



Library of the Theological Seminary,

PRINCETON, N. J.

Presented by Rev. A. A. Baker - 1883

Division.....*SEC*.....

Section.....*3094*.....

Shelf.....

Number.....*1*.....





SERMONS,

BY THE

REV. JOHN VENN, M.A.

— Alfred. Stubbs —
1840

SERMONS

BY THE

REV. JOHN VENN, M. A.,

RECTOR OF CLAPHAM.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

—◆—
VOL. I.

THE THIRD EDITION.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY ELLERTON AND HENDERSON,
JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET:

AND SOLD BY J. HATCHARD, PICCADILLY; AND
RIVINGTONS, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD.

1818.



PREFACE.

IT has frequently been remarked concerning literary men, that their lives afford few incidents which are likely to engage the attention of the public. This observation seems especially applicable to persons who have adorned the clerical profession. The duties which devolve upon them have little of variety, and less of ostentation: the pursuits to which they are called are not of this world; and some, that will shine hereafter among the brightest stars of the firmament, have excited little interest beyond their appropriate and limited sphere; so silent was their progress, and so retiring and unobtrusive their character.

Among those who have been most anxious to escape observation, beyond the bounds of their immediate circle, was the Author of the following Sermons. It was his earnest

and particular wish that nothing should be recorded of him in the way of panegyric; and his injunctions have not been disregarded. Far be it from the Editors of this work to offend against a desire so humble and devout, and so characteristic of the individual who expressed it; but they consider it as an act of justice, both to the dead and the living, not to send these volumes into the world without some account, however brief, of the departed friend who composed them:—and of such a man, how is it possible to speak in language which shall not serve to record their sense of his extraordinary worth?

The Rev. JOHN VENN was born at Clapham, on the 9th of March, 1759. He was descended from a long line of clerical ancestors; some of whom were remarkable for independence of character, and some for patience in suffering. So far as any knowledge of them is preserved, they appear to have lived in the fear of God, and to have been elevated far above the fear of man. Their profession was sacred; their lives

reflected credit upon their profession ; and their respected descendant has added new lustre to their fair and honourable name.

His father was the Rev. Henry Venn, well known as a most zealous and indefatigable minister of the Church of England, and as the author of that very useful and popular work *The Complete Duty of Man*. At the time of his son's birth he was curate of Clapham : he removed afterwards to Huddersfield in Yorkshire, where his labours were abundantly blessed ; and he died vicar of Yelling, in Huntingdonshire, on the 24th of June, 1797.

The subject of this memoir received the early part of his education under Mr. Shute, at Leeds. He was then removed to Hipperholme School, where he was well grounded in classics by the care of Mr. Sutcliffe. He had afterwards the benefit of the Rev. Joseph Milner's instruction, at the Grammar School at Hull ; and of the Rev. Thomas Robinson's and the Rev. William Ludlam's, the last an eminent mathematician, at Leicester. He was admitted a member of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge,

where he took the degree of A. B. in 1781. In September, 1782, he was ordained deacon, as curate to his father : he entered into priest's orders in March 1783, and two days afterwards was instituted to the living of Little Dunham, in Norfolk. On the 22d of October, 1789, he married Miss Catherine King, of Hull, who died April 15, 1803, leaving a family of seven children. In June, 1792, on the death of Sir J. Stonehouse, the former rector, he was instituted to the living of Clapham. In August, 1812, he married Miss Turton, daughter of John Turton, Esq. of Clapham. At this place he resided, with little intermission, from the beginning of the year 1793, to the day of his death.

It would be a pleasing task to enter, at large, into the history of Mr. Venn's labours, and to develop the full character of his elevated, discriminating, and pious mind : but, for the reason already assigned, the Editors will do little more than cite the testimony of two clergymen ; of whom the one was the companion of his early life, and the other was intimately connected with him at a time when his mental powers were in

their full action and energy, and when, to the zeal and piety which characterized his youth, was superadded the wisdom of maturer years.—“ Mr. Venn,” says the first of these gentlemen, “ I consider to have been the oldest friend I had among my equals. Long before either of us went to college we were intimate, being children of parents betwixt whom there existed the most cordial and Christian friendship. After a separation of some years, he came into residence, at college, a few months before I took my degree. But as I continued to reside in Cambridge, our intimacy was renewed and increased; and he then discovered that warmth of affection, and that soundness of judgment and principle, which gained him the esteem and love of all who knew him. Through his influence were first formed those little societies of religious young men, which proved, I believe, a help and comfort to many. At various times, after Mr. Venn’s institution to the living of Little Dunham, I visited him, and witnessed his able, affectionate, and zealous manner of addressing his people. In 1792, he established the

Dunham Meeting of Clergy, which has continued to this time : it has proved a blessing to that district, and has led, I believe, to the establishment of another, on similar principles, in another part of Norfolk*. At the period of his removal from Dunham, his modesty and disinterestedness were eminently conspicuous ; and his friendship to me at that time I shall ever have cause to remember with lively gratitude.

“ As a father of a family I have always admired Mr. Venn ; and I hardly ever visited Clapham without being impressed with a conviction that the blessing of Heaven was upon him and his. No where did religion appear in a more engaging form ; and the impression which both his life and death must have made upon his children and all his friends, could not fail to convince them that ‘ the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.’ ”

* It ought not to be forgotten that Mr. Venn was also the projector and principal founder of the Church Missionary Society to Africa and the East ;—a society which by its subsequent progress reflects no small credit on the wisdom and piety which led to its formation.

Our second extract is from a sermon by the Rev. Hugh Pearson, M. A. of St. John's College, Oxford, preached in the Parish Church of Clapham, on the occasion of Mr. Venn's death.

“We are met,” says Mr. Pearson, “this day to deplore the loss of one of the best and greatest men, of one of the most eminent and useful ministers, whom we have ever known. The all-wise and gracious, though, as in many other instances, mysterious, providence of God has been pleased to remove him from us; and painful and difficult as it may in some respects prove, it is our duty, and I trust it will be our endeavour, humbly to submit to the dispensation, and diligently to profit by the various lessons of instruction which it so loudly speaks to us. Known as your late excellent Pastor must be to most of you by the intercourse and experience of more than twenty years, you will still doubtless expect from me, on this mournful occasion, some notice of his character, some mention of his virtues. Yet if, in the performance of this grateful service, I should appear, in any measure, to violate

that unaffected modesty, that deep humility, which distinguished and adorned his character, and which expressly and earnestly sought to prevent any adequate tribute to his merits, let it not be ascribed to any forgetfulness of this excellence, or to any opposition to his known wishes; but to the influence of emotions which cannot and ought not to be repressed, of claims which cannot be resisted, of obligations alike owing to the great and glorious Being who made him what he was, and to the grateful and affectionate people who esteemed and valued him as he deserved. In truth,

“ It were profane
To quench a glory lighted at the skies,
And cast in shadows his illustrious close.

“In delineating the character of our revered friend, it is far from my intention to attempt any thing elaborate or complete; the pressure, no less of time than of feeling, forbids the one; my own real inability, and my regard to what would have been the wishes of him whom we lament, would prevent the other. My only aim will be, to offer such a brief sketch of a few of the most promi-

ment and valuable features of his character, as may tend to excite our admiration of the graces which were vouchsafed to him, and our sense of responsibility for the long-continued exercise of them for our own benefit.

“The Christian Minister, whose premature removal (if the expression may be allowed as to any dispensation of Divine Providence) we are this day met to deplore, was adorned by nature with a sound and powerful understanding, with a rich and fertile imagination, with a correct and discriminating judgment, with a temper uncommonly mild and gentle, with affections peculiarly benevolent and tender. Cultivated, enriched, and exalted as these natural endowments were by the stores of learning, observation, and science, and by ‘the wisdom’ and the grace which are ‘from above,’ they united in forming him to all that is most excellent and desirable in the Minister and the Man.

“As a MINISTER, need I in this place enumerate the principal qualities by which he was distinguished? If it be necessary to specify some of them, I would first mention that of

which alone he would allow himself to be possessed; *his fidelity in the interpretation and exposition of Scripture*; his integrity in preaching that Word of God which had been committed to his trust, that Gospel of Christ of which he was a Minister. In the execution of this most important part of his ministerial duty he regarded no peculiar system, farther than as the great doctrines of Christianity are clearly and simply drawn from Scripture, and are embodied in the Articles and Liturgy of that Church to which he was so sincerely and zealously attached, and of which he was so distinguished an ornament. He was studious and careful, therefore, to set before you a complete and comprehensive view of the revealed will of God, giving a proportionate measure of attention to the truths and doctrines, the precepts and examples, the promises and threatenings of Scripture; being anxious that none of those committed to his care should err from want of direction, should fail for want of encouragement, should slumber from the neglect of warning and exhortation, should ‘perish for lack of knowledge.’ His doctrine distilled like the

dew, and nourished and refreshed those on whom it descended. He fed his flock 'with knowledge and understanding,' and led them to the great and 'good Shepherd,' who laid down his life for the sheep, whom he uniformly represented as 'the way, the truth, and the life;' without whose atonement, righteousness, and intercession, we cannot be forgiven and accepted in the sight of God; without obedience to whose precepts as to the various duties which we owe both to God and man, the imbibing of whose spirit, the imitation of whose example, we cannot be his true disciples; without whose all-powerful grace we can become and can do nothing. In short, 'by manifestation of the truth he commended himself,' as a faithful minister of Christ, 'to every man's conscience in the sight of God; warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that he might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.'

“In the discharge of this part of his ministerial office, shall I speak of the remarkable *originality* of your departed Pastor; of the rich and copious, and varied streams of piety,

truth, and eloquence, which flowed from his lips; of that noble and sublime train of thought, which frequently elevated his hearers above the business, the cares, and the pleasures of this lower world; of that spirituality and heavenly-mindedness, which made him occasionally speak of heaven almost as if he had been there, and raised you for the moment, and I would hope, with respect to many, more permanently, to that eminence on which he was habitually seated! In these, and in many other qualities, he will readily be admitted, by all who knew him, to have been unequalled and unrivalled.

“Nor were these his only, if they were even his chief, claims to your admiration and regard. The Lent Lectures, which during so many years were exclusively devoted to the moral and religious improvement of the younger part of his flock, and which have been so remarkably blessed to their spiritual benefit; the Society for improving the temporal condition of the Poor in this Parish, and for providing in some measure for his own unavoidable but lamented deficiency in personally administering to their spiritual

wants; the enlargement of the Parochial School; the share which he took in the establishment of a local Bible Society; the plan for the better accommodation of the increasing population of the parish, as to the public worship of Almighty God,—all proclaim his pastoral care and kindness, his practical wisdom, his unwearied and beneficial exertions for the temporal and eternal welfare of his flock.

“ If from this brief and imperfect sketch of his ministerial character, we direct our attention to our departed friend, as a MAN, we shall be equally struck with the extraordinary value of the blessing which we have recently lost.—*Humility*, profound and unvarying humility, the foundation of all that is great and excellent and amiable in man, was remarkably conspicuous in him whom we are lamenting. Not only was he humble as a sinner before God, ever acknowledging his own unworthiness, and accepting the ‘ faithful saying ’ of the Gospel, as the chief of sinners; but humble in his intercourse with men; and with those amongst whom it is most difficult both to be and to

appear so, with his associates and equals ; not affectedly, however, obtrusively, or painfully humble ; but manifesting upon all occasions the most marked yet unostentatious apprehension of his own inferiority ; eagerly and cordially allowing and assigning to others a large share of the merit, or the praise, which every one else perceived to be far more justly due to himself ; frequently lamenting his imperfections and deficiencies in duty ; thinking nothing of his eminent and various services ; and willingly performing the least and lowest offices of kindness and love.

“ *Universal benevolence, and uncommon tenderness, were other striking features in the character we are considering.—His love of man was indeed inferior only to his love of God. It was the element in which he moved in his intercourse with others ; and the kindness which warmed his heart, beamed forth in his countenance, and was manifest in all his words and actions. This truly Christian temper was steady and invariable, and prompted him to a thousand nameless expressions of it, which diffused an air of*

peace and harmony, of benevolence and happiness, over all around him.

“ *Disinterestedness*, a greatness and magnanimity which overlooked all that was envious, little, or selfish, was another admirable quality which distinguished your late excellent Minister, and which could not escape the notice of the most superficial observer of his conduct.

“ I might mention the remarkable *soundness of his judgment*, which rendered him so wise and able a counsellor ; the singular *sobriety* of his views, possessed as he was of such genius and talent ; and the equanimity and well-balanced proportion of his whole character. But enough has been already said, and much more will readily occur to those who have been so long and so intimately acquainted with his excellence, to prove the value of what was once enjoyed, and the greatness of our present loss.

“ That such a Minister and such a Man should have been thus removed in the midst of his years, and in the midst of his usefulness, is one of those mysteries in Providence, which we too often witness, but endeavour

in vain fully to comprehend. 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.' We may, indeed, consider, that your late Pastor had been long spared to you; that he had taught, and exemplified, and effected much for your benefit; and that he was peculiarly qualified to be an inhabitant of that higher world to which he had long aspired, and for the enjoyment of which he was anxiously training you. Still there will remain in this mournful dispensation of Providence, much that is painful, trying, and, for the present, inexplicable. In one respect, however, it is calculated to afford us the most important instruction and consolation. During the lengthened and afflicting illness which terminated in the death of our lamented friend, he exhibited an example of the infinite excellence and value of the Gospel, of the solid peace, the firm hope, the joy unspeakable, which it inspires; of the meekness, the patience; the submission, the resignation, the

spiritual and heavenly temper of the true Christian ; an example which infinitely exceeds the most laboured and finished description of those blessings, and was doubtless intended, as it is eminently suited, to produce the deepest and most beneficial impressions upon our minds.

“ The hour of sickness and the bed of death are the times which more especially try the stability of the foundation on which the Christian hope is built : it is then that the real character appears, that the genuine dispositions of the soul are manifest, and that the supports and consolations of Divine Grace are most abundantly vouchsafed to the faithful servants of Christ. It was thus with the pious and excellent subject of these remarks. Living as he had done the life of the righteous, it could scarcely be doubted, that he would in sickness possess his peace and comfort, and in death enjoy his blessedness and hope. Accordingly, your departed Minister afforded a most animating and edifying example of the reality and power of religion, of the faithfulness of God to his promises, of the triumph of the Gospel of

Christ over all the miseries of nature, over sickness and pain, and anxiety and fear, over sin and sorrow, and over the last enemy, even death itself. Our dear and valued friend was exercised, during his illness, with long-continued and excruciating pain : yet, amidst his severest sufferings, no impatient or complaining word was heard to proceed out of his lips. His language was uniformly expressive of patience and resignation to the holy will of God ; and once, in the very words of a most devout and distinguished Christian (the learned, pious, and judicious Hooker), whom in many respects he nearly resembled ; ‘ Since I owe thee a death, Lord, let ‘ it not be terrible, and thou take thy own ‘ time ; I submit to it ! Let not mine, O ‘ Lord, but let thy will be done.’

“ That filial confidence in God, which had ever formed a distinguishing part of his character, was strikingly displayed in his last illness. Few men, perhaps, had stronger ties to bind them to this world, or more powerful and affecting motives to the love of longer life, than your departed Minister : yet all was subdued to the will of God ; all

was resigned to his infinitely wise and holy appointments. He doubted not the wisdom, the mercy, and the goodness of the dispensation which was about to separate him from the duties of his ministerial service, and the objects of his tenderest earthly affections; and under the influence of Divine Grace he soared above the present world, and anticipated the society, the employments, and the pleasures of the blessed inhabitants of heaven. Yet as long as he remained in this state of trial, he was occupied in prayers for his flock, that the great Head of the Church would bestow upon them a faithful, able, and laborious pastor; for his family, that they might be guided and supported, comforted and blessed; for himself, that patience might have its perfect work; that he might be sanctified in body, soul, and spirit; that he might be guided by the Divine counsel whilst here, and at length be received to glory. Thankful for the abundant blessings he had enjoyed; full of consideration, tenderness, and love to all around him; he looked forward to the hour of dissolution, not only without dismay, but with hope and

joy. He declared that the light affliction he was then enduring was working out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; that the sting of death was taken away ; that although he walked through its dark valley, he feared no evil ; that the rod and staff of his heavenly Shepherd supported and comforted him ; that he knew whom he had believed, and was persuaded that he was able to keep that which he had committed unto him against that day ; that, though heart and flesh were failing, God was the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever. The language of praise was indeed almost constantly heard from his mouth. Though so frequently tortured with pain, and exhausted with weakness, these were the strains in which he often expressed his gratitude and love to his God and Saviour :

“ I’ll praise Him while he lends me breath ;
And when my voice is lost in death
Praise shall employ my nobler powers :
My days of praise shall ne’er be past,
While life and thought and being last,
Or immortality endures.

“ I should detain you too long, if I were

to detail but a small part of the truly divine and Christian words which proceeded out of his lips, during the progress of his long and fatal illness. What I have just stated will, I am persuaded, be sufficient to convince you, how eminent and undoubted an example your deceased Pastor afforded of the power and excellency of that Gospel which he had so faithfully preached; and how earnestly it is to be desired by every one of us, that we may resemble him in our lives, that so our last end may be like his!

“ And here I should at once proceed to exhort you to be *followers* of him as he was of Christ, if I had not a far more interesting and impressive Address to present to you than any which I could imagine. I hold in my hand part of a Pastoral Letter intended to be addressed to you by your late invaluable Minister; dictated not long before his lamented death, but interrupted by the unexpected and rapid progress of disease and weakness. Yet though it is, alas! but a fragment, you will, I am sure, receive it with all that reverence and affection which it so justly demands. It is thus entitled:—

“ ‘ *A Pastoral Farewell Address from the Rev. John Venn, Rector of Clapham, to his respected and beloved Flock.*

“ ‘ My dear Friends,

“ ‘ I cannot quit the pastoral relation which I have so long held over you, without expressing my deep sense of obligation to you, and without giving you my last friendly advice. For twenty years I have lived amongst you, and preached to you. With respect to myself, I have humbly to request you to pardon the many deficiencies in my ministry and conduct of which I am now deeply sensible. But with respect to one thing, I can truly say that I have acquitted my duty faithfully and conscientiously. I have taken much pains to understand accurately, and impartially to preach to you, the Gospel of Christ, as it appeared to me to be delivered by Christ and his Apostles. In this respect I have called no man master; nor have I ever, in any one instance that I know of, for the sake of system, given an interpretation to any part of the word of God which I was not fully convinced, after

the most mature deliberation, to be just and right : so that I can truly say, I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God.

“ ‘ And now, with respect to yourselves, I have to return you my most sincere thanks for your kind, and tender, and candid acceptance of my labours amongst you. I have met with daily instances of attention, civility, and affection; and I cannot recollect, that in the whole course of my ministry I have met with a single instance of rudeness or incivility. You have been ready to forward every good work which I have proposed. With a more attentive audience no pastor was ever blessed: the decency and devotion of your conduct in the house of God have been such as to attract the notice and excite the admiration of every stranger. By your kind assistance and liberality, I have been enabled to complete the three things nearest my heart:—by the enlargement of our School, every child in the parish may be gratuitously taught to read; by the institution of the Bible Society, every family will be supplied with a Bible; and

by the erection of a Chapel of Ease (the Bill for which has already passed Parliament), accommodation will be provided for every inhabitant to worship God with facility and convenience. These are blessings which rarely fall to the lot of a Minister in so short a period.

“ ‘ But now, my beloved friends, when I am standing upon the verge of eternity, and looking forward to the time when you and I must meet together before the awful tribunal of God, suffer me, I entreat you, to warn you, that you stop not short in the mere forms of religion. Suffer me to remind you of some of the principal doctrines which I have ever insisted upon amongst you, and which now, at the hour of death, appear to me to be more important and real than ever.

“ ‘ The foundation of all my preaching amongst you has been this; that we are naturally in a corrupt state, alienated from God, and subject therefore to the just displeasure and condemnation of the Almighty; that it is the chief business of man in this life, and his first and most important duty,

to seek deliverance from that state, that he may be reconciled to God——’

“ Here, I regret to say, this interesting and valuable Farewell Address from your late beloved Pastor, ends. It bears upon it striking marks of his characteristic humility, faithfulness, and concern for the spiritual and eternal welfare of his flock: and I cannot doubt, that its simple, affectionate, and weighty import will make a deep and lasting impression upon your minds. The long and uniform tenor of his preaching may enable you to conjecture what would probably have been the substance of his advice and exhortation, had he been permitted to have completed this parting address. He would doubtless have repeated, what he had so frequently declared, and on which he had been accustomed so copiously and ably to enlarge;—that the deliverance of fallen, sinful man, was to be sought by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, as the only and all-sufficient Saviour; and by the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit,

to be obtained by fervent and persevering prayer.”

