.

All traps set to discover whether, unassisted, a novice in integrity will stand or fall, are stumbling-blocks put in his way. Till we have some reason to believe that the offender is confident, or till we have reason for confidence in him, no experiment, the failure of which we cannot bear with temper, should be made. We must allow time for our colours to dry, before we varnish our picture: we must take care our cement be hardened, before we move a vessel once broken.

As soon as it is possible, the delinquent should perceive our disposition in his favour: it must not be supposed that he will, of necessity, fall; the coming failure must not be anticipated: the first relapse should be punished, but with evident regret: the first triumph should be marked by encouragement, approbation, and reward. We cannot err much, if we ask ourselves, what

mode of treatment, under this disease of mind, would be that for which we should feel the most grateful, and from which we might hope the greatest advantage.

But where neither youth nor ignorance, neither the want of experience nor of information, can be pleaded, every disposition to excuse, to palliate, or to consider the evil as necessary, and ourselves as bound, by the constitution of the world, or for our own peace or interest, to endure it, is so much connivance in the ruin of a fellow-creature, as well as folly in ourselves. Our choice of friends should be made on this test: our favour ought to depend on it; our affection ought never to be bestowed where it is wanting; and no consideration that fashion or selfishness can offer, to induce us to overlook that which destroys confidence, must be admitted, even should we be stigmatized with every epithet that characterizes cruelty: severe reprehension and relative punishment, must be tried in cases where we have authority, if neither information, persuasion, nor encouragement, will succeed; and, unless there is

treachery in those who should join with us, the nature of things must be changed, if the invariable succession of chastisement to guilt, and the equally regular reward of victorious integrity, do not, in time, convince the hardest offender, that it is better to tell truth, than to resort to falsehood.

In the polite world, there is a currency of lying, which, like the smaller weeds in agriculture, escapes deracination, because it is too despicable to gain notice. But the fungus will spread as well as the thistle; and, though we may pass it by to-day and to-morrow, it will, at the end of harvest, give a character to the crop. Those, the most successful in petty deceit; those, who value themselves the most on their ability to palliate a breach of forms by a breach of what is far more sacred; those, who sacrifice veracity to momentary applause, though they may, perhaps, through life, preserve something that gives them an enviable place in the ranks of society, can neither excite emulation in the virtuous, nor obtain imitation among the prudent. Nothing is wanting but their exit from the

stage of life, to learn their due appreciation : if they are not immediately blotted from the remembrance of their contemporaries, they are thought on with aversion, and spoken of with sarcasm. They have no place in the hearts of mankind.

If truth wanted recommendations, the same that attend any other elegant study may be ascribed to it. The disciple may, by docility and industry, make the outline of it correct ; but the proficient, conversant in light and shade, attains to a precision, a nicety, a finishing, which gives the ability to discern between all its gradations, and, when perfect, makes the acute judge, the faithful historian, the moral philosopher, and the conscientious Christian.

L.

SERMONET XXXV.

PSALM I. I.

*Blessed is the man that hath not walked in
the counsel of the ungodly.*

WE will not here understand the blessedness of the text farther than as connected with, or descriptive of, a state of superior happiness in this world. It will afford ample scope for precept to those whom it does not include, and encouragement to those whom the grace of God has kept out of the counsel of the ungodly.

The disposition to ridicule, or to treat as odiously singular, every thing serious and every body professing regards beyond those of the world in general, is one of the greatest trials young persons have to endure; and it should be the conscientious endeavour of such as have the guidance of them, to fence their minds early against these base attacks, while, at the same time, in order to keep their fortitude entire for great oc-

easions, singularity in trifles should be avoided; and they should not, without a reason that may be avowed, be called on to blush for, or to defend, an unnecessary dissimilarity to the rest of the world. Real strength of mind will never be obtained by the young, with whom the opinion of those around them is the highest appeal they know, if it is called out on subjects beneath it. He who spends all his shillings in the fair, will never have an hundred pounds for an important purchase.

The most effectual means in most cases will be found the simply honest; and there is nothing can so fortify young persons in the fearless attachment to virtue and its concomitant good conduct, which is necessary to their peace and interests, as an early impression of the truth in the text, that those are indeed blessed, who, notwithstanding the sneer of fools and infidels, have not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, or, in the language of the world, who have neither imitated nor associated with bad people.

It is the unhappy infirmity of man, in

his fallen state, to be least sensible of advantages, when in the most perfect enjoyment. We must be poor, before we know the comfort of affluence; we must be sick, before we can be grateful for health: and, in like manner, we must see, or, at least, be convinced by the report of others, how great is the misery of guilt, to be able to appreciate the happiness of innocence.

To this happiness, some may be insensible, through ignorance; but many, it is to be feared, are so wilfully and perversely. Some there are, indeed, so foolish, so inconsiderate, as to declare their insensibility to it, and even when the interests of those almost proverbially dearer to them than themselves, are involved in the question. Many a father, and, shame to say! many a mother, would be disappointed if a son did not show those dispositions in his early years, which, in his last hours, must be atoned for by bitter repentance, or carried with him to receive the judgment of an offended and insulted God; and all those vulgar expressions, which signify joy and exultation, at seeing seeds of mischief and

vice in children, too paltry for repetition, even here, are so many contradictions of the Psalmist, when he says, that those are blessed, who have “not walked in the counsel of the ungodly.”

NOTE.

THE disposition of women to be vain of fashionable vices in their sons, supersedes all necessity of remarking on the preferencē often given by their daughters, when they have their choice between a virtuous and a vicious man. Something might be said, if talents or manners were always in favour of vice; but there have been instances of this perverted taste, where nothing has decided but the charm of a licentious character. Pride, perhaps, (but what a wretched species of pride!) may have its share in the election: him who has never yet been fixed, it may seem glorious to bind. The delusion may last a short time; and, in some cases, a virtuous example may have influence; but it is a risk not to be adventured; and, in the case of foolish mothers, the sacrifices made by the idolatrous nations to Moloch, had, at least, obedience to something they imagined right, to plead, which is more than can be said of our contemporaries.

L.

SERMONET XXXVL

ROMANS, VII. 6.

But now we are delivered from the law.

IT is much to be regretted, and, in our self-examinations, it ought to be deplored, that whatever good we enjoy, be it ever so great, when it loses the character of novelty, ceases to call on our attention. We go to our rest, so certain of the return of day, that the rising sun is unheeded by us: we take a journey; we set out on a voyage; we sow seeds; we plant trees; and, unless called on to do something unusually precarious, we seldom consider the almost miraculous process of nature which is requisite to give effect and success to our labours and endeavours. There is hardly a more convincing proof of the mercy of the Deity, than the forbearance which makes so rare those interruptions which would best render us sensible of our dependence.

One of the many blessings which it would almost require an apology to observe on in refined society, ought, however trite and obvious, and therefore disregarded, to be, in rational minds, an incessant subject of gratitude and praise—the grand emancipation bestowed by the Gospel, particularly on that part of the world the most subject to the bondage of false opinion, or the most scrupulously attached to the oppressive observance of rites and ceremonies, the conscientiously superstitious among the Gentiles, and the punctual worshippers amongst the Jews. It matters not, as to their claim to our notice, that the former were in error, and that the latter were in darkness. We are taught, and we have reason to believe, that the one God could look with pitying approbation on a mis-directed piety; and that he accepted the literal performances of his chosen people, as proofs of all that he required of them, their obedience.

But let any one peruse the “Fasti” of the Romans, investigate the religious customs

of the Greeks, or endeavour to commit to memory the Levitical laws of the Jews; and he must be sensible to the labour, the inconvenience, the expense, nay, the disgust, imposed on mankind; he will see the extreme, the hourly danger of offending conscience by error or negligence, the immense claim on time and caution, and many more fettering circumstances, which, whatever the intention of the Deity, in permitting or enjoining them, ought to produce in our minds, one invariable sentiment of praise and thanksgiving, when we call to mind our emancipation, and compare with these burdens our beautiful religion—a religion of motives, in which every man may be said to be his own judge, and a law to himself;—a religion of observances, neither gloomy nor fatiguing; occurring often enough to keep alive the gentle flame of pious affection, and leaving us leisure even for the indulgences of body and mind;—a religion that brings its altars to our doors, and, to the feeble and infirm, still nearer; to the hearth, nay, to the couch. We are

not obliged to go up to Jerusalem three times in a year; we have not the humiliation of showing, in the face of the congregation, that our worldly circumstances do not afford the sacrifice of a lamb; our eyes are not offended, nor our hearts wounded, by the effusion of blood;—we may touch the dear remains of those from whom death can scarcely sever us, and not incur the penalties of defilement. We can, if our folly does not forfeit the privilege, in all our actions refer to God and our hearts, and feel acquitted.

To enumerate particulars would lead too far: the most learned on the subject of religious worship, will be the most thankful for the blessing of Christianity; and should the superstitions of Rome and Greece, the ceremonies of Jerusalem and Samaria, seem hackneyed themes; let the barbarians of that, which was once the most elegant country of the terraqueous globe; let the observances of the eastern world, let the aggregated traditions of the Jews, let Peru and Mexico,—those fancied

realms of innocence and purity!—bring in their rituals; and then it must be acknowledged and felt, that it is “a great deliverance,” which Christ hath wrought for us.

I.

SERMONET XXXVII.

MICAH, VI. 8.

And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

IT would perhaps have been difficult to give so excellent, so compendious a summary as this, of moral and religious duties, had not the invention of man been assisted by inspiration. For there is scarcely any thing which is incumbent on a moral agent to perform, which may not be referable to some part of the text. In his transactions with his neighbour, he must be called upon by the sense of that which is strictly his due, which is comprehended in the clause, to “do justly;” or, it may be, that something more than mere right may be required; in which case it is an act of “mercy:”—so much for the two first clauses of the text. The third relates to our duty towards God.

The phrase, “to walk humbly with thy God,” is but a very lax translation of the original Hebrew. The margin of the Bible gives a better: “to humble thyself to walk with God;” for certainly he that can be said to walk with God, must first be required to humble himself, to put away all lofty thoughts, and to feel himself, and to confess himself, a weak sinful creature, unworthy of the least of the mercies that are daily showered down upon him. And this principle admitted into the mind, what virtue is there, comprehended in our duty to God, which does not emanate from it? whether it be resignation to his will when he sees fit to afflict us, or hope in his mercy, his fatherly care and his pity, when we need his support and assistance, his guidance and protection, to prosper our undertakings; so that it may be said, that, in the few words of the text, man may read the summary of all his duties.

And here it may be observed, that, however various, however complicated the paths of error may be, the language of truth is simple and intelligible; and most

true it is, no scheme of religion purely of human invention was ever promulgated to the world, but it contained, however defective it might be in purifying the heart of man, or in regulating civil society, more difficulties, and more of mysticism, than the whole code of Christianity, designed by its all-wise Author to penetrate into the inmost recesses of human corruption, and to establish laws by which the highest and the lowest should be equally restrained.

Let no one, therefore, suppose, whatever may be promised by the infidel and free-thinker, that a man, throwing aside Christianity, can take up another system of religion that can afford him better protection against the evils of this world, or even against the tyranny of his greatest enemies—his own passions: the Author of our faith knew full well what man was, and of what religion he stood in need; and by that acquaintance with our necessities has Christianity been regulated: it is the wisdom of man in this world to conform himself to its precepts.

Those who understand the text aright,

will find in it ample matter for meditation, by which both the head and the heart may be amended. They may learn that it is a part of the gracious dealings of Providence with man, that he is not “pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil;” so as to accept them instead of what little virtue man is capable of performing: they will perceive that the state of the world required a moral law as well as an expiatory one, and that no law could be so admirably adapted in all its parts to human life, as that which Christ Jesus came into the world to promulgate, and which, thanks to God! it is our honour and our glory to profess.

H.

SERMONET XXXVIII.

I CORINTHIANS, XI. 28.

Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.

EVERY day's experience, added to the testimonials of history, serves to teach us the tendency of the human mind to extremes, and the consequent difficulty of preserving its equilibrium. It seems paradoxical to say that indolence is the cause of vehement excess; yet the original sense of the word indolence will almost justify the assertion. To indulge our natural inclination, which is its nearest definition, is to remain little better than passive; and to let it lead us till it can lead us no farther, is the perfection of inactivity: it requires an effort to stop: we make none; and we are carried to the farthest point of weakness, and often beyond the boundary of innocence.

So it is with our actions; and in the

conduct of our minds, there is little difference. To form a judgment for ourselves, is more trouble than to take up with one ready made for us; and thus, without the grace of modesty or the comfort of humility, we transfer the charge of our consciences to another, always more inclined to listen to advice tending to extremes, than to that which recommends a safe distance from them.

In no opinion is this more evident than in that most momentous, respecting the blessed sacrament. The superstition of the Church of Rome leads to one extreme, in which, without asking a question, its disciples are permitted to rest; and believing what is imposed on their faith, the mind rolls in a bias that admits neither of opposition nor approbation: acquiescence is its highest exertion; and belief becomes credulity.

In our own church, another opposite opinion, and nearly as opposite to the legitimate doctrine of it, is, in some instances, to be found; and grave, learned, pious men have adopted an extreme equally reprehens-

sible, and perhaps more dangerous, in reducing a rite, which it is our best interest to consider as a fountain of grace, to a mere affectionate record of Him who instituted it.

To what does so light an acceptance lead? Almost to a supposition that, in every ordinary use of bread and wine, we might sufficiently fulfil the injunction of our Saviour, by recollecting him. Or, if we have stopped so far short of this laxity, as to admit the church as the scene of this ceremony, it removes all necessity of a previous preparation and peculiar frame of mind, and leaves us nothing but the vain satisfaction of having paid a tribute of respect. Can this be an advantage? can it form a motive strong enough to make us regular in our attendance, except as forms become habitual? can we hence derive that *viaticum*, without which the best and wisest Christians have not thought themselves fortified in their passage from this to another world?

Dare we not say, that the humility of our Saviour prevented his leaving us a more

precise direction? May we not humbly suppose he left it to St. Paul to inform us? There is no inconsistency between the words of the master and those of his apostle: the one says, "Do an act, perform a specific rite, lest the remembrance of me may, like other remembrances not revived by circumstances, wear out of your mind." St. Paul says, that, to renew this remembrance aright, our minds must be brought into a suitable frame. But surely there is something more meant than a mere respectful remembrance, when he tells us to "examine" ourselves—when he threatens punishment to the unworthy receiver—when he bids us "judge" ourselves, "that we may not be judged." Can those teachers, however respectable, and however deeply read in sacred lore, be, in this point, safe guides, who tell us, that "they doubt whether pious formularies which recommend seclusion and other strictnesses before the reception of the sacrament, can be of much use?"

To those, indeed, who have made a great progress in a good life, these helps may be

needless :—to *one* who has been thus tender to us, it is to be hoped and believed they were so ; but to *us*, who need “ to be held in with bit and bridle,” they are indispensably requisite ; and no encouragement ought to make us relax. Which of us who live in the world, and with the world, can feel fit to approach the table of the Lord on a sudden ? Is it from the theatre, the ball-room, the public spectacle, that we can, with the interval only of unconscious and unprofitable sleep, go to the holy communion to any good purpose ? With music in our ears, with the scene of a drama before our eyes, are our thoughts and affections in a train for devout exercises ? That they *ought* to be fit, at all times, is granted ; but the corruption of human nature must be always taken into our calculations ; and admitting this, the probability is most discouragingly against us—so much against us, that no respect for authority, no preference, even the most justifiable, of another’s wisdom to our inexperience, can supersede the absolute conscientious necessity of saying that this is a most dangerous

doctrine. Something rather more positive and precise, may be usefully subjoined to this negative precept.

The sacrament was a memorial ceremony enjoined by our Saviour. St. Paul tells us it is more—it is an act not only of love and worship to Christ, but of spiritual advantage to ourselves; and whoever has observed the effect produced in his own mind by his best, though imperfect, endeavours to communicate worthily, must be sensible to some of these advantages. A week's moderate, quiet, imperceptible preparation, is never time or labour lost. To resolve on Sunday evening, that, during the week thus begun, we will be still more diligent in guarding ourselves from passion and peevishness, from the admission of trifles into our attention, from sentiments of pride and indulgences of vanity—that our appetites shall not be pampered—that the poor shall have a larger share of our commiseration—that little duties of kindness shall no longer call in vain on our recollection, and that our minds shall be still more firmly set towards Heaven; all this is

not only wholesome, but necessary; and when the purpose is performed, the impulse, if we do not deceive ourselves, will not cease. We need the spur of times and seasons; and those know little of human nature, who talk of an equal tenour of constant unrelaxing exertion.

To conclude—If we admit this very indulgent doctrine, we must give up St. Paul's Epistles; for, without pious formularies and some seclusion, at least of mind, which of us is, to any purpose, to "examine" himself, to "judge" himself, "and so eat of that bread and drink of that cup?"

NOTE.

THE practice of those whom we esteem for other observances of Christian duties, ought to guide us. The afflicting discipline of Johnson, it is to be hoped, is not needful for us all. His tender conscience prescribed it to his gigantic mind; and he best knew what suited it. But if *he* thought all he could do too little, can we be safe in thinking any thing *we* can do too much?

SERMONET XXXIX.

I CORINTHIANS, XI. 28.

Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.

THIS text has generally been considered as exhorting to self-examination before partaking of the sacrament of the Lord's supper; and certainly such an explanation is to be justified, because he who partakes of the sacrament without the examination here recommended, obviously offends against the very first words of the precept. But this does not appear to be the emphatical part of the admonition; for it goes on to say, "and *so* let him eat." In the original the word *so* is as emphatical as any word apparently synonymous could be; it is no expletive—it is no error of an ignorant copyist—it is an integral part of the text, and consequently ought to be adverted to in the elucidation of it. We are directed *so* to eat—that is to say, according to the self-exa-

mination directed in the preceding part of the sentence, and which seems to admit of the following interpretation. It is to be supposed, that, by examining himself, a man becomes acquainted with his own disposition, his habits, his desires, his propensities, or, to use the Scripture-phrase, with the spirit that is in him. In some, this spirit will be little other than that of worldly concupiscence, having scarcely any other object than the mammon of unrighteousness: in others, it may be the spirit of holiness, evermore looking to that time when the things of this world shall have passed away, and "this corruptible shall have put on incorruption."

St. Paul, therefore, must be understood as saying, that, whatever spirit a man may, by this scrutiny, find in himself, the sacrament is an useful and beneficial ordiuance to him who worthily receives it—that he who, by investigating the suggestions of his own heart, finds the thoughts of it are "only evil continually," so should receive it with humble supplication, that, by the grace vouchsafed to him by such an iusti-

tution, he may be enabled to purify himself from his manifold corruptions, whilst he who is not oppressed with such corruptions, may receive it as a preservative from them; and thus it will appear, that there is no description of persons not bound, as they regard their salvation, to partake of a rite ordained in consequence of the fallen state of human nature, with a design to remedy it as far as might be.