After several weeks of great suffering, he finished his course on the morning of the first of July, 1813. His remains were followed to the grave by a large concourse of his mourning parishioners, and of his friends both clergy and laymen; by several of whom it was afterwards unanimously determined to raise a monument to his memory, as an evidence to future times of *his* singular worth and of *their* affection.—It is to be lamented that Mr. Venn prepared no Sermons for the press. The following Discourses were selected from his manuscripts; and may therefore be received as a fair exhibition of his manner, and sentiments, and doctrine. But the Editors themselves are in a measure responsible for any defects which may be discovered in the style. Mr. Venn addressed one of them in the following terms, a few months before he died:—“ I request you to point out from recollection, as well as you

can, those Sermons of mine which you may think to be the least unworthy of the public eye. I must further trust to your kindness in taking a share in giving them that correction which is absolutely necessary for their publication, leaving as much as you can unaltered, &c." They have been anxious to present this work to the public eye in the state in which they conceive that Mr. Venn himself would have wished it to appear; and they dismiss it from their hands with an earnest prayer that it may be effectual, by the blessing of God, to the conversion and salvation of many souls.

The following inscription appears on the Monument :—

TO THE MEMORY OF THE REVEREND **JOHN VENN**, M. A. FOR TWENTY YEARS RECTOR OF THIS PARISH:

HE WAS SON OF THE REVEREND HENRY VENN, VICAR OF YELLING;
AND HIS PROGENITORS, FOR SEVERAL GENERATIONS, WERE MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

HE WAS ENDOWED BY PROVIDENCE WITH A SOUND AND POWERFUL UNDERSTANDING:

AND HE ADDED TO AN AMPLE FUND OF CLASSICAL KNOWLEDGE
A FAMILIAR ACQUAINTANCE WITH ALL THE MORE USEFUL PARTS OF PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE:
HIS TASTE WAS SIMPLE. HIS DISPOSITION WAS HUMBLE AND BENEVOLENT.

HIS MANNERS WERE MILD AND CONCILIATING.

AS A **DIVINE**, HE WAS COMPREHENSIVE AND ELEVATED IN HIS VIEWS,
AND PECULIARLY CONVERSANT WITH THEOLOGICAL SUBJECTS;

BUT HE DERIVED HIS CHIEF KNOWLEDGE FROM THE SCRIPTURES THEMSELVES,
WHICH HE DILIGENTLY STUDIED AND FAITHFULLY INTERPRETED.

AS A **PREACHER**, HE WAS AFFECTIONATE AND PERSUASIVE,
INTELLECTUAL AND DISCRIMINATING. SERIOUS, SOLEMN, AND DEVOUT;
ANXIOUS TO IMPRESS ON OTHERS THOSE EVANGELICAL TRUTHS WHICH HE HIMSELF SO DEEPLY FELT.

BY HIS **FAMILY**, AMONG WHOM HE WAS SINGULARLY BELOVED,
HIS REMEMBRANCE WILL BE CHERISHED WITH PECULIAR TENDERNESS.
HAVING BEEN SUSTAINED DURING A LONG AND TRYING ILLNESS,

BY A STEDFAST FAITH IN THAT SAVIOUR WHOM IN ALL HIS PREACHING HE LABOURED TO EXALT,
HE DIED 1 JULY, 1813, AGED 54 YEARS, LEAVING TO HIS SURVIVING FAMILY AND FLOCK AN ENCOURAGING EXAMPLE
OF THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO EMBRACE WITH THEIR WHOLE HEARTS THE RELIGION OF JESUS CHRIST.

REMEMBER THEM WHICH HAVE THE RULE OVER YOU, WHO HAVE SPOKEN UNTO YOU THE WORD OF GOD; WHOSE FAITH FOLLOW, CONSIDERING
THE END OF THEIR CONVERSATION; JESUS CHRIST, THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TO DAY, AND FOR EVER.—*HEB.* XIII. 7, 8.

THIS MONUMENT WAS ERECTED, AS A TESTIMONY OF RESPECT AND AFFECTION, BY FRIENDS OF THE DECEASED.

CONTENTS

OF

VOL. I.

Page

SERMON I.

THE IMPORTANCE AND DIFFICULTIES OF THE
CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

1 Cor. ii. 3.—I was with you in weakness, and in fear,
and in much trembling. 1

SERMON II.

ON PREACHING THE GOSPEL.

Mark xvi. 15.—And he said unto them, Go ye into all
the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. 16

SERMON III.

THE GLORY OF GOD.

Exod. xxxiii. 18.—And he said, I beseech thee, shew
me thy glory. 34

SERMON IV.

ON GOOD WORKS.

James ii. 24.—Ye see then how that by works a man is
justified, and not by faith only. 50

SERMON V.

THE PRAYER OF ST. PAUL FOR THE EPHE-
SIANS.

Ephes. iii. 14—19.—For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth and length, and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. 65

SERMON VI.

STATE OF THE SAINTS ABOVE CONTRASTED
WITH THEIR FORMER CONDITION BELOW.

Revel. vii. 9—17.—After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the Throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the Throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of

the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes... 82

SERMON VII.

THE GREAT MYSTERY OF GODLINESS—GOD
MANIFEST IN THE FLESH.

1 *Tim.* iii. 14—16.—These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And, without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. 101

SERMON VIII.

ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.

Matt. xxviii. 19.—Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost..... 122

SERMON IX.

HOW ABRAHAM SAW THE DAY OF CHRIST,
AND IN WHAT WAY THE TYPES IN THE
OLD TESTAMENT REFERRED TO CHRIST.

John viii. 56.—Your father Abraham rejoiced to see
my day; and he saw it, and was glad. 139

SERMON X.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PATRIARCHAL,
JEWISH, AND CHRISTIAN DISPENSATIONS.

Luke x. 23, 24.—Blessed are the eyes which see the
things that ye see. For I tell you that many prophets
and kings have desired to see those things which ye
see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things
which ye hear, and have not heard them. 157

SERMON XI.

ON THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

1 *John* i. 3, 4.—That which we have seen and heard
declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship
with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father,
and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things
write we unto you, that your joy may be full..... 177

SERMON XII.

ON COMMUNION WITH THE ANGELS.

Heb. xii. 22.—Ye are come to an innumerable com-
pany of angels. 192

Page

SERMON XIII.

ON THE EFFECT OF SEEING GOD AS HE IS.

- 1 *John* iii. 2.—Beloved, now are we the sons of God ;
and it doth not yet appear what we shall be ; but we
know, that when He shall appear we shall be like
him, for we shall see him as he is. 210

SERMON XIV.

UNDUE REGARD TO REPUTATION A SOURCE
OF UNBELIEF.

- John* v. 44.—How can ye believe, which receive honour
one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh
from God only ? 228

SERMON XV.

ON THE CAUSES OF UNTHANKFULNESS.

- Rom.* i. 21.—Neither were thankful. 245

SERMON XVI.

THE TARES AND THE WHEAT.

- Matt.* xiii. 28—30.—The servants said unto him, Wilt
thou then that we go and gather them up ? But he
said, Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root
up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together
until the harvest. 261

SERMON XVII.

INDECISION IN RELIGION.

- 1 *Kings* xviii. 21.—How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. 276

SERMON XVIII.

THE FALL AND PUNISHMENT OF DAVID
ILLUSTRATED.

- 2 *Sam.* xii. 7.—And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. 292

SERMON XIX.

ON THE GRADUAL PROGRESS OF EVIL.

- James* iii. 5.—Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth !..... 306

SERMON XX.

THE NATURE AND VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE.

- Psalms* lxxxix. 47.—Remember how short my time is. Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?..... 321

SERMON XXI.

THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF PILGRIMAGE ON
EARTH.

- Heb.* xi. 13.—And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 336

Page

SERMON XXII.

ON FASTING.

- 2 *Chron.* xx. 3.—And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah 352

Handwritten signature or scribble at the top of the page.

SERMON I.



THE IMPORTANCE AND DIFFICULTIES OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

PREACHED AT CLAPHAM, ON HIS INDUCTION.



1 COR. ii. 3.

*I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in
much trembling.*

ST. PAUL had been educated in the learning, and instructed in all the religious knowledge, of the age in which he lived. He belonged to the strictest sect of his religion; had been from his youth blameless in his moral conduct; was converted to the Christian faith by a special revelation of Christ, and appointed by him to be a chosen vessel to bear his name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. In knowledge of the Gospel, and success in preaching it; in love to Christ, and sufferings for his

sake; in spiritual gifts, and the abundance of revelations, he was “not a whit behind the very chiefest Apostle.” Nevertheless, he observes to his Corinthian disciples, that when he first came to them, it was “in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.” If such were his feelings, what should be mine!

I am well aware of the caution which is necessary in applying to ourselves any expressions of the Sacred Writers. Without a guarded attention to the circumstances in which they stood, there is great danger of employing their words in such a manner as to sanction our own ignorance or presumption. But the text expresses, so exactly, and so feelingly, the sentiments with which I now address you, that I trust I shall stand excused before God and you for my adoption of them.

The language which the Apostle used implies a distressing sense of inability rightly to discharge the duties of his office, and a painful fear lest he should be found wanting. I shall consider the causes which must produce in every Christian Minister the same apprehension. They may be reduced to three principal considerations:—

- I. The importance of the trust reposed in him;
- II. The difficulty of the service itself; and,
- III. The aggravation of that difficulty produced by his own infirmity and corruption.

I. The IMPORTANCE of the trust reposed in every Minister may be inferred both from *the good effects produced by a due discharge of his sacred office, and from the evil consequences of a negligent discharge of it.* Let us consider these effects, first, in their most extensive operation.

It requires but little attention to perceive that a very close connection subsists between the character of a Nation and that of the Ministers by whom it is instructed. Are they pure in their doctrines, holy and exemplary in their lives, diligent in the discharge of their duties, and impressed with a deep sense of the weight of spiritual and eternal things? The national character will, under the Divine blessing, be in a measure conformed to theirs, and will take the impress of their virtues. Let them, on the contrary, degenerate, and become earthly-minded, sensual, and corrupt: the fountains being thus polluted, the streams will almost inevitably become impure also. And that which takes place in a nation will be found to hold in a parish. Due allowance being made in this, as in every other instance, for the restraining effect of other causes; the spirit of a Minister will generally be infused into his Congregation. They will rarely be zealous in religion while he is lukewarm, or altogether careless in the service of God while he is active in it.

But, to view the subject in a narrower compass, let us observe the effect which the instructions of the Preacher may have on Individuals.—The Gospel is the great remedy supplied by God for the disorders introduced into the world by sin; and the dispensing of this remedy is intrusted to his Ministers. They are the stewards of his mysteries, the shepherds of his flock, and labourers together with God. He has chosen to commit the treasure of his Gospel to “earthen vessels.” He communicates to men spiritual health by the hand of their fellow-sinners, in the same manner as he healed the sick by the hands of his Apostles and Prophets. Wherever, therefore, his Gospel is faithfully delivered, his blessing may be expected to attend it. The sinner will be awakened, grace will be imparted, faith will be strengthened, and hope enlivened. The fruits of love to God, and of cheerful obedience to his law, will be produced; and a spirit of benevolence and charity to man will be diffused. These, even if estimated as referring to this life only, are important benefits; but they become invaluable when referred to eternity. They constitute the purest and most perfect happiness of this world, and are the earnest of glory in the next. But to point out the value of these blessings, is to shew not only the importance of the office of the Minister, by

whom they are dispensed, but his responsibility and his danger. Let him ponder upon eternity, let him estimate the value of the soul and the worth of spiritual blessings, and he cannot enter upon his sacred office without fear and trembling.

But, weighty as is this consideration, there is another which appears to me not inferior to it, in estimating the importance of the trust reposed in a Christian Minister: *The honour of Christ, and the glory of his Gospel, are intrusted to him.*—It has pleased God to ordain, that the preaching of the Gospel shall be the chief instrument by which the name of Christ shall be made known, and his glory celebrated. Does the Minister of the Gospel duly dwell upon the power and grace of Christ, upon the dignity of his person, and the merit of his death? These glorious subjects will be understood; Christ will be honoured and obeyed; the influence of the Spirit will be sought; God will be worshipped through the Mediator, and will receive the fresh tribute of praise for his mercy in the work of Redemption. It is true, that by the reading of the Bible, as well as by preaching, the same knowledge may be attained, and the same effects produced: but whatever influence private reading may have upon some individuals, the great mass of society must necessarily either

learn the Gospel of Christ from preaching, or not know it at all.

It is remarkable, that although the word of God was already in the hands of the Ethiopian Eunuch, the Spirit of God brought an Apostle from a distant part of Judea to communicate, through his means, the knowledge of Christ;—a sufficient proof that it is agreeable to the economy of Divine Wisdom to make use of the agency of Ministers for imparting the blessings of the Gospel. But what is man, or the best and ablest of men, that he should be thus put in trust, as it were, with the glory of Him who sitteth above all, the Lord of heaven and earth? Well may he, to whom this solemn charge is intrusted, enter upon it in “weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.”

Should any one be inclined to think that I too much magnify my office, let him reflect upon the *responsibility* annexed to it.—There is little to be envied, when the post of pre-eminence is the post of extreme danger: for, if God has intrusted us with a great charge, he will demand of us a solemn account of the manner in which we have executed it. Where “much is given, much will be required.” If the Minister, who is sent to be the pattern and guide of the flock, be negligent or unfaithful, his guilt is great, and his punishment will be severe.

These are the words of the Lord to Ezekiel, and they are applicable to every Minister :—“ Son of man! I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel ; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die ; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at *thine hand*.” Again : “ When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling-block before him, he shall die : because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered ; but his blood will I require at thine hand.” And is it thus with every watchman of God, that he shall not only answer for his own sins, but for those of the flock committed to his care, if he warn them not, nor lead them in the right way ? Alas ! who can enter upon such a charge without fear and trembling ?

II. If the importance of the work of the Ministry must produce a sense of weakness and fear, these emotions will be exceedingly increased if we add the consideration of its DIFFICULTY.

It is a difficult service in its own nature. Were the work of a preacher indeed confined to the delivery of a moral discourse, this would not be an arduous task. But a Minister of the Gospel has much more to do. He will endeavour, under Divine Grace, to bring every individual in his congregation to live no longer to himself, but unto Him who died for us. But here the passions, the prejudices, and perhaps the temporal interests of men combine to oppose his success. It is not easy to obtain any influence over the mind of another; but to obtain such an influence as to direct it contrary to the natural current of its desires and passions, is a work of the highest difficulty. Yet such is the work of a Minister. He has to arrest the sinner in his course of sin; to shake his strong hold of security; to make the stout-hearted tremble under the denunciation of God's judgment; to lead him so to deny himself, as to sacrifice the inclinations most dear to him—to repent, and become a new creature. Neither is the work of the Ministry less arduous in respect to those who are not open and profligate sinners. Self-love, the most powerful passion of the human breast, will render it equally difficult to convince the formalist of the unsoundness of his religion, the pharisee of the pride of his heart, and the mere moralist of his deficiency in the sight of God.

In all these cases, we have to convey unpleasant tidings; to persuade to what is disagreeable; to effect not only a reformation in the conduct of men, and a regulation of their passions, but, what is of still higher difficulty, a change in their good opinion of themselves. Nay, further, we have not merely to “wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” “Who is sufficient for these things?”

III. When a Minister, deeply impressed with the importance and difficulty of his work, looks into HIS OWN HEART, to explore the resources with which he is furnished for so difficult a service; there, alas! he meets with little that does not serve to increase his sense of weakness, and to confirm his fears. For it must be remembered, that he is a man of like passions with his flock, inheriting a body of corruption; that he is, perhaps, deficient in ability, perhaps unfortunate in the natural constitution of his mind; that, at all events, he has to struggle with infirmities, is exposed to temptations, has more to accomplish than others, as well as greater difficulties to surmount; and that, whilst more will be expected from him, in himself he may have no resources above those of any of his congregation.

Suffer me to enumerate some particulars, which my own feelings suggest as likely to produce an affecting sense of weakness in every Christian Pastor.

A want of wisdom and spiritual understanding, is one of the first things which presents itself.—When the question is proposed, Will you undertake to be the instructor of a congregation in matters of the greatest import; who would not tremble to answer in the affirmative? Consider the various errors which have distracted the religious world; reflect upon the dangerous consequences of error in the way of salvation. Can you hope to discover the way of truth? Can you presume to be the guide of others? To such questions a Minister will reply, by entreating his congregation to join their prayers with his, that the Spirit of Truth may lead him into the knowledge of “the truth as it is in Jesus.”

A want of ability in the mode of communicating religious instruction, is another subject of anxiety to a Minister.—There is great danger lest a good cause should suffer by the inefficient or imprudent mode in which it is maintained. An uninteresting manner or an indiscreet zeal, too great laxity or unnecessary severity, may be equally hurtful. When the awful judgments of God are to be denounced, it requires much cau-

tion to combine, with manifest hatred of the sin, tenderness to the sinner. There is a limit, not easily to be found, where reproof tends to exasperate, rather than to amend; where it ceases to promote reformation, and begins to provoke resistance.

A good intention will, however, do much to prevent the bad consequences which may arise from want of wisdom or ability. But there is another weakness, more pernicious in its consequences: I mean, *a want of courage*.—To “fight the good fight of faith;” to speak honestly and openly; to rebuke vice wheresoever it appears; to incur displeasure rather than spare a prevailing error; to assert the cause of God in the face of licentiousness and infidelity; perhaps to suffer in reputation, to be misrepresented, to be exposed to ridicule (and to these trials both Ministers and the Master of Ministers have been called);—these things require no little courage. St. Paul entreats the Ephesian disciples to pray, that even he might be enabled to “speak boldly, as he ought to speak.”

But, alas! want of courage is but one weakness out of many, which spring from the fruitful source of the corruption of the nature of man. This corruption itself it is which is calculated to bring the Minister before his people in “weakness, and in

fear, and in much trembling.” If he asks his own heart, Where is the ardent love to Christ, the compassion for perishing sinners, the delight in the service of God, which are the qualifications of a faithful pastor? Where the purity of heart, the meekness, the humility, the heavenly mindedness, the fervent piety, which should adorn the example of the flock? Such questions impress him with a sense of something more than “weakness;” and lead him to “fear and tremble,” lest, by his conduct, he should injure rather than assist the holy cause of which he is the advocate.

The account which I have given of the weakness of a Christian Minister is indeed very humiliating: yet there is a point of view in which the contemplation even of this weakness may serve at the same time to encourage man and to glorify God. When the Lord had said to St. Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness,” the Apostle at once founded this conclusion upon the review of his infirmities; “Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me; for, when I am weak, then am I strong.” And the same language may every Christian Pastor humbly adopt. His “strength is indeed perfect weakness,” but he may be strong in Christ Jesus. Christ has pro-

mised to be with his Ministers “always, even unto the end of the world.” Encouraged by this gracious declaration, I would trust that the word spoken in great “weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling,” may yet be made effectual, by the power of Christ, to “pull down the strong holds of sin and satan.”

I have now briefly stated the causes which ought to produce, in every Christian Minister, a sense of weakness and an impression of fear. It will not, I trust, be thought foreign to my subject, to apply what has been said of the duties of the Minister to the practice of his Hearers.

If he, then, is impressed with awe, from a sense of the worth of their souls, ought not they also to consider their inestimable value? Ought they not to reflect seriously upon the importance of their eternal happiness; and to weigh all that relates to their salvation with attention, with impartiality, and with a wish rather to profit by what is said than to criticise the mode of saying it? If, again, the glory of Christ fill the Minister with a consciousness of utter inability to sustain the character of His steward or ambassador; should not the majesty and power of the Master induce you to respect His words, and the doctrines drawn from them, though conveyed by the medium of a feeble

and unprofitable servant? If, also, the strict account he will be required to give of his ministry, induce him to labour that he may discharge it faithfully; shall not the sincerity of his intention, and the awfulness of his responsibility, excuse the freedom of his admonitions? And is it not of moment to consider, that it is not he alone who shall render an account of his conduct; and that if the preacher be responsible for his preaching, the hearer must, in an equal degree, be responsible for his hearing?—Again; if the minister is in danger of sinking under the impression of his own weakness and incapacity, is it not the duty of the congregation to interpret both his words and actions with candour and charitable allowance? Ought they not to reflect, that a weak and unworthy messenger may faithfully and honestly convey a most important message? Ought they not to weigh impartially, and without prejudice, the doctrines which derive their sole authority from God's written word, although delivered by one neither possessed of any authority in his own person, nor indeed ambitious of it? Ought they not to afford him encouragement, not only by a patient hearing of his counsel, but by that best and most animating reward—a ready compliance with it in their practice?

Finally, my brethren, let me entreat of you, that which indeed might have been added to

your duties, to join with me in earnest prayer to God, that He who “giveth eyes to the blind and feet to the lame,” may preserve me from faltering or fainting in my Christian course; that He, who ordaineth strength of praise even out of the mouth of babes, may enlighten me by his heavenly wisdom, encourage me by his strength, and sanctify me for his service by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit; that he may look down with mercy on my weak and defective services, and so bless the seed of the word sown among you, that it may bring forth a fruitful harvest of righteousness and true holiness; and that thus we may together render up a clear and acceptable account to the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, Jesus Christ: to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, &c. &c.

SERMON II.

ON PREACHING THE GOSPEL.

MARK xvi. 15.

*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world,
and preach the Gospel to every creature.*

SUCH was the commission given by Christ to his Apostles, and, virtually, to all who should succeed them. They were to preach the Gospel to all the world; and it was declared, that “he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.”—How momentous was the trust thus reposed in them! They were to be the ministers of eternal life, or of eternal death. With what earnestness were they bound to impress their important message upon the consciences of their hearers!