For though some who have been desirous of relaxing, if not annihilating, every religious institution, have thought themselves justified in considering the sacrament of the Lord's supper merely as a memorial of a certain event, and themselves as bound to observe it, solely because they are commanded to do so; yet as there seems no reason to suppose that our Saviour would have instituted this sacrament, had not something further been comprehended in it, the Established Church of this country impresses on the minds of all her children, the belief that great and many are the benefits conferred by God on such as comply with what he has enjoined; and with-

out some such belief, there does not seem to be any cause for our Saviour's commemorating his supper, more than any other event in which he and his disciples were interested. But as in many other instances, which might be quoted from the Old Testament, where great benefits, in some instances of a spiritual nature, were about to be conferred on those whom God had chosen, the emblem of gift and acceptance was something eaten; so here, in the Eucharist, where the benefit of grace was to be bestowed on man, the mean, or emblem employed, was the eating the bread, accompanied with the drinking the wine.

Hence it appears, that the sacrament of the Lord's supper was intended to aid the weakness of man; and from the words of the text, that all, whether more or less pure, stand in need of the assistance thus vouchsafed; the precept must, therefore, be considered as extended to all; the only difference in the two descriptions of recipients being, that the one receives

in order to purify himself from sin, the other as a preservative from that corruption to which he would be exposed without such aid.

H.

SERMONET XL.

PSALM CXVI. 4.

I will call upon the name of the Lord.

WHOEVER should have the wickedness and cruelty to endeavour effacing from the minds of the poor, that strong sense of religion in general, and of trust in God in particular cases, which is, in them, often proportionate to their need of it, would merit, at the hands of all mankind, the severest punishment that justifiable indignation could inflict. Yet there have been wretches who, though not immediately addressing themselves to the lower classes, have put their poison in their way; and that in this country it has failed of its intended effect, is more to be ascribed to the goodness of God, than to any want of industry in them, or, perhaps, of disposition to evil in the objects of their cruelty.

Let any unprejudiced persons visit the habitations of the poor—let them see, in

addition to the common and accidental calamities of life, the almost intolerable, and often inevitable misery of having nothing to offer to the sick or the starving—nothing to alleviate the pinching cold—to fence out the beating tempest—to clothe a new-born infant, or support its famishing mother: let them contemplate the relatives of a family in the abyss of despair, not knowing whence comes evil to them, why it is sent, or whither it tends; take from them their reliance on the wisdom and mercy of the Deity, their submission to his will, their resignation of those dearest to them into his hands, in the hope of meeting again in a world not subject to the calamities that have overwhelmed them!—what shall hinder the father from rushing out with a knife, and waylaying the first unwary passenger whose appearance offers to his mad grief the means of alleviation? what shall restrain the sons from the haunts of thieves, or the daughters from the loathsome chambers of the brothel? If there is no justice in heaven, who shall ordain laws on earth? If there is no punishment in hell,

what retribution have they to fear? This world is their all, and they must make the best of it: they will see examples enow of greediness and selfishness in those above them, to teach them, and afford the comfort of retaliation. In short, take away the fear of God; and though, with it, you may take away all other fear, there will be no fortitude left; there may be despair, but there will be no courage.

If we would rid ourselves of the cry of the poor—if we would fence ourselves against the madness of their sorrows—if we would turn over to Him “who is mighty to save,” that which the feeble arm of flesh cannot do—if we would soothe their sorrows, increase their patience, give them fortitude, and raise their hopes; let us, by all means, lead them to look to Him on whom we all depend, whether we acknowledge it or not—let us decline their thanks, and direct them to Heaven—let us teach them the use of chastisements, and exhort them to bear them so as to obtain the reward promised to those “who by patient

continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and immortality.”

By this method—a method which recommends itself to us by motives of every kind—we convert the ills of life into future blessings, the cruelty of the world into the mercy of God, the extreme of despair into the commencement of hope, and that which would rack our hearts with unavailing anguish, into a tender feeling that has its immediate consolation, and, not unfrequently, its useful example. We retire from the sad cottage better than we entered it: we are shamed out of our susceptibility of petty vexations, when we see how the greatest griefs may be borne; and when it is our turn to mourn, we recollect with gratitude, with hope and confidence in the support of Heaven, that this, and perhaps more than we are called upon to endure, even with the heavy addition of pinching poverty, has been made light by the counterbalancing promises of Him who never yet deceived those who put their trust in him.

NOTE.

“AND how, my good woman,” said a lady to a poor Irishwoman, a soldier’s widow not entitled to a pension, “would you have supported yourself in your distress, had we not found you out? when you had neither food nor money, what would you have done next?”—“Why, to be sure,” said she, “I kneeled me down there, just at the foot of that bit of a bed, and I prayed to the Lord, with all my heart, that as he had been so good as to send me these three children, he would, in his goodness, send me something to feed them; and so, you see it is, Ma’am; for then came that lady that told you of my distress.”

L.

SERMONET XLI.

I CORINTHIANS, I. 23.

Unto the Jews a stumbling-block.

THERE seems to be some difficulty in comprehending how the appearance of Him who had been expected for ages, and who completed, in his own person and sufferings, the many prophecies uttered concerning him, should, in any sense of the phrase, be a stumbling-block to persons who were in possession of those prophecies, and whose interest it was to accept him as the Messiah, sent amongst men to instruct their ignorance, and to heal their infirmities. To say that the Jews were disappointed, and that they expected a temporal governor, a man who, like Joshua, was to drive out idolatrous nations, and to establish the Jews in those countries whence such nations had been expelled, does not solve the difficulty: for if the Jews had admitted Jesus Christ as their lawgiver,

or, in other words, had conformed themselves to what he taught; in what other situation could he have remained among them, than as their sovereign, or their leader, or their judge? under any one of which titles, he might have conducted them to 'as great honour and prosperity as the vanity or the selfishness of the Jews could desire: all which glory and prosperity were defeated, not, as far as appears, by any unwillingness or inability of the Messiah to produce them, but by the Jews themselves sacrificing, or, rather, murdering that Person who was alone able to advance their glory or their happiness.

Perhaps, to understand the passage correctly, we should advert to other passions and prejudices which might operate on the minds of the corrupt and sordid Jews, to make them consider the doctrine of Christ as a stumbling-block: they saw, by what he daily taught them, that he was not likely to favour their rapacity in devouring widows' houses; nor their hypocrisy, when they stood at the corners of the streets to pray; nor their ostentatious display of

piety when they fasted; nor their wide phylacteries; nor their traditions, which had rendered the law given by Moses of little or no effect:—they saw that the poor had the Gospel preached to them, and that the manifold corruptions of the Jewish priesthood were openly and avowedly pointed out to the poor in the Gospel thus preached to them: all this must necessarily have had a tendency to make Christianity a stumbling-block, or, in other words, a scandal or an offence to the Jews—whose power would be ruined as soon as their frauds became known: they would, therefore, it may be reasonably supposed, be ready to term his language blasphemous, to impute his miracles to the power of Belzebub, and to tell him, “Now we know that thou hast a devil!”

How far the death and sufferings of Jesus Christ were attributable to malice or to ignorance, we cannot precisely say; but from many passages in Scripture, there seems strong reason to suspect that they knew him to be a divine person, even to the full extent of that divinity: neither should

the dying words of our Saviour be understood as denying such to be the fact. In many senses it might be true that they knew not what they did:—they did not know what they did when they cried, “His blood be upon us and upon our children”—they did not know what they did when they exposed themselves to the calamities which they endured when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans—they did not know what they did when they asked Judas, who came to them to confess that he had betrayed the innocent blood, “What is that to us?” and lastly, they did not know what they did (such is the power and wisdom of God to bring forth good out of the perverseness of man’s will) when they cast lots for Christ’s vesture—when they stood looking on Him whom they had pierced—when they offered him vinegar to drink—when they numbered him amongst the transgressors, by crucifying him with two thieves: had they known what they then did, they would have perceived that they were themselves but completing the prophecies already in their own

hands, respecting this great and illustrious Personage, and by so doing, supplying the strongest evidence that a sceptic would desire.

Without attempting to assign a motive to the conduct of the Jews, it may be sufficient to say, that Christ crucified might be a stumbling-block, an offence or scandal to them, that is to say, to pride and prejudice, without its necessarily implying that they were disappointed in their hopes of a restoration of their former power, or of an advancement to still greater—they declared that they had no king but Cæsar; and when the business was to crucify Christ, they were, it seems, sufficiently loyal, though, in former ages, when that loyalty was to be shown towards the God who had made them and had redeemed them from innumerable evils, the only return they then could make was rebellion and distrust—open revolt or secret murmurs.

Such was the temper invariably—with the exception of those who were brought by Joshua into the promised land—of the chosen people of God; a temper doubtless

permitted for wise purposes. May no one who now reads the Scripture, be induced, by any motive, to consider that which was intended as a blessing to all, as a stumbling-block or a scandal to himself!

H.

SERMONET XLII.

JOB, v. 26.

Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age.

THE season of youth in human life, like the season of spring in the natural world, has a sort of prescriptive preference in our affections, which makes it appear the limit of our cares. How to pass youth agreeably, and how to make the most of the enjoyments of spring, seem solitudes natural to us on emerging from the restraints of childhood, and from the rigours of winter. Few speak of what is to be done for the decline of life; and the gay votaries of spring are not those the most anxious for the event of the harvest. It might give respectability and increase to the pleasures of both, if they extended their views not only thus far, but to the ensuing winter of the earth and its inhabitants.

But winter and old age have a bad reputation: they are supposed to have nothing

good to offer ; they are suspected to have innumerable evils to impose : and the supposition and suspicion tend to realize themselves, as an imaginary dislike between two persons who never yet met, has a tendency to confirm itself by the means offered to ascertain it.

But experience shows, many times in the course of our lives, that the winter of nature brings its peculiar gratifications, a sort of humble comfort and consolation, in lieu of the charms of more popular seasons, which not unfrequently leaves their gaudy pretensions some way behind in the competition. The sense of security, which our home and our hearth afford against existing inconveniences, adds gratitude to enjoyment : society has its charms, and quiet its advantages ;—the mind concentrates its powers, when exertion is to be made, as the blood mantles round the heart to promote the purposes of digestion ; and those ideas which the images of gayer seasons tended to disperse, now united, are returned sometimes in fruits of industry, beneficial to a rising generation. In short, the

difference between the seasons is this : those which invite us abroad exhilarate us by the pleasure of innocent idleness ;— those which confine us at home, nerve us by those of industry.

And, in the comparison of youth and age, as equal a distribution may be observed. We have not, in the latter part of life, that keen appetite, that insatiable thirst for variety and novelty of enjoyment, which characterize our early years : experience has taken the place of curiosity ; but, unless to know is less desirable than to wish to know, the exchange is not to be deplored. The young heir, waiting for the possession of wealth, and planning the disposal of it, may be an object of envy ; but it does not follow that he must be miserable when his hopes are realized : he has pleasures of enjoyment instead of those of expectation ; and so it is in age, unless our own improvidence has marred our comfort. There is great pleasure in store for increasing years : plans perfected, knowledge attained, services rendered, duties discharged, a progress made in virtue, a

gradual and encouraging emancipation from our vices, our faults, our foibles; to say nothing of the nearer prospect of the country to which we are directing our steps: all these are satisfactions equal to any vivid pleasures. Nor is there, in the reality, or of necessity, that stagnation which seems so much dreaded by those who look at age as a frozen sea—the rigid barrier of two worlds. With the industrious, with those who have not misused or wasted their faculties, there is no pause of improvement while life lasts: we would not wish, on the confines of it, to improve in the arts of triflers; but we may improve in knowledge of every virtuous kind; and to-day will tell the man of seventy something that he was a stranger to yesterday. In a word, we might all be younger than we are, if we were less time children; and he will find himself a happy old man, who, when a young one, has not omitted to pray to Him in whose hands are “the issues of life and death,” that he will not cast him off in his old age.

A more melancholy sight is seldom ex-

hibited to the world than that of a man far advanced in years, bearing about him the testimonies of an ill-spent youth; and the sensations it excites, one should think, would induce those whose destiny is not yet irrevocably decided, to shun the errors that have led to such deplorable consequences. But mankind seem to act like fatalists: they take their chance; and, as much convinced, that health is not to the temperate, or repose of mind to the virtuous, as that “the race is not to the swift, or the battle to the strong,” they launch, in early years, into every excess, leaving it to what they wisely nickname “the chapter of accidents,” to allot them, in future, years of suffering which they have well merited, or of exemption which they ought to regard as a more awful warning—as the dead silence which is observed by naturalists to precede an earthquake.

Leaving these careless mortals to their own calculations of chances, let us consider how we can best secure ourselves against the most probable of all chances, that the harvest of old age will bear some

resemblance to the seed we have sown in our youth.

The number of persons who do not experience the advantages of early good habits, can never bear any proportion to that of those who are punished by an indulgence in bad habits. It is matter of fair wonder, if a man, who has been a drunkard, a glutton, or licentious in any way, enjoys, in old age, the comforts of the sober and temperate; nor must our judgment be formed on what we are allowed to see: there is a management, well understood in the school of vice, by which the superannuated are, for a certain portion of each day, nearly on a par with their neighbours; but, if their boasts are to procure them applause, they must not be taken by surprise.

But the rational, the pious man, disdains even the knowledge of such resources. His hand, if it be tremulous in old age, is not tremulous with wine: however the functions of nature may be decayed, he has not contributed to their decay, by his own faults or follies; and, satisfied that every

thing is good which comes by the appointment of the Almighty, he is prepared to meet whatever may be the subtractions of his long-enjoyed comforts. But the chances are in favour of his retaining a large portion of his comforts to the end of his life. If he has done what prudence dictated, to secure the blessing of health, he has reason to hope that extreme sickness will not be his lot. If he has used his faculties to the best purposes; if he has kept them from rust by exercise: if he has cultivated a taste for those pleasures which are to be pursued without a sacrifice of conscience, and enjoyed without danger of repentance; in short, if he has lived like a rational being, accepting this world as a school, and looking forward to another for the immeasurable reward of imperfect endeavours;—old age, he may hope, will be to him a pleasant winter: infirmities will be repelled or palliated by the vigour of his mind, and his habits of exertion; his affections towards his fellow-creatures will keep his life-blood warm, when the misanthrope is chilled by disgusts and suspi-

cions: in striving to assist others, he will keep his joints supple; and, in the habit of advising the inexperienced, he will preserve his judgment ready for his own use.

Nor is this all: he will feel daily and hourly the goodness of God, in supplying the place of those temporary gratifications which will not last beyond their season. He will find renunciations by which his faith is tried, more than compensated by the hope, for which the transitory joys of life are exchanged: he will feel that every day refines his practice and purifies his affections; that, having passed the midway between this and another world, as the beauties of the one recede, those of the other approach. He will even find his love for the charms of Nature, as they are the gift of God, increase as his taste for artificial pleasure decreases; and, looking steadfastly on that sun which never goes down, he will, with humble hope, with well-grounded confidence, with gratitude, and resignation, “come to his grave in a full age.”

SERMONET XLIII.

ROMANS, VIII. 21.

The bondage of corruption.

CHRISTIANITY being intended to make mankind wise unto salvation, which no one can ever be, who leads a life of vice and folly; the Scriptures, with all the power of reasoning and persuasion, recommend a life of virtue, and prohibit a life of vice—prohibitions which we now wish to make the subject of our consideration. And doubtless, reflecting on the majesty of Him who gives the law, it might have been deemed sufficient had he declared that he forbade vice: for this no reason could have been required, for who shall argue with infinite power and perfect wisdom? The declaration, that such was his will, was sufficient to establish his claim to obedience; and man, if disobedient, would justly have incurred the penalty of disobedience.

But the great Lawgiver remembered that

we are but dust and ashes ! and he hath so done his marvellous acts, that they ought to be had in remembrance—not contented with declaring, that sin was hateful to him, he has done much to show the true nature of sin. Thus, at one time we are told of the deceitfulness of sin ; at another, of the timidity of sin ; and now, in the words of the text, of “ the bondage of corruption.”

In our view of the above-quoted expression, we shall not enter into any mystical interpretation of it, but consider it simply as implying the many disadvantages under which he must labour, who spends a life at variance with the duties of the Gospel, and consequently with the dictates of his own conscience. A man, therefore, of this description must rely on it as an indisputable fact, that nothing is so hostile to that cheerfulness of spirits, which every one must wish to enjoy, as that remorse or self-reproach, which arises from the neglect of moral duties ; whilst, on the other hand, it has been frequently observed by those acquainted with the human mind, that none are more cheerful than such as, perhaps,

living without any great share of the good things of this life, pass the time which God appoints them, in his faith and fear; and, due allowance being made for unavoidable infirmity, in the discharge of the duties annexed to their station. Of those who have thus grown old, comfortable to themselves, and revered by all around them, numberless instances might be adduced; but, to adduce instances, would weaken our argument; the experience of almost every one may suggest examples. And, on the other hand, what persons have seemed more depressed, or less able to endure the various accidents, in some cases, we may say the adverse accidents of human life, than those who have felt the truth of the phrase, the bondage of corruption?—to whom each succeeding year, showing more plainly the vanity of all things whose ultimate object is the world, brings with it fresh reproaches, and new wishes, that the drunkenness, the profligacy, the thoughtless extravagance, the sanction, the countenance, the encouragement to vice of former years, could be annihilated: when those whom

such persons as are now described, have seduced into transgression never to be wiped away, shall, as it were, arise up in judgment against their tempters, and arraign them as the primary cause of all their sins and iniquities. Yet what is this more than what every vicious man must expect? And is there any man of such unshaken nerves, that he can say, he still, with all this responsibility, maintains his serenity, his peace of mind, and will proceed in his career of iniquity, without being conscious of the bondage of corruption?

Or, to carry our observations beyond this life:—what must be the apprehensions of such a person with respect to death! Concerning the future state of man, little is known further than this, which Revelation assures us is true, that the good are reserved to everlasting happiness—the bad to everlasting misery. Will not the forebodings as to what may be his destiny, suffice to show him the error of his ways, and to prove to him, that, even in this life, there is no peace for the wicked?