But *what is it to preach the Gospel?* This is a momentous question, both to preachers and

hearers. The Gospel is stated by St. Paul to be the power of God unto salvation unto all who receive it; that is, a dispensation in which the power of God is exerted for the salvation of men. The object of it is the recovery of man from that state of guilt and misery into which he sunk by the fall, and his restoration to the Divine favour and eternal happiness. The means by which this great end is accomplished are made known by the Gospel: Christ, by his death, takes away the guilt of man, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies the heart. Faith is required on the part of man; and this faith is employed by these Divine Agents as their instrument in effecting their own gracious designs. Hence the Gospel itself is said to be the means of salvation.

There are, therefore, several essential points in which the Gospel may be said to consist; and these I shall endeavour clearly, though briefly, to explain. They respect the state of man by nature; his state as renewed by Divine Grace; and the means by which this renovation of the soul is produced.

The whole economy of the Gospel evidently supposes man to be in a state of sin and guilt, under the just displeasure of God, and incapable of extricating himself by the exertion of his own powers: and it implies that no other means have been provided by God for the salvation of man;

every law of God being too pure and holy to be sufficiently kept by human weakness.—Man being in this state of ruin, we are informed by Revelation, that it hath pleased God, in great compassion, to appoint a Saviour. He hath sent his own beloved Son to take upon him our nature, and to make atonement for our sins. He hath likewise sent his blessed Spirit to testify of this Saviour, and to communicate the benefits of his salvation to the souls of men. Through this Saviour, men are to be restored to the Divine favour, and hereafter to be made partakers of the kingdom of heaven. In the mean time, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, they are to be prepared for this heavenly state by the renewal of their souls in holiness, by the mortification of the body of sin, by their growth in grace, and their conformity to the Divine image.

Such is the general outline of the Gospel. To “*preach the Gospel*,” is to make known these truths to men: it is both to declare them in a full and perfect manner, and to enforce and apply them in all their bearings to the consciences of the hearers.

From this brief statement we may form some general judgment on the subject; but, in order to give it additional clearness, I shall proceed to shew *what it is not to preach the Gospel*.

We do *not* “preach the Gospel,” if we represent man as in a state different from that which the Gospel supposes. If we do not describe him as fallen and corrupt; if we do not speak of him as yielding to the power of sin, and therefore obnoxious to the just displeasure of a holy God; we give a false view of the subject,—such a view, indeed, as wholly supersedes the grace of the Gospel.

Again: If, allowing the corrupt state of the human race, we assert that there is sufficient power in man to restore himself by his own exertions, without referring him to the grace and power of God, we do *not* “preach the Gospel.” This is to render the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit unnecessary. The philosophers of old did not “preach the Gospel;” for they pointed out no other means of reclaiming man than the wisdom of his own reasonings, and the energy of his own exertions.

Further: If we so exalt the merit of any righteous acts which man can perform, as to suppose them sufficient to counterbalance his transgressions, and to render him acceptable in the sight of God, we do *not* “preach the Gospel;” for thus also we make the Cross of Christ of none effect. This was the error of the Jews: they had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge; for being

“ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God.”

Again : If we represent Christ as only an example to mankind, and not as making atonement by his blood for sin ; as being a mere man, and not as the “ only begotten Son of God,” who came down from heaven to become our Redeemer ; we do *not* “ preach the Gospel.” For “ great is the mystery of godliness”—that is, of the Gospel—“ God was manifest in the flesh, seen of angels, received up into glory.”

In like manner, if we do not insist that the great end of Christ’s coming in the flesh was to purchase to himself a holy people who should be zealous of good works, to enable them to escape the corruptions of the world, and make them partakers of a Divine nature, we do *not* “ preach the Gospel ;” for we overlook the very design of Christ in coming upon earth.

In a word, if we represent man as in no need of a Saviour, or if we ascribe to him the ability to deliver himself ; if we leave Christ out of our view, or substitute any thing in the place of his meritorious death, perfect righteousness, and prevailing intercession ; or if we do not insist on the necessity of the sanctifying influence of the Spirit ; we evidently do not preach the Gospel : we do

not glorify Christ, or exalt his Spirit as we ought : we give false views of the state of man, and therefore fail in rightly preparing him for eternity.

In the several cases I have mentioned, the Gospel may be justly said not to be preached at all ; because either some doctrine opposed to it is introduced, or some essential part is omitted.

But the Gospel may also be preached *imperfectly*, and may thus fail, in a considerable degree, of fulfilling the great ends for which it was designed.—This is the case when the several points already stated, as characterising the Gospel, are not exhibited in their proper and full proportions : when either a clear view of the whole is not given, or a distorted image of it is presented ; when one part is unduly magnified, and its connection with the rest is not distinctly shewn ; when the outline is not properly filled up ; when the points, more peculiarly applicable to the circumstances of the hearer, are not brought forward ; or when a close and direct application to the conscience is omitted.

We have hitherto described the mere outline of the Gospel, an outline which it requires much knowledge and wisdom to fill up. Some further detail, therefore, is necessary.

The Gospel in itself is plain and simple : it professes to be so. It was intended for the poor and

unlearned; and therefore, if not plain, must be useless. It was given by God, in all whose works a noble simplicity bespeaks the perfection of the Creator. It was delivered by Christ and his Apostles, who professed to come, "not with excellency of speech," or worldly wisdom, but with plainness; and indeed they were the very models of simplicity in all their discourses. However high may be the subjects, they are so simplified by the strong and artless representations of the inspired writers, that "he who runs may read." Moreover, the Holy Spirit is promised, to enlighten the ignorant. In short, so intelligible has the Gospel been rendered, that nothing is required but a humble and teachable spirit, a diligent attention to the Sacred Oracles, and earnest prayer to the Giver of all wisdom for his illumination.

But though the truth is thus sufficiently manifest to those who are duly prepared to receive it, there is in men an unhappy blindness of mind, a perverseness of judgment, a corruption of heart, and a regard to worldly interest, which render him incapable of discerning spiritual objects in their true form and just dimensions, and according to their real beauty. Hence it is that even the professed Ministers of the Truth, with the same documents in their hands, with the same words of our Lord, and the same writings of the Apo-

styles before them, have often differed so materially from each other in the character of their discourses, that plain and illiterate men have been greatly perplexed, and have been at a loss to know what was the Gospel.

Some preachers, for instance, have dwelt almost entirely upon the evidences in favour of Revelation. This is, unquestionably, to give a very imperfect view of the Gospel; for, however important it may be to establish these evidences in their full force, this cannot be considered as constituting the whole, or even the chief part, of the message of the Christian Minister.

Others have been copious in describing the duties of man, and the obligations of morality; while they have very feebly urged, and very sparingly explained, those doctrines which constitute the only foundation of Christian practice; while they have left too much out of sight that Saviour by whose blood alone we can be cleansed from our iniquities.

Others, sensible of this error, have fallen into an opposite extreme. On points of doctrine they have sufficiently dwelt; but of Christian practice they have spoken only in general terms, and without adequate explanation.

Others have failed through want of a pointed application of the truths they have delivered. They

may have stated the grand doctrines of Scripture, but not in a way to interest their hearers. They have propounded them as speculative points; as if a cold and heartless knowledge of the truth could be effectual for salvation. The animated appeal to the feelings, the close application to the conscience, the tender address, as of a father to his children over whom he tenderly watches, have been wanting; and thus their preaching has been unfruitful.

Another error has been that of not sufficiently filling up the outline. It is the business of the preacher to bring general truths to bear upon individual cases. It is not the constant repetition of the same form, even of sound words, which can be styled a complete delivery of the truth. The truth must be distributed into particulars; it must be amplified; it must be variously elucidated; it must be brought home to the consciences of the hearers, to their lives, to their several trials, to their peculiar circumstances; so that they may clearly and fully understand it. The preacher of the Gospel is to be as the "householder, who, brings things new and old out of his treasury:" he is "rightly to divide the word of God:" he is "to give to each a portion in his season."

The grand and distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel are plain and easy; but they are also most

comprehensive. Their truth may be readily acknowledged by all; but to detail and apply them fully, is the labour of a whole life. It is easy, for example, to admit that we are sinners; and undoubtedly the sinfulness of our nature forms a very important doctrine of the Gospel; but of how small importance is the mere loose and general acknowledgment of this truth! It must be explained. The workings of sin, in its diversified forms, must be pointed out. The numerous lusts of the flesh and spirit which lurk in the human heart, must be stripped of their disguise. The love of ease and of pleasure must be exposed. Pride, whether assuming the character of self-conceit, of boasting, of vanity, or the desire of praise, must be exhibited to view. Covetousness, with its several indications; worldly ambition, in its various shapes; the spirit of impatience, of envy, of resentment, in their secret operations:—all these must be developed, in order that we may truly display the nature and extent of that corruption from which it is the design of the Gospel to set us free. And, without doubt, he who thus exposes sin to view gives also the best proof of the necessity of a Divine Influence on the soul, and is preaching the Gospel as truly and effectually as if he were directly proclaiming the “glad tidings” of forgiveness in Christ Jesus.

In like manner, he who largely explains the holy tempers which adorn the character of the renewed man; he who describes the fruits of the Holy Spirit, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance;" may surely be said to preach the Gospel, provided he neglect not to add a clear and full exhibition of all the other parts of true religion. It is owing to a narrow and imperfect view of the Gospel, that we confine that name to the doctrine of faith in Jesus Christ; we ought to include in it all those other doctrines which were equally taught by Christ and his Apostles.

It appears to have been the practice of our blessed Lord and his Apostles, to turn their peculiar attention to the prevailing faults of those whom they addressed: these they forcibly and directly attacked. Our Lord saw that the Pharisees, for example, were the chief opposers of spiritual religion: he therefore constantly reprovèd them, and exposed their hypocrisy to the people. He perceived that false interpretations were put upon the Law of Moses: he therefore gave a full and explicit view of its purity in the Sermon on the Mount. He "marked how the people chose out the chief rooms at a feast:" and hence he took occasion to rebuke pride, and to inculcate humility. He observed the Apostles

to be worldly and ambitious: he therefore frequently commended to them heavenly-mindedness, and deadness to the things of this world.

A great part, also, of the Epistles was directed against existing errors and vices. A Corinthian is guilty of incest, or disorderly practices prevail in the administration of the Lord's Supper: these require and receive the correction of the Apostle. It is this particularity of detail in the Epistles which renders them so instructive and interesting. It is thus that Scripture becomes "profitable, not only for doctrine," but "for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The Apostle, actuated by these views, commanded Timothy not only to preach the word, but to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering;" knowing that "the time would come when men would not endure sound doctrine, but, after their own lusts, should heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." He was to watch against the rising evil, and thus "do the work of an evangelist," and "make full proof of his ministry."

The Gospel, it is to be observed, was intended not only to convert men, but to build them up in the faith, the love, and the obedience of Christ. Hence we find some difference in the strain of the

apostolic preaching, at different times and to different persons. When addressing those who were unacquainted with the truth as it is in Jesus, they declare it to them with all fidelity and plainness. Afterwards, the same Apostles urge, upon the same people, new exhortations, more particularly suited to their actual condition. They “feed them no longer with milk,” as infants, but with “strong meat.” If an Apostle finds, at a succeeding period, that they abused the Gospel of grace to purposes of licentiousness, we hear him sharply reproofing them, and saying that “faith without works is dead,” and that a man cannot be “justified by faith, if it be alone.”

By this accommodation of the instructions of the teacher to the circumstances of the hearers, an admirable pattern is afforded of the manner in which we ought to teach others; for, doubtless, the Apostles as much fulfilled the high commission they received from Christ, when they reproofed sin, unmasked hypocrisy, and rectified mistakes, as when they first delivered the simple doctrine of Christ dying for sinners, and exhorted men to be reconciled to God.

We must guard, then, against an imperfect or partial representation of the truth. Christ, indeed, must always be held up to view as the great Agent in our salvation. He must be described as the

Spring of all obedience ; the Sun of the system, whose influence will pervade every part ; the Centre, in which all the rays must meet. But yet the very perfection of preaching consists in filling up this extensive circle, in delivering the whole counsel of God, and in giving to each part a degree of attention that shall be exactly proportioned to its rank and importance. Of the relative importance and rank of these parts a perfect scale is afforded by the Scriptures.

These observations may suggest several useful inferences, with which I shall conclude.

They may, in the first place, serve to correct the error of those who would confine the preaching of the Gospel to that particular class of doctrines which relates to the forgiveness of sins by Christ Jesus.—These doctrines, indeed, are the prominent part of the Gospel ; but they are not the whole of it. The office of the Christian Minister is much more arduous and extensive than this opinion would imply. It requires a deep knowledge of the heart, with all its movements ; and a careful attention also to the state of the hearers. In some congregations, the exposition of doctrinal truths is chiefly wanted ; in others, that of the practical parts of religion is more immediately required ; and the preacher must adapt himself to both. To preach the Gospel doctrinally,

and to preach it practically, may perhaps appear to superficial judges to be two distinct and even contradictory strains of preaching. Such, however, was the case in respect to St. Paul and St. James. Both preached the Gospel with wisdom and ability; both were inspired by the same Spirit: yet to many the one has doubtless appeared to hold a language inconsistent with that of the other. Cool reflection and attention to circumstances, will serve in this, as in many other instances, to reconcile the apparent contradiction.

We may further learn from these observations the necessity of caution in deciding what it is to preach the Gospel.—There are many sources of mistake on this point. Wise, and learned, and good men, have often differed, and even on some questions of importance. Let us not be rash or confident in our judgment. Who has not had occasion to retract errors into which he has fallen? I frankly own that I have varied in my sentiments on some points where I formerly thought that I had truth clearly on my side. I trust that the doctrines I now deliver are those which are clearly contained in the holy Scriptures. I can truly say, they have been adopted after a careful perusal of the Sacred Writings, after much observation of the state of mankind, and much serious reflection. But I would not be confident

that I shall never see reason to alter my judgment in some particulars; though not, I trust, upon any material point. It certainly is my earnest and daily prayer to God, that where I am wrong I may be set right; and that I may both clearly perceive, and faithfully preach, the whole truth as it is in Jesus. And this also I may affirm as before God, that I neither deliver any doctrine without a full conviction of its truth, nor keep back any from regard to man. Still I every day see more strongly the necessity of guarding against that spirit which decides upon great points hastily and dogmatically, and without candour or reflection. It is natural for men to form rash judgments. How striking were the instances of this even in the days of the Apostles! Could there be any doubt, while they were yet alive, as to what was the truth, or who were the preachers of it? Yet even in their congregations, and among the persons awakened by them, false teachers arose, who pretended that they knew the truth better than the Apostles themselves; and, strange to say, they were believed and followed! "Lord, what is man!" How blind and rash; how soon carried away by prejudice, or betrayed by a hasty judgment! Let us, my brethren, learn caution and humility.

We may infer, also, from what has been said,

that nothing new is to be expected in the preaching of the Gospel. What is new must, on that very account, be false. Yet many persons seem anxious to discover something which was never heard of before ; something which is to operate as a charm in effecting their salvation. All that can be delivered by the ablest men has been already revealed in the holy Scriptures ; and these truths will be found to be clear in proportion to their importance. Let none of us, then, neglect the treasure we already possess, in order to go in search of something new. Let us take the Bible into our hands, allowing to it its just weight and authority, and it will not fail plainly to make known to us the whole counsel of God.

The desire of novelty often leads to fatal consequences. Many are ever seeking, but never find the truth. Many love to repeat some favourite expression, or to dwell on some favourite topic, to the neglect of more important points. Many cherish a fond regard to doctrines, without attending to practice ; while some make use even of religion itself to stifle the remonstrances of conscience. Hence, too, come dissensions in the church. One says, “ I am of Paul ; another, I am of Apollos ;” and thus, as the Apostle tells us, they “ prove themselves yet carnal.” It has been the policy of Satan to undermine the church rather than to

attack it openly. An avowed denial of any truth would alarm the mind ; but the exaltation of one part of the Gospel, to the disparagement of the rest, is not so soon perceived to be equally productive of danger.

Lastly ; Let us ever remember, that it is the practical application of old and well-known truths to the conscience which is chiefly wanted, and from which Satan would divert our attention. What does the mere speculative belief of any truth avail, if it be not brought into effect ? You believe, for instance, the sinfulness of your nature : —then, mark it well ; trace it through all its windings ; cherish tenderness of conscience ; confess your sins before God ; be deeply humbled for them ; strive against them, in the name of Jesus Christ. Thus you will walk in the right way. The hour is at hand, when empty words will not be allowed as a substitute for holy deeds. We may build upon the true Foundation, wood, or hay, or stubble ; but that day will try every man's work of what sort it is. God grant that we may then be found to have received the truth in the love of it ; and to have brought forth its appropriate fruits, to the glory of God and the salvation of our souls. *Amen.*

SERMON III.

THE GLORY OF GOD.

EXOD. xxxiii. 18.

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

AT the time when Moses spake these words, he had just received a remarkable proof of the favour of God towards him: God had punished the Israelites for the great sin which they had committed, in making and worshipping the idolatrous calves, at the very moment when he was delivering the Law in Mount Sinai. On this account he had destroyed many; he had threatened to visit their sin upon future generations; he had separated himself from them, and ordered his Tabernacle to be pitched without the camp; he had refused to go up with them into the land of Canaan; he had ordered them to put off their ornaments, and, in dread suspense, to await his judgment. In the midst of this indignation,

Moses had ventured to prostrate himself before God, and to become an earnest intercessor in their behalf: he prayed for them, and prevailed. At his intercession, God was pleased to promise that he would not deprive them of his protection, but continue the visible tokens of his presence amongst them as before.

Emboldened by such gracious condescension, and mercy, Moses prefers a farther request which he had probably long, though in vain, sought an opportunity of preferring. "And Moses said, I beseech thee, *shew me thy glory.*"—What! it may be asked, had not Moses before this seen the glory of God? Had he not witnessed it when God appeared in Horeb, as a fire in the midst of a bush? Had he not seen it in the Pillar of the Cloud, which guided the Israelites in their passage from Egypt? Had he not seen it continually resting upon the Tabernacle, and appearing with awful brightness at its entrance? Had he not, in common with all the Israelites, seen it resting upon Mount Sinai, when the glory of the Lord covered the mountain, and the mountain appeared to burn with fire? Had he not seen it, in still greater effulgence, when he was called up into the mount, and entered within the cloud and the glory, and remained there forty days and forty nights conversing with God?—He

had ; and, therefore, it is plain that Moses meant, by the glory he desired to see, something far surpassing the splendour he had already witnessed ; something which should be more expressly characteristic of the God of the universe. He wished, probably, to see God in his proper form, under such an appearance as that in which he manifests himself to the blessed inhabitants of heaven.

This request of Moses, it may be, was founded on a misapprehension, both of the nature of the Divine glory, and of the capacity of man to behold it. Yet God was pleased graciously to answer it ; at once instructing him in the true nature of the Divine glory, which is that of his moral attributes ; and intimating, that, in the present state of man, he was incapable of beholding the proper glory of the Divine Essence. “ And he said, Thou canst not see my face ; for there shall no man see me and live.” Yet, that he might in some measure gratify the desires of his faithful servant, he added, “ Behold, there is a place by me ; and thou shalt stand upon a rock ; and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by ; and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts, but my face shall not be seen :”—*i. e.* I will give thee such a lowered

representation of my glory, as thou mayest be able to bear ; a representation which may be compared to seeing only the back of a person, instead of surveying the whole figure.

It is a natural mistake to judge of glory by the outward appearance. Hence we are apt, at first sight, when we hear of the glory of God, to conceive only of some external glory ; something bright and dazzling, like the radiance of the sun in the firmament. The glory of God, in this respect, might indeed sufficiently display his infinite superiority to all other beings. His glory, even in this lower sense, is represented by St. John as illuminating the boundless regions of heaven : nor could man any more endure the splendour with which the Divine Majesty might clothe himself, than the eye could endure the brightness of the meridian sun. But from this lower sense of the word it is necessary that we should turn our attention to one which is far more elevated and sublime. Indeed, the aim of all Scripture is to wean our thoughts from the objects of sense, from what is material or external, and to fix them upon things spiritual and internal.

We rise to a nobler and juster sense of the term, **THE GLORY OF GOD**, when we consider it as consisting in the perfection of his attributes.

In these his glory pre-eminently consists. Let us proceed with reverence to contemplate them.—His attributes are either his *natural* or his *moral* qualities.

I. Consider, first, his NATURAL attributes.

1. God is *self-existent*.—All other beings are created, and created by Him. He is the great Parent of existence. There was a time when other beings were not; and there was a period when they began to be, and to possess life and the various powers of life. And they then became, not what they chose to be, but what he made them. Their powers and faculties also are limited, and capable of increase. Their knowledge increases, their perfections advance. But God remains the same; unchangeable; incapable of increase or progress in the perfection of his attributes. What he is at this moment, he always was, when as yet there was no created being.

2. Reflect next upon his *Omnipresence*.—He fills heaven and earth. He is equally in all places. Other beings reside where he has placed them; in heaven, on earth, or in hell. They have their proper and peculiar sphere of action. He alone has no place, no sphere, no limitations. His perception, agency, power, and wisdom are operating in every part of the universe, with as much

perfection as if they were concentrated in a single spot—as though he were no where present and had no existence but there exclusively. He pervades all things, he comprehends all things; yet is pervaded by nothing, comprehended by none.