From these circumstances, which are no

exaggerations, we may learn to appreciate, as friendly admonitions, all those phrases of Scripture, which, by pointing out the turpitude of sin, have a tendency to put us on our guard against the arts of the tempter; and happy is that man, who is thus contented to adopt the Bible as his friend, without leaving it to experience to render him wise. Happy is that man, who does not trust to his repentance to make his peace with God; but who, being timely wise, remembers his Creator in the *days of his youth*; and who thus enables himself to enjoy all his life, and not merely those days which, when every external object ceases to please, he can rescue, by penitence and prayer, from the sins which have disgraced his former course; who, looking round on the world, does not deem it good or safe to sin, because the majority are wicked, but waits to see how many of those who sin, would not give, on their death-beds, all that the created world possesses, could they but erase from the book of life, those transgressions which are recorded against them, before he turns aside

from the ways of the Lord, or forgets his laws, but thankfully unites in the ejaculation of David, " Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth! O shut not up my soul with the sinners, nor my life with the bloodthirsty. But, as for me, I will walk innocently: O deliver me, and be merciful to me!"

H.

SERMONET XLIV.

ST. JAMES, IV. 5.

The spirit that dwelleth in us, lusteth to envy.

THERE IS NO vice so ignorant as envy; and if the envious deserved to have their comfort considered, it might be an agreeable office to persuade them that their painful feelings will be annihilated, the moment they get at the truth of the advantage for which they envy another. It cannot be denied, that riches, honours, talents, are desirable possessions; but it may be asserted, that they bear with them counteractions that greatly abate their value. The wants of human life are, after all, so few; if we confine ourselves to realities, that, beyond a certain extent, riches are rather the property of others than of ourselves; and we spend for the public, for our friends and acquaintance, far more than for our own convenience. But, as the gratification of

vanity, ostentation, or ambition, may be the purpose for which we spend, here is, to be sure, something which we may claim for *ourselves*, if we will run the risk of snatching at it. But who will dare to say they envy us? The possession of honours or distinctions in society places us in a situation of patronage that brings its peculiar cares; and the more dangerous gift of talent has its more awful responsibility. The rich are cheated, the powerful are thwarted, and the wise and witty are mortified; and no envious murmurer against the allotments of Providence, if knowing the influence of these abatements on the pleasure of possessing, can be reasonably entitled to justification or excuse.

The last named of these gifts, the intellectual advantage of what are called talents, brings with it a sort of temptation, that makes the two former, in the estimation of the inexperienced, shrink into insignificance. Alas! how ill do they judge, who consider them as contributing to the happiness of life in their use! They can be used but in two ways: to amuse—what oc-

cupation so trifling? or to instruct—and what office so anxious? It may appear, to those just rising into credit for any superiority of mental power, that nothing can be so honourable, nothing so gratifying, as the situation of a public teacher of any description. Let the disputes, the controversies, the fashions of thinking, be considered; and who would endure, without the strong and blinding stimulus that almost, by instinct, overleaps danger, the heart-burnings, the suspension or denial of applause, which the learned and ingenious often undergo? Would you accept the gratification of possessing talents, if this were to be your lot? if you say, “Yes,” you are, it is to be hoped, of a mind too liberal for envy; ’tis honest emulation: go your way, and labour for the rising generation.

But in any envy, attracted by those talents used for the abatement of vice and folly, let a secret be penetrated, and all desire must end. Let it but be recollected, that those who spend half their time in teaching others, ought to devote the other half to teaching themselves. That science

which is meritorious in a scholar, is ignorance in a master; and he who claims respect from those whom he is instructing, must be doubly, trebly cautious, that no error in his own performances escape his detection.

Our life, lengthened to the utmost, is, with many of us, not long enough to correct half the evil we inherit and augment by nature and our own perverse wills. In teaching others, we must not fancy we are discharging the duty of watching over ourselves. On the contrary, the time bestowed on the precepts of virtue, as they regard others, may be subtracted from our watchfulness over our own conduct; and he who set out in life as a guide to the blind, may himself, in the progress of it, need leading more than they. What, but the prospect of God's displeasure, can be more painfully oppressive than such a situation, where all eyes are fixed on one object, perhaps some disposed to find blemishes, and where, after a life of labour and fancied importance, a teacher awakes to the conviction, and probably by means

not the most gentle roused to it, that, in teaching others, he is in danger of being himself “a cast-away?” The probability is a lesson to the possessor of talents;—if the envious would run this risk, he must be envious indeed.

L.

SERMONET XLV.

GENESIS, XXVII. 46.

I am weary of my life.

THESE words were uttered by the wife of Isaac, in one of those fits of spleen, to which her descendants, of her own sex, are still, alas! but too subject. Rebecca was weary of her life, because of the daughters of Heth. What offence the daughters of Heth had given her, matters not. We know only that Isaac's marrying two wives of the Hittites was grief of mind to her and to Isaac. To the *expression* we will confine ourselves; and, admitting that a wife of those early ages might meet with vexations exciting weariness of that which she had not been taught to regard as we regard it, we will only ask ourselves whether it can, under any circumstances, be excusable in a Christian, except under sufferings to which human

nature is hardly adequate, to profess himself weary of life.

To get at the truth, we must consider the purpose for which the Divine Wisdom sent us into the world, and what is to be our lot when it is fulfilled.

We were sent here, undoubtedly to prepare us for an eternal life of happiness; and as this preparation was rendered, by the fall of our first parents, a work of difficulty, our task is, to the best of us, arduous, and, to the generality of us, so severe, that all the time that can be granted us, all the labour we can bestow, all the assistances we can procure, are scarcely sufficient for it; and it becomes our prudence, as well as our interest, to be as æconomical of our minutes, as industrious in our exertions, as earnest in supplicating for help, as if we were to die in the course of the present hour.

Does it need a word more to prove the absurdity, the almost impious absurdity, of being weary of the length of life? Is the folly of a child so childish, when he

thinks the few hours of the day devoted to his learning, tedious? Is the presumption of a youth so great, when he fancies the period allowed him for fitting himself for a profession, unnecessarily long?

In truth, none complain but those who misuse: the industrious never find the day too long; the pious never find life too long. "I am ready to go when it shall please God to call me;"—"I wait with patience his good time;" or, even under suffering, "God's will be done!" is the utmost latitude of speech they allow themselves; well knowing how many have sinned, and in vain, at the last, for one day, one hour more, to add to the work of repentance, and to pray for the extension of mercy.

The persons most weary of life, are those who either fancy they have nothing to do, or who will not do what they have to do. Pressed on all sides by neglected duties—under such a heap of arrears, that they know not where to begin their performances—the negligent and immethodical are reasonably weary of life, because

life is a perpetual scene of accumulating reproofs; while those who consider themselves as removed from the necessity of exertion, are wearied by the want of self-approbation; and when we see the paltry shifts to which they have recourse, to get rid of a day, they have no occasion to *tell* us that they are weary of life.

But if we cannot stimulate those misled wanderers, to retrieve their lost time, let us not be wanting in informing them. It is not our being weary of life that relieves us from the necessity of accounting for it. Whether it has been time pleasant or unpleasant to us, our use of it is recorded; and no more than sleeping will excuse an idle scholar, will our being weary of the time of our probation, justify us in appearing before our Judge, surrounded with the infirmities of the flesh, which that time was given us to overcome. If our great poet makes us shudder at hearing of the royal Dane, sent to his grave

“Unhousell’d, unanointed, unanneal’d,”

what ought we to dread in the prospect of
being called,

“ No reckoning made, but sent to our account,
With all our imperfections on our heads!
O, horrible!—O, horrible!—Most horrible!”

L.

SERMONET XLVI.

PSALM XXXVIII. 18.

I will—be sorry for my sin.

Is it not Lord Bacon who says, “every age has its vice?” He is an authority, in *opinion* at least, not to be doubted: and we may believe him; and, if not him, those who have lived before him, and since him, and the history of mankind, that there is a succession of infirmities, and worse than infirmities, to which human nature, in its progress to the grave, and to that judgment, which is to decide its lot for ever, is liable and exposed; and which, without the counteracting grace of God, must produce an accumulated task of penitence too severe for such frail beings even to resolve on.

How lightly, then, do we talk, when we express our hopes, that the gloomy discontent of old age will be accepted as an atonement for the eagerness of vicious en-

joyment in those not yet abated in their capacity of gratification, or that an increased sensibility to interest will, in advancing manhood, make good the deficiency of moral and religious principle in youth! As well might it be argued, that a change of meats is synonymous with abstinence, or that variety of dissipated pleasure is equal, in virtue, to a life of conscientious forbearance: as well might we claim reward for ingenuity in disobedience: as well might we hope that contrary means will produce similar effects. In any thing, but that in which it is most evident, such fallacies would be stigmatized by the well-deserved name of nonsense; and the repetition would not be endured by such as look for truth, reason, or consistency in assertions. If we would not be deceived, we must believe Lord Bacon, that every age has its vice; we must, therefore, in our advance in life, add fresh caution to that which has hitherto carried us through, with any tolerable safety: and where sensible, as, alas! too many of us must be, of our sad falling short even of our own intentions,

we must take up the pious resolution of the Psalmist, and, without seeking subterfuges or making precedents, which never existed but in our own need of them, we must, while we strive to the utmost, feel the conviction which prompted him to say, "I will be sorry for my sin," and act as those, who, honestly ashamed of their folly, and offended with themselves on seeing its fruits, are sensible to the inestimable comfort of knowing there is a God, who, when we have *forsaken, not bartered* sin, will, on our turning to him with all our heart, "abundantly pardon."

L.

SERMONET XLVII.

I ST. PETER, III. 8.

Be pitiful—be courteous.

CHRISTIANITY, being the perfect law of God, comprehends all the duties that man can be called upon to perform. It takes a grand view of the necessities, the weaknesses, the infirmities of human nature; and then promulgates its doctrines with a kind and benevolent intention of supplying the necessities, and strengthening the weaknesses, of man. In strict conformity with these intentions, it requires of its votaries, that they should ever be ready to administer to the wants of their neighbours;—and declares, that he who but gives “a cup of cold water” to him that is thirsty, shall not lose his reward. Had the precept stopped there, it had certainly done much to alleviate the sufferings of human nature;—but the religion of Jesus Christ was to go much farther; it not only

was to declare, that the law of charity required our administering to the wants of our fellow-creatures, but to regulate our deportment: we were not only to be pitiful; we were not to wound by asperity; we were to be courteous: a maxim equally beneficial to him who practises it, and to him towards whom it is practised. For how many immoral acts, how many breaches of the law of Christian charity, have been committed by our not observing the golden maxim here given us! An offending deportment, that which is unseemly and indecorous, is not only a violation of the law of good manners, but likewise of that which we all have pledged ourselves to obey.

Or, taking the injunction merely in a moral point of view, how many friendships might have remained unbroken, had not some one, in a moment of petulance, sinned against the rule here laid down! The pity, directed in the text, is a duty which can only be practised under certain circumstances; it presupposes the sufferings of another: but the law of courtesy is of ge-

neral and daily use, binding on all. And though many pass through the world with little thought concerning their general deportment; yet, doubtless, as we are forewarned, that, for every idle word, a man shall be called into judgment, it is to be understood, that the general temper which we adopt in our converse with the world, must be regulated by those laws, according to which we shall be judged.

It has been observed, that human life is made up of trifles; and, consequently, many a mind may be deeply wounded by that which he who gives the wound, may consider but as trivial. The discourtesy may not always arise from innate malignity.

The feelings inherent in our nature, were indisputably given us for wise purposes; for what has Almighty Wisdom bestowed on the animate or inanimate parts of the creation in vain? and those which bespeak an elevated and a noble mind, are not to be violated by grossness or petulance: they are the gift of the Deity, and, as such, entitled to our respect.

Let such, however, as are disposed to set at nought the precept of the Apostle, learn discretion from the maxims of the world, and they will find, that no man ever infringes the law of good manners, without drawing on himself, even from the imperfect judgment of his fellow-creatures, a degree of censure and disgrace, which no one will ever find contribute either to his interests or his happiness.

NOTE.

CICERO has most happily described politeness, as that deportment which neither violates the dignity of another, nor sacrifices our own.

H.

SERMONET XLVIII.

PROVERES, XXIV. 29.

Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me.

THIS is a maxim of wisdom, laid down, not by the divine Author of the sermon on the mount; nor yet by Him, to whom Heaven itself was revealed, and the glory of Him who was seated on the everlasting throne, to whom angels cry unceasingly, “Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty! that was, and is, and is to come!” but by him to whom wisdom was given in a more eminent degree than to any other of the sons of Adam—by Solomon the king: and, like many other of the maxims inculcated by this illustrious personage, it is replete, not only with exalted virtue, but also with that wisdom which every man might wish to practise, with a view to his interests and connexions in this world.

Doubtless, upon principles of virtue, it

is not justifiable to say, that, because another has done an injury to *me*, therefore I will do an injury to him; for, as the injury done to me was an evil act, such must be the act that I should do to that person: nor does it lose any thing of the moral evil, by the circumstance, that a prior injury had been done. In such a case, it is to be feared, that the mind, habituated to do an evil act in *revenging* a prior injury, might, at last, be brought *to offer* an injury: for, when once the idea of evil and of the facility of perpetrating it, becomes familiar to the mind, it is to be apprehended that the actual perpetration is at no great distance.

The author of our text tells us, “it is the glory of a man to pass over a transgression;” and certainly that moderation which enables him to do so, is a quality, which, as vulgar minds do not possess it, is a proof of a loftiness and dignity of spirit, which excite the applause and admiration of those who are witnesses of it;—thus a man is rewarded in this world, by observing a maxim of virtue: and, if we consult history, it will be found, in num-

berless instances, that those minds which would have endured the severest punishments without either repining at what was inflicted, or amending what was evil in their conduct, have been subdued by mildness and forgiveness, which has produced a greater effect upon them than any punishment could have done; at one time causing the enemy to forget his hatred, and, at others, converting him into a faithful friend.

Such are the results, in this world, of obeying the precept, "Resist not evil;" a precept which, though not delivered till four hundred years afterwards, was, in fact, anticipated by Solomon. Referring it, therefore, to Solomon, and consequently divesting it of that divinity, which would belong to it, if considered as the maxim of Him, who, in confirmation of its virtue, when he was reviled, reviled not again; we have only considered it as it appears in this world, and according to the effects it produces on our own hearts, and the influence it has over others.

In this case, as in many besides, it will

be found, that the wisdom which enables a man to pass through life with honour, and that which is to make him wise unto salvation, are perfectly consistent; and, doubtless, he only can be called a truly wise man, who builds his house upon a rock, by establishing, not merely his faith, but his practice, on the firm basis of everlasting truth.

H.

NOTE.

It is to be feared, that it is the sum and substance of what passes in many adult minds, that a little boy made perceptible, when he gravely asked, whether it was not right that he should beat his younger brother, because he himself was suffering under the blows of an elder one.

L.

SERMONET XLIX.

PSALM LXXXIV. 12.

The Lord will give grace.

IT is a fair reply to those votaries of sensibility, who overrate the feelings of human nature, and consider them as the anchor of our conscience, to say, that if this were true, and they might in all cases be relied on, the necessity of laws would have been superseded; and it is as fair an answer to those who consider our feelings as our misfortunes, to tell them, that He who gave them, will, by his grace, direct them, and by that power which rules the wilfulness of men, will convert what are to ourselves sources of delight, into means of obtaining his approbation. Every feeling of humanity towards our fellow-creatures, by taking a higher motive than our own selfish indulgence, becomes the performance of a duty. He has given the impulse in the compassion of our nature, the sauc-

tion in his command, the reward, even here, in the judgment of our hearts; and all that feeling of awe, of fear, of apprehension, which, excited by our fellow-creatures, would be base, becomes, by the operation of this grace, when turned towards his omnipotence, only the rational acknowledgment of what is due to it; while those sensations of devotion, of gratitude, of affection, of confidence, of reliance, of hope, and exclusive preference, which would, if expressed to the world, place us in a situation of dangerous dependence, are, as regarding Him, only a compliance, and, at the best, an imperfect one, with that of which he has an uncontrovertible right to make a demand, but to which his grace gives a value, by making it agreeable to himself.

To those who, on the one hand, allow no control of duty or prudence to consist with genuine sensibility, it will be information to warn them, that such sensibility can never, in the present state of human imperfection, be safe; there is none of the grace of God in their effusions: it is put-

ting to sea all sail, no ballast, no rudder, no compass, to take our natural feelings for our guides. It is asking those to lead us who cannot see their way themselves; and it is, by a great folly, and for no gain, to throw away the little merit of our services, by saying, "I desire something, not much better than caprice, for my master, in preference to an all-wise, all-merciful Governor, who has taught me how to please him, and promised, not only his law for my guide, but his grace for my support, and an eternal reward, even to my imperfect success in the endeavour."

To those, who, on the other hand, meritoriously fearful of giving way to any impulse but that of a divine command, would set aside our feelings as the "ignes fatui" of our fallen state, it may be encouragement to remark on the liberal bounty of our Creator, in contriving the harmonious accordance of our best propensities, duly regulated, with his pleasure. The experience of others may be adduced to prove how delightful is the contact of Christian duty, with a frame of mind fitted

for Christianity; how ecstatic is the feeling, when, giving “a cup of cold water” to rid ourselves of the agony of seeing any one a-thirst, we recollect, that here we have, for our monitor, Him who could not err, for our aim the pleasing our Maker, and for our requital a promise of more than this world can bestow.

And when our feelings, not called into action, are perceptible to us only as the commentators on God’s blessings; when seeing, for instance, the ocean an object of dismay to some, the destroyer of health and comfort to others, the grave of happiness to thousands, and the resort of want to tens of thousands, we behold in it our physician, our exhilarating amusement, our relaxation, an expansion of almighty power that gives us an idea of the Divine Majesty, the element which disdains the intervention of a thought between us and the Deity, the mean by which life is sustained and adorned; or, referring to this our favoured isle, the bulwark between us and a spirit of war never to be satiated—then our feelings become the voice of our

hearts ; and when it is beyond our power to give utterance to the mixt emotion, they can, in silent gratitude, witness for us, in a language that Omniscience alone can understand, the due sentiment with which we see ourselves included in the number of those who have cause to consider, as the greatest of the blessings we can receive, that “grace” which alone can sanctify our thoughts, our words, or our actions.

L.

SERMONET L.

JOB, XI. 17, 18.

And thine age shall be clearer than the noon-day: thou shalt shine forth; thou shalt be as the morning. And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope.

To expect an old age of blessing consequent to a mis-spent youth, is folly and presumption that needs no comment. Let us rather consider what old age may be rendered by the exercise of such prudence as it is in the power of us all to learn.

However attached to those pleasures of the world which are derived from irrational indulgences, there is surely no one so foolish as to deny that he deserves envy who can be happier without having recourse to them, than their votaries are in the enjoyment of them. If we see a man in better health, more uniformly cheerful, possessing clearer intellects, retaining his powers longer than any of his neighbours,

and are credibly informed that he owes these superior advantages to his temperance, none of us in our senses would prefer the gratification of our palate, for a moment, to this pre-eminence of happiness; because we should be aware that every purpose we seek to answer by indulgence, is obtained without it. Now this freedom is one of the many privileges of advancing age: we can be far happier without the trouble of being foolish, than those whose whole time and thoughts are devoted to the search after happiness. Even when the acuteness of the natural eye is impaired, that of the intellect is improving in its powers. The young man gallops over the turf and calls it all grass, while the old man finds every square yard more than the occupation of a day, to his powers of mental exercise: he has in his recollection what the other passes by: his amusements are without cost or labour: he is at no trouble to be happy.

But the amusements of old age are its least concern. There are far higher gratifications for those who have not misused their youth. The more than noonday clear-

ness of the text, and the security founded on hope, mean something higher than mere pastimes.

In whatever sense we understand the clearness promised to old age, it must be something very desirable: if it be emancipation from the fetters of passion—if it be a lucid intellect—if it be an illustrious diffusion of light around us, it is good, and must be productive of happiness: followed as this promise is, by that of shining forth, and being as the morning, it is reasonable to suppose the good we shall be permitted to do to others, is to reflect back on ourselves; and the security founded on hope includes in itself, and will unfold to every thinking mind, a state second to none, but that which shall admit us to the presence of our Maker. With security and hope, who would ask any thing more on this side the grave? It is complete felicity guarded against satiety by the admission of powers of increase.

Far from mere speculations, the promises of the text are daily made good to those who have in time endeavoured, as far as

human infirmity permits, to merit a comfortable old age: they depend on few physical causes: they need only that consciousness which we may hope to be as unperishable as the soul itself; and possessing this; even if we cannot make our "light shine before men," we shall be sensible to the never-failing sunshine diffused over our own minds; and in a modest retrospect, or even in an excusing conscience, we shall feel "secure, because there is hope."

To those who have added to the performance of duties, and an habitual regard to the precepts and promises of revealed religion, their honest endeavours to preserve, as long as possible, the faculties they have been intrusted with, embellishments of old age are not wanting: they can climb the steeps of learning, when others have supinely sunk again to the abyss of ignorance: they can press forward in paths of virtuous knowledge, when the idle and the careless are losing that which has been forced on their attention.

An old age uniting the power of informing the ignorant, and that of continuing,

our own improvement in knowledge, is perhaps the most enviable period of human life. Infirmities, diseases give way, or are disregarded under such alleviations. The venerable professor of the university, resigning his chair with dignity to his former scholar, and becoming in retirement the voluntary instructor of children and of females, is in possession of a satisfaction matured by time, and not inferior to that which he experienced in the outset of his fame. It is far more easy to shine in the eyes of a multitude, than to obtain the temperate deference of the select few; and hence results a reward for the social kindnesses of age, which youth cannot ask. When a long life has been well used, and the world has pronounced its plaudit, the veteran can retreat into the bosom of his neighbourhood, and console himself anew with the gratitude and affection of those whom he has contributed to render useful in their generation.

And without talents, without learning, without the power of making others wise according to the wisdom of this world,

there is an employment for the aged that none other can undertake. To lead the inexperienced in the paths of righteousness, we must have proceeded some way in it ourselves; and cold and lifeless, beyond the deadness of extreme decrepitude, must be that heart, which will not feel, in communicating this knowledge, a gratification beyond that belonging to any other mode of pleasure, or any earlier period of life.

NOTE.

“ I HAVE been made an old baby just now,” said good Dr. E——, wiping his eyes, “ by a letter, telling me how well one of my young men is acquitting himself at Oxford. This,” continued he, addressing himself to an amiable girl present, “ is one of the pleasures of old age : and old age, take my word on it, young lady, has pleasures, of which you cannot, at your time of life, have an idea.”

L.

SERMONET LI.

HEBREWS, II. 7.

*Thou madest him a little lower than the
angels.*

TO the eloquent and animated appeal to the feelings of the human heart, contained in this Psalm, little seems necessary to be added to rouse every dignified and generous mind to the adoption of that course of life which it is the duty of man, and, consistently with the words of the text, his glory to pursue. From a contemplation of the great works of the creation, the heavens, the moon, the stars, the attention is directed to man. Nor is he without his dignity :—he is declared to be, according to the intentions of his Maker, “ little lower than the angels :” —pre-eminent over all the creatures of this world which perish and rise no more, he is permitted the privilege of knowing, of adoring, of holding some degree of intercourse with his Crea-

tor, and of enjoying in this life a foretaste of the blessings of a happy eternity. "Thou madest him a little lower than the angels."

How then does the pious sentiment expressed in the text, affect us? What is required of man?—or what feelings are naturally generated in his mind, on reading the declaration of an inspired writer, that man was made "a little lower than the angels?" *Human pride* might almost be trusted to return a suitable answer. If a man be thus gifted, let him be careful that he does not disgrace himself:—if he was created in the likeness of the Deity, let him do nothing that may obliterate that likeness:—let him not exalt his passions, which were designed to be his servants, into the place of his tyrants:—let him exercise himself in the law of God—let him meditate on it, and let him "*hold fast* that which is good," knowing that this only "will bring" him "peace at the last:"—let him not seek either for profit or pleasure in sin; but let him learn that the first grand secret in the science of human life is, that sin

is a fraud, a delusion invented by the father of lies, to deceive all such as choose to barter peace of mind, and all honourable estimation amongst men, for what we will not dignify with the appellation of transient *pleasure*; but for that which promises to be pleasure, but is, in effect, misery. Let him learn prudence from a heathen; let him say, "I will not buy repentance at so great a price."

It is no figurative language which says, that sin leads to destruction; neither is it necessary to refer the destruction consequent on sin, to any judgment that may threaten us in the next world. Christianity does not wait for the precarious events of another life, to prove the truth of her doctrines; even this world will show that "wisdom is justified of her children." It may be undeniably asserted, that there is no vice which does not lead to destruction, in some sense of the term, even in this life: it injures all the powers of a man's intellect—some feelings of his heart, or his fame, or his fortune, or his

peace—in some way or other he is sure to pay the forfeit of his folly.

Neither let him suppose that the corruption of the times creates any necessity, or affords any excuse, for misconduct:—the times, in no age or country, were ever so corrupt but virtue was honoured; though perhaps it has, in a very few instances, been feared. Owing to the present state of the world, and the general diffusion of Christianity, those instances are not likely to occur again: and to us who live when the Gospel doctrines are established, and persecution is no more dreaded, the sufferings of those by whose blood the Gospel covenant was sealed, should affect us no otherwise than to excite our pity or to animate our zeal.

Thus, resting our observations on the authority of the text, that man was made “a little lower than the angels,” we have contended, that it becomes him not to degrade himself; that he is responsible for his maintaining that rank, by the practice of those virtues which the Gospel inculcates. Vice being that which more essentially degrades

a man, as it destroys those great qualities with which he was endowed by the great Artificer of the universe, doubtless it was for wise reasons that man was thus distinguished: the debilitating our intellects, therefore, or the hardening of our hearts—the sacrificing our health, our fame, or our fortune, as much mutilates the grand work of his hand, as the want of a limb may be said to mutilate a statue; and as in proportion to the beauty of the remainder of the statue, will the loss of that limb be deplored, so will the absence of any one moral quality in the human mind be more regretted, from the consideration that he who is in this respect deficient, was made by the Power that fashioned him—“a little lower than the angels.”

II.

SERMONET LII.

ST. MATTHEW, XXIII. 23.

*These ought ye to have done, and not to leave
the other undone.*

THERE is a latent suspicion of envy and ill-will, which is very easily excited into action, or at least into sentiment, whenever our projects of gaining credit to ourselves, are thwarted by the cool prudence of an uninterested observer; and on no subject is it more disposed to be awake than the proud education of a promising offspring. Perhaps it would be just to limit it to the female part of the creation; for in the fashionable education of the superior sex, parents seem to make "the world" serve all its purposes; and a lad is, without any painful vigils on the part of a thoughtless father or mother, sent out of the nursery to the preparatory school, to fit him for that microcosm a public one, and thence launched on the reality, with a firm re-

liance on “the course of things” and “the chapter of accidents,” and large allowances for, and indulgences to, not the well-considered corruption of human nature, but the absolute necessity of being wicked.

The father’s care for daughters has a still more precise boundary. The hour that induces some man, either possessed of, or knowing how to obtain, a due portion of this world’s goods, to make his proposals of marriage, is that of parental emancipation; and, taught to wink at vice, to be silent under ill-usage, and to divert her attention from folly by being more foolish, a poor vain, accomplished, yet ignorant young victim is made a wife, before she has begun to perceive that her previous state of daughter had its duties.

The anxious mother, perhaps, no less dependent on this chance of matrimony for her daughter, has still another motive to stimulate her endeavours; and, determined that good fortune shall not be disgraced by her supineness, she labours indefatigably to render the young females of her family superior to all on the level with them.

Every thing is sacrificed to what is thought improvement; and industry, excusable, if not commendable, claims and receives the world's applause.

And should any one shake his head at all this care—should any one presume to see mischief in all this excess of worldly solicitude, the suspicion hinted at, comes to support intentions whose character cannot be questioned; and some sinister purpose is discovered, which invalidates advice and renders caution superfluous. Nothing farther can be urged in excuse by the foiled monitor, than the words of the text, which, paraphrased, may admit all that has been adduced, to be justifiable, yet hint that something is wanting.

This “something wanting,” however, is the corner-stone of the building: it is that which is to keep us from the world, not assist to entangle us in its delusion: it is that which is to render us content, not emulous; to fit us for life as it exists, not as we may fancy it; and to lead us quietly out of it, rather than to enable us to figure on its gaudy stage:—it is “something” that

must perpetually remind us of the fallen state of our nature, make us aware of the deceitfulness of our own hearts, and keep our attention active to the ceaseless necessity of strict watchfulness. How this can consist with the views of our modern fashionable education, is best known to the architects of young ladies' fortunes.

But let it not be supposed, to the dishonour of our country, that the vices and follies which present themselves for animadversion, are, without exception, the characters of modern manners. There are thousands of families in this kingdom who prefer to fashion and celebrity, their own right sense and their own quiet retirement. Innumerable are the young women now educating under pious sensible mothers, with the simple view of doing their duty humbly, yet cheerfully, in that station of life in which they are placed, or to which they may be called. To make home fairly attractive, and at the same time to acquaint them with the state of society; to make them thankful for their own happiness, and compassionate to the wants of others; to

bound their views of worldly enjoyment within the circle of their natural connexions, and to point the eye of faith to Heaven, under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, and in reliance on the merits of Him alone who was without sin: these are the points of education even *now* insisted on by many excellent mothers; personal accomplishments are made subservient to these high considerations, and even the attainment of useful knowledge is forced to receive its greatest value from its power to conduce to these great ends. May the blessing of God attend all such endeavours!

NOTE.

WHOEVER would, without trouble, and with the excitation of deep interest, judge of the sum-total of a thoroughly fashionable education, should read the work of an anonymous writer, entitled, "The Age we live in." That it is the production of a female, is all, at present, known to the world; nor can encouragement, and the best applause, that of the best people, induce her to come forward. Thus a stranger, it must be the merit of her performance that excites the wish to praise, to recommend, and

to overcome diffidence. Such an artist must not be idle when so much is to be done. "The Age we live in," is a composition of no ordinary rank; and to those who, having palled their appetites with all the sweetmeats of the circulating libraries, are at a loss for something they can taste, it may be a recommendation to inform them, that it has an interest which, if one reader resembles another, may leave its impression for more than twenty-four hours. The French artist's picture of "The Vestal" consigned by her own folly to an anticipated burial, had not more touching strokes than this portrait drawn by the pen: its importance is immeasurably greater: it is a product of employment that may be laid on the altar, or even before the throne of Him who will judge our works.

All that we minor moralists can do in exhorting, we must confess superseded by religion; and it is only in the hope of gaining attention by a light step and a smiling countenance, that we can proceed without diffidence. Much more might be effected by example. If the detail of education in the best conducted families were more known, it might be useful: but then nothing ought to be admitted but the plainest truth. Our statement should have the fidelity of the lawyer's report, and the nakedness of the physician's prescription.

L.

SERMONET LIII.

ROMANS, XIV. 17.

*For the kingdom of God is—righteousness,
and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

IT perhaps would have been difficult to find terms more expressive, or more concise, than those made use of in the text, to give an adequate idea of the duties and the happiness of a Christian; for what duties can he be required to perform, or what happiness can he be permitted to enjoy, which are not comprehended in it?

In the first place, he is required to practise righteousness, or, in other words, the duty which he owes to his Maker, by living in obedience to his laws; and this is, of itself, no small ingredient in the happiness of a good man:—in the next place, he is required in his general demeanour to be peaceable, or, in other words, of a gentle spirit—not given to quarrelling or anger, but regulating his conduct according to the

Apostle's description of charity—"Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth."—Such is the temper which we are required to adopt in our intercourse with the world: a temper which, it must be admitted, is admirably calculated to remove many of the little evils and uneasinesses which have a tendency to embitter life.

The Apostle, therefore, having stated the duties of man—righteousness, which furnishes the principles of virtue, and directs the application of those principles; and peace, which regulates our passions and our demeanour—subjoins, in the last place, the joys of the Christian, under the term, "joy in the Holy Ghost."

By these words it is not necessary to understand any visionary or preternatural gifts of the Spirit, but simply that joy attendant on the glad tidings of the Gospel, which was to dissipate the clouds of error

then overhanging the whole world, and “to bring life and immortality to light.”

Such is the conduct required of Christians: duties are enjoined, and joys are annexed to the performance of them. Our master is not a grievous tyrant, exacting painful service, and not requiting the service:—neither does he, when men have performed what little they are able, say to them, “Ye be idle.” For God reproacheth not any one. But let none hope to partake of the joys of the Gospel, whose lives are at variance with the precepts of it. In those joys what share can the vicious man have, who has lost his taste for virtue; or the man of malignant passions, in whose mind all injuries are written as on a tablet of marble?

Let those, therefore, who are desirous of being partakers in the joys of a purified mind, remember, that, to attain them, the righteousness and the peace which religion recommends are necessary. Without that discipline of the heart, which the righteousness of the Gospel inculcates, what relish can exist for those joys which are founded on it? To depraved minds the hea-

ven of Mahomet is better adapted:—their life has been sensual; why should not their Paradise be sensual also? of higher joys they are incapable. But from this degraded state, every true Christian will pray to be preserved. He will doubtless consider, that nothing is more base, or more vile, than sin; and, consequently, that the Scriptures, and the doctrine which they inculcate, exalt a man to a higher rank than unassisted nature could attain to.

No great portion of worldly experience is necessary to show us, that even the most plausible appearances of happiness will occasionally fail us. Not to mention the death of friends, or the ill success that may attend our exertions in our pursuits, and honest vocations, numberless accidents, not seen by any eye, and not felt by any heart but our own, may cloud the brightest day of any one; but he who draws his happiness from the joys of the Gospel, may be said to draw from a well “of living water.”

To this source of comfort we must learn betimes to betake ourselves. We must not

think, when the danger is come upon us, that it is time enough then to apply ourselves to God. The Jews were forewarned during their idolatries and rebellions, that, when afterwards they should seek the Lord, he would hide his face from them; and such will be the case with all who obstinately or carelessly reject the good proffered them, and forbear to strengthen their minds and purify their hearts before the evil day arrives. The whole mass of Scripture was formed by a Providence as merciful as wise; and every part of it was designed either for our instruction or our encouragement. We are told, “without holiness no man shall see God;” but we are told likewise, that his grace is with us to direct us, and to protect us against every danger and every temptation. If, therefore, a man fall, whom shall he blame but himself?

H.

SERMONET LIV.

ST. LUKE, XII. 40.

Be ye—ready also.

OF all the evil we are required to take patiently at the hand of Him who best knows what is necessary to bring our hearts to himself, none seems, to some of us, more heavy to bear than the continuance of infirm health. Acute diseases we endure far better; for, often attended by fever, they can, for a time, furnish a support for themselves; but chronic complaints, and those consequent on an advanced period of life, seem to require, and perhaps do in their nature require, the exertion of something more than human fortitude to make them tolerable by our weak frame. Yet as instances are, now and then, to be quoted of persons exemplary under this species of affliction, it is to be inferred that they have something to teach which it may be useful to learn. Let us endeavour to describe the

evil as it exists, and then consider of a remedy, or at least a palliative.

A very short acquaintance with the various lots of the human species, will present to us various modes in which this impatience of our fate exists, to the increase of the sufferer's affliction, and the discouragement of those who would mitigate it. According as the temper is disposed to strong or weak passions, at the time, the impatience will show itself in violence of resentment on every imagined offence, or wounding querulousness on every unintentional omission. Complaints of a hard lot, a rejection of all alleviations, a foreboding of future evil, a recollection of lost ability, a comparison of the present with the past—all these things fill the mind, and obstruct the avenues of comfort; and considered in their bearing on those who would gladly serve or please, they render the nurse sometimes as great an object of pity as the sick person.

An acquaintance with this common infirmity of disease, of age, and even of convalescence, should, on our parts, immedi-

ately produce a cool, firm resolution, taken in health, to be prepared to sacrifice even the most important of all our blessings, with the spirit and temper of a Christian. It is too late to put this resolution in practice, if it is to be made on the occasion. "How shall I behave to my Maker, and my fellow-creatures, if ever I am in such or such a situation?" is a question that must be previously put to ourselves, if we would be ready with an answer.

It is bad œconomy to waste that time in complaint and repining, which perhaps is the most valuable of our lives, and that on which our future state may depend. Do you ask how it is to be rescued from loss? Nothing, if the mind is at liberty, can be so easy or so profitable—so consoling or so animating. In cases affecting intellect, it cannot be supposed advice can be given; the time, if ever it occurred, is gone by; but in languor, in privation of the comforts of society, in sleepless nights, and often in painful days, there is much to be done; and even the infirmity of age can console the oppressed body.