3. Survey his *Power*.—He is almighty, and can do every thing. These words are easily used; but what do they imply? How inconceivable is that infinity of power which they attempt to describe! He can do, instantly and perfectly, all things which are feasible. He can act without agents or instruments. All other beings, animate or inanimate, are but his instruments to fulfil his will. He speaks, or wills, and it is done. He said, “Let there be light, and there was light.” No other beings can create; they work with the materials which he bestows. They combine and modify these: but they cannot create: they cannot form what they please out of nothing. He needs the help of no other being: indeed, the strength of all other beings, annexed to his own, would be no addition to it; for they possess none which they do not derive from him. His powers alone are underived. He is the original Fountain of his own perfections.

4. Contemplate, also, the infinity of his *Knowledge*.—All things in heaven or on earth he distinctly and fully observes and knows. Every truth, in all its bearings, in all its recesses, in all its ful-

ness, is perfectly unfolded to his mind. He knows the smallest things as well as the greatest; surveys and remembers all the actions, and all the thoughts, of every one of the lowest of his creatures, as well as of the highest. There is nothing so minute as to be overlooked; nothing so vast as not to be comprehended by him without labour or effort. Amidst attention to every object in all his boundless dominions, he alone is never fatigued by the intentness of his observations, nor distracted by the variety of his knowledge. All things are equally naked, equally plain, equally revealed to him. The most secret recesses of the most secret mind lie exposed to his penetrating glance. Nor is his knowledge confined to things past or present. In this it is pre-eminent, that he also knows every thing future. All the thoughts and all the actions of all the beings who shall be living millions of ages hence, are now present to him, with as much certainty as are the events transacting at this moment. Yet no confusion disturbs his mind. He is all mind. It is of the essence of his nature to be omniscient.

5. Consider further his *Wisdom*.—He plans and directs all the events which occur in the universe. His plans are invariably pursued by all the creation, devils as well as angels fulfilling his will; all

beings, however unconscious, or however averse, acting as his instruments, and accomplishing his purposes. His plans never fail, can never be frustrated. He alone is never disappointed, never deceived, never surprised. All the designs of his adversaries are foreseen, all converted by him to his own glory.

6. View, lastly, the immeasurable extent of his *Bounty*.—By him all things subsist. All creatures in earth and heaven are replenished out of the storehouse of his beneficence. They all wait on him for every thing they need, and derive from him every thing they enjoy. He gives, to all, exceeding abundantly above what they can ask or think, or can ever conceive: he gives freely, neither expecting nor needing a return: yet the treasures of his bounty are not exhausted; they are not even diminished. Millions of generations yet unborn will equally be dependant upon him for the supply of their wants, and will equally partake of his boundless beneficence. Every archangel is as much a pensioner on his bounty as the meanest creature. All creatures are but parts of his family, for which he daily provides, “giving to each their portion in due season.”

And now, when we consider merely these *natural* perfections of the Deity, how sublime an idea do they present of the majesty of his glory!

In how many, and in what important particulars do all creatures differ from him; their powers from his powers, their excellency from his excellency, their glory from his glory! The distinction between them is not only great—it is infinite. They do not even approach to him. Their inferiority is not that of degree only—it is that of kind. He is every thing; they are comparatively nothing: he possesses every thing; they possess only what he pleases to communicate. Things of a like kind may be compared; but what comparison can possibly be instituted between finite and infinite, between time and eternity, between matter and spirit? Were all the myriads of creatures which now exist by his power, whether angels or archangels, principalities, thrones, or dominions, to be weighed in the balance against him, they would be found lighter than vanity. All their excellence would be as a drop in the ocean, compared with his excellence and the glory of his perfections. All that he possesses is original, is self-existent, is unlimited; what they possess is dependant, is finite. Hence we see why all creatures ought to seek exclusively his glory; and why he may justly, and without vanity, seek his own. There is, properly speaking, no glory any where but in God; and whatever glory other beings possess is but an emanation, a spark, derived from

him, and communicated to them. It is his glory which is seen and admired in their glory.

II. But the glory of God derived from what may be termed, by way of distinction, his natural attributes, is not the highest description of his glory, or even that in which it properly consists. A being might be powerful, and wise, and bountiful, without a disposition to direct that power and bounty necessarily and invariably in a right and proper channel. It is therefore the disposition to make a proper use of power, and not power itself, in which true glory consists. In answer, therefore, to the request of Moses, that God would shew him his glory, the Lord replies, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee." And when in the morning the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him on Mount Sinai, he proclaimed his name: "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands; forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation." It

was the goodness, therefore, and holiness of God which distinguished his character, which constituted his peculiar glory, and properly supplied his name. These, indeed, as much excel the glory of mere power or wisdom, as mind excels matter. Let us, then, contemplate these as constituting the real glory of God.

1. His *Goodness*.—The goodness of God is that attribute by which all his other perfections are directed to the best possible end. It is that which renders his wisdom, power, and presence, not only not dangerous, but in a supreme degree beneficial to the whole creation. Now, the goodness of God, like all his other attributes, is infinite. No one can comprehend its extent, can measure its height or fathom its depth: it “passeth all knowledge.” “High as the heavens are above the earth, so high are his thoughts” of love and mercy “above our thoughts, and his ways above our ways.” This is true glory—that the most powerful of all Beings should be the most generous; the most lofty, at the same time the most merciful; the most glorious, the most condescending. No finite creature ever was, or can be, as long-suffering and merciful as God. It is the glory of his nature to be exempt from the elements of those passions which tend to diminish the exercise of immeasurable love. “God is

love;" pure, unvarying love; love in its essence. No jealousies, nor envy, nor selfishness, nor rivalry, nor private wants, nor poverty of means, can ruffle his mind, or limit the full exercise of his love. But, to understand this subject, we should be translated to heaven. We must see God as he is, and know what he deserves and requires from his creatures; we must understand the evil of sin, and judge of its tendency in its remote effects, if we would learn how gracious and long-suffering, how slow to anger and of how great goodness the Lord is, in passing by the most aggravated provocations of his creatures. Then, and then alone, could we be prepared justly to appreciate the goodness of God. O God of love and mercy! so display to our minds thy goodness and love, that we may ever admire and adore thy transcendent glory displayed in them, and may love thee with all our hearts, and souls, and strength!

2. But the *Holiness* of God forms another principal feature in his glory: He "will by no means clear the guilty."—Here, again, we discover a tremendous infinity in his perfections. His justice and holiness are as infinite as his goodness. His mercy is not the weak mercy which cannot punish. He does not threaten, without meaning to execute his threats. No. His punishments are awful,

irremediable, eternal. To this part of our subject we must approach with trembling. How terrible is his wrath! It is the wrath of the Almighty! Here, like the angels who are represented as singing "Allelujah" while the smoke of the torments of the condemned ascends, we must adore what we dare not contemplate, and submit to what we cannot avert.—Yet, let me suggest, that the holiness of God, however pure, and his justice, however severe, may be the mere modifications of goodness—inseparably connected with it, and indispensably necessary to its very existence. For what is *holiness*, but the supreme regard to what is just and right? It is equity in the highest perfection. It is the security of the creature, that the power of the Creator will never be abused, never misemployed. It is the defence and the ornament of goodness. It is goodness directed to the purest and best ends; goodness enlightened by reason and sanctioned by wisdom. Holiness is therefore the glory even of goodness itself.

3. But is *Justice* also a modification of goodness? Yes, strictly so. It is the pledge of its being continued to the creation. Justice towards some is the security of all. Were an indiscriminate mercy to be shewn to all, sin would prevail, and soon prostrate the mercy of God, and efface from

the universe every trace of his goodness. That God may continue to be merciful, he must be just. That the universe may enjoy the most perfect and lasting happiness, under the mild effulgence of paternal kindness, it is absolutely necessary that vice should be eradicated and the offender be deprived of the power of contaminating others. Justice to a few is, in fact, mercy to all. Nor let it be forgotten, that his mercy and holiness, thus guarded by his justice, become in their turn the guards of his justice itself. His wisdom directs his justice, his mercy guides and proportions it. In such hands and with such guards, who will ever arraign his equity, or doubt the continuance and perfection of his love?

Thus, my brethren, have I ventured, under the consciousness of that ignorance and infirmity which must attend all human endeavours upon such a subject, to direct your attention to the glory of God. But though the subject is infinite, and infinitely transcends all human powers, it does not follow that we ought not to study it, and to endeavour to familiarize ourselves with it.

In every thing which relates to God, we find ourselves ever learning, yet never able to come to a perfect knowledge. And this is, perhaps, the condition even of angels. Even they may only

know in part, and comprehend in part, the glory of God. Their knowledge of it is perpetually advancing, their admiration enlarging, their adoration of it becoming more profound. Like them, we must endeavour to adore what we cannot comprehend, and to study what we can only imperfectly understand. And we are encouraged by the example of Moses in this pursuit. The desire to see the glory of God, though evidently conceived and expressed under some misconception of its nature, was acceptable to God, and rewarded by the noblest conceivable display of the Divine Nature. And thus every attempt to know God better, and to love him more, will be accepted and rewarded by him. Abraham desired to see the day of Christ, and “he saw it, and was glad.” Let us, then, pray earnestly that we also may behold the glory of God.—But where is it to be contemplated? I answer, Revelation is intended to display it. In the Gospel, especially, we see, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord. There an exhibition of it has been presented, such as even to astonish the angels, and make them stoop from heaven to contemplate it. Would you see the glory of infinite Mercy and infinite Love transcendently displayed? Behold Jesus Christ; see the Son of God freely given by the Father to dwell with us, to suffer for us, and to bring us to glory. In Christ is the Divine

glory transcendently displayed. He was the “brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person!” He that “hath seen Him, hath seen the Father.” Let us then study to know the glory of the Gospel. In that we shall perceive the glory of the Lord ; and as the face of Moses, when he beheld this glory on the Mount, was illuminated by it, so we “shall be changed into the same image, as by the Spirit of the Lord.” The knowledge of God is to be our grand study through eternity. Here then, in this lower school, let us begin, as Christians, to learn the lesson which, as glorified spirits, we shall perfect in the realms of glory.

SERMON IV.

ON GOOD WORKS.

JAMES ii. 24.

*Ye see then how that by works a man is justified,
and not by faith only.*

YET St. Paul (Rom. iii. 28) says, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." How are these declarations, apparently so contradictory, to be reconciled?

I am far from thinking the pulpit a proper place for the discussion of religious controversies, or even for a very critical and minute inquiry into the true sense of obscure passages of Scripture: yet, when it is considered that the subject treated of in the text is one of the most important in religion; that the supposed contradiction between the two Apostles has served as an occasion of reproach to infidels, and of doubt to

sincere but unestablished Christians ; and that the removal of a difficulty in any doctrine, or the solution of an objection against it, often tends to give the clearest and most complete views of it ; I hope I may be permitted to devote the present discourse to the subject of the text, and the reconciliation of the language of the two Apostles.

The doctrine of St. Paul, respecting justification, can scarcely be mistaken. He largely and expressly teaches, that “ by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified ” in the sight of God ; —that “ we are therefore justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ; ” —that we are “ saved by grace through faith,” “ not of works : ” that “ to Him who worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness ; ” —and finally, that “ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.”

On the contrary, the doctrine of St. James, as stated in the text, may appear to be, that it is not by our faith only, but by our works also, that we are to be justified. “ Can faith,” he asks, “ save a man ? ” “ Ye see how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”

In what sense this is to be understood I shall endeavour to shew ; first premising two obser-

vations, which may tend to prepare us for better understanding the meaning of the Apostle James.

1. In the first place, then, it is to be observed, that the two Apostles appear to have had different objects in view in their respective declarations concerning justification. St. Paul is treating on the method by which a sinner may have his sin forgiven, and become partaker of the salvation of Christ. This the Apostle asserts to be "by faith," in opposition to any merit of his own. He does not, therefore, take any pains to prove that this faith must be a sincere faith. This the question did not lead him to consider, and he properly assumes that the faith, to which so much is attributed, will be a true faith. The scope of his argument is, that this favour of being admitted to partake of the benefits of Christ's redemption, was not to be considered as a just reward of any man's merit, but only as the effect of the free grace and mercy of God. Now, was this also the intention of St. James? No—he had a distinct object in view. His object was to prove that the faith which saves a man must be a true and operative faith. The doctrine which he opposes is, not that a man will be saved by faith, but that he will be saved by a barren and useless faith. The persons of whom he is speak-

ing, are not those spoken of by St. Paul, who have not been admitted into the church of Christ, but those who, though they have been long members of the Christian commonwealth, yet, through an insincere faith, are still living in sin.

2. I observe, secondly, that it is probable the two Apostles, in treating of this subject, *use the several principal terms in the same sense*. When they both use the word “justify,” it is not probable that they should mean two different things. Besides, they both consider the word *saved* as having the same signification with being justified. Thus St. James says, “Can faith *save* him?” And St. Paul, in the same manner, says in one place, “By grace ye are *saved* through faith, not of works;” in another, “We reckon a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” The term *works* appears also to have the same signification with both the Apostles. The works which St. James means are evidently moral works, for he has given an instance of them. In like manner, St. Paul says, in one place, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done;” and in another, By the deeds or works of the law we cannot be saved, because “by the law is the knowledge of sin.” Now, it is not the ceremonial but the moral law which chiefly produces the knowledge of sin; and it is from the moral law he

quotes his examples of guilt, to prove that the law condemns instead of justifying. I conclude, therefore, that both the Apostles mean the same thing by "works," viz. works done in obedience to the moral law.

If, then, the two Apostles understood the same thing, by both the terms "justification" and "works;" and if one Apostle asserts justification to be by faith, and the other by works; the question recurs, "Do they not contradict each other?" I answer: In words they may appear to do so; but then this circumstance must be taken into the account, that an author's meaning is to be collected rather from the general sense of a passage, than from a few detached words in it. The sense of the Apostle James, as collected from the whole scope of the passage, is not doubtful; and evidently so far from being contrary to St. Paul's idea, appears strictly to accord with it. Should there, therefore, be any detached words which appear discordant with this sense, these should be interpreted according to the sense of the whole, rather than the sense of the whole be changed to accommodate them.

Permit me, therefore, to offer a brief paraphrase and comment upon the Apostle's words, beginning at the 14th verse, in which the subject is introduced. I would be far from asserting

that the interpretation I give, is, in all points, right ; or that it will in all parts, especially in the first instance, appear obviously just ; but it is such as appears to me to accord with the general scope of the passage, and to be the natural deduction from the words, even though there were no desire to reconcile them with the statement of another Apostle.

The Apostle, at the beginning of this chapter, had been reproving the conduct of certain persons in the church, who despised the poor, and observed the laws of God in a partial manner. “ My brethren,” says he, “ hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons.” “ If ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convicted,” or reprovèd, “ by the law as transgressors.” For “ whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” That is—whoever shall be partial and defective in his obedience, keeping some branches of the law, but breaking others, he is to be esteemed a transgressor of the law, although he may, in some respects, observe it. This is what introduces the subject ; and the introduction may be considered as the key to the whole. The Apostle is, therefore, led to this subject by justly censuring the partial and defective obedience of some hard-hearted and proud professors of Christianity.

He then proceeds in the fourteenth verse, “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith and have not works : can faith save him ?”—*i. e.* Let not any Christian think his faith sufficient to justify him, without those works of justice and charity of which I have spoken. “For what doth it profit if a man say he hath faith,” *i. e.* in words profess to have faith in God or in Christ, and “have no works” to evidence the truth of that profession : can such a naked, fruitless faith save him ?

Much stress is here to be laid on the expression, “if a man *say he* hath faith.” The question is not, “What doth it profit if a man hath faith and have no works ;” though this might have been truly said, and understood consistently with the system of the Gospel ; but the Apostle forbears to employ so strong an expression, and merely asks, “if a man *say he* hath faith ;”—evidently meaning, that he merely *says* this, without any foundation for so saying ;—can such a pretended or false faith save him ?

Here then we see what it is the Apostle condemns. It is the dependance, not upon a true, but upon a false faith. He then adds, verse fifteenth, —“If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,” *i. e.* make profession of good will towards them,

but, notwithstanding, “ye give them not those things which be needful” for the clothing or feeding of the body, what doth it profit them to hear your kind words? Would it not be a mere mockery, if your pretended compassion issued only in fine words and a courteous manner towards them? Even so faith professed with the mouth, if it hath not works answerable to that profession, is dead and fruitless as these words, “being alone;” being, that is to say, unaccompanied by works to shew its reality.—The illustration which the Apostle here produces of the folly of pretending to love without deeds to prove it, clearly develops his idea respecting faith. You do not condemn the quality of Christian love, because a pretender to it will suffer his brother to starve; but you justly condemn the man, and deny that he possesses this love. Even so, when a man “says he has faith,” but has no works to demonstrate it; you would not condemn faith, but this pretender to faith, and reprove him by saying, that “faith without works is dead.”

We now come to the eighteenth verse. “Yea a man” (an opposer of the Christian faith, as a Jew, for instance,) “may say” to such an empty pretender to faith, Thou boastest that “thou hast faith, and I have works; shew me thy faith” (to which

thou pretendest) “ without thy works,” if thou art able. For my part, I will prove the superiority of that faith which thou despisest; because “ I will shew thee my faith by my works.”

“ Thou believest that there is one God. Thou (in this) dost well;” but if this faith has no influence upon thy conduct, what is it more than “ the devils” possess? “ The devils believe” in the power of God, and their faith has some influence upon them; for “ they tremble.” Can thy pretended faith, which has less influence on thee than even that of the devils, save thee?

Verse 20. “ But wilt thou know,” he then adds, “ O vain man!” who makest profession of such a naked faith, “ that faith without works is dead,” is a mere nullity? Is it therefore such a faith as this which will justify thee?

He then comes to the example of Abraham. “ Was not Abraham our father justified,” not by such a lifeless fruitless faith without works as you possess, but “ by” a faith which produced “ works” (for such I take to be the sense of the passage, though the detached words might not seem to convey it) when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar. “ Seest thou how faith wrought with his works,” to produce them, “ and by works was faith made perfect?” “ And the Scripture was ful-

filled which saith, Abraham believed God, and *it* (his faith) was counted to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God!"

The argument respecting Abraham appears to be this:—God had promised to Abraham a son; Abraham stedfastly believed that promise, though it was most unlikely, according to human appearance, to be fulfilled. And we are told, in the Book of Genesis, that God so approved of this faith, that “he counted it to him for righteousness.”—From these words St. Paul infers, that Abraham was justified by faith; the expression, having righteousness imputed to him, being equivalent to “being justified.” And from this use of the example of Abraham, by St. Paul, against the Jews, as establishing the power of faith to justify, the argument had probably grown familiar with the Church, and might be misinterpreted by the false professor whom St. James reproves, as though it authorized his want of works.

What then is the object of St. James in producing this example of Abraham? Did he wish to contradict the Old Testament;—to contradict it also in that part which was used as an important bulwark of the Christian Church? Did he mean to assert, in contradiction to Moses, that Abraham was not justified by faith, but by his works? If he

did, why quote the very Scripture which makes against him, and why speak of its being fulfilled, but upon the supposition that the object of the Apostle in the preceding verses is what I have shewn it to be? There he quotes the example of Abraham, as a case full in point, to strengthen the assertion just made, that a faith not productive of works is useless or dead, and therefore will not justify. On this supposition the example he produces is important, and the declaration of Scripture in harmony with it. It is to this effect:—Abraham was justified by faith. But consider the character of his faith. Was it not so powerful and active a principle, that, under the most trying circumstances, he stood ready to sacrifice his child to God? Was he, therefore, justified by a fruitless faith? Or by a faith which produced works? “Seest thou not how his faith wrought by his works,” constraining him to produce them; and that thus his faith was completed, was rendered perfect, by his works? Thus the Scripture was fulfilled which said, “Abraham believed in God, and his faith was imputed to him for righteousness;”—and thus, on account of his faith, so manifested by works, he was called the friend of God.

The Apostle then adds, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith

only." This is the conclusion from the case of Abraham, and can therefore mean no more than is warranted by that case. Suppose it to mean, as the words detached from the context would seem to mean, that it is not faith by which a man is justified, but works. In this case, the example of Abraham, and the quotation from Genesis, are both foreign to the purpose. In this case, there could be no occasion to particularize the kind of faith by the adverb *only*, or alone. But, on the contrary, suppose the Apostle to have the same object in view throughout; viz. to convince a false professor of the worthlessness of an empty faith; and that he quotes the Book of Genesis, which says, that Abraham's faith saved him, in order to strengthen his argument, and concludes from it merely what is necessary to his main object; then, we shall also interpret the last verse in conformity with the general scope of the passage. We shall conclude that the Apostle intends merely to prove, that a barren faith will not justify; that a man is justified by works, *i. e.* by a faith productive of works, instead of a faith which is without works or alone.

In like manner must the example of Rahab be understood. St. Paul asserts her works also to have been done by faith. And St. James main-

tains, that her faith was evidenced or illustrated by the acts of receiving the messengers and sending them another way.