Let these considerations be resorted to by those who feel it grievous to want only the power of enjoying the blessings of affluence: "I have had my share of good in this world, or at least as much as Infinite Wisdom and Mercy thought fit for me; and there is nothing I could bear, which I would not prefer to being turned over, by my future Judge, to a state of stupifying worldly enjoyment, as if not worth correction. In these hours of suffering, I am secure from adding sin to sin. I have only to be thankful and patient. Every pain that diminishes the comfort and value of this life, makes me more anxious to secure my situation in that which now may be not far off. All that is taken out of the scale of this world's blessings, is laid up for me in that which contains what is far more valuable. The more this world repels and escapes me, the more I feel attracted towards another. I have time to think: I am in that state of quiet leisure, the want of which has been my excuse for neglect. What would thousands give to change places with me? Every thing is done that

can be done for me. Were I poor, or neglected, I should say, 'If I had money ' or friends, I would not complain.' I have both. Let me suppose I were in a sinking ship, with death in all its horrors surrounding me, and recollecting the comforts I have perhaps on a shore I can see, but not reach—is not my state preferable? And many, many are the scenes of horror in which I might, but for the mercy of God, be ending my days. Others have left it on record, that situations, such as mine, have consolations which the young and healthy do not imagine or care for : these must be derived immediately from God:—let me then seek them ; and, supported by his divine arm, let me be studiously cautious not only to avoid wearying the patience, slighting the kindness, or depressing the spirits of those about me ; but by all the active exertion in my power, let me strive to set an example of cheerful resignation. If their courage fails under the appeal their love for me makes to their feelings, it is I who must re-animate it : I must, as far as I can, convince them that I prefer the trial to

which I am called, and that, whatever be its event, it is that which I would choose, and that for which I am prepared. I know they *must* follow me, therefore I ought to show them that the path is not rugged: I know they *will* follow me, therefore I must not act as if we were parting for ever in despair."

It is good, likewise, to have in our minds the sentiments of persons wiser than ourselves, which may, by recollection, atone for the stagnation of our ideas. The divines and moralists of our own country, well studied in health and vigour, will furnish us abundantly, even if our stores have not been collected from foreign fields. The Scriptures are the property of us all: these must be in our hearts and on our tongues, or we can have no claim to pity for any privation, when we have voluntarily submitted to the greatest possible. Lord Bacon, than whom no man knew better what was right, ends his Essay on Death with these important axioms: "A mind fixed and bent upon somewhat that is good, doth avert the dolours of death;

and the sweetest canticle is, ‘ *Nunc dimittis,*’ when a man hath obtained worthy ends and expectations.”

NOTE.

INSTEAD of the high-flown panegyrics with which the obituaries of the day are loaded, till invention is racked for new forms of extravagant praise, and at last nothing is so evident as the weak vanity of surviving friends, a little fair and circumstantial biography of exemplary persons, such as might inform the young and stimulate the indolent, would be a useful acquisition. When those whom we have loved “till life can charm no more,” and feel that we must “mourn till Pity’s self be dead,” have shown us how the righteous die, it would be well to know how they have lived, or at least prepared themselves for death. Instances crowd on recollection, of those who, awaiting, in patience and resignation, the event of a tedious and precarious disease, have shaped their conduct, as a mariner does his course, that they might not miss “the haven where they would be.” “I know my danger,” said Mrs. A——; “and however it terminates, I am prepared. If I recover, I shall consider my life as lengthened that I may do more good; if I do not, I shall suppose the fit time for me to die is arrived, and I shall not repine.” Consistent with these sentiments was her conduct; she omitted nothing

that could spare her friends the grief of losing her : though unable to make the exertions necessary for society, she never gave up her interest in it, or spoke of herself as an exile from it : her amusements were cheerful to those around her, without being laborious to herself : her reading, which had been of the light kind, but of the purest morality, by degrees assumed a bias that made her covet religious instruction and sober ethics, with an avidity no licentious writer ever could excite in minds best fitted to relish poison. Her letters breathed a spirit of hope and submission of the highest description :—she could hope to die ; she could submit to live :—she could hope to live ; she could submit to die. And in this calmness, her purified spirit disengaged itself from its fettering companion, before age had pronounced any of its usual warnings.

“ I am quite ready to go,” said another exemplary woman, of a more advanced period of life : “ there is but one thing now that vexes me, and makes me willing to bear a little longer my infirmities, which are indeed more troublesome to others than to myself. I cannot always command my attention in my devotions ; my mind will still wander, and I could wish to get over this, before I am called to give up my account ; but still I know whom I have to trust to—Him who, unless he had taken our nature on him, I could not hope would have had all the compassion I need for such an habitual transgression.”

Will the reader's patience bear an irrelevant anecdote

dote? This amiable useful woman, who had mind enough to have apologized for inactivity, and activity enough to have gone through her path of life with much less mind, had a considerable part of her funded property in annuities for a limited time, and which those who so arranged her income, did not suppose she could reach. But she was still likely to live some years, when they were near expiring. Of this an old friend of hers was aware; and to relieve her from anxiety, in the most liberal way he insisted on her consulting his ease of mind, by allowing him to make good the deficit. Before he could commit this intention to paper, sudden death deprived him of the power and her of his assistance; and the day was approaching when the evil would be first felt. The widow of her friend, however, made it her earliest care to come to her, and to say, that her having heard Mr. ——'s resolution on this subject, was a sufficient obligation on her to pay respect to his memory, and indulge her own feelings by carrying it into effect. Here was now the merit of a good-action divided between two persons without being lessened. But the wisdom and mercy of our heavenly Father did still more: he suffered his servants to have all the enjoyment such kindness in intention could reflect on their excellent minds—but the delicate feelings of one not accustomed to pecuniary obligation, were kept sacred—she died before the day of payment arrived!

L.

SERMONET LV.

PROVERBS, XII. 1.

*Whoso loveth instruction, loveth knowledge ;
but he that hateth reproof is brutish.*

THE text above quoted has not been selected as pre-eminently expressive of the sentiment conveyed in it, but as one among many, which declare the excellence of virtue and the superiority of a life conducted on good principles, over that which is founded on the corrupt inclinations of man; and the *specific* excellence which is now to be considered, is the elegance of virtue, as opposed to the rudeness, the coarseness, the rusticity of vice.

For as in our deportment, and the mode of using our limbs, there would be something ungraceful, were it not that we are, in our early years, disciplined and instructed to avoid what is thus inelegant, so is it with our minds and dispositions. Were it not that religion teaches us to avoid some

things, and adopt others, our minds, our principles, and our tempers would exhibit as much that is offensive and disgusting as any thing that we could observe in the gesticulations of the most untutored rustic. For what is the difference between the manners of the rustic and those of the more elevated ranks, but that the latter are taught to eschew whatever is unbecoming, while the former is left without any restraints whatever? And what is the difference between the virtuous man and the voluptuary, but that the virtuous man is taught a more elegant, a more refined mode of thinking, and considers it as inconsistent with correct and elevated sentiments to offend against morals, as the most accomplished courtier can conceive it contrary to "etiquette," to be guilty of a breach of what is called good breeding?

He, therefore, who is friendly to correct manners, should, upon a principle of consistency, be likewise friendly to religion: in both, it is a principle of refinement; in both, it is the rejection of what is gross, and the adopting that which is, under all

circumstances, good—in many cases great and glorious.

The young, therefore, to whom the present observations are especially addressed, as they may be supposed to be more solicitous in forming their characters than those of an advanced age, would do well to recollect, that if their wish is to become elegant, they ought, in fair reason, to wish to become virtuous: for what virtue does Christianity call upon them to practise which does not diffuse a grace over the general character? Is it respect to superiors?—is it diligence in laudable pursuits?—is it reverence to parents? let them but listen to those who speak of such as practise these duties, and they will no longer doubt what estimation the world has of them.

To say that the times are altered, that these virtues are not appreciated as formerly, is to trifle with morality. At no period were mankind so corrupt as to withhold their veneration or their applause of that which is fundamentally good in itself. Mankind, instinctively, from a natural

inherent preference of good to bad, will always approve the former and condemn the latter. Our Saviour and his disciples had the reverence and the applause of those who sought to put them to death; but in our days, when no persecution is to be apprehended, the virtuous are at liberty to be virtuous without incurring any risk. The royal Psalmist says, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? even by ruling himself after thy word." And the writings of Solomon are replete with admonitions to young men, supplying their inexperience with the result of his wisdom; in order that they may not be left to remorse when they contemplate the baseness, the worthlessness, the grossness of sin.

In what has been said, no propensity to sin, as previously influencing the mind, has been supposed to exist. The text shows that sin, superadded to its moral depravity in the eyes of God, is likewise, in the eyes of all who can judge of it, odious, gross, and inelegant; as it may generally be referred to the lowest passions when unrestrained by regard to the duty which we

owe to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves.

No one will contend, that when sin takes possession of the mind, though it comes recommended by the soft phrase of a “fashionable failing,” or a “juvenile indiscretion,” it is less sin, or less odious, on that account:—what it is inherently, it will still continue to be: sin it is, and sin it always will be. Neither let it be supposed, for it would be to adopt a most lamentable error! that he who indulges in this “fashionable failing,” this “juvenile indiscretion,” merely indulges himself in this one foible, and that it proceeds no farther. When sin is admitted, who can tell how far the taint may extend? The indulgence of avarice, of prodigality, and of every vice, brings with it a train of concomitant evils, in number beyond all calculation:—and the Vices might, like the Sciences, be painted hand in hand, to denote that no one of them could be admitted to the exclusion of her sisters. When the sceptre is once in the hand of Sin, no eye can see how far her tyranny may extend,

or what iniquity her votary may be compelled to commit. How many are there who have been allured, though but in an individual instance, to abandon the fair path of virtue, who steadily intended, after this slight deviation, to return again; but who, bewildered in their deviation, have but wandered on in their error, and have never recovered that which they once quitted! till, at last, their minds have sunk down to the level of the situation to which they were reduced, and no vice could shock them by its enormity or its grossness.

No one, therefore, can sufficiently appreciate that purity of mind which is equally the prerogative and the bulwark of virtue; and he who would seek to destroy it, or to weaken it, is alike ignorant of human nature, and an enemy to its best interests. It was a protection given to us by the Almighty himself, when he sent us into this world; and happy is he who, when temptation assails him, is wise enough to make that purity his instructor to teach him his duty.

SERMONET LVI.

EXODUS, XX. I.

And God spake all these words.

NONE of us can be at a loss to know or to recollect what words are here meant. They are what are called, "The Ten Commandments," which the Almighty, in his immediate government of the Jewish people, delivered to their leader Moses, and which, though addressed to the children of Israel, our Saviour tells us, he came, "not to destroy, but to fulfil."

Of these commandments, some, when understood in their original limited sense, must seem superfluous to us, who have accepted the terms of Christianity. We may, in the self-congratulations of human pride, thank God that *we* are in no danger of polytheism or idolatry, and conceal from ourselves the Pharisaical character of our boast, by admitting, with affected candour, that a few unwary expressions, which,

after all, we persuade ourselves mean no harm, may escape our lips, and a little infringe the letter of that which forbids "taking God's name in vain."—"Sunday," we may say, "cannot always be set apart so strictly as we wish for religious observances; such punctilious regard must be dispensed with, in people who live in the world; and, indeed, it was for the purpose of making this yoke light, that Christ came upon earth."—"As to honouring fathers and mothers, much, we are convinced, depends on parents themselves; if they are honourable, they will not fail of honour; but if they are impediments to the happiness of young people, or choose to envelope themselves in singularities, they must even take their chance."—"With regard to murder, unless duelling or suicide be voted murder, we are in no danger; and the one being absolutely necessary, and the other consequent on the nature of things, for which we are not responsible, we may hope to escape this censure, especially since a most logical argument has been brought forward (with a most laudable intention,

no doubt), to prove that a man's sacrificing himself for the good of another, is suicide." —“The seventh commandment stands pretty much on the ground of the fifth; the marriage-vow, like filial obedience, has two contracting parties. If persons who have solemnly at the altar, and in the face of God, undertaken to spend their lives in the closest union, have no real or imaginary cause of complaint; and if they do not chance to meet with somebody they fancy they could like better than their legal partner, they must observe this commandment; but it is to be supposed that a beneficent Being meant his creatures to be happy in their own way; therefore, every one must judge for himself.”—“Stealing is not a fashionable vice; it is confined to those who have that wretched disease, the *caecities habendi*, which now and then is heard of in shops, but never can gain ground amongst liberal people.”—“Bearing false witness, can mean only perjury; as for reports to the injury of others, they, too, must take their chance: and, if coveting be a heinous offence, who can be inno-

cent? and why were the good things of this world made so attractive?"

Alas! alas! what reasoning is this? Can we, the professed followers of Christ, adopt, or even listen to it? True, indeed, our blessed Lord came to lighten our yoke; he came to exchange servile fear for generous obedience; but the commandments are still in force; and whoever fancies that the indulgence of a master-passion can consist with the worship of the One true God, has, as far as is in his power, rendered himself a polytheist and an idolater. Profane use of our Maker's name, is still, as much as ever, a breach of the command against taking it in vain; and, unless we can persuade ourselves that He who in mercy says, "I will not take all," means to say, "I will take none," we cannot suppose the observance of the Sabbath dispensed with. Parents are still to be honoured, be they what they may. Murder is committed whenever we risk the life of another by negligence, of which we are aware, or obstinacy, of which we will not be convinced.

The marriage-vow is not to be taken with any grains of allowance, either for change of sentiment or the chances of new objects. And all appeals to the caprice of fortune, all contraband trade, all over-reaching, all endeavours to get what we wish for, at less than a fair price, are, in motive and essence, thefts; not to mention the as frequent infringement of the command, by incurring debts without the intention, or a prospect, of payment. The emulation of the present day is too much of kin to the covetousness proscribed; and whoever, in vying with his neighbour, incurs a larger debt than he can discharge, at the same moment breaks two commandments. Confined to courts of law, as seems the probability of bearing false witness, it is the unthought-of vice of every day. From the political oppositionist, who seeks to persuade the mob, that those who are fighting their battles mean to cut their throats, and that views, as low as his own, are the highest that can call forth the toiling exertion of him whose place he would fill: down to the discarded servant,

who, on the threshold, asserts that he leaves no honest man behind him, is this practice prevalent. Who now can be deluded by the notion, that he has little concern with the commandments given to the Jews?

Such is the foundation of the virtues we are called on to practise, in counteraction to the vices against which the commandments were directed, that we cannot stir without hitting our foot against some corner-stone, on which they are supported. It requires so many vices to make up one act of sin, that we have many more guards to defend, than enemies to attack us; more warnings than sudden surprises.

When our Saviour tells us, that we are to love the Lord our God as much as is possible, his injunction may, indeed, be called the fulfilling of the law. There can be no fear from straying affections, where heart, soul, mind, and strength, are all devoted to one object; and to feel offended when cautioned against choosing any other object of adoration than God, is, perhaps, the least reprehensible offence a Christian

can feel. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with thee," is the replying sentiment.

But, alas! there is no one of the commandments given to the children of Israel, which the world, or we the most enlightened part of it, do not need to have perpetually repeated; and to every one of these belongs a ramifying character, a wide reaching to unsearched corners and deep recesses of the heart, sufficient to put on their guard all who have not, till now, considered how much more He who framed these laws knew of what was in man than he does himself. The voluntary confessions of those about to pay to the laws the forfeit of their lives, prove that taking God's name in vain, breaking the Sabbath, dishonouring parents, forming illicit connexions, accusing others to screen themselves, and coveting their neighbours' goods, has been, in numberless cases, the course by which the mind has been led to brave the ignominy of detected theft: it may, therefore, be concluded that these

roots of evil possess a property not common to the vegetable productions of nature—that of ripening seeds of plants different from themselves.

The greatest care, then, is demanded of us to prevent the flowering and fruiting of vice, since we cannot tell how rank may be the poison of its ultimate production. We know not, perhaps, half the reasons our gracious God had for issuing the negative commandments; he might foresee the most desperately active, complicated crimes in a single transgression; and he might know, what experience has taught us, that it is impossible to sin in one single point. When our Saviour says, that he who breaks one commandment is guilty of all, we cannot suppose he spoke without a precise meaning. We may not be polytheists, in the strict sense; we may not be idolaters like those nations whom the Jews were commanded to extirpate; we may not be perjured; we may not follow our lucrative occupations on the Lord's day; we may not say to our parents, This is "Corban," that is to say, a gift to God, therefore not to

be given to you ; we may not have taken a life ; we may not have broken the marriage-vow ; we may not rob ; we may not bear legal false witness against our neighbour ; we may not have wished to possess, without a purchased right, the property of another ; and yet we may, in spirit, have broken the whole law.

L.

SERMONET LVII.

ST. LUKE, XVI. 25.

But now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

THE parable of Dives and Lazarus, though it has often been made the subject of religious instruction from the pulpit, seems to have been very seldom considered with that close attention to the strict letter of the text, which fair exposition requires. In general, we have heard the character of Dives loaded with numberless crimes: he was cruel; he was hard-hearted; he was voluptuous; whilst, on the other hand, Lazarus has been dignified with ten thousand qualities, all calculated to awaken sympathy and affection. For the one or the other of these characters no authority whatever exists. If, in the explaining of any Scripture-text, he who explains is at liberty to add, from his own invention, whatever he may think necessary, he may

call his explanation what he pleases ; but it is not Scripture. In the present case, and, indeed, in every other, he is restricted to that which he finds written, and not an iota farther is he permitted to go. The story tells us, that a certain man was rich, and lived sumptuously ; and that a certain other man was poor, and begged to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table : that they both died : the rich man was conveyed to a place of torment, and the poor man to everlasting happiness : and it is remarkable, that in the reason assigned for this difference in their destiny, nothing seems to turn upon the merits or demerits of the one or the other ; but it is simply said, " Son, remember that thou, in thy lifetime" (addressing the rich man), " receivedst good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things ; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." A sentence which refers solely to the worldly state of the two persons, without any allusion to their virtues or their vices.

For any thing that we know to the contrary, Lazarus might have been very will-

ing to change worldly circumstances with the rich man, and the wealth of Dives might, perhaps, have come to him without any imputation. The whole parable refers merely to the situation in which they both were; and no farther may we go for a solution of any difficulty that may present itself.

It is, perhaps, not too fanciful to suppose, that under these two characters the Jewish and the Gentile church might be portrayed. The rich man might be a type of the flourishing and established state that the Jewish church had long enjoyed; and Lazarus, with his sores, might represent the distressed condition of the Gentiles, before the advent of Him who came "with healing on his wings;" but with any typical allusion of this kind it is not necessary, at present, to trouble ourselves; we take the story as we find it. With the restrictions which have been before mentioned, the text seems to admit this interpretation. Intending to state the physical effects of the world, and its pleasures, and its occupations, on the mind, which render it less

awake to the concerns of futurity, the divine Author of the parable introduces a person rich in his possessions, and sumptuous in his living; and, on the other hand, wishing to show how the absence of the good things of this world acts upon the mind, describes a poor diseased man: and as the mind of the rich man would not be in such a state as to qualify him for being received into heaven, the sequel represents him consigned to everlasting torments; whilst the mind of the poor man, not being sophisticated by the pleasures of this world, would be fit for the kingdom of Heaven. And here no greater difficulty occurs than in the text, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." From the whole history of the Gospel, we may infer how much more willing the poor were to accept it than the rich; and thus it is reasonable to suppose that Lazarus might possess that spirit which the rich man had not.

But let not any one conclude, that the possession of riches, in this our day, necessarily involves a man in a sentence of condemnation: in speaking of the *effects* of

wealth, the term *physical* has been applied, as what wealth may naturally be expected to produce. But since the time when this parable was delivered, much has been done to rescue man from many of the dangers and evils that beset him: Christianity is now established: the third Person of the Trinity has been sent from Heaven to sanctify the elect of God; and many of the virtues, to which human nature could never have attained by its own unassisted exertion, have been placed within our reach by the gracious aid vouchsafed to us from above. How many thousands are there, in this happy land, whose hearts and whose purses are ever open to the calls of humanity! who, giving in secret, may hope, that "He who seeth in secret" shall hereafter "reward them openly." Our Saviour's parable was formed upon the state of the world when he uttered it: all were then children of wrath; for then no atonement had been made for sin; neither had the Comforter descended, by whose operation all were to be sanctified.

Happy are those, who, by not resisting

the Spirit, have been so far sanctified, that they can hope, in some degree, to practise those virtues which Christianity enjoins, and who, possessing great wealth, and consequently great means of beneficence, apply it in the way most acceptable to Him who bestows that and all other blessings, in doing good, in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked; who, in the midst of numberless comforts, acknowledge the hand whence they receive them; and who may be truly said to convert these snares and temptations to sin, into steps to attain that happiness and that glory which were "prepared from the beginning," for those who were ultimately to be admitted "into the joy of their Lord."

H.

SERMONET LVIII.

I CORINTHIANS, XIV. 1.

Follow after charity.

HACKNEYED as is the subject of charity, something yet remains to be said, to bring it into common use. Let us see how its various characteristics may be incorporated with our daily deportment, in our intercourse with the world.

No one, in this enlightened age, will need to be told, that the charity of St. Paul has no relation to that which is practised in our streets, or that we may be eminently charitable, when ourselves in a state rather to receive than to give. Passing by these possibilities of erring, we will consider charity under all the lights the Apostle has afforded us, to discover it when genuine, and detect it when spurious. For the information of the inexperienced, and to direct those who need only to be taught what is right, to enter on the practice of

it, we must descend to very minute construction, and a close application of St. Paul's general assertions to particular and very ordinary cases.

The first characteristic of charity is, that it "suffereth long, and is kind." The trial of this ability, in common life, often comes from those with whom we live. Various tempers produce in others various vexations: the petty malignity of some, the irritating habits of others; the provocation that our own faults, and, alas! we may say even any little superiority of talent or merit, will give, and which recoils on ourselves!—the thousand ways of manifesting the hostility of human nature, and the ten thousand ways of being disagreeable, call for all the graces of charity to tolerate them; and those who can accomplish this important victory over their own feelings, whether culpable or excusable, and retain a kind, benevolent disposition towards the aggressor, are not only commendable, but happy. It is a superiority of satisfaction worth attaining; and, above all, to attain it, or endeavour at it, is an indispensable

part of our duty. A great assistant in the task is the cultivation of a spirit of cheerfulness, and a firm resolution not to be disturbed by trifles. On the contrary, any encouragement given to a morbid sensibility, is so much deducted from our power to please our Maker by our obedience.

“Not to envy,” is a feature of charity. If envy were not as much a folly as it is a vice, in vain would be all preaching against it. But most truly may it be said, that nothing can so entirely rob us of all pretensions to love and respect, as the subjection to this base, this ignorant feeling. Its best punishment is its indulgence; its readiest cure, an extended knowledge of the world.

If “charity vaunteth not itself,” all egotizing, all attempts, whether veiled or unveiled, to procure to ourselves applause; all boasting of talents, of wealth, of distinctions, with every other adroit art of self-exaltation, must be renounced, or we are amongst the uncharitable. Neither must we be elated with praise when deserved, or with honour when acquired.

Flattery must have no sufferance beyond that enjoined by charity; and the chilling recollection of our own fallen nature must mitigate the scorching rays of an ignorant or insidious adulation.

If "charity doth not behave itself unseemly," we must suppose its voice soft, its gestures modest, its expressions divested of all vehemence, its manners refined. If it "seeketh not its own," it is content when the credit it might claim is bestowed on another; and in any failure of what is due to it, more concerned to hide than to expose the error. If it is "not easily provoked," and "thinketh not evil," it is the last to understand or to suppose an affront: it is not of importance to itself sufficient to keep its own interests always in view; and it therefore does not readily comprehend itself as the object to another.

When it "rejoiceth not in iniquity," it does not anticipate the defects of its neighbour: it does not prophesy mistakes or misconduct; it is not employed in bearing about the evil tidings of another's disgrace. Having no pleasure "in iniquity," it has

no interest in disclosing it, but turns, sickening and disgusted, from the obtrusion of vice on its attention. Its rejoicing is reserved for "the truth;" and when that is made manifest, and triumphs over falsehood, then its rejoicing is great indeed.

While it "beareth all things," and "believeth all things," it does not make itself base by mean condescensions, or contemptible by credulity; but it offers to view the high considerations that overcome the paltry feelings of mortals unassisted by religion: and it professes its disposition to believe, in terms that have often confounded the liar. By "hoping all things," it gives the yet unstable in righteousness, time to recover from a false step; and by "enduring all things," it makes the injustice of the world profitable to its own future reward.

When we are told, that it "never faileth," we have the word of God through his inspired Apostle, that no repentance can attend our sacrifices to this compendium of Christian virtues. Be its consequences here what they may; be its inconveniences all that a corrupt world can throw in its

way; be it contemptible to the violent and foolishness to the cunning, still it shall not fail of its requital hereafter.

Nor even amongst the worthy of our own age and nation, shall it lose its value; for every one, capable of judging of morals or manners, will be sensible to the result of a character composed of such features, however ignorant of its genuine construction; and he who approaches the nearest to St. Paul's portrait, will be acknowledged by every term of fancy or of fashion, "the best-bred person" of their acquaintance.

NOTE.

WE must not be dejected, when, after our best endeavours, we find ourselves still short of this glorious standard: we must persevere; we must strive daily; we must overcome the evil of our minds, by forcing good on them. When we would disparage, we must find something to praise; when we would resent, we must recollect the juster resentment of God towards us; when we would make ourselves the object of attention, we must say, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" when we could rejoice in the disgrace

of others, or envy their honours, we must call up feelings of self-abhorrence. In short, by a regular system of counteraction we must gradually change our nature.

But nothing must induce us to believe the virtue of charity, in all its branches, unattainable, or dependent entirely on a conformation of the material part of us. It is practised every day, by many who have had, at first, the same difficulties as those which discourage us, to overcome. Some true recital might be appended to every article of its description. One must suffice, and this attaches to "the hope" that it practises.

After a large dinner-party at the house of Mr. —, a silver salver was missing, and suspicion fell upon a lad newly taken into the family as a servant: he was examined, but he persisted in denying all knowledge of the loss, though he owned having had the piece of plate in his hands, and in his custody. No interrogation could make him confess more; and he seemed to add lying and hardened obstinacy, to theft. Nobody but his master had any doubt of his guilt; and prudence dictated his dismissal. His master added no severity to his punishment: he encouraged him to refer any new employer to him; and, when called on to speak to his merits, he revealed the circumstance; at the same time stating the suspension of his own belief. The lad was not rejected; common cause was rather made between his

old and new master, to protect him from desperation and from ruin.

The time of year not calling for the decorations of the table, some time elapsed before the matter was revived : but at the very next occasion of opening the plate-chest, the salver dropped from the foot of a bread-basket, which had been heedlessly set down on it, and had carried it away in a hasty movement : it had fastened itself into the hollow, and there it had remained. Mr. —, it is scarcely necessary to add, omitted nothing that could exculpate the lad. Valuable as was his acquittal to *him*, more valuable is the story to *us*.

Of a very different school was the nobleman, to whom the following authentic anecdote belongs. In a coffee-house in Holland, Lord — accidentally met the Earl of —, the straitness of whose finances was no secret to him. He entered into conversation with him, during which he had the ungentlemanly indiscretion to produce a bank-note of large amount, which he challenged the Earl to match. The revenge to which he exposed himself was fairly taken, by the drawing out a little shabby pocket-book, and producing from it a bill with a receipt to it. The Earl contented himself with saying, “ I believe your Lordship will find it as difficult to match this.”

SERMONET LIX.

ST. LUKE, II. 29, 30.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.

SUCH were the words of the pious Simeon, who had been permitted to live to see Him who came into the world to be the Saviour of the whole human race! He who uttered them had reached a very advanced age, most probably in the earnest expectation of the appearance of the Messiah,—which expectation was now realized; and having been the witness of this great event, he is prepared to die! There is much in the text that addresses itself to the feelings of every one; for who is there who would not wish, when his life, be it long or short, is drawing to its close, to depart in peace? Mankind have, generally speaking, great apprehensions of death; but a philosopher of our country has observed, that these ap-

prehensions rather resemble the fears of children to go in the dark, than any innate rational fear, as there are many passions of the human mind that make us either defy or wish for death.

The influence which the text should have on us, is to recommend the enviable temper and resignation which Simeon seems to have been possessed of; and it may be hoped, it is not above our reach; as there seems no reason to suppose, that—in this respect at least—Simeon was “favoured of Heaven so highly,” that what was granted to him, must be unattainable by us. But it by no means follows, that, if it be attainable, it is so without some exertions, some care, on our part. To die like the righteous, we must live like the righteous; to die in peace, we must live in peace; to depart like Simeon, we must live, as we may suppose Simeon had lived, else must our hope be vain. “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” We must have lived in conformity to the law of Him, whose grace alone can enable us to die in

peace, before we can expect or have a claim to this high prerogative.

But, let any one observe how few there are, who seem, in their various occupations, to bear in mind the probability of the peace or the trouble of their latter end. How many are there, whose whole day is spent in one continued succession of vice or folly! with whom the certainty of a future state, and all that revealed religion has communicated to us concerning it, is of no more weight or authority than a fairy tale! What reasonable hope have such persons of departing in peace?

Of the text, it may be observed, that he who uttered it does not make it a prayer, that he *may* depart in peace; but, probably from a conviction that his life had been such as justified the expectation, he breaks out into the fervent anticipation of that which awaited him, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

To the above may be added, that the peace which attended Simeon's death was not the stupor of indifference and insensibility. He had, in pious hope, waited the

coming of Jesus Christ; and that event having happened, he was permitted to depart. Those, therefore, who affect by an insensibility, which they are pleased to dignify with the name of magnanimity, to show themselves superior to the apprehensions of death, may, at least, learn that the peace of Simeon arose from his piety, and not from a disregard of that which is most awful and most important. They may learn that true religion, at the same time that it speaks tremendous truths of the power and avenging arm of Omnipotence, can confer resignation and hope on him from whose eyes this earthly scene is about to vanish for ever; and, disclaiming to delude its votaries with unfounded ideas of security, openly declares that we all stand "in jeopardy;" that it is only by the mediation of the Saviour that man can expect to be saved; but that still there is comfort for all, and that man may hope.

H.

NOTE.

CAN it be believed, that in the eighteenth century of established Christianity, men could, on choice or principle, seem relapsed into the barbarous ignorance of the "times of darkness?" What would be said of an astronomer, who should now argue on the system of Descartes and Tycho Brahe, rejecting all that has been done for the science by Galileo, Copernicus, and our immortal Newton? But is this worse than, when "life and immortality have been brought to light by the Gospel," and fallen man's sole dependence on the mercy of God has been made so clear, to talk as historians have done, of suicide as Roman death, and to strive to amuse us with the nonsense of Charon and his ferry-boat, in describing the last awful hour of an infidel! A hope might be entertained, that this infamous delusion, and contemptible trifling, can be obtruded on us no more; but though, perhaps, not so daring as heretofore, the spirit is not quelled. The national sentiment will now, however, we may trust, under the blessing of God, keep it within the narrow circuit of its proper domain; for nobody can hope for applause in revealing the petty wit of metaphysical ladies, if they amuse their nurses and their waiting-maids with their fancied invitations to the Elysian fields, when they ought rather to be repeating, in all the clamour of imminent danger and heart-rending repentance, "Lord, save me, or I perish!"

SERMONET LX.

PSALM XCVII. 10.

Hate the thing which is evil.

WOULD to God we could obey this precept! It has been said, and by one whose pious spirit is now, it is to be hoped and believed, rejoicing in the deeds done in the body, that repentance, to be sincere, must be grounded “on a real hatred to sin, and a real desire to obey God.” Which of us can say we have a real hatred to sin? We can conscientiously, as far as we know ourselves, hope that we have a real desire to please God; and it may be rashly concluded by those who judge of spiritual by worldly matters, that the inconsistency of a desire to please God, with any thing short of a hatred to sin, proves that, if we have the virtuous inclination, we must have the virtuous antipathy. But here it is that we show the vanity of earthly wisdom. No mathematical demonstrations, no arithmetical

results, no mechanical processes, can reach the waywardness of the heart of man; no line can fathom the abyss of folly into which it sinks, whenever it escapes from the hand of God. No wonder that the Gospel was "an offence," and "a stumbling-block;" no wonder that it was "foolishness to the wise," for it was wisdom to the foolish!

To convince ourselves of the state of our disposition towards that which we are commanded to hate, it is necessary to enumerate a few of the characteristics of the aversion recommended to us. Whatever we thoroughly hate, we uniformly shun:—we are in no danger from its attractions, its temptations, its fascinations, or its allurements:—consequently, if we really hate evil, evil is not capable of acquiring an ascendancy over us. Neither as a whole, nor in part, can it be formidable: every thing that bears its aspect will share in our feeling of dislike;—as the resemblance of a person who has never offended us, to one who has given us offence, is sufficient to create aversion,—and no fancied gratification will induce us to tolerate even the offered kind-

ness of those who have incurred our displeasure.

Happy for us would it be, had we this genuine feeling towards evil of all kinds; but it is not so: and, in our corrupt state, our utmost endeavours will fall far short of what are probably the honest wishes of many of us. We can love good much more easily and perfectly, than we can hate evil. Good says honestly to its votaries—"Give me the whole heart; nothing else will content me in receiving, or you in giving:" but Evil says, insidiously—"I ask only the smallest portion;" well knowing that one footstep makes way for another.

The natural propensity of human nature in its fallen state, is to evil; but the propensity, though strong, does not amount to a total proneness. Good has a share in the affections, more or less, of all but the most abandoned of human brutes; and our interest and our business are to take as much as possible out of the scale loaded with evil, and add it to the light burden in that appropriated to good.

But none of us must fancy, either that

we have attained a complete hatred of evil, or that, while we perceive any remaining attachment to it, we cannot hope we have any love for good. "The heart is deceitful above all things;" and daily and hourly are we exposed to attacks, which if they make no impression, only prove that they missed our weakest places. We are told by the Gospel, that hatred of sin is necessary to the love of God; and it is our duty to act, as far as is possible, in conformity to this information. We must strive to hate sin; we must every day dismiss our love for something connected with it. We must purify our hearts; but we must wait patiently, till "this corruption has put on incorruption," to perfect our endeavours.

NOTE.

To those who, guided by the light of revelation, are acquainted with the fallen state of our nature, it is as painful to hear the bragging boasts of pride and self-complacency, as to a musician to listen to voices and instruments in discordance; or to a painter to see a well-coloured picture where the outline is out of all drawing; or to an architect to witness the erec-

tion of a noble edifice, which must fall under its own ill-supported weight. “ You are wrong; I am right” —“ I am quite satisfied with my own conduct” —“ wish all the world did their duty as I do mine” —“ am sure I suffer enough to atone for all my sins whatever they are ;” are expressions no less surprising when uttered by a Christian, than oaths would be from the lips of a bishop. When the want of experience is at the bottom of this ignorance, it is pitiable, and there is hope ; but when it is seated in arrogance, there is, as we are told, “ more hope of a fool.”

Children should be very early taught the grace of owning themselves wrong, and rather to take demerit to themselves than to throw it on another. As they advance towards judgment, the positive rejection of undue praise should be encouraged : their honest circumstantial proof that opinion was too favourable to them, should be listened to, and followed by increased esteem and confidence. The first sign of uncommon integrity given by a lad, whom an early and honourable death removed from the service of his country, was his contradicting a servant who apologized for him, by saying that something wrong he had done, was accident : “ ’Twas not accident,” said he ; “ I did it on purpose, in a passion.”

Those really skilled in knowledge of the world, will see the immediate advantages attendant on this candour, as well as the more important reward which

may be hoped for hereafter : but others will be, perhaps, as implicitly believed, when they see and prognosticate the worst consequences from it, and rank speaking truth and disclaiming praise amongst the diagnostics of pitiable weakness.

L.

SERMONET LXI.

PSALM XLVI. 1.

A very present help in trouble.

THAT the Deity is the shield of those who are in distress, is the uniform language of Scripture. The revelations made to the Patriarchs—the leading the Jews up from Egypt, by a miraculous deliverance; and their prosperity in the midst of their enemies—all performed by power more than human, might be adduced to confirm the truth of the text; but an appeal needs not to be made to the events of so remote a period; for though we do not expect the sea to be divided to advance man's happiness, or to rescue him from danger, yet the occurrences of every day “in the changes and chances of this life,” are sufficient, without any farther allusion, to show that man must endure trouble; that in his trouble he is compelled to look for help, and that no help can be found, save from God alone.

But even in admitting that God is the only help of man, the most important part of the text is omitted; for we are told, not merely that he is our help, but that he is “a present help;” from which we must infer, that by his nature, his connexion with us, his spirit which he infuses into us, and the dominion which he has over us, he is a present help in trouble: yet even in this we must observe, that a man may fail of help from God, if he does not properly apply to it; or, under particular circumstances, God *may* withhold that help of which man may seem to stand in need. But we do not address persons whose conduct has drawn down the judgments of Heaven, or whom the Deity has, in his wrath, left to follow their own imaginations.

But those who are desirous that in their troubles the help of God should be a present help, it may be proper to remind, that it is in every one’s power to render it so, as the essential requisite in obtaining it, is that state of mind which the Gospel not only requires, but has the greatest tendency

to produce. With the light of the Gospel to conduct him, a man cannot fail to perceive the absolute inanity, as to any pleasure or profit, of the greater part of the pursuits of the world; pursuits which have no other origin than the avarice or the ambition, or perhaps the idleness of men: in these cases, the reason of man, unaided by revelation, might be supposed of sufficient avail; but it is desirable, inasmuch as there are real cares and real calamities to which all are subject, to point out to the truly afflicted that never-failing source of consolation to which all are invited. "Come unto me, all ye that are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." To the Gospel then we are invited for help: not that he who has lived in a state of habitual sin, whose mind is polluted and disgraced with corruption, can expect, "when destruction cometh upon him as an armed man;" to receive the help that he may hope for.—It was the habitual temper of David's mind, most probably, that enabled him to derive that comfort which religion only can bestow:

it was from the constant sense of God's superintending providence, that he acquired that strength of mind which enabled him to bear up under all his calamities, and to discover that, in any degree of trouble, God was a present help.