Thus also, in consistency with the general scope of the subject, must the remaining verse be understood—"As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." The expression is equivalent to that which the Apostle had previously employed with respect to faith. Faith can no more subsist without works, than the body can when the spirit is fled; than the principle of Christian love can prevail in the heart without prompting it to deeds of benevolence and affection.

Such appears to be the general meaning and object of this important passage, and such the harmony between the two Apostles.—I shall conclude with a single observation. Whatever be the difficulties discovered in this passage, one truth it most obviously teaches,—that faith, to be genuine, must produce good works. It must be a principle from which they spring, as the effect from its proper cause. Hence, then, we should surely be led to inquire into the influence which our principles have upon our conduct. What effects do they produce in us? Wherein are we more excellent than others who have no faith? What is

the benefit of barren and speculative opinions? They may be just in themselves; but so is the faith of devils; that faith which serves only to plunge them in deeper perdition. Nor is this admonition of small importance. Many are more solicitous to form their creed than to purify the heart. As if the essence of religion consisted in correct opinions; as if their salvation were suspended exclusively upon a barren belief; they rest there. For this purpose they read, they listen to the Minister of the Gospel, they inquire with eager curiosity into the various sects in religion; as if some tenet were thus to be discovered, the reception of which would operate as a charm, and at once recommend them to God.—Far, indeed, is this from the true genius of Christianity. True faith is the cordial reception of the Gospel of Christ. It is inherent in the very nature of the Gospel, that whosoever really believes it will do what is right in the sight of God. The various objects of a Christian's faith will each excite its corresponding virtues. Belief in the holiness of God will create a devout fear. A belief in the love of Christ will produce a reciprocal love to him. The reception of the Son of God as our Saviour will lead us to keep his commandments; and faith in his atonement will not only fill our souls with peace, but will lead

us to adorn the Gospel, and to exalt that Saviour who is the Source of all our hope and joy. Such is the power of faith as a principle of action. It moulds us into a state of conformity with the whole will of God. It works by love: it purifies the heart: it teaches us to live to Him who died for us; to “glorify Christ with our bodies and souls, which are his.”

SERMON V.

THE PRAYER OF ST. PAUL FOR THE EPHESIANS.

EPHESIANS iii. 14—19.

For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

WHEN St. Paul wrote these words he was a prisoner at Rome, and expected soon to suffer death. His sufferings and bonds were the conse-

quences of his preaching the Gospel. Had he remained a Jew, he might have continued to live in ease, and to enjoy the respect of the world. But no painful reflections on account of his sufferings appear to have haunted his mind. On the contrary, it is remarkable, that in none of his Epistles do we find higher commendations of the Gospel, nobler descriptions of its privileges, and stronger evidence of his "glorying" in it, than in those which were written during his imprisonment at Rome. In the Epistle, for instance, from which my text is taken, we find one of his most animated descriptions of the happiness of true Christians; and then, with his heart enlarged by the contemplation of that heavenly inheritance and those Divine blessings of which they were partakers, he suddenly adverts to his own situation as a prisoner. With a noble disdain of his personal sufferings, he exhorts the Ephesians not to be distressed by them: "I desire," says he, "that ye faint not at my tribulation for you, which is your glory." And that they might still further be strengthened to regard all sufferings whatever as unworthy to be compared with the glorious privileges of the Gospel, he pours forth the fervent aspirations of his soul to God in their behalf, in the interesting words which I have chosen as my text.

“ For this cause,” says he, “ I bow my knees :” for this cause,—namely, that the disciples might not “ faint” at his or their own “ tribulations ;” that they might take joyfully the spoiling of their goods ;” that they might rejoice “ they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ’s sake ;” that they might gladly “ suffer the loss of all things for Christ, and count them but as dung, or dross, for the excellency of the knowledge of him.”

We are all, my brethren, “ born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.” If even we do not suffer from the persecution or oppression of wicked men, still we must suffer from other causes : and is not that man blessed, who possesses a sure resource under every trial ; who is lifted above it, by an elevation of soul arising from the contemplation of privileges and happiness in comparison of which all that mortals can endure here is a mere trifle ? Such a superiority to the trials of life is to be attained through faith in Christ and the knowledge of his Gospel. These it was the prayer of the Apostle that the Ephesians might obtain.—Let us follow the Apostle in his petitions, and lift up our hearts to the God of all grace, to impart to ourselves the blessings which were desired for them.

He thus commences : “ *I bow my knees,*” in prayer.—Prayer is the source of the Christian’s

strength. The dispensation under which he lives is a system of intercourse between God and man. Man approaches his God, and spreads before him his wants, his dangers, and his sufferings : and God communicates to him, from heaven, mercy, grace, and strength, as the answer to his prayer and the fruit of his faith.—Oh ! think not by the resolutions of your own will, by the mere exertion of natural fortitude, by the force of moral considerations, or even by the mere speculative knowledge of the Gospel-system and its powerful motives, to endure afflictions as a Christian. No. The knowledge which is efficacious must be acquired by frequently “ bowing the knees ” in prayer. It must be imparted from above, by the “ Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Be not satisfied, then, with merely listening to the preaching of the Gospel, and endeavouring to understand its theory ; but, by earnest prayer to God, seek to have its great principles deeply impressed upon your hearts, and made effectual by the power of his Spirit.

“ I bow my knees,” he continues, “ unto *the Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—The blessed God has many titles by which he may justly be addressed : but there is no one which could be chosen with more propriety in offering up such a

prayer as this, than that which the Apostle has employed. The object of the prayer is, that the "Holy Spirit may strengthen us;" that "Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith;" and "that we may know his love." How properly, then, is God addressed by the title of the "Father of Jesus Christ!" It is He who, with the Son, sent the Spirit. He sent the Son to be our Saviour, and the object of our faith. His love was the same with that of the Son; for it was the Father who planned that wonderful scheme, the redemption of fallen man by the death of his Son, which the Son afterwards executed.—And here, my brethren, allow me to observe, that it is not always a matter of indifference by what title we address God in prayer. The title is, in a measure, significant of the views with which we regard him. To regard him merely as a wise, a just, a holy, an almighty Being, as the Governor of the universe, or as the Judge of man:—this, though a just, is not the proper Christian view of the Most High. Taught by Christ, we draw nigh to him in "the Spirit of adoption, crying, Abba, Father!" We approach his throne as children: we feel the sentiments of filial confidence, of holy boldness, of grateful affection, of lively hope, and of thankful exultation. We address him as "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and, in that character

as our own Father through Christ, who was partaker of our flesh ;—as the Father of Christ, and therefore the Father of love and mercy ;—as the Father of Christ, and therefore the Author and Giver of all spiritual blessings in him. What hopes does not this title express ! May our hearts be deeply affected by it whenever we “ bow our knees” to God in prayer !

The Apostle, having thus addressed God as “ the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” adds next this description of God, that “ *of him the whole family in heaven and earth is named.*”

The Church of Christ below is considered as “ a family.”—“ A family” is a term which conveys every tender and endearing idea. It supposes a society sprung from one common parent, and united by the strongest bonds, dwelling with each other in harmony and peace. And such a society is that of Christians, when they are truly partakers of the Spirit of the Master they serve. Of this family there are two branches, Men and Angels ; both sprung from one common Father ; disunited and separated for a time by sin, but now made one in Jesus Christ ;—angels ministering to the heirs of salvation ; angels waiting to receive the souls of the faithful, to be incorporated into their own blessed society. Of him, then, this

whole “family in heaven and earth is named.” He is become the illustrious Head of both : he is their common Lord. They derive a common glory and dignity from the relation which they bear to him. They look up with a common confidence to the Great Head of the family in earth and heaven ; and, through him, to that Father who loves them for his sake.—How do those, my brethren, disparage Christianity, who fail to acknowledge the admirable dispositions it has a tendency to create ! What a spirit of love and goodwill to our fellow-Christians does it instil, by teaching us to regard them as members of the same “family !” What a dignity does it impart to the poorest creatures around us, when we regard them as united to the family of angels above ! And what a feeling of holy courage and confidence does it inspire, when we look up to Him who is the Head of the family, even Jesus Christ, who, from love to man, took our nature upon him, and became “bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh !”

We now come to the petitions contained in this prayer. The first petition is, that God would “*grant them, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.*”—The Spirit of God is the Source of

all strength in the Christian. Man, in himself, is a feeble creature, yielding to the slightest temptation, falling before the most trifling opposition, dismayed by the most insignificant dangers. It is therefore the office of the Holy Spirit to receive him, when engrafted into the family of Christ, as his charge ; to enlighten him with knowledge ; to open his understanding to the truths of the Gospel ; to affect his heart by those powerful motives which it suggests ; to incline him to adopt those principles which it proposes.

And the Spirit “strengthens us *in the inner man.*” The heart is the seat of pure principles and holy affections ; and it is the heart which the Holy Spirit purifies. All external reformation, while the heart is unaffected, is but hypocrisy or self-deceit. All appearance of fortitude, either in resisting temptations or in bearing persecution, is but a vain shew, unless “the inner man” be fortified with holy principles, and be strengthened with Divine aid. But if “the inner man” is cleansed, the outward man will be pure, and will appear to be so.—The Spirit strengthens us with might more than human : with might sufficient to bear whatever we may be called to suffer for Christ’s sake ; with might to resist temptation, to overcome our corruptions, to mortify our fleshly appetites, to “pluck out the right eye, or cut off

the right hand." With what might were the primitive Christians endued, when they "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, and were tortured, not accepting deliverance!" With what might were women, the feebler sex, strengthened, when they encouraged their children to suffer death, even in their own presence, rather than deny Christ! With what might are the disciples of Christ strengthened, when inveterate habits are resisted, the besetting sin subdued, the strongest passions of the soul controuled; when they, who, like the Corinthian converts, were once "unrighteous, idolaters, fornicators, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners," become sanctified, holy, pure, heavenly-minded, sober, temperate, full of good-will towards their fellow-creatures!—Behold, then, my Christian brethren, your lofty privileges! We do not call you to "mortify the flesh" by your own unassisted resolutions;—but we bid you expect aid from above; we bid you look to Him, who is the Author of all strength and grace, to "work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," that, by Him, you may escape the corruptions that are in the world, and be made partakers of a Divine nature.—Nor, my brethren, let the other clause of the passage I have read to you be forgotten. The Apostle prays that all this may be done "accord-

ing to the riches of the Divine glory." The glorious power of God is displayed, his inscrutable wisdom magnified, his unsearchable grace honoured, when the sinner is thus endued with Divine power, and "strengthened with might" by the operation of his Spirit. O forget not the animating consideration, that, while you contend for salvation, God himself is interested in your success, and that his grace will be glorified by it!

The next petition of the Apostle for his disciples is, that "*Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith.*"—Christ may be justly said to dwell in the hearts of his people, either by his Spirit, which he has given them, or by his doctrine abiding in them. By virtue of their union to the Spirit, they become one with Christ and Christ with them. It is not, however, I apprehend, this union, which the Apostle here makes the subject of his prayer; for this has already been requested in the former petition. I rather understand it of the doctrines of Christ. Thus our Saviour says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." And in like manner St. John: "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Son and the Father." Let us, then, consider the full import of the doctrine of Christ "*dwelling in the heart by faith.*" It

supposes a clear and lively apprehension of Christ, —in his glorious person, his infinite love, his meritorious death, his kind offices,—to abide in the heart, that is, to make a deep impression on the heart,—to remain fixed there as an object perpetually present. It supposes the mind to be deeply penetrated with a sense of his infinite importance to the soul; to place a constant dependence upon his merit and promises; to study continually his word and commandments; to be perpetually looking to him for grace and mercy in every time of need. When Christ thus dwells in our hearts, as the object of our frequent meditation and our lively faith, his person and his name will be received by us with entire veneration; our obligation to him as a Saviour and Redeemer will appear to require every sacrifice which he demands, and every proof of attachment which can be shewn to him. In our prayers, then, we should have respect only to *his* mediation. In our thanksgivings, his worth and his blessings will inspire our hearts with gratitude and our tongues with praise. When oppressed with trouble, we shall look to Christ for succour, and be comforted. In combating with our corruptions, it will be from the intercession and aid of our Saviour that we shall expect strength, and courage, and constancy. In sickness, the name of Christ will be health to

our souls ; and in the hour of death, his rod and his staff will comfort us : we shall lean upon him while we pass through the dark valley of the shadow of death. Where Christ truly “ dwells in the heart by faith,” he will never for a long period be absent from our thoughts. Our hopes will be too much fixed upon him ; our peace will be too manifestly derived from him, to permit us long to remain without meditation upon the power and grace of Him who is at once our Shepherd, our Friend, our Lord, our Life, our Light, our Glory, our Redeemer, our Intercessor, our “ all in all.”

My brethren, I would then ask, “ What think ye of Christ ? ” Does he thus dwell in *your* hearts by faith ? Are you, with an earnestness unfelt on other subjects, accustomed to meditate upon his mercies, and to study his word ? Not to have the heart supremely fixed upon him, is not to know him aright. A right knowledge of him will discover such infinite obligations to him, will reveal in him such perfections and such glory, that we cannot but consider him as the most glorious object upon which the contemplation of man can be fixed.—Suffer me to ask ; Do *you*, my friends, know him in this way ? Do your thoughts dwell upon him with inexpressible delight and confidence ? If not, how can you call yourselves his disciples ? How can you consider yourselves

as redeemed by no less a sacrifice than that of his own precious life, how can you imagine that he is interceding in your behalf in the courts of Heaven, while you refuse to give him the chief place in your hearts and affections?

The Apostle proceeds next to pray, that the disciples, "*being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.*"

The "love of Christ" to his church — that love, of which many in the world so seldom think, and which they estimate at so low a value — that love, the Apostles, while they speak of it, feel themselves at a loss for words adequately to describe. Hence St. Paul speaks of it as we speak of infinite space, the boundaries of which we cannot perceive, and the extent of which we cannot define. But even this expression, strong as it is, and vast as is the idea it conveys of the love which is the subject of it, does not satisfy the Apostle. He adds, which "passeth," or surpasseth, "all knowledge." It is as though he had said: Raise your ideas to the utmost elevation, extend them to the remotest bounds; still they are inadequate: the love of Christ no mind ever yet fully conceived.

But, you may ask, why should it not be con-

ceived? What is the love which you so labour to magnify? In what particulars does it differ from the most exalted human love, or from the still more pure and generous affection of an angelic being? I answer—It differs essentially. But in order to comprehend it aright, it is necessary that we should form some adequate conception of the glory of the Son of God, as the object of adoration to all the hosts of heaven;—that we should understand, in a degree, the perfections of his nature;—that we should ourselves feel somewhat of that ardent love to his Father's law, which glowed within his breast;—that we should also be actuated, in a degree, by that inexpressible hatred of all pollution and sin which he felt;—that we should entertain a just conception of man, and be sensible how low and worthless a creature, in his fallen state, he is;—that we should understand something of what it would necessarily cost to redeem the soul, and to expiate Divine Justice. We should feel a portion, also, of what Jesus felt in the garden of Gethsemane, when his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood. We should feel something of the breadth of that love which extended to the covering of such a multitude of sins; sins of such a complicated dye; sins of the memory, the will, the imagination; sins of revolt against God, of willing service to

satan, of hatred of the Almighty; sins of backsliding and treachery; sins against the clearest light and knowledge. We should also enter into eternity; should survey the duration of that love, which was from everlasting to everlasting; should behold the thrones of glory, and the eternal bliss to which that love will advance the redeemed. Oh! my brethren, how well did the Apostle exclaim, it “passeth knowledge!”

And yet this love, as the Apostle tells us, is the object of the contemplation of “all saints.” They desire, at least, to understand it. The little they do know of that love inspires them with a “hope full of immortality,” and communicates a peace which “passeth all understanding.” In this love may we be “rooted and grounded!” May the knowledge of it not be a mere transient emotion; but may we be “rooted and grounded in it;” so fixed and established in it, that we may derive from the knowledge of this love, as the tree from the soil in which it is rooted, a powerful influence, which will invigorate all our endeavours in the service of God, and produce in us the fruits of righteousness, to the praise of his holy name!

Finally, The effect of our knowledge of the “breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of

this love will be, as we here learn, that we shall be "*filled with all the fulness of God.*" The Apostle prays that our understandings may be filled with such high and extensive thoughts of the Divine perfections and glory, as to cover, and as it were overwhelm, the mind ; that our hearts may be altogether absorbed by the great work of salvation ; by its suitableness to the state of man, and its sufficiency to satisfy all his wants ; that we may be amazed at the greatness of the Gospel ; and that we may perceive it to be truly worthy of Him who is infinite in wisdom, in glory, and in power.

The time will not permit me to make more than one short reflection on what has been said. I would propose it in the form of a question : it is this ; How far does the subject-matter of our prayers correspond with that of the Apostle ? We pray for pardon of sin ; for grace to live a sober and godly life : it is well. But do we pray, also, that " Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith ; " that we may be " grounded and rooted in the knowledge of his love ; " that we may " comprehend, with all saints, what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height " of it ?—There are many who never consider the acquiring of a knowledge of the love of Christ as a duty. But,

my fellow-Christians, it is indeed the first of your duties to be sensible of your obligation to a Redeemer; and methinks it should be the chief end for which we live. Pray, then, that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;" that your heart may be the temple and throne of your Saviour. You will soon discover and acknowledge the unspeakable benefit of his presence. It will enliven you, it will embolden you, it will comfort you, it will shield you, it will strengthen you, it will sanctify you; for the knowledge of Christ is the light, the honour, and the glory of the church. To him, therefore, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, let us give, as is most justly due, all glory, honour, majesty, and dominion, henceforth, and for evermore. *Amen.*

SERMON VI.

STATE OF THE SAINTS ABOVE CONTRASTED
WITH THEIR FORMER CONDITION BELOW.

(FOR ALL-SAINTS' DAY.)

REV. vii. 9—17.

After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the Throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever:

Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

ON this day, consecrated to devout meditation on a future state and a heavenly inheritance—within these hallowed walls, in which we feebly attempt to emulate the worship, the feelings, and the employments of the blessed spirits above;—on this festival, dedicated to the pious commemoration of the saints who have slept in Christ, and are now with him in joy and felicity; let us endeavour, my Christian brethren, by the help of God, to detach our thoughts for a few happy moments

from the alluring scenes below ; from the tumults, the anxieties, the troubles, the vicissitudes, the fears, the follies, the vanities, the corruptions, of this sinful world ; and fix them, in devout contemplation, on that glorious state and that blessed assembly of which so delightful a picture has been just presented to us. It is a picture rendered sacred by the recollection that it describes the felicity of those beloved friends who were once our companions and guides upon earth ; who departed hence in Christian faith and hope ; and to whom our souls yet cleave in all the union of the tenderest affection. It is a picture endeared to us by the humble hope that it describes the happiness which we ourselves shall one day enjoy, when our warfare has been accomplished, our labours finished, our sorrows ended, and our released spirits have “ entered into the joy of our Lord.”

“ I beheld,” says the Apostle (admitted, for the consolation of the church, to witness and record the happiness of the saints in heaven) ; “ I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the Throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.”—O what a different scene, what a different world, separated only by a slight veil from that which we inhabit, is here exhibited to

our view!—a world into which we may enter by a single step, and in a moment of time! Here we see a busy world, eager in vain pursuits, agitated by mere trifles, contending about objects of no moment, and immersed in things which perish with the using. All is noise, and confusion, and vanity, and sorrow, and evil. But behold another world, nigh at hand, composed of different beings, governed by different principles; where all things are as substantial, as here they are vain; where all things are as momentous, as here they are frivolous; where all things are as great, as here they are little; where all things are as durable, as here they are transitory; where all things are as fixed, as here they are mutable! That world has also its inhabitants—so numerous, that the population of this world is but as a petty tribe compared to them. It has its employments; but they are of the noblest kind and weightiest import; and compared with them, the whole sum of the concerns of this life is but as a particle of dust. It has its pleasures; but they are pure and spotless, holy and divine. There, perfect happiness, and uninterrupted harmony, and righteousness and peace, ever prevail. What a contrast to our present state!—And is this blessed scene near us? Is there but, as it were, a step between? May we be called into it in a moment? With what anxious solicitude, then,

should we endeavour to realize it! And how ardently should we desire to be prepared for an admission into it!

The number of the blessed inhabitants of heaven is represented as infinite: "I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number." And if we consider the infinite power and glory of Him who created them; the magnificence and even profusion displayed in the works of His hands; the end and design for which they were created—namely, to manifest His glory; we shall at once feel that their number must be, in the fullest sense of the word, infinite. Let us reflect, that to create a million, or a million of millions, of the brightest and most glorious spirits, is as easy to the Almighty, as it was to create our first parents: He has but to will, and it is done. Let us consider, that he rejoices in the multitude of his works; that every part of the universe is filled with being—from the immeasurable system of worlds, to the atom whose minuteness eludes the keenest sight. Let us reflect, that heaven is the perfection of his works, the grand scene of his glory, the immediate place of his residence. There he is to be known, and adored, and glorified; there he is to receive the homage so justly due to his majesty. And shall this part of his works alone be scantily peopled? Shall those realms alone, which he made

for himself, be without inhabitant? Shall heaven alone be a blank in the creation?—Our Lord, it is true, hath said, speaking of the race of man, that “narrow is the way which leadeth to life, and few there be that enter in thereat;” but this expression relates solely to the earth we inhabit—one world amidst, perhaps, an innumerable multitude. It relates also, principally, to the time in which our Lord lived. Even this world, we trust, will not ultimately be barren, but produce numerous and faithful witnesses to the glory of the Redeemer. He made this earth the scene of his sufferings, and we may expect it to become the scene of his triumph. Only allow the Gospel of Christ to prevail, as the Prophets lead us to hope that in the latter days it will prevail; allow the world to continue, as here is ground to expect it will continue, to a period of which the infancy has scarcely yet passed; and we may well conclude, that even from this fallen world shall multitudes, as numerous as the drops of the morning dew, crowd into the realms of light, to ascribe glory, and praise, and honour, to Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever.”

In considering the multitudes, beyond the power of calculation, which will people the realms of bliss, we must recollect, that these multitudes constitute happiness. On the earth, where a diffi-

culty of subsistence is often experienced ; where there exists a constant collision of interests ; where one stands in the way of another ; where jealousies and envyings, anger and revenge, pride and vanity, agitate and deform the world ; numbers may tend to diffuse wretchedness, and to multiply evil. Hence we flee for peace and joy from the crowded haunts of men, and court the sequestered habitation and the retired vale. But in heaven, where there can be no thwarting interests ; where the wants of one are never supplied at the expense of another ; where every bosom glows with love, and every heart beats with desire to promote the general happiness ; the addition of a fresh individual to the innumerable throng diffuses a wider joy, and heightens the universal felicity.

The multitude assembled there is described as composed of “ all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.”—Here, again, we must beware of forming our judgment from the feelings and views of this fallen world. There, it will be no cause of jealousy, or rivalry, or hatred, that one person received his birth on this, and another on that, side of a river or sea. A man will not despise his brother on account of the different shade of his complexion : he will not seek his destruction because he spoke in another language, nor renounce communion with him because he

praised the same God, with the same spirit of piety, in a house of a different form. All these petty distinctions will have either ceased to exist or will be completely annihilated in the general spirit of love which will then animate every mind. One pursuit will occupy every heart; each will strive only to glorify God. There will either be no distinctions, or the distinctions be like the beautiful variety we see in the works of God, —like flowers enriched with different colours to delight the eye, or with various perfumes to gratify the smell. Why should distinctions offend, or variety disgust? It is the dark and selfish pride of the heart which considers itself as the only standard of right and excellence; and therefore despises or hates every deviation from itself. Let the pride be removed, and the distinction would become a pleasing variety, instead of a source of hatred.

Alas, alas! what petty differences, engendered by pride, and nursed by the worst passions of the human breast, here separate, with unchristian hatred, those who are brethren, the children of the same God, the members of the same church, taught by the same book, partakers of the same hope, redeemed by the same Saviour, influenced by the same Spirit, travelling along the same road towards the same blessed country! Oh, Religion!

our best, our dearest, holiest guide! is thy sacred name to be prostituted, is thy divine aim to be perverted, to sanction discord, to justify hatred, and to consecrate bigotry? No! Religion acknowledges nothing as her own work, but union and peace. In heaven, her throne, no odious denominations will parcel out the regenerated church, no frivolous distinctions be suffered to break the unity of the members of Christ; but people of every nation, and kindred, and tribe, and tongue, will unite in one worship, will be animated with one spirit, will be actuated by one principle—and that the principle of pure and universal love.

The society of that blessed place is composed of “angels” and “saints;”—of those, that is, who have never sinned against God; and those who, having sinned, have been redeemed by the Cross of Christ, and have “washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb;”—of those who were created, and have continued, in the highest order of bright and glorious spirits; and those who once were “dead in trespasses and sins,” who “walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience,” but who have been “quickened together with Christ, and raised up together with

him, and made to sit together," with angels, and with the Lord of angels, "in heavenly places." Yet the angels scorn not such society; they reproach not the children of men with their fall: they refuse not to receive them into their company. On the contrary, they "rejoice" when any "sinner repenteth;" they convey the departed Lazarus into Abraham's bosom; they become "ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation;" they worship with them in the same adorations; they answer in responsive chorus to their praises. What a model for the conduct and worship of the saints below!

The employment of that innumerable company is represented as that of praise "to God, and to the Lamb," who redeemed them and bought them with his blood.—In other parts of the sacred writings, where the employments of heaven are described, worship and praise are represented as the chief occupation. We are not, however, to infer from this, that the exclusive employment is religious adoration; for we know that the angels, beings of a still higher order and more spiritual nature, are frequently engaged in active commissions to execute the will of God. What are the precise occupations of the "spirits of the just made perfect," we indeed know not; nor could we, perhaps, comprehend them. It is

sufficient for us to rest assured that they are occupied in that work for which they are best qualified. It is sufficient for us to know, that, whatever the employments are which their Creator and Redeemer assigns to them, they are such as must tend to produce the greatest happiness, and to excite new and continual praises to God ; for, in every description which is given us of the heavenly world, it is the voice of incessant praise and thanksgiving we hear ; it is the overflowing of thankfulness for a state of exquisite enjoyment ; it is the universal burst of gratitude, extending from one boundary of heaven to the other. The voice of prayer itself is lost in the exultations of praise ; the language of complaint is unknown ; the lamentations of sorrow, and the sighs of grief, are never heard.

The happiness of that innumerable company is described in the most glowing colours :—“ They shall hunger no more, nor thirst any more. The sun shall not light on them” (to scorch them), “ nor any heat” (molest them). “ The Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water ; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”—Here we see every source of evil, and even of inconvenience, removed, and every good bestowed, by the unrestrained bounty of Heaven.

Descriptions of this kind must be figurative ; but the figures are evidently intended to convey to us the highest possible conception of unqualified good, and the total absence of all evil.

The remaining part of the description both manifests the nature and the source of the happiness which they enjoy. They are “before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple : and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.” The happiness which they enjoy is, then, a refined and holy happiness. It is not the happiness of a Mahometan paradise, but such as is suited to spiritual beings of the highest order and most exalted taste. It is a happiness founded upon religion and devotion, upon near and intimate access to the Lord of life and glory. And let not this happiness be judged of by those who, far from having enjoyed pleasure arising from such a source, have, on the contrary, experienced from it only pain and restraint. They know not what religion is, nor are capable of appreciating its nature and excellence. To others, it will be sufficient to state, that religion is but another word for happiness. I do not mean this merely in the sense in which, without guarding them, the words may be understood—viz. that the effect produced by religion is happiness. I use the words literally ; and design to state

that religion itself, the act and exercise of it, is the purest and highest happiness.—It may here be necessary to rectify the general definition of religion. Religion is not merely the worship of God, or the exercise of obedience: it is the union of the soul with God; the conformity of the will with his will; the enjoyment of communion with him; and the transformation of every faculty of the soul to his image and likeness. Religion, here, is but the faint outline of this more sublime image of its nature; the outward expression of what it ought to be, and of what it is above. Now happiness arises from a frame of mind harmonizing with the objects which surround us. When the soul, therefore, is moulded into the perfect frame of religion in its most exalted state; when every affection and every faculty are put into perfect tune, and all are in unison with the Divine Source of all good; there must be happiness, arising from such a constitution, the most pure and perfect which a creature can enjoy. It is the happiness of God himself—of God, the Source of all happiness. It is a state of mind in which that necessarily gives pleasure which gives Him pleasure; in which there is a participation of His feelings; in which the soul drinks at the Fountain-Head of all enjoyment; in which the bliss of the Almighty becomes the bliss of his

creatures. Thus religion and happiness are convertible terms. They are, in fact, one and the same thing: and it is not more impossible that God should be unhappy, than that his devout servants, dwelling near his throne, and “serving him day and night in his temple,” should taste of misery.

To what an exalted height of happiness and glory, my Christian brethren, is then that “innumerable company” advanced! With what a glorious society do they hold communion! In what noble employments are they engaged; of what refined enjoyments do they partake! Blessed spirits! your lot is fixed; your happiness is permanent and eternal. You will suffer pain or feel distress no more. Your minds are cleansed from every taint of sin; your breasts are the everlasting abode of purity and joy. All around you is peace. Every thing is concerted, by Almighty Wisdom and Infinite Goodness, to banish the very elements of evil; to dispel the slightest shade of misery; to pour around you, in luxuriant profusion—a profusion designating the infinitely varied power of the Giver—all the richest stores of good.—How unlike this is our present state! What a different abode is this world below! Here, fear and terror, danger and violence, pain and suffering, sin and remorse, misery and grief,

poverty and labour, the curse and the frown of Justice, have fixed their abode.—But, my brethren, though “these days be evil,” give not way to despair. Let me now present to you this innumerable company under a different aspect. Let me point out to you what was their former, as well as what is their present, state. Once, these were “men of like passions with yourselves;”—“they have come out of great tribulation;”—they once sighed and groaned under sufferings and sorrows as deep and grievous as those by which any of you are afflicted. Oh! what an invaluable and sure source of consolation is it, to every pious Christian suffering under the weight of worldly calamities, to direct his contemplation to this glorious host above! Standing before the Throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and with palms in their hands, methinks they say to him,—“We were once as you are; we were assaulted by the same temptations; we were stricken by the same arrows; we drank deep of the same bitter cup; we combated with the same enemies; we felt all the sharpness and bitterness of the Christian warfare. Often were we ready to faint; often we cried to God in an agony of grief, on the point of being swallowed up in despair. We felt all the weakness of our faith, and trembled under the infirmities of our

common nature. Faint not therefore in your course. Behold the "cloud of witnesses" surrounding you. With one voice they bid you "lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees." "Be strong, fear not; your God will come: he will come with a recompence, and save you."

Oh, my brethren in Christ! my flock whom I long to present to God "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light," and prepared to join their innumerable company, let me conjure every weak and every afflicted brother amongst you, to contemplate these blessed inhabitants of heaven. How changed are they from what they once were! Praises incessantly occupy those tongues which once breathed out only complaints, and told of fears and apprehensions. Not a complaint can you make which they have not made: not a temptation can you describe to which they were not exposed. All your weakness they felt: all your trials they endured. Some, like Lazarus, were afflicted with poverty; some, like Job, were plunged from the height of prosperity to the lowest depth of adversity; some, like David, were harassed by severe persecutions; some, like Lot, were vexed by the unrighteousness of those around them; some, like Eli, were cursed with unrighteous children; some, like Peter, were

shut up in prison; some, like Manasses, felt all the anguish of remorse; some, like the Apostles and the noble army of martyrs, were stoned or sawn asunder;—yet, now, their sufferings have been long forgotten, or are remembered only to bless God, who “counted them worthy to suffer for his Name’s sake.” One moment spent in heaven effaces for ever the afflictions endured upon earth. Oh! look to them, then, and indulge the delightful hope that one day “God may wipe away all tears from your eyes,” and compensate all your sufferings.

For the better confirmation of your faith, let me, lastly, refer you to the means by which this wonderful change was accomplished in them: “They washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” They bear in their hands the “palm,” as an emblem of victory in the good fight of faith; and they are “clothed with white robes,” to denote the purity of their hearts under the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit.—The first point to which our attention is here directed is that “blood of the Lamb” in which their “robes have been washed and made white.” This image is designed to shew, that it was to the efficacy of the death of Christ they trusted as the atonement for their sins. Christ was to them the “hope of glory;”

that is, they founded all their hope of glory upon him. Their robes were formerly defiled and stained by sin; but they were “washed, they were cleansed, they were justified, they were glorified” by Christ. He it was who gave them heaven, and who gave them the preparation for it. He is the Lord of the world above; he has the “keys of death and hell;” he “openeth, and no man shutteth; and he shutteth, and no man openeth.” To him, trusting in his grace and mercy, they applied, as to the Saviour of mankind; and he heard their cry, and was gracious and merciful unto them. He delivered them out of the “terrible pit and the mire, and set their feet upon a rock.” Behold then, my brethren, the secret source of the wonderful change wrought in them—this grand translation from earth to heaven, from ruin to glory. The Son of God came down from heaven “to seek and to save those that were lost.” They heard of his love; they needed his power; they approached him in faith; they received him as their Lord;—and he acknowledged them as his disciples, interceded for them, delivered them out of their distresses, and raised them to eternal glory. And, O my brethren! is his “arm shortened, that it cannot save? Is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear?” Has he intermitted his gracious work?

Are there no new trophies of his power to be suspended in the kingdom of glory? Yes! he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Approach him, then, with true faith and fervent prayer; "fight the good fight of faith," as they did, and you also shall receive the palm of victory. Seek for the sanctifying influence of the Spirit, and you shall receive the robe of righteousness granted to them.

SERMON VII.

—

**THE GREAT MYSTERY OF GODLINESS—GOD
MANIFEST IN THE FLESH.**

(PREACHED ON CHRISTMAS-DAY.)

—

1 TIM. iii. 14—16.

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly ; but, if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And, without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness : God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

IT is my intention, first, to state what I conceive to be the true meaning of this passage of Scripture ; and then to endeavour to deduce from it such practical remarks as may be likely, under

the blessing of God, to prove beneficial to our souls.

I. I am first, then, to EXPLAIN THE PASSAGE. —And here I must begin by observing, that it is attended with some difficulties, which have exercised the pens of the most able commentators. It is not, however, my intention to enter into any critical disquisition; as I do not think the pulpit a fit place for it. A minister should study his subject in his closet, and then bring the result of his investigations before his audience. But as many of them must necessarily receive much upon his authority, let him remember that he is strictly answerable to God for the diligence, the impartiality, and the sacred reverence for truth with which he has pursued his inquiries. It has been my endeavour not to be deficient in these respects.

In order to judge of an author's sense, it is material to know his style of writing, and his general turn of mind; for, wherever the meaning of a particular passage is doubtful, it ought to be interpreted so as may best accord with the scope of his general writings. Now, in the style of St. Paul, the following peculiarities are to be noticed:—1. He appears to have generally present to his view the Jewish dispensation. He often alludes to it, compares with it the several parts of

the Christian system, and illustrates the one by the other. The whole Epistle to the Hebrews is a continued parallel of this kind.—2. He is apt, on the occurrence of a particular word, or the suggestion of a particular idea, suddenly to diverge from his general subject, and to follow up, and perhaps at considerable length to elucidate, the new topic.—3. He is accustomed to give only a rapid sketch of the subject which engages him, often leaving the detail to be supplied by the reader's mind. Much that was distinct and evident to himself is implied, rather than expressed. Even the strict rules of grammar are occasionally neglected. His mind seems so warmed by the subject, as to render him indifferent to exactness in his expressions. Hence he is often sublime in his thoughts, but inaccurate in his language; clear in his ideas, but involved in his narration; rapid in his transitions, and concise in his arguments. All these remarks will, I think, assist us in the elucidation of the passage before us, to which I will now proceed.

“These things,” says he (namely, those relating to the government of the church), “write I unto thee, hoping to come to thee shortly; but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church, the pillar of the living God,” (for so, with the learned Heinsicus, would

I place the words), “and ground” or depository “of the truth.”—When the idea of the church as the “house of God” arose in the mind of the Apostle, there instantly suggested itself a comparison of the Christian church with that house or tabernacle which under the Old Testament was called “the house of God,” and particularly with that house in which God might be said to dwell during the passage of the Israelites through the wilderness. Over that tabernacle was a pillar of cloud, or of fire, which in a signal manner denoted the presence and residence of the Most High God; and within the tabernacle was contained the ark, which was the depository of the law of God. In this pillar, denoting the residence of God, and this ark, the depository of the Law, the Jews might justly exult. And in like manner, the Apostle goes on to shew, might Christians exult in their church; for this was now become the residence of God, and the sacred receptacle of truth. There is now the “pillar of the living God.” There is now permanently deposited the truth;—the truth, which, though once borne from place to place in the ark, is now become stationary in the church.—It may be right to add, that the ancient fathers of the church consider the words “pillar and ground of truth” as bearing this reference.

The idea of the visible presence of God, as

denoted by the pillar and cloud, having thus taken possession of the mind of the Apostle, he continues, in his usual manner, to dwell upon it; instituting a comparison or analogy between the presence of God formerly displayed, and the presence of Christ as vouchsafed to the Christian church. In this parallel, however, from the usual rapidity of his ideas and conciseness of his manner, he leaves the points of resemblance to be in part supplied by the reader. Contemplating the similarity of the type and the antitype, he observes, "and great, without controversy, is the mystery of godliness," or of the Christian dispensation. The mystery of the appearance of God in the Pillar and Cloud to the Jews, was confessedly great: but, says the Apostle, the mystery of his being manifested in the flesh, is "without doubt great" also. If, in the wilderness, God was "justified," or his Divine presence and his truth were vindicated, by miraculous signs; so, in the Christian church, Christ was "justified," or the truth and authority of his pretensions vindicated by the miraculous operations of the Spirit. If, in the wilderness, the Divine presence was beheld by "angels," who, on Sinai, attended the delivery of the Law, and who were represented as stooping over the ark, "desiring to look into" the things shadowed

out by it; thus, in the new dispensation, Christ was the object of wonder and adoration to angels: he was seen by a "multitude of the heavenly host," as he lay at his birth in a manger; he was "seen of angels," when he was tempted in the wilderness; he was "seen of angels," whilst in agony in the garden of Gethsemane; he was "seen of angels," while lying in the sepulchre, and when he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. In the wilderness, God delivered the Law to the Jews alone; but Christ preached his Gospel to the Jew and Gentile also. In the wilderness, only one nation believed in God, and even they continually gave way to unbelief; but the Gospel of Christ was preached throughout the world, and throughout the world was his name honoured. In the wilderness, the cloud, the visible symbol of the Divine presence, often mounted up towards heaven, the seat of the Most High; and, in like manner, Christ proved his intercourse with Heaven, by being, in the presence of many witnesses, "received up into glory."

Such is, I conceive, the general outline of the meaning of the Apostle. But there is, I am well aware, a difference between the several manuscripts of the Greek Testament in respect to the word "*God* manifest in the flesh." The larger number of manuscripts agree with our translation, but

others, of great weight and antiquity, have, instead of "God," the pronoun "*who*;" a word the form of which in Greek very nearly resembles the form of the Greek word "God." On the ground, as well of these various readings, as of some other considerations, I should not choose to lay much stress upon the proof which the term "GOD," here used, affords of the Divinity of our blessed Saviour. God forbid that we should attempt to support truth by arguments which we deem to be not decisive! We need no such fallacious aid. The Divinity of our blessed Lord rests upon many other passages of Scripture, where no various reading or version has ever been pretended. Indeed, if even the term GOD be omitted in this place, the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ is implied; for, as Cyril bishop of Alexandria, about four hundred years after the birth of our Lord, writes, "If the Word, being God, is said to have put on human nature, then it is indeed a great mystery: but if Christ be a mere man, how can he be said to have been 'manifested in the flesh?'" "What would be the 'mystery,' if 'the angels' saw him abiding with us, being man only?"

II. But I now pass on, from the explanation of the text, to state some PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS which it naturally suggests. And may that gracious

God who “spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all,” mercifully vouchsafe to us his blessing, without which we shall hear of this “mystery of godliness” in vain!

Consider then, in the *first* place, the important declaration, that “without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness.”—The term “godliness” means the worshipping and serving God in a right and acceptable manner; and therefore, as Jesus Christ was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no man came to the Father but by Him, the whole Christian dispensation is here denominated “godliness” by the Apostle. “Great,” then, “is the mystery” of Christianity. The word “mystery,” as used in Scripture, does not denote any thing absolutely unintelligible or incomprehensible, as it often does in modern language, but something sacred which had been hid and is made known only by Divine Revelation. The mystery of Christianity, here spoken of, consists of the several particulars which are subsequently specified; particulars, indeed, which it would never “have entered into the heart of man to conceive,” had not God revealed them to us by his Spirit; namely, that the Son of God should become man for our salvation; that he should exhibit, in the miracles he performed, many and incontestable proofs of his Divine mission; that he should be seen and

adored by the heavenly hosts while in his state of humiliation; that his Gospel should be preached to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews; that every creature under heaven should be invited to partake of it; that multitudes, in every nation, should lay aside their prejudices and superstitions, and should accept him as their Lord and Saviour; and that, when he should have been thus proclaimed to the world, he should be openly "received up" into the glory of "heaven." These particulars are indeed most weighty and important, and they surely deserve our most serious consideration. Indisputably "great," then, "is the mystery of godliness."