Neither let any one suppose, that though David might experience this help, yet to us who live under a different dispensation, when inspiration of every kind has ceased, no such help is promised, and consequently no such hope can reasonably be entertained. To us the Spirit of God still speaks, animating us, and enabling us to discharge our duty, if haply we be found willing and obedient.

If we look into the world, who amongst the afflicted have behaved with most dignity?—those who have trusted to the world, or those who have trusted to religion for support? We appeal to every day's experience for the answer.

Religion does not require a man to disgrace himself because he is unfortunate: it does not tell him that the wicked have peace; for the wicked have not peace:

those only have peace in this world who seek it in the next. The voluptuary, therefore, who hopes to banish his cares, or alleviate his afflictions, in vice, will ultimately find himself the dupe of his own folly: the enervated mind is no more calculated to resist the dart of affliction, than the debilitated body the attacks of disease:—from virtue alone is strength of mind to be acquired.

Among the ten thousand blessings which Christianity offers to her votaries in this life, we may reckon, that she enables us to avoid many of the direst evils to which human nature is subject; and those which we cannot avoid, her precepts alone can alleviate.

Let him, therefore, who is tried with affliction, forbear complaining or repining; let him learn, that whatever God brings upon him, God will enable him to bear: “heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”

“O! tarry thou the Lord’s leisure: be strong; and he shall comfort thy heart; and put thou thy trust in the Lord.”

SERMONET LXII.

PROVERBS, XIX. 27.

Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.

THE word knowledge shall here be used as meaning knowledge of our duty towards God, as derived from revelation: it is assuming no more than is allowed when we translate "the fool" of the Psalms, as designating him who has not sense enough to find, or to seek, the only path in which a wise man would wish to tread.

In applying the prohibition to our own use, we shall instantly feel anxious to discover what amongst us, and in the course of our instruction, is that which we ought to abstain from hearing.

There never, perhaps, was a time in which the caution was more necessary to be given; nor, it may be added, when it was more difficult to avoid transgressing against it. The blending of good with evil is now so

intricate, that, lest we reject the former, we accept the latter :—we postpone, beyond the term assigned in the Gospel, the separation of the tares from the wheat ; and we are sometimes so much at a loss to distinguish them, that we seem to acquiesce in the resignation of the task to an order of beings above us. All that can be done here is, to enforce the necessity of distinguishing them, as far as we can, and to warn the inexperienced that snakes may lurk where there seems nothing but verdure.

It may startle the innocent readers of the present knowledge-seeking age, if it be asserted that they court the danger of taking evil for good, by the very form and fashion of their studies ; but the assertion is well-founded, and the danger is imminent.

To throw the bridle on the neck of judgment, to spread the wings of imagination, and to launch into the boundless empyreum of fancy, can never be the sober advice of those who wish well to a rising generation—but advice of an extremely opposite tendency is not less dangerous. It does not follow, that, in avoiding one edge of a pro-

montory, we are safe on the other; nor will it be found, that those who discard the vivid powers of the intellect, and cultivate exclusively the investigating or calculating faculties of the mind, are at all nearer making the only profitable use that can be made of the best gifts that Infinite Wisdom has to bestow on creatures intended for immortality.

This only profitable use, no one will deny to be the advancing our eternal interests, which interests can be advanced no other way than by making all "our thoughts, words, and works," tend to the glory of our Maker. In the liberal and affluent situations of life, our studies so much affect this purpose, that to regulate them is a prime concern with the conscientious.

One of the first questions such persons should ask themselves, with regard to their pursuits, is, "Do they tend to, or counteract, the glory of our Maker?" If the former, is the manner in which they are conducted, in harmony with this tendency? and is the motive such, as, on such principles, may be avowed?

Certainly there are few of the innocent species of study, such as those to whom we address ourselves will pursue, which may not tend to a justifiable, nay, a laudable purpose, and be made conducive to the glory of God: and to common observation, and a mind not rendered suspicious by experience, it appears that there are none more directly entitled to this praise, than such as investigate the works, whether minute or magnificent, of the Creator, which are called the productions of Nature: but a question remains—Do we search in order to confirm, or to impugn, religious belief? And it is very much to be feared, that the answer will justify the caution of the text; for it is too observable, that, in this age of calculation, of analyzation, of decomposition, of metaphysics and subtle reasoning, shipwreck has been often made of that faith which is “the anchor of the soul,” and for which, in the storm that separates our mortal bodies from their immortal partners, we may seek and cry in vain, unless, warned in time by the example and the exhortations of some of the best and greatest

of mankind, we can be persuaded to examine the heavens, and explore the earth and its abysses, with our Bibles in our hands, and a belief of their contents in our hearts.

The misery of neglecting this advice may and must be great to an individual; for, to forego the comfort, the satisfaction, the support of religion, is, beyond all comparison, to give up the greatest that the universe has to offer; but there is a further danger attending the neglect. In the fashion of teaching by methods that spare the trouble of learning, a very heavy responsibility is thrown on those who communicate knowledge—the mind of the disciple is prostrate—it pledges itself to imbibe whatever is poured on it; and any individual guilty of such fearful presumption as to conceal the hand of the Divine Artificer, while displaying his works, or who, admitting the hand, shortens its power, has to answer not only for his own defection, but for that of all those whom he assists to lead astray. There is no one amongst us who can answer for the last half-hour of life: the wisest, the greatest, the

most admired and applauded in the valuation of this world, may, at that moment, feel, and be forced to publish with his own expiring voice, that Christianity is no fable, and the threatenings of the inspired writers no “*vox et præterea nihil.*”

Nothing is gained by all the knowledge in this world, if our hopes in another are shaken: men who would teach, could it be taught, more than the wisdom of all ages comprehends, are still pests of society, if the glory of God be not part of their system; and the youth of our country should be most studiously prevented from hearing their instruction, unless that of a far wiser set of beings can counteract the mischief it may occasion. “You may see your error when too late,” is a prophecy that must not be suppressed, and cannot be imprinted too deeply or too early in the mind.

But it is not only in pursuits of science, that we are in danger from this species of instruction: our amusements, trifling as they seem, and vapid as they are, are now made deep lessons of error, and are some

of the worst conduits of immorality and an unsuspected infidelity. Profound writers may slay their thousands, but light writers may boast their millions destroyed: learning may attack, but genius will sap; and the fortress may seem impregnable till the moment when it crushes all whom its ruin can reach. The popular taste for reading is of late much refined; and on the authority of one very well informed of the world's palate, it may be asserted, that better productions are now rejected when offered for publication, than many which, thirty years ago, met with attention and applause. Vulgar adventures of imaginary persons have given place to portraits of manners, by which the lower ranks hope to get acquainted with the etiquette of high life; and readers who were accustomed to seek amusement by seeing their own modes and habits of life reflected, now take a superior track, and prefer the mind's excursions of opinion.

Now, if there is one exercise of discretion more valuable than another, it is that which inclines us to ask, whether the writer

whose opinions we seek to know, be of a description that renders those opinions worth learning and safe in adopting; because a very little experience will inform us, that if we are deceived in this point, and at all inclined to be dazzled by the glitter of false eloquence, we may, when meaning only to indulge our curiosity, go much farther. While gazing on a poisonous substance, we may inhale its effluvia; and the terms of commendation used in closing many a mischievous volume, by those who intended to be disgusted, prove what is in the power of words.

But, as if our own language and our own power of human corruption were insufficient to the destruction of the moral sense, we borrow from neighbours, of whose characters we cannot be ignorant, but whose sentence of condemnation to discredit, we reverse or suspend as often as they give notice that they will amuse us; and under the artful veil of idiom that will not yet bear close translation, we seek error of every kind—to-day in the profligate sophistry of an inflammable novel—to-mor-

row in the enveloped poison of shallow, mazy metaphysics—and all, perhaps, at the time when, in compliance with what we think fashion, we affect to be in search only of the collateral relation of religion.

Nor are these poisons left to themselves to operate, or these fire-balls to explode at hazard. The public attention is forced on them: we must *not* read; and if we are obstinate, and will not make ourselves acquainted with that, of which we had better be ignorant, the sum and substance are afresh extracted—the ingredients are anew concocted; and the critic has told us, before we are well aware of it, what we refused to hear from the author.

Still there is hope. Curiosity is seldom long-lived, and the quick succession of novelty superannuates last week's tale. The caprice of Fashion might assist us; and by consigning the labours of the wise and the foolish purveyors of amusement, promiscuously, to high shelves and utter forgetfulness, she might save some from ever reading, and others from recollecting, these scum-like productions of diseased nature;

but if their authors follow them into our attractive country—if they are to be received as the arbiters of literary taste—if we are weak and conceited enough to believe that they condemn themselves, when they only fear detection; and if we do not see, that, “becoming all things to all men,” they hope to recover those whom their daring immorality may have lost them, we are gone as the virtuous English, and must no more look for that almost miraculous mercy, under which, ungrateful as we are, we have been spared from “the sword, the pestilence, and the famine.”

NOTE.

EVERY thing ought here to be said that can defend the inexperienced from the misery of having, at any period of life, listened to instruction in the ways of error. They should know how the pure mind may and should resent any insidious attack. They should learn by their fruits to know these upas-trees. Asking a very well informed friend, in every respect of the world of fashion, and an enthusiastic votary of genius, what that production of literature could be, which in mentioning it, so shocked and disgusted her,

that her voice, when she spoke of it, faltered, and her eyes seemed to appeal to Heaven, as under an apprehension of guilt, her answer was—"It is a description of every species of illicit passion: it artfully takes its point of time when the French cast off all the obligations of religion, consequently it has a spacious range of possible iniquity: the wretched creatures who stand forwardest in its dramatis personæ are, the one an Atheist, the other a Deist: 't is true, they are all unhappy at last; but the poison is absorbed, and the antidote may come too late: it may be a pretext, but it is no defence. I have incautiously, and yielding to the present excitement of curiosity, read it; but I repent it sincerely; for the soil my mind had received was not instantly to be removed: it made me wretched; but now, thank God! I feel only anger at having spent my time on reading a work which, though the production of unequalled talent, and the employment of the most attractive powers of fascination, I do not scruple to say, notwithstanding the professions of the author, deserves, more than any libel, to be publicly burnt."

Now let any person, at an age to judge between right and wrong, and with the perfect use of reason, recollect what we are by religious profession:—we choose to be called Christians;—well, then! we acknowledge in the Almighty Creator of the world, a Father, a Protector, a Judge: we must not, therefore, think lightly of his love, his providence, or his

justice: he has, by our Lord, told us that we must, by every mean in our power, endeavour to recover, as far as fallen nature can, the purity of heart forfeited by the transgression of our first parents: he has warned us that it will be found very difficult to accomplish this, in any degree, and absolutely impossible, unless we submit to the guidance of his Holy Spirit. He has promised us we shall not want for his help, if we will but seek it, and accept the atonement offered by our blessed Lord for our deficiencies: he has told us, that our reward shall be everlasting life, never-ending happiness, and an admission to the effulgent glory of his presence; and he has denounced his extreme displeasure, and its most terrific consequences, against those who obstruct or mislead us.

What judgment then must such persons as are referred to, form of writers seemingly of the same, or nearly the same church as ourselves, who, either by gross obtrusions, or refined insinuations, place before their fellow-creatures' minds, in the hope of fixing their attention and interesting their corrupt or their weak feelings, exactly those scenes and those sentiments which must injure that purity, which, if wholly lost, we should strive to recover; if in any measure retained, we must preserve, and by all means strive to increase; but which at our peril we renounce? "How any of us in our senses," said an amiable and elegant young woman of birth and fashion, "can, when we are told that the pure in heart shall see

God, endanger that glorious privilege by listening to the voice of passion, and, above all, how any one can dare to teach others what must tend to corrupt that purity, is matter of awful wonder. What is there in wit or poetry that can allure to so heinous a crime?—what talents can justify it?—what repentance can atone for it?” She should have asked farther, What credit is due to the essays, the dissertations, the relations, the opinions, of such writers? Is virtue to be sought in a work, because without a story, when the former fictions of the same pen have striven to root it out?

Were it permitted to describe the last hours of a lovely accomplished young woman, who, only that she might, as she fondly fancied, repel the attacks of French moralists, had dipped into the liberal system of doubt and denial, nothing more would be wanting to make us cling to “the Rock of our salvation:” fever, not to be subdued, was kept up by remorse; and when encouraged to make exertions, on which her life was thought to depend, her reply was, “If I recover, and these horrible ideas return—O! I had rather die than live.”

In conclusion, let entreaty prevail on all who have not renounced the terms of the Gospel, to make its doctrines the strict rule of life:—let neither fashion nor flattery, neither curiosity nor admiration, mislead them. Evil, whether aimed at our purity or our faith, is to be avoided; its access to us is, with

all our might, to be stopped ; and our appearance in every point must declare under whom we serve. With firmness and honesty, every invitation to associate with people of avowed, or even discovered bad principle, must be declined : it is no honour, it is degrading, to sit down with those below us in the rank of morals ; and no mock humanity, no cant of charity and philanthropy, will apologize for it. No genius, no eloquence, must recommend bad books to our perusal : if we feel as we ought, that which should entitle them to fame, is so much detracted from it : it is the base, treacherous use of God's good gifts.

Having accomplished, as may be easily and most profitably done, the keeping at a distance bad people, and shutting our ears and eyes against bad books, our insidious enemies will go home again ; and we may be left by them in happy neglect and inestimable peace.

L.

SERMONET LXIII.

ST. MARK, XV. 40.

There were also women looking on afar off, among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less, and of Joses, and Salome ; who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him ; and many other women, which came up with him unto Jerusalem.

WERE it conducive to any useful purpose, to decide who, of all those persons to whom our blessed Lord condescended to address his discourses, and whom he made intimate with his gracious views for the benefit of mankind, seemed most disposed to listen and to learn, the female sex might, perhaps, find themselves distinguished ; yet, any vanity or self-complacency consequent on this distinction, would hardly be excusable. The female mind, by the goodness of God, was rendered, in its original formation, more susceptible of the

impression to be made by the gentle hand of Christianity; and while women, with heartfelt gratitude, acknowledge the invaluable privilege, they must remember, that at the moment when they boast of it, they forfeit it; and, instead of retaining it as an aid to virtue, convert it into an auxiliary of their busy tempter.

Happy for them if they meet, in time to correct them, the reproof uttered by a very unworthy man, who, when one of a greatly superior character inadvertently, but with the best intention, said, "I boast myself a Christian," replied, "A Christian never boasts."

Admitting the female sex, in consequence of its characteristics, to have been thus honoured, our reason and our best feelings will join in the remark, that some vestiges of this fitness to receive a benefit, and of the benefit received, may be expected to subsist amongst the women even of our own time. Family-likeness descends through many generations; family-talents may be traced; and, alas! family-infirmities are communicable: but the likeness and the

talents wear out in a few successions : the infirmities, perhaps, adhere more strongly ; and the likeness most desirable, that which would, at once, declare the ladies of the present day the uncorrupted daughters of those exemplary females who “ ministered unto” Jesus, and in the closing scenes of his life followed him, weeping, is, it is to be feared, nearly extinct amongst us.

It may be so ; and it will appear so, if indiscriminately we survey the manners and habits of this half of the creation ; but we must not content ourselves with a cursory survey, in a matter that thus involves the interests of the whole world ; and a survey, not cursory, will prove that, at least in this country, however the likeness may be lost in general, it is preserved by some, and, in our times, has been most assiduously renewed, as far as assimilation, the result of industrious inquiry, could give the ability. Let the necessity of censure, and the disposition to censure, be what they may, whoever chooses to keep good company, whoever seeks the friendship of the worthy, and shuts the door

against vice and vicious folly, may see, and must see, that the character of women, of the better sort, is daily rising, not merely by the acquisition of elegant accomplishment, or the pursuit of knowledge—for the one is often frivolous, and the other vain—but by an honest, indefatigable anxiety to know the will of God, and to do it. “I have it at heart to make my children good, and I know no means but religion;”—“I want a teacher for them, of morals rather than of accomplishments”—is the language we daily hear; and young persons are certainly much more acquainted with the Scriptures, and informed in points of duty, than they were fifty years ago. Aunts, intrusted with the care of nieces, are seen fulfilling the duty of parents; nay, those proverbially odious beings, stepmothers, have worn out or worked out prejudice.

But still, with a host of good examples around us, there is, we well know, a large, and, it is to be feared, a much larger part of the female sex, who need being reminded of their pedigree, to recollect that they are, as Christians, the representatives of

those women, who “ministered” to our blessed Lord, and followed him to Jerusalem and to his crucifixion. If we accuse them of having lost their family-likeness, it becomes necessary to compare the features.

In doing this, every fair allowance must be made for difference of existing circumstances, and even for the cessation of impulse. During the short period of our Saviour’s active life, it is easy to conceive that the curiosity and attention of women as vain and as frivolous, perhaps, as English ladies, in their usual habits, would be so seized on and engrossed, that dress and amusements might have sunk in rank and estimation with them; and that, when once “He who spake as never man spake,” had opened to their view a Heaven to be inhabited only by those renouncing the concerns of this world, these trifles would have become matters of confirmed depreciation. We are not thus seized on and engrossed; for the Gospel does not strike us with its novelty; neither are we, perhaps, so disposed to think, that the con-

cerns of this world and another are incompatible. The women, we may suppose, who followed our Lord, might be stunned into the adoption of such new doctrine; they had, we may think, no time to recover from the impression of a novel system; but, when once their minds resumed their tone, it is not to be doubted, and indeed it is evident from St. Paul's complaints of them, that they became very women again.

Some, alas! did so; and many might do so; but still the Acts of the Apostles tell us, that "not a few believed;" and, moreover, for the encouragement of the great, these "not few" were "of the chief women." Christianity must, therefore, be supposed indebted, under God, to women of rank for part of its furtherance; and these women must, to have been thus recorded, have renounced "the pomps and vanities" of a world much more hostile than that we live in, to the interests of Christian ladies: *they* could take no pleasure in vying with each other in distinctions of any kind, but those of their "meek and

quiet" spirits; *their* amusements must have been the charities of life; the subjects of *their* attention must have had a connexion with things far above the frivolous occupations of the unbelievers amongst whom they lived; and, moreover, and most incontrovertibly, as they must have seen that their divine Master came especially to teach us to conquer the most absorbing passions of our nature, *they* neither could have indulged in a spirit of covetousness, nor have, by the immodest exposure of *their* persons, first excited, and then, thanks to the fiat of the Almighty! disgusted the moral corruption of the other sex. They must have seen, if they thought at all (and we have no warrant for supposing them fools), that, in the one case, they were doing all in their power to lead a soul to perdition; and, in the other, defeating not only their own intentions, but those of their Creator, who, in the institution of marriage, had prepared for these two parts of his creation, a lot replete with all that can fill the human heart with sensations of

gratitude, and secured by the fences of reason and moderation.