Great indeed it is, in every point of view.—Consider, for instance, its *object*. This is the very greatest which can employ the attention of the mind. For what is it but the everlasting salvation of our souls? The Gospel was devised by the gracious counsels of God, in order to raise us from our fallen state of sin and misery, to fit us for a nobler existence, and then to translate us into the blessed mansions of glory; mansions into which the Son of God himself has entered before, as our forerunner, that we, being for ever delivered from evil, may be unspeakably happy with him through an infinite succession of ages. What object can be greater than this, more worthy of the

Divine nature, or more deeply affecting our interests?—My brethren, you all feel daily the infirmity of your nature ; you are admonished that you have here no abiding city ; you see your friends and acquaintance fall victims to the attacks of disease and death ; you know that, ere long, you must yourself lie upon the bed of sickness, your present frame be dissolved, and your soul either cease to be, or exist in some new state. Of what infinite consequence, therefore, is it that this state should be happy ; that you should be translated to realms of glory, and be blessed eternally in the enjoyment of the favour and presence of your God and Saviour ! God has revealed to you, in Christianity, the means of obtaining this blessedness. I beseech you, let not this Revelation be made to you in vain. Such, alas ! is the thoughtlessness, folly, or sin, of many, that they feel no concern about it ; no solicitude about the means of securing eternal happiness. They are unmoved by any object which does not immediately address their senses, strike their sight, or manifest itself to their touch. Future blessings, however great, do not affect them ; future miseries, however dreadful, do not alarm them. Against this insensibility to future things, I would earnestly warn you. When you behold the Divine Author of Creation exhibiting such a system of wonderful dispensations

for your benefit and salvation, is it for you to be indifferent, to pass them by as if you had no concern in them? If ever God spoke to the feelings of man, it is in this Revelation. If ever we are interested in listening to his voice,—a voice not speaking obscurely, as is often the case when we are addressed through our natural reason, but plainly and intelligibly by the declarations of his own word,—it is when this great mystery is made known to us. If it is ever sinful and ruinous to neglect the warning of God, it surely is when so great a salvation, wrought out for us by the Son of God himself coming down from heaven, has been graciously presented to our acceptance. “See, then, that ye refuse not him that thus speaketh to us from heaven.” The period, my brethren, is fast approaching when no knowledge but that of this “great mystery of godliness” can be interesting to us, and no possession but that of salvation of any real value. Oh! let the commemoration of the Nativity of our blessed Saviour bring to your serious recollection the train of objects connected with it; and let it be considered as an event in which you are more deeply interested than in any other which has occurred in the annals of time.

Reflect, next, upon the *means* by which this great object of the “mystery of godliness” was

accomplished. It was by means of "God" becoming "manifest in the flesh." "The Word," says St. John, "was made flesh, and dwelt among us;" and "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." When God brought the Jews out of Egypt into the promised land of Canaan, he might, doubtless, have led them, after the ordinary manner, by the instrumentality of some eminent captain, such as Joshua. But it pleased Him, whose ways are unsearchable, and whose judgments are a great deep, to deviate from the natural course, and become himself their Leader and Commander; sensibly to display his presence in the midst of them, and to dwell amongst them in a mode totally unprecedented and new, as well to the Israelites as to every other people. There was seen hovering over the tabernacle the Cloud, the symbol of the presence of God himself; a mysterious and Divine emblem, filling with astonishment and gratitude the mind of every pious Israelite.—Was it merely to the Jews that such a signal exhibition of the special intercourse and protection of the Almighty was vouchsafed? Was all this celestial interference and display of glory intended only as a safeguard in conducting a tribe of men from one country to another? No: God was giving to the world a grand lesson of his own agency: he was affording an anticipa-

tion of the manner in which, by his Divine power, he should conduct, not a tribe or a nation, but a world; not from one earthly station to another, but from earth to heaven; not in order to satisfy them with temporal bounties, but to bless them with the eternal glory of a higher and nobler existence. If God thought proper to bring the Jews to Canaan by a miraculous display of his own energy, with how much reason might we expect that the eternal salvation of the human race should not be accomplished but by as remarkable an exhibition of the Divine interference? Hence, to save man, he sent his only-begotten Son. God was thus "manifested in the flesh:" he pitched his tabernacle, "and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

While we behold this mystery of godliness, with what sentiments of gratitude, my brethren, ought we to hail and welcome the illustrious Saviour sent down from heaven to accomplish our redemption! The Scripture is full of exhortations to "take heed" that we do not despise his authority, nor reject his testimony. For "to him all the Prophets give witness;" to him all Revelation points. "There is no other name under heaven given, whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ." While I contem-

plate the wonders of this salvation, I own that I am lost in astonishment ; and scarcely could I credit the stupendous fact, did I not perceive that in every age, in every dispensation, the tenor of Divine Revelation has been uniform ; that the whole volume, and not merely a single discovery of the Divine will, attests these amazing truths ; that the whole book of Revelation must be torn asunder before these can be disjoined from it ; and did I not reflect, that the very approach to infinity in any act of Divine Goodness, in itself renders it more credible, by rendering it more suitable to the infinite benignity of the Divine Being. I cannot reject the Divinity of Christ without discarding, at the same time, the Divine manifestation of the Shekinah in the wilderness ; without dismissing, indeed, the whole Mosaic dispensation, and the whole Mosaic record. Having credited the Divine interference in bringing the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan—the account of which is attested by evidence so strong, that it is scarcely possible to conceive how it could be stronger—I become fully prepared to believe that the Divine interference was also employed in the infinitely greater work of accomplishing the salvation of men.

When, therefore, the magnitude of this mystery of godliness staggers our reason, let us reflect

that the illustrious Saviour was "*justified by the Spirit.*"—His character and dignity were ascertained and vindicated by the illustrious display of miraculous powers. What miracles were not performed by Jesus! Take but a single miracle of the vast profusion; and, if you admit that one, it is scarcely possible not to admit them all. Take the single fact of Christ's resurrection, than which there probably never was an event more satisfactorily attested. Believe only this, and all the other miraculous actions recorded in his life become credible; for, allowing the Divine interference in this one instance, you must expect it to have taken place on other occasions, in order to give its attestation to the character of Jesus. It cannot be supposed that the Divine power would be exerted in order to raise from the dead an impostor, or an enthusiast, or even a merely good man. God Almighty never would act in so extraordinary a manner, except for some great end. Such an end was the salvation of the human race by the mission of his only-begotten Son. A greater object could not be accomplished; a more noble Personage could not be the instrument; a more grand and luminous display of Divine Power could not attest the greatness of the end, or the dignity of the Agent. The end, the Agent, the testimony, were in unison with each other.

“Great” indeed was the “mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit.”

Let us, my brethren, derive from this part of the “mystery of godliness” substantial ground on which to establish our belief in Christ, and, together with it, our hope of salvation. We need—indeed we need, if we know ourselves, or if we feel how momentous is the issue which is before us—we need strong evidence upon which we may confidently venture our souls, and build our hopes for eternity. In the hour of death we especially need it. I allow that, in the vigour of health, amidst the levity of youthful spirits, under the benumbing effects of that worldliness which immersion in business is too apt to produce, the idea of an eternal state may be so faint; the knowledge of God, and particularly of his justice and holiness, may be so obscure; and the realization of the solemn account to be given at the day of judgment, may be so imperfect; that even the hope arising from our own merits, however delusive and wavering, may be sufficient to support us. But things will wear a different aspect when disease has abstracted us from the surrounding scene, and left us leisure and coolness of mind to reflect. When death has knocked at our door, and warned us to be ready for his return; when the fascination of

the world has subsided, and its spell is broken; when better acquaintance with ourselves, and deeper reflection upon the state of our hearts and lives, has brought low our high conceit of ourselves; when more accurate meditation upon Scripture, so full of facts and declarations which attest the holiness of God and the alarming awfulness of his justice, has bowed our hearts into a holy fear of his Name, and a serious alarm about our acceptance with him: then we shall feel our need of a Redeemer; then we shall welcome the account of his salvation as glad tidings of great joy; then we shall earnestly seek for such evidence as may calm our troubled mind, and enable us to rest with tranquil hope in the moment of death: then, also, will that evidence meet our wondering eyes in all the radiance of truth; and while we contemplate Christ as justified by the Spirit, we shall be enabled to say, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."—God grant this may be the blessed experience of every one here present!

Christ was "*seen of angels.*"—Those heavenly hosts beheld him, while yet an infant, with pious awe and reverent adoration. A "multitude of the heavenly host" surrounded the stable where he lay, singing, "Glory to God in the

highest; and on earth peace, and good will to men." They beheld glory accruing to God in the highest heavens, peace and tranquillity reigning upon earth, and reconciliation and good-will to men diffused by the birth of this illustrious Stranger. Yet, to them, it was matter of wonder and praise only; to us, it is a subject of the deepest interest. Let us not, my brethren, be silent, while they adore; let us not be cold, while they deeply feel: let us not disregard those things, which they "stoop down to look into." Oh, how will heaven and earth testify against the man who has neglected so great a salvation! God will testify against him; for "he spared not his own Son, but gave" this inexpressible gift to us, and proclaimed from heaven, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him." Christ will testify against him; for he laboured, he suffered, he died for man, to make him partaker of eternal salvation. The Holy Spirit will testify against him; for he wrought a profusion of miracles in order to direct the attention to Christ, and to testify of him as the great Saviour of the world. The angels will testify against him, who came to learn upon earth the riches of this grace of God. Men will testify against him, millions of whom have received the record of Christ and believed on him as their Saviour. And the fallen spirits will

testify against him ; for even they obeyed the word of Christ, and feared his authority. Let not all these witnesses appear against us, to display to us the greatness of the neglected salvation, and to aggravate our condemnation in having dared to slight so high a Saviour.

Christ was, also, “ *preached to the Gentiles, and believed on in the world.*”—To us he has been “preached :” God grant that we may hear him and receive his testimony ! But methinks I see, flocking from the east and the west, from the north and the south, many who from the extreme parts of the earth only heard the distant sound of salvation ; many from the remote extremity of Africa ; many from the frozen realms of Greenland ; many once sunk in the lowest depths of poverty and misery, now hoping and triumphing in their Saviour, and pressing with joyful haste to the courts of Heaven. Behold, also, some of “the children of the kingdom” shut out ;—those who, through fastidiousness of taste, or sceptical apathy, or worldliness and sordidness of mind, have sat continually under the preaching of the Gospel, and remained indifferent to its glad tidings ! Thus shall that Scripture be fulfilled, which I never reflect upon without shuddering ; “The first shall be last, and the last first.” Oh, my brethren ! ye who enjoy every opportunity of religious improve-

ment ; ye whose learning qualifies you to read and understand the Scriptures ; whose leisure and ease, and whose whole circumstances, afford you every advantage in the pursuit of sacred knowledge ;—O beware, lest you perish amid the abundance of the means of edification ; lest, while Christ is “ preached to the Gentiles, and believed on in the world,” he be proclaimed to you in vain.

Lastly, Christ was “ *received up into glory.*”—Glory, perpetual glory, was the termination of all his benevolent labours and sufferings. And into this glory he entered, in order that his disciples might have the same splendid mansions ever before them, as the end of all their toil and the crown of all their hope : “ I go to prepare a place for you, that, where I am, there ye may be also.” Under the deep impression of the truths contained in this “ great mystery of godliness,” how should our thoughts soar to the blessed place where our Saviour is gone before us, and our affections be “ set not on things below, but on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God !”—My brethren, do you consider that, after a short time, our labours will cease, our battle will be fought, our warfare accomplished, and that we shall enter into eternal glory ? What thought can be more animating, what more consoling, amidst the troubles and

trials of your pilgrimage here! Only wait on, steadfast in faith, in love and obedience; and the Saviour, who came down from heaven to save you, will receive you to his own glory. Oh! let us often turn our eyes from these sickening earthly scenes of discord, and bloodshed, and woe, to those regions of glory, where the day shines in endless lustre; where violence shall no more be heard in the land, nor wasting and destruction be found within its borders; where the sun shall be no more the light by day, nor the moon give light; but “the Lord shall be an everlasting light, and God its glory.”—Would to God, that this glory were more frequently the subject of our contemplation! Then should we look with a holy tranquillity upon the petty troubles and evils of this transitory scene. We should bear affliction cheerfully, knowing that we have an enduring inheritance. We should enjoy true happiness in this world, reflected through the radiance of that glorious world above.

But let us remember, that “he who hath this hope, must purify himself, even as He” who hath called us “is pure”—for into these regions of glory the unholy shall not enter. May “God, therefore, sanctify you wholly, and establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints!”

SERMON VIII.

ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.

MATT. xxviii. 19.

Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

IF the Scriptures merely spoke of the Son of God and of the Spirit of God as beings whom we ought to reverence and worship, we should surely be bound to inquire diligently and devoutly into the manner in which this reverence ought to be displayed. But when we are baptized in their names, this expressive rite and solemn memorial gives them still larger claims upon our attention. That we are admitted into the Christian covenant by a rite which bears a distinct reference to them, clearly implies the existence of some intimate relation between them and us. That we are baptized in their name, in common with that of the Father,

invests them with inconceivable dignity. It cannot but arrest our regard, even at the very entrance and porch of Christianity, that the Son and the Spirit are placed on the same level with the Father. Should we not deem it strange indeed, if we were commanded to be baptized, with an exactly similar form of expression, in the name of persons infinitely inferior to, and wholly distinct from, the Father: if the form of baptism, for instance, were this;—Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Apostle Paul, and of the Power and Love of God? Add to which, the persons into whose names we are baptized bear a manifest relation to the Deity as well as to ourselves: “Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” In the name of the *Father*. Why not in the name of *God*? Why should the Divine Being be here styled the Father? He is so styled, evidently with respect to the Son, who is named together with him.—But we are to be baptized also in the name of the Son. The Son of whom? Doubtless of the Father.—And in the name of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of whom? Evidently of God, of the Father, and of the Son. The sacred names, thus introduced, were names already familiar to the Jews. The Holy Spirit, though not with a distinctness which enabled the Jews to compre-

hend much of his essence or origin, is often introduced into the Jewish Scriptures; and every pious Jew anticipated the coming of the Messiah, whom they were accustomed to call by the title of "the Son of God." Our Saviour, also, had more completely familiarized them with these terms, and elevated their conceptions of the Divine Persons to whom they are applied, by his frequent mention of the Son and of the Spirit. Nor is it superfluous to add, that the doctrine of the Trinity does not depend on a few passages, where, as in my text, the Father, the Son, or the Spirit, are mentioned, as it were, collectively; but upon a multitude of passages where they are separately introduced. If, therefore, this, and every passage which speaks of these Divine Persons collectively, were blotted out, still the doctrine would be triumphantly established by other passages; and is, in fact, interwoven with the very frame of Scripture.—I acknowledge, however, that there have been few points of doctrine more warmly disputed than this. It may therefore, I apprehend, be useful to endeavour to state the subject clearly, so as to obviate some misconceptions which prevail with regard to it, and to pave the way for its more cordial reception.

The doctrine of what is called "the Trinity," concisely stated, is this—that, although there is

only one God, this God is revealed to man as subsisting under three distinct Names and Persons —“ the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost” — who are yet, in a sense to us mysterious and inscrutable, one God.—Let us more distinctly consider the several parts of the doctrine thus stated.

I. In the first place, *There is but one God.*—This truth is not only universally attested in Scripture, but is at once acquiesced in, as agreeable to all our preconceived notions of the Deity. The difficulty is, not in admitting the Unity of the Godhead, but in comprehending the distinction of Persons. But, to whatever extent we maintain this distinction, it is obvious that it must not be so held as to be incompatible with the Unity of the Divine Nature. Those, indeed, who deny the doctrine of the Trinity, chiefly ground their denial upon an alleged zeal for the Unity of God; and, by the name which they assume, desire evidently to be considered as the only persons who maintain this great truth. But it should be understood, that those who hold the doctrine of the Trinity, do, in the strongest sense, concur with them in the maintenance of this fundamental doctrine. They do not consider their own belief in the Three Divine Persons, as interfering with the doctrine of the Divine Unity. They maintain,

as a fundamental truth which is to regulate and modify their belief in a Trinity of Persons, that there is one only eternal and infinite God. And, though they pretend not to explain or comprehend the consistency of this plurality of Persons with this Unity of Nature, they nevertheless, in the most unequivocal manner, admit and affirm it. It is true that, on this subject, some persons may have spoken rashly and unwarrantably, in representing the Three Persons to be so absolutely distinct as to be in all respects three different beings. Such representations, however, have not the countenance of our Church. And, in all our conceptions and explanations of the doctrine, let us carefully remember, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are properly One. Let us not, with the view of rendering a necessarily mysterious subject familiar, so interpret it as to violate a fundamental principle of religion. It is a mistaken, as well as dishonest policy, to endeavour to preserve one part of the temple by the sacrifice of the rest.

II. But, secondly, *Though God is One, yet he has revealed himself under three different characters and titles; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.*—The precise nature of the distinction here implied is not described in Scripture;

nor, perhaps, is it conceivable by fallen man. It has, indeed, been agreed to express this distinction by the term "Person." And this term is perhaps, as eligible as any other, whilst it is understood not to convey any real idea of the nature of this distinction, but merely to affirm that it exists and is not confined to a distinction of mere titles or attributes. Such various titles and attributes are frequent in Scripture. The Divine Being is introduced under the title of Jehovah and Elohim. He is described by his various attributes, as the "Eternal," "Almighty," the "Father of lights," the "Lord of hosts." But when the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are spoken of in Scripture, it is evident that these terms imply a distinction of a very different kind from that conveyed by these titles and attributes.—In this limited sense, it is, therefore, that we must here be considered as employing the term "Person." It does not imply that distinction of nature or being, when applied to this doctrine, which is implied in the use of the term on other occasions.

But it may be asked, What then do we in fact believe as to the Divine Nature? I answer, We believe, that one and the same God is Three in a sense which we are able neither to express nor comprehend.—And this brings us to notice a

third point, included in the brief statement of the doctrine of the Trinity delivered above.

III. The doctrine has been mentioned as “*mysterious*,” and, *as to certain points, inscrutable to the human mind*.—It might be anticipated, that any Revelation respecting the Divine nature would, if in any degree minute, involve many points far beyond our comprehension. For with what are we familiar which is beyond the narrow range of our senses? We are acquainted, indeed, with some of the properties of animals, because these fall within the cognizance of sense; but when we attempt to speak even of our own mind, in what difficulties are we at once involved? Can we explain the manner in which the mind acts on the body; their union in the same person here; the distinct existence of the soul in a future state? Can we form the slightest conception of the manner in which spiritual beings exist at all;—beings who, without eyes, see; without ears, hear; without limbs, move; without material organs, communicate their ideas and feelings? Thus shut out, then, from an acquaintance even with the lower orders of spiritual existence, can we wonder if that Divine nature, to which, perhaps, these orders approach no nearer than we to them, is incomprehensible to

us? Such obscurity, indeed, affords a presumption in favour of the truth, rather than of the falsehood, of any Revelation which respects the nature of God. It is no more probable that we should comprehend the Divine Nature, than that an animal of the very lowest order—an animal, for instance, wanting the organs of sight, and touch, and hearing, and speech—should comprehend and delineate the faculties of man. Such, indeed, is the obscurity in which the Divine Nature is necessarily involved, that it matters little what terms are employed by us to describe it. Change the terms, yet the obscurity remains. They would either have no meaning affixed to them, or be understood in precisely the same sense with those employed for the same purpose before. Had the very terms adopted by us to express the doctrine of the Trinity been found in Scripture, the revelation of the doctrine itself would not have been more distinct or intelligible. Language could not have made that distinct which we have no faculties to comprehend.

Still, my brethren, though the doctrine of the Trinity is mysterious, and above our reason, *it is not contrary to our reason*. And this is a most important distinction. We do not believe or teach contradictions. We do not affirm that there are more Gods than one, or that God is One and

Three in the same sense. To believe that any principle or nature is one, and at the same time three natures or principles, is contrary to reason. It cannot be required of the human mind, and is not required of the believer in the doctrine of the Trinity.

But are the *difficulties of the orthodox creed* still objected to us? I answer, there are difficulties upon every hypothesis which the objector may choose to adopt. In the attempt to avoid one class of difficulties, others are created quite as insurmountable. You may, perhaps, dismiss them from your theory, but then you transfer them to your Bibles. If, for instance, the Holy Spirit is not God, what, we may ask, is he? Clearly not an angel. Scripture ascribes to him none but Divine attributes. So decidedly is this the case, that unbelievers in the doctrine of the Trinity usually speak of him as an attribute of God. But, if a mere attribute, then what becomes of the passages describing his personality, and even distinguishing him from the Father? In like manner, if the Son is not God, who is he? How must we understand the title given to him—"the Son of God;" how the attributes of Divinity ascribed to him; how the worship offered, and accepted by him? Many, in the hope of escaping difficulties, have even reduced our Saviour to

the rank of man. But what difficulties have these men not to encounter? What violence of criticism, what forced interpretations, what perversion of doubtful passages and denial of the authenticity of plain ones, have they not been compelled to employ? If, indeed, *all* difficulty could be escaped by any particular theory, then (although perhaps its very clearness would be suspicious) it might be worthy of examination. But, hitherto, all objections to the orthodox doctrine, if they have shifted or eluded the difficulty, have never removed it. The recesses of the Divine Nature constitute a depth that we have no eye to measure, and no line to fathom; and he who rashly presumes upon his powers, sinks only from one abyss of error and confusion to another.