Now, let us figure to ourselves some one of these elegant Christian women: she cannot have been, in appearance, much unlike what we have seen, when the best taste prevailed among us, and was not deformed by excess. No erroneous idea of external sanctity or austerity, however excusable when provoked by the abominable excesses of after-times, marked her out as a candidate for a well-earned distinction. She would understand that she was of a religion inculcating innocent compliances; she would feel that dissimilarity lessens our power of recommending what is right; she would, therefore, conform, that she might not shock, and try to attach, lest she should repel. If she had any one to please, she would try to please: if the bounty of nature had given her fine hair, though it would not occupy her time or attention, it would partake her care with the rest of her person: if her form was fine, she thought it justice to her Maker not to disgrace it;

but in the choice of her attire, recollecting the spirit of Christianity, though the Tyrian purple, the heavenly azure, the golden sunbeam, might vary her garments, and give to her contemplative mind fresh food for admiration; yet the rule of chastity, and its precursor, modesty, would be ever inviolable. Her decent garment would be folded over her bosom; her arms would be covered, because the display of them would be no gratification; and, unless when convenience opposed it, her delicacy would prefer a length of drapery that should intercept the coarse gaze of a less correct eye, when she moved. She would neither expose herself for the sake of being seen, nor hide herself for the sake of being sought. Her spirit would be pure, and her character would, therefore, be simple; and, like many that might be quoted even now, she would be too much occupied with her real interests, and the discharge of her duties, to fancy that allurements would procure happiness, or the seeking her own pleasure be accepted

by her Maker, as the praiseworthy use of her one talent.

Who now will venture to draw the contrasting figure? It must not pollute this page. Let it be left to the publications of the day, to point out how the women of a country, almost the only one not visited by the scourge of the Almighty! do, and may still farther, degrade themselves, by not only offering to view, but forcing on the view of their very servants, as much of their persons as they think will be endured. It is a fitter task for the religious moralist to warn them, that they are worse enemies to Christianity than worse women: the silly and inexperienced fancy it right, because it is done by women of repute: if women of no repute did as much, it could do no harm to others; but, in general, they are better friends to themselves. God send a spirit of reformation amongst the ladies of this favoured country!

NOTE.

WHAT must that sort of error be which taxes the invention of an humble writer to find decent terms in which to attempt correcting it? The evil here pointed out, is of this description; and now calls almost for the interference of the legislature. Those excesses which the law can reach, do not, perhaps, as much mischief—Smollett and Sterne may have less to answer for, than the Anacreon and Monk of our day. If it be indeed true, that “a star of the second magnitude” did send down mantles and shawls for the needy ladies of a large company, we may hope; and certainly, as the newspapers have kindly announced, that in the ensuing season the dress of high fashion is “to display the back, bosom, and shoulders, as much as possible,” we cannot have long to wait for his kind exertions. Can any thing be so coarse, so disgusting, as this advertisement? Could it be credited, if our enemies were to affirm it of us, that we shall see it verified? Let no one say it is of no consequence—that the men do not mind it, and that women mean no harm:—That the men are disgusted—that they leave parties, wearied of endeavouring not to see “backs, shoulders, and bosom”—that they do not even laugh; that they rave, is much to their credit, and is the real effect, but not that intended:—the design is the vulgar one; and the only distinction that charity can

make, is between active delinquents, those who *set*, and passive delinquents, those who *follow*, this nauseating fashion. No one will ever, or ought ever, to reconcile the conscientious eye to this enormous departure from right. Not a great lady's standing before corporations, and deputations, in a display of person that made many thankful, for decency's sake, that it was a visit not to be repeated, has done away the feeling of renewed disapprobation: the mind's eye cannot forbear to see it—it attracts or offends observation; and though the advantageous contrast of extreme colours may make sables desirable on such an occasion, it really only renders the folly more deplorable.

Quitting the subject as it regards the men—for it is painful to think of it in this relation—it remains to be noticed, that instances of coarseness of manners and expressions, are growing more frequent amongst women: in their defence of the practice, they discuss and decide questions better suffered to rest: in their orders to their artificers, they violate the respect due to themselves; and certainly, in considering how much “they may show,” they do not contract their ideas.

The forbearance demanded of those who live in the world, precludes the use of facts, the repetition of opinion, and all the most powerful weapons of a most unholy practice; but thus much may be asserted, that friendship and protection have been with-

held by it, and that a husband's life might have been endangered by it, had he seen what all saw but himself.

Nor, in this case, must some who feel as they ought for the sex, escape without reproof. Mothers, perfectly decorous themselves, strip their daughters into fashion; and remonstrance is not spared where those not so immediately under authority, are averse to the shameless custom. The wretched plea, of "doing like the rest of the world," that is, following the multitude to do evil, is brought forward to accomplish their purpose, and to excuse their toleration of the practice in their acquaintance. And in those who in no way encourage it, there is still something to condemn if they are silent. Why do not husbands, fathers, masters of families, declare it shall not be? Why do not wives, mothers, and women of influence, say what they think? There would then be no occasion to "follow a multitude to do evil;" for if there were no admission to fine houses and gay amusements, without decent covering, the multitude would soon be covered, and, at least externally, decent. The world is not as obstinate as it is thoughtless; and the very becoming courage of Mrs. —, who stopped fifty questions of, Have you been there? and, Will you not go there? by saying, "To speak honestly, I do not think it becoming me, as the wife of a bishop, to be seen in all places of amusement—" might be imitated to very good purpose, by those

whose years or situation in society give them a right to say, that “bosoms, backs, and shoulders, exposed as much as possible,” are fashions not becoming them as professors of Christianity,—and in themselves fit only for savages, or a lower order of females. Mr. S—— was the advocate of decency, when at a ball where was a lady of large dimensions, on the eve of assuming the maternal character, and in the “first fashion” of “bosom, back, and shoulders,” he whispered his next neighbour, “Pray, is that lady from any of the South-Sea islands?”

L.

SERMONET LXIV.

ST. JOHN, XIV. 16.

I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter.

IN the declaration contained in the text, we trace the same tender regard towards his followers that had been manifested by our Saviour during the whole period of his abode on the earth. He was now about to leave them;—but he would not leave them comfortless:—he therefore promises that a divine Personage should be sent from Heaven to perfect the work which he had in part achieved; and the operation of this divine Personage, who was to guide them into all truth, seems sufficiently proved by comparing the conduct of the Apostles, before that event had taken place, with what it was, subsequent to it. Of the affection of the disciples towards their Master, no one can doubt: the zeal of Peter is not to be considered as a single instance; all,

save Judas, though with different species of attachment, according to their different minds and habits of thinking, loved him ardently : and if they failed in acting consistently with that feeling, it was, perhaps, to be attributed merely to human infirmity ; which might be permitted to show itself in this manner, to point out the necessity of something being done to aid the weakness of man, or, in other words, of sending the Comforter.

The subsequent narrative contained in the sacred writings informs us that our Saviour suffered—that he ascended into Heaven, and that the Comforter, that is to say, the Holy Ghost, was sent to his disciples, according to the promise given to them. And what was the conduct of the disciples when the Comforter had descended, and filled them with his grace ? The disciple who had denied his Master was now the most strenuous to show his allegiance ; and all those who, when their Master was seized and carried away to be tried as a criminal, had fled, and left him to his fate, were now undaunted in facing and

confuting their persecutors, and dared the most cruel and agonizing sufferings which it was in the power of their persecutors to inflict. The contest was now, not to evade pains and tortures, but who should show himself most prompt to undergo that which he might be called upon to endure. Such was the difference in the same persons, between what they were, anterior to the descent of the Holy Ghost, and after it.

And to what cause could this change be attributed, other than the influence and operation of that Spirit, which Jesus Christ promised should be sent to his disciples, and which was, indeed, sent; and which has never since that time ceased to animate and to sanctify all the elect of God? To seek to ascribe it to any other cause would be preposterous:—for what other cause could exist?—Our Saviour had shown, in his own catastrophe, what might be expected by his followers:—he was now gone from them;—his personal influence had, therefore, ceased; and if they had chosen to renounce his doctrines, they

might have done so, as far as appears, with perfect safety; and their Master had forewarned them what they were to expect by adhering to them: so that, unless we are to understand, that the Apostles had a certain predilection, however unaccountable, for torments and miseries, such as human nature cannot contemplate without shuddering, we must be satisfied that their zeal is to be attributed to something other than mere worldly views, or mere human strength; and what could this be but the grace of God, vouchsafed to them by the Holy Ghost, which animated *them*, and which worketh in all of *us*, both to will and to do?

The infidel who denies, and the sceptic who doubts, the Socinian and the Unitarian, may find many other causes of this change of mind. In order to exclude every thing divine, they will attribute it to any thing that is *not* divine; but against any claim for human nature, as if that alone would be sufficient to create the change, we call upon the whole history of human nature to bear testimony; for had

human nature been capable of so great exertion, the power would have manifested himself; but human nature never devised an adequate system of religion, from the creation of the world to the present time; consequently, revelation was necessary; and, therefore, those who declare themselves the followers of Jesus Christ, seeing that the purity of an Apostle, the zeal of Peter, the affection of John, and the intended fidelity of all, save the son of perdition, could not keep them in the strict path of consistency and duty, without the aid of the Comforter, but that, when left to human infirmity, all turned aside and went astray; will thankfully receive the assistance thus offered; and, banishing from their hearts all pride and all suggestions of human sufficiency, will duly acknowledge the hand from whence salvation cometh, lest the Spirit of grace should be withdrawn from them, and they should be left to their own hearts' lusts, and permitted to follow their own imaginations.

H.

SERMONET LXV.

I THESSALONIANS, v. 22.

Abstain from all appearance of evil.

WITH such an injunction for our guidance, how astonishing, how worse than astonishing, how deplorable it is, to see persons who would be offended at the question, Are you Christians? maintaining in the world an appearance so equivocal as to make it matter of doubt whether they are not rather promoting the interests of the devil than the glory of their Maker; and this, when most excusable, out of regard to convenience, or from an imbecile spirit of servile acquiescence, and a fancied necessity of compliance with the corruptions of the world!—at other times, and when there is no resort but effrontery, preferring, and avowing their preference of an assimilation with those worse than themselves, as if they knew better what was fit conduct for the inhabitants of Great Britain, than

St. Paul did what was good for the people of Thessalonica.

One of the most dangerous, as well as one of the most erroneous notions which a changeable multitude could assume, would be the vicissitude of moral estimation; the persuasion that what was virtue a thousand years ago, would be merely prejudice now; and that what our Lord and his immediate ministers denominated vice and folly in their time, may, by the passing fashion of this world, rise, in its turn, to a rank not far removed from virtue and wisdom. But we must not listen to any such delusive teaching: the characters of good and evil are immutable—they cannot adapt themselves to the interests or the will of mankind; and although it may be held true in the science of government, that a corrupt people are not to be led to their advantage but by corrupt means, the opinion can never find admission into society, nor can it, in any way, justify the conduct of an individual.

If there be truth in an adage, if proverbs are the concrete of experience, there

is no appearance of evil that can better justify censure, than the associating with persons of immoral character ; yet, as if in utter forgetfulness of the Apostle's injunction, little scruple is now made by those who profess to live in the world, of resorting to the houses of persons of infamous life, and returning to them those testimonials of regard which are conveyed in politeness and hospitality. But our forgetfulness of a law does not abrogate it ; and there is no one can be sure that the judgments of God do not await such cool, deliberate transgressions of a rule laid down for our preservation from the noisome pestilence of bad example. Be it remembered, that we are responsible for whatever mischief may ensue to others, for the false credit we suffer to be derived from us.

To the facility with which we fall into this snare, may probably be attributed the extreme freedom of conduct now observable between persons of different ages and sexes. Those accustomed to compare that which *is*, with that which *ought to be*, will be displeased in seeing the exchange which is

now made of well-bred affection between friends and relations, for an assuming familiarity in juniors towards their elders, and a strange, undescribable, equivocal sort of French sentiment between those who avail themselves of distant consanguinity, or near alliance, to wear the appearance, and yet defy the charge, of evil. In domestic circles of better principles and purer manners, the parents and elder relations are not supposed, in condescending to the young, to forfeit the respect due to them; and the junior relations of both sexes understand more correctly what their respective situations demand. Brothers are the protectors, the guardians of sisters; and under this protection and guardianship, young women pass a noviciate that fits them for a higher station in society: they learn to respect the superior intellect and larger scope of power in men: they acquire a habit of endeavouring to please: they take an interest in what occurs abroad, and learn to make home pleasant: more distant relations fill up the space between those whom they daily, and those whom they seldom see;

and propriety of behaviour is learnt by the fireside. But not so, where a mode of conduct, such as is now growing frequent, prevails, where the intercourse of near relations of both sexes is deficient in delicacy, and the alliance of a marriage seems to give a license for indecorum to persons whom it distantly connects. The appearance is evil—the example is bad; and not a word of complaint can be listened to, from any who feel injured by censorious suppositions, when it is to their own folly that they owe them.

Another appearance of evil which seems irresistibly tempting, is that of licentious imitation in females: and not caring in the least, whether the examples were persons of repute or no repute, or perhaps a little inclining to the latter, our women of influence have gone through all the modifications of artifice and absurdity: health has been sacrificed, and sometimes that which should be more valued than health; and the courtezans of Athens, the seraglio of Constantinople, and the more unpardonable prostitutes of Charles the Second's court,

have been resorted to for novelty of indecencies.

For evil associations in society, for indecorum of conduct, for the vain anxiety that produces absurdity and indecency, there is but one admissible excuse—a perfect ignorance of the contents of the Holy Scriptures; and if any of us can honestly say, that these hints are the first that have referred their practice to this standard—that, till it was thus pointed out, they did not know that these appearances were of evil, or that we were commanded to abstain from all such, this most deplorable blindness and fatal deafness must, to their fellow-creatures, acquit them. How it may avail at a higher tribunal, must be left in the secret counsels of the Most High.

NOTE.

A DISPOSITION now most laudably indicated amongst the younger females, to hear reason, and to improve their practice by it, calls loudly on their seniors to be cautious in their conduct, lest they not only hinder the good intentions of others, but lessen

their own estimation. Those who are now educating for exemplary wives and mothers, must not only not see any indulgence to appearances of evil; but they must be convinced, that nothing bearing that appearance will be tolerated. The wish to bring them forward in society must give way to that of preserving them from its dangers; and they must be taught, by example, to decline pleasures offered by disreputable persons, on the ground of conscientious regard to “whatsoever things are pure.” They must not be referred to the world and its opinions, nor allowed to dispute the fancied danger of contagion. The eye must be directed, and the finger pointed, to Heaven; and they must hear of nothing ~~less~~ than the will of God. The New Testament must be at hand, and resorted to—as is the Atlas, to prove the local identity of an event, or a transaction;—to show, that here, and here, and here, is to be found, under various forms, that law which, for the most merciful purposes, and on the most intimate knowledge of the human heart, enjoins us to “abstain from all appearances of evil.”

L.

SERMONET LXVI,

I ST. PETER, II. 21.

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example.

ARE not our endeavours to walk in the footsteps of our blessed Lord, and thereby to imitate the only perfect pattern ever vouchsafed us, a little discouraged by a supposition that he had means of perfection which we have not? And do we not excuse ourselves, though perhaps silently, by thinking, that, mere human beings as we are, it is in vain that we strive to copy a divine original?

If we reason thus, we are wrong. We ought to be informed, that our Saviour, in his human nature, which contains our pattern, had no assistance from his godhead.

The mysterious union of the two natures can never be clear to the limited powers of human comprehension; yet, to deny the possibility of such an union, we must first

set aside that association, of which we are every hour conscious, of our minds and our bodies.

But it is not the present purpose to prove that which we are pledged to believe. We must, if we are Christians, whether we understand it or not, take it on the word of the Holy Scriptures, that Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, associated our nature with his, that he might, in obedience to an established law, offer himself as an acceptable person to undergo punishment, that would otherwise have fallen on us. The point here to be insisted on is, that, after this association, the two natures were so distinct, that, as temporary man, he had no support from himself as eternal God. If he had not that support, nothing but the evil of our nature hinders our imitating him; and, if there is no other hindrance, there is no excuse for our not making every exertion for the purpose, especially under the promise of spiritual aid.

Our Lord was as sensible to all the ills of life as we can be; though born in poverty, and protected in his first years by

maternal love, he might, indeed, as knowing nothing better, be content. Facts prove the sweetness of his temper: he had no earthly ambition: he was kind-hearted: he was diligent in the discharge of his ministry, while, as if afflicted by prescience of his fate, a pensive gravity seems to have rendered interesting the authority his mission gave him. In his temptation, he had his choice to stand or fall; and nothing less than the grace he obtained by prayer, could have saved him. When, houseless and powerless, the devil, by illusion, offered him universal dominion, and suggested the means of supporting sinking nature, it was the virtuous *man* that refused to do evil that good might come of it. His exertions of supernatural power were not made for himself, but to prolong a painful life of duty: his hour was not yet come, and, therefore, he could remove himself when in danger, and walk on the sea; for here the God assisted the man: his tears at the death of Lazarus were those of sympathy: he could not mourn the death of one whom he was about to recall to life,

unless he was not certain of divine assistance; but, in his agony, it is evident that he had reason to suspect the withdrawing of his Father's aid. No expression we can use in the deepest grief, can equal the distress implied by his question: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" His friends had deserted him; justice had quitted her path to avoid assisting him: he was the scorn of every one, and, till he was out of hearing, no one dared lift up his voice in his behalf: "he was despised and rejected of men;" and their rejection seemed consentaneous with that of God.

We read all this, as we hear a tale twice told; and, perhaps, it is not in human nature, till quickened by the grace of God, to retain interest without novelty; but, till this be vouchsafed us, we should do well to prevent the hardening of our hearts, by bearing in mind the incontrovertible truth, that our Saviour was as susceptible of cold, of hunger, of thirst, of bodily pain, and of ill-treatment, as we can be; but that, possessed by a strong sense of duty, he acted in such a way as to ensure,

though he did not always feel, the divine protection.

Our judgment thus informed, it is our duty, as well as interest, to acquaint ourselves, as far as possible, with the character of our blessed Lord, and, “as far as the infirmity of our nature will permit,” to imitate the glorious example he has set before us.

May the humble endeavour to excite this diligence be attended by the blessing of God

L.

THE END.