But, again, it may be objected, that, “admitting the doctrine of the Trinity not to be contrary to reason, it is still a mystery, and, as such, ought not to be made an article of faith.”—In answer to this objection, it may be observed, that in this doctrine, as in most other objects of faith and knowledge, there are parts which are plain, and parts which are obscure. Thus, a man, by reflection, is infallibly conscious of his own thoughts, and judges whatever he perceives in himself to proceed from one common principle, which he

calls his *soul*. But what this soul is, or how it acts upon the body, he cannot conceive. The nature of the soul, or of its operations, are no less mysterious than the sublimest truths of religion. Again ; what idea can we form of *infinity* and *eternity* ; and yet is it possible to do otherwise than believe them? Many similar instances might be produced to shew how utterly unfounded in the nature of things is that system of reasoning which would teach us, that nothing is to be received as true which we cannot understand. If we attend to the necessary operations of our own minds, we shall surely have no difficulty in admitting, that much is true which we are unable to comprehend. Bring, my brethren, what you are required to believe of the Trinity, to this test. You are required to believe, that these three terms, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are all applied in Scripture to the One Supreme God ; that all the actions, offices, attributes which are ascribed to any of these names, are plainly attributed to, and do truly belong to, one and the same Divine Nature ; that there are such frequent and evident assertions in Scripture of the Unity of God, and yet such plain distinctions signified by the terms Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as imply both a perfect Unity of nature, and yet a distinction in the Godhead ; and that this distinction, whatever it may be, is not the same

with that which we conceive betwixt the attributes of God—nor a mere difference of name, office, or relation—but some other distinction of which we have but a confused conception, and which we can express by no particular language. A more accurate acquaintance with spiritual beings, and especially with the Nature of God, might develop the mysterious parts of this doctrine. Till then, we profess our faith in them merely as mysterious.

But even yet the peculiar difficulty involved in the doctrine of the Trinity may be objected; viz. that the same Divine Person is both God and man. Certain it is, that the Scriptures assert the man Christ Jesus to be also the Son of God. He himself speaks of his existence before he “came into the world,” of “the glory which he had with the Father before the world began,” of his being in “the form of God” before he was in “the likeness of man.” It is also affirmed of him by the Apostle, that “in him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” And he himself adopts such language, with regard to the Divine Presence, as proves, at the least, that God was present with him in a sense distinct from that in which he was present in the temple, in the prophets, or in the heavens. Hence he suffered worship to be rendered to him, which was refused both by the pro-

phets and by his own followers. Hence, also, he said to Philip, “ Hast thou not seen *me*, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?” If the question be asked, How can God and Man be united? I must answer, that I know not. But neither can I conceive how the soul and body constitute one man.

If the astonishing facts of the union of God and man in the same Person, of his birth, and of his death, be alleged against the truth of the doctrine, I desire the objector to consider the stupendous object his birth and death were designed to accomplish. Had man remained in his original estate, and had there been no need of redemption, possibly (for I desire to speak with the deepest humility on such a subject) the Divine Being might not have revealed himself to man under these distinct characters. It is possible that the different titles and relations by which God has been pleased to express this distinction in the Godhead should be chiefly considered with reference to the great work of salvation, and as tending to that grand consummation of all things, when the Son of God “ shall have delivered up the kingdom to God even the Father,” and when “ the Son also himself shall be subject to him that did put all things under him, that God may be all in

all." Our belief as to the work of redemption is this, that the only Supreme God, upon his foreknowledge of the fall of man, decreed to redeem mankind by a Person chosen and qualified for this work through the fulness of the Divine Nature dwelling in him; and, in consideration of his passion and intercession, to impart such gifts, graces, and spiritual assistances as would be sufficient to render this Redemption effectual to the saving of mankind. Now, with a view to this great design of saving mankind, and to the plan and method of the Divine Wisdom in the execution of it; and in order to give us as full and distinct apprehensions as we are able to receive, of the misery of our condition, the difficulty of deliverance, and the unspeakable goodness of God in our restoration, and to fill us with gratitude and love; God has been pleased to reveal himself to us, under several personal relations, such as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—the Father, the Saviour, the Comforter: by which titles and all others analagous to these, we are directed to consider some such kind of distinction and subordination of offices and relations in the Divine Nature, as the terms made use of do commonly import. Thus when God is pleased to represent his love to mankind by the highest image of nature, that of a father sacrificing an only and well-beloved

son, the exact transcript of himself, we are to believe, that, by the sufferings and death of Christ, God has given us greater proofs of his love than any man is capable of giving to another : but that such an action of an earthly parent suggests the nearest and most impressive conception of what our heavenly Father has done for us, though at the same time a conception infinitely short of the reality.

In conclusion, I would beg to say a few words on the disposition of mind with which this great subject should be approached and regarded.

In the first place, Let us approach it with *humility* and a *deep conviction of our own ignorance*. —God has mercifully given us, as it were, some glimpses of his nature; and let us not use the light he has bestowed, to question the truth of his own Revelation. It may be designed for the trial of our humility, that something mysterious should be revealed to us; in the same manner as affliction may be designed for the trial of our patience. It is not for us to say, “It cannot be thus; I cannot believe;” but rather, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.”

Again: *Avoid a spirit of presumptuous curiosity*. —Reason not upon the mysteries of religion, as upon topics within the cognizance of human faculties

“The secret things,” my brethren, “belong unto the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed to us, and to our children, that we may do them.”

In the third place, Beware of *regarding this* or *any* other doctrine of religion, as a *merely speculative* subject.—All religion tends to practice. And that doctrine which teaches us that it is the Son of God who died to save the world, and the Spirit of God who lives to sanctify it, ought to exercise a large, a lasting, an habitual influence upon every feeling, and resolution, and affection of the mind.

Once more: Beware, under the pretence of simplifying the doctrine, of *explaining it away*, and *substituting a theory* of your own.—God, my brethren, dispenses salvation in his own appointed way. And, having revealed this way, man must expect salvation in no other. Different ages have had their peculiar temptations upon the subject of the Trinity. Former periods of the Church have been chiefly remarkable for their subtile attempts to explain it: the present is, perhaps, not less characterised by attempts to subvert it. Be it your endeavour, my brethren, neither to add to the Revelation of God, nor to take from it.

On the whole, approach the doctrine with reverence, and embrace it with gratitude and joy.

Acknowledge the Son who is thus proclaimed to you, and pray for the Comforter who is thus promised. Learn your need of the salvation and the grace which they respectively communicate; and you will then also learn to value the doctrine. Receive and honour them as they require to be honoured; and they will enable you, by the sanctity of your life and the triumphs of your death, to vindicate the faith you embrace. "Baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost," enlist, with your whole heart, under the banner of the Gospel: and God will "give you the victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

SERMON IX.

HOW ABRAHAM SAW THE DAY OF CHRIST,
AND IN WHAT WAY THE TYPES IN THE
OLD TESTAMENT REFERRED TO CHRIST.

JOHN viii. 56.

*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day ;
and he saw it, and was glad.*

THESSE words would, perhaps, be more justly and, without doubt, would be more intelligibly translated thus : “ Abraham earnestly desired that he might see my day ; and he saw it, and was glad.”

This declaration implies, that Abraham had possessed some previous knowledge of the Messiah ; that this knowledge, having been in the first instance general and indeterminate, he earnestly “ desired to see” the day of Christ more clearly ; that he was gratified in this desire ; and that when “ he saw it, he exceedingly rejoiced.”

That Abraham had possessed the general know-

ledge of the Messiah of which I speak, is probable ; because the promise had been made to him, that “ in him,” that is, in his family or some one sprung from his loins, should “ all the nations of the earth be blessed.” But he, probably, as yet knew little of the nature of the blessing to be bestowed. This, then, was the point on which he sought to be informed. And he was permitted to understand it. He was favoured with such a view of the nature of that blessing which should come upon all the families of the earth, and of the manner in which it should be communicated : he saw so much of the glad tidings of the Gospel, as to “ rejoice ” on this account, and be “ glad.”

I. I propose, in the first place, to consider at what time and in what sense Abraham saw the day of Christ.—The solution of this question must be sought for in that account of Abraham which is given in the Old Testament : for our Lord, in making the declaration in the text, meant to confirm his own authority. But he could not confirm it by offering merely his own unsupported assertion, that Abraham had seen his day. The fact might be true ; but if he gave no evidence of it, nothing would be added to the authority of Christ. He might have known this circumstance

in a miraculous manner; but if other persons did not know it except by his assertion, their belief of it must have rested entirely upon his word. Our Lord himself inculcated this principle of reasoning at the very moment: "If I honour myself," he said, "my honour is nothing." We may conclude, therefore, that our Lord grounded his assertion upon something already revealed in the holy Scriptures.

The history of Abraham, I admit, gives no specific account of his having either desired to see the day of the Messiah, or having been permitted to see it. Indeed, if the Old Testament had spoken plainly on the subject, no occasion would have existed for our Saviour's remark. But if there is something in the history of Abraham which, though not obvious at first, yet when properly considered, manifests both the desire of Abraham to see the day of the Messiah and his having been permitted to see it, and at the same time affords some peculiar indications that Jesus Christ was that Messiah; then there is a propriety in our Lord's assertion, and the argument in favour of his own Messiahship is supported by his appeal to the testimony of Abraham.

Prophecy is of two kinds—direct and plain, or indirect and obscure. Of direct prophecies,

there are comparatively few ; and, for a wise reason, namely, that the event might not be forwarded by man for the purpose of accomplishing the prophecy. What is the use of prophecy? It is not designed to enable mankind to foretel future events ; but that, after the events shall have taken place, they may appear to have been foreseen and foretold. An indirect or obscure prophecy is better calculated than a plain one, to answer this general end. It is more free from suspicion, and yet proves as fully the Divine foreknowledge. Accordingly, a great part of the prophecies, especially those relating to the Messiah, were obscure. The event was to be the key which should open and illustrate them.

Whoever has attended to the usual style of our Lord, must have observed, that he was accustomed to make declarations which were at the time mysterious. These were intended to excite reflection and inquiry ; and, when comprehended, through subsequent meditation, or the further explanations of our Lord, or illustrated by succeeding events, they were found to contain some most important and interesting truths. The declaration respecting Abraham was probably of this kind. It was intended for the conviction, not so much of those cavilling adversaries who disputed rather than inquired ; and who sought

to confound him, rather than to be instructed themselves ; but of those humble and sincere disciples, who “ pondered these things in their hearts,” who were “ waiting for the consolation of Israel,” and who gladly received the testimony that Christ was the Messiah. Such persons would be confirmed in their faith by finding, in the history of Abraham, an illustration of some of the principal points in the life and death of our blessed Saviour.

The part of Abraham's history which affords this illustration is, as I apprehend, that which relates to his intended sacrifice of his only son Isaac. Abraham was, in the first place, called to give the highest possible proof of his obedience to God which could be given ; to offer, at the command of God, a sacrifice, the most painful which could be required of a parent—the sacrifice of his beloved son. And this test to which his faith was put was rendered peculiarly severe by the circumstance of Isaac's being the son of promise ; for it was declared, that “ in Isaac should his seed be called.” Here, therefore, both the obedience and the faith of Abraham displayed themselves in the most remarkable manner. His obedience induced him to make the sacrifice ; his faith assured him, that when it should have been made, Isaac would again be raised to life from

the dead, by the almighty power of God. Such obedience and faith God was pleased highly to reward, making the act by which they were evinced the very means both of manifesting the coming of the Messiah and of satisfying his earnest desire to know the manner in which the world through him should be “blessed;”—so true is it, that when God calls us to great and self-denying duties, however painful may be our apprehensions, he will not fail to sustain us in their faithful discharge.

In ancient times, Divine instruction was often communicated by actions, and these were symbolical of some other event or action. Thus Elisha directed “Joash, the king of Israel, to take a bow and arrows, and to shoot eastward, and to smite upon the ground. And when he smote thrice, and stayed, the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldst have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed them: whereas, now, thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.” Of this mode of instruction we have innumerable instances in Scripture;—as where Jeremiah by God’s direction hides the linen girdle in a hole of the rock near Euphrates; where he breaks a potter’s vessel in sight of the people; where he puts on bonds and yokes; where Ezekiel carries out his household-

stuff, and joins together the two sticks for Israel and Judah; and, to come nearer to the time of Abraham, where Jacob wrestled with the angel during the night. Now, it is probable, that the redemption of Jesus Christ might be pointed out after this symbolical manner, by the sacrifice of Isaac; after the same manner in which it was afterwards pointed out by the brazen serpent in the wilderness.

Supposing, then, Abraham to be subsequently instructed by Divine Revelation in the meaning of that sacrifice of Isaac which had been required of him; he would thus learn that the sacrifice which he had found so difficult, was also to be made by the Almighty Father of the world; that as Isaac was the child of promise, so the illustrious Person descended from himself, in whom all the nations of the world should be blessed, would be still more eminently the subject of all the promises and prophecies of God; that as Isaac went to Mount Moriah to be laid upon the altar, so should the Son of God be afterwards offered on that same mountain; that as Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice, so should Christ be the bearer of the cross. “So very exact, too, was the parabolical representation, that the duration of the action, viz. three days, was the same as between Christ’s death and resurrection, both which were

designed to be represented in it ; and further, that not only the final sacrifice of the Son of God was figured in the commanded one of Isaac, but the intermediate typical sacrifice in the Mosaic œconomy was represented by the permitted sacrifice of the ram offered up instead of Isaac.”—*(Warburton.)*

II. Allowing this representation to be just, it becomes important, not merely as elucidating some remarkable words of our blessed Lord, but as affording us a key to interpret the manner in which Christ is prefigured in the Old Testament.

If it be true, that such an illustrious Person as the Son of God did indeed come down from heaven, and give his life for the redemption of the world ; it might be expected that there would be some antecedent notice of his advent, and that if any revelation were made by God, it would have some reference to Jesus Christ. If there were no such anticipation of his coming, there might be reason to doubt his pretensions. Had there been no previous revelation, there might have been no ground for this doubt ; but, if previous revelations had been given, they might naturally be expected to point to Him who was infinitely the most august and glorious subject of

prophecy.—This, then, is the sum of my observations. In all the principal revelations of God a reference was made, on every fit occasion, to the Messiah, as the grand object to which the hopes and expectations of man ought to be directed; a reference obscure indeed, but yet sufficiently clear for the purpose it was intended to answer. Thus, in the very first Divine communication made to man after the fall, an intimation was given, that the “Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head.” Instruction of the same kind was afforded by the institution of sacrifice; an institution evidently of Divine appointment;—an institution of which, though the Scriptures give no account of its origin, traces are found in the history before the Flood, and which is employed by Noah as an institution familiar to him. For “Noah,” it is said, “builded an altar unto the Lord, and took of every clean beast and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar.” Nothing could afford a more just representation of the great Atonement to be offered for sin than the appointment of sacrifice. We know that it was of the most ancient date, and that it became general through the world, and yet that the nations using it could give no rational account of the grounds of their own practice. The act of immolating an innocent animal appears to have

had in itself little tendency to take away the guilt of sin, or render the Deity propitious ; yet it was resorted to for these purposes in almost every heathen land. If considered as originally appointed to typify the sacrifice of Christ, the appointment appears at once to be reasonable and judicious.

As we proceed with the sacred history, we find that the true knowledge of God being lost to the world, it pleased the Almighty to reveal himself to Abraham ; who received a call to leave his idolatrous relations, and to remove to a land which God would shew him. Here was another revelation : and in this there was, first, a promise that Abraham should be the means of blessing the whole earth ; next, a promise limited to his descendants by Isaac ; then to one individual of those descendants. He was also further instructed by that typical act required of him, of which we have spoken, in what manner all the nations of the world should be blessed in his Seed.

As we advance still further in the Sacred Records, we find that a new revelation was made to Moses with a publicity and splendour and a profusion of evidence before unknown to the world. Here also we may expect to find traces of the great Redeemer ; but of what kind did they prove to be ? They were still typical. There was

an unquestionable reference in almost all the institutions of Moses to the great Author of our salvation. The blood of sacrifices was to be perpetually offered; an high priest was ordained; various rites were prescribed, with a scrupulous particularity of circumstances; and, when the great High Priest had come and offered his perfect sacrifice, all these institutions appeared to have been designed for the purpose of shewing, that He who appointed them had in his eye the grand Pattern and Archetype which should afterwards be exhibited to the world.

After this period, God manifested himself to his people by the Prophets.

This was a fuller mode of revelation. By this the will and intentions of the Most High were capable of being declared more plainly. Accordingly the Prophets give far more distinct notice of the Messiah,—of the wonderful manner of his birth,—of the place and the time in which he should appear,—of the family from which he should descend,—of the dignity with which he should be invested,—of the miracles which he should perform,—of the contempt and persecution to which he should be subjected,—of the violent death which he should suffer,—of his resurrection from the dead on the third day, as well as of the nature of his Gospel, the success with which

it should be preached, the extent and glory of his kingdom, and the everlasting blessings to be communicated by him to the world. All these things are so intelligibly predicted, that there can be no question as to their reference to Jesus Christ alone.

Thus we see that Abraham, Moses, and all the Prophets give witness to him, and prophesied of his day. Yet it must be remarked, that the reference which they made to him was to the men of their own day *obscure*. It was intended to be so. If the reason of this be asked, that question may be answered by another: Why was not the whole plan of salvation accomplished in the first age of the world? Doubtless the Divine Wisdom saw just reasons for delaying so great a blessing for four thousand years. "In the fulness of time," that is, at the best-adapted season, "God manifested his Son." Now the same reasons which induced the delay of the event might also justify the withholding of full information concerning it. We surely are not competent to determine the degree of light proper to be communicated. The notice was sufficient to answer the intended purpose, although it consisted only in an obscure reference. The Apostle, in remarking on this very point, declares, that "the Law had only a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image."

Its resemblance was like that which the shadow bears to the person, not like that which is afforded by a picture or a statue. It exhibited the great outline, but not every feature of the body. The resemblance was strong in some points : it was not necessary that it should be exact in all.

III. What, then, was the design of the reference to the Saviour? I reply, that it was various. It respected the persons who lived *before our Lord*, those who were his *contemporaries on earth*, and those who *lived after him*.

1. In respect of the *persons living before the time of our Lord*, it seems to have had in view the following ends :—*First*, It served to produce in their minds a general impression, that some great Person was to come into the world, who should be “ a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of God’s people Israel.” They were led to transmit this imperfect knowledge from generation to generation ; a knowledge perpetually enlarging itself ; so that when the illustrious Saviour appeared, there might be a ready apprehension of his character, and a willingness to hail him as the Messiah.—*Secondly*, It was intended to improve and exercise faith ; that quality so suited to the state of man, which in the sight of God is of great price,

and which is the appointed means of salvation. In this sense the Gospel was preached before to Abraham, and Abraham partook of its blessings: "He believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." By faith, every great and glorious action under the Old Testament dispensation was performed; so that the principle on which the venerable fathers of the Jewish Church acted, was substantially the same as that by which we are influenced, though the object of their faith was less clearly apprehended. It is obvious, that the same object may be more or less distinctly seen, as the object itself indeed may vary, while the principle of faith preserves both its excellency and its vigour. That the members of the Jewish Church did not understand as fully as we the nature of the Gospel Salvation, is unquestionable. But they knew that a great Saviour and Deliverer, the Hope of all the ends of the earth, the Desire of all nations, should arise; and they, like Abraham, looked forward, desiring to see the day of Christ. Like Simeon, they "waited for the Lord's salvation." And this principle sanctified their services, as it does ours, and rendered them also "accepted in the Beloved."—These obscure intimations concerning the Messiah disposed them, in the *third* place, to holy meditation and devout reflection. They were taught to com-

pare one Revelation, already made, with another—one part of their own Scriptures with another. “They searched what, or what manner of thing, the Spirit of God did signify, when he spake of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory which should follow.” And as this contemplation of the Divine Word was a religious exercise highly acceptable to God, it may have pleased him to bestow, on the more pious amongst them, such Divine illumination as enabled them to comprehend the types and typical actions much more fully than is generally apprehended. God may have rewarded extraordinary obedience and faith with extraordinary light, and thus extended to others the hope and consolation vouchsafed to Abraham.

2. The Divine purpose, as it respected *the Jews living when our Saviour came upon earth*, was somewhat different.—These obscure intimations were gradually discovered to correspond with the scenes of the life and death of Jesus Christ; and thus indicated him to be the great Messiah of whom the Prophets had spoken. To those who believed in Christ they were a powerful confirmation of faith. This, indeed, was the grand argument which convinced the Jews even more than the miracles which he wrought; for the word of the Apostles “mightily prevailed,” when

they proved from the Scriptures, that Christ had all the characters of the Messiah, and “that thus and thus it behoved him to suffer, and to die, and to rise again from the dead.”

3. *And, to us*, the ancient testimony concerning Christ answers the same valuable purpose. We now can look back upon a regular connected series of revelations, originating at the creation of the world, and delivered in sundry ways, by different instruments, and at various times, so that it was impossible to suppose any human concert, and yet uniting to prefigure the advent of that Saviour in whom we trust, and the principal events of his life and death. If these descriptive prophecies had been more clear, they might perhaps have been more useful to the Jews to whom they were delivered; but they would have been less convincing to us. Those prophecies, and those prefigurations of Christ, afford the most conclusive evidence to us, which are now seen to refer evidently to Christ, and which yet, previous to their fulfilment, were so obscure, that the coincidence of the event could not have been designed. To us, therefore, provided the application of the prophecy be clear, the obscurity of its terms is an advantage. We do not require information from the types and prophecies respecting the nature of the Messiah. This we suf-

ficiently derive from the writings of the Apostles. The point of importance to us, is the intended reference to Jesus Christ. If that reference be evident, it is of very inferior moment to know in how many particular circumstances it consists.

These observations appear to me important, in suggesting the use to be made of the Old Testament. Errors and prejudices have been entertained, in consequence of not clearly apprehending the character of this portion of Revelation. Some have been staggered because there was so little mention of Jesus Christ. Others have thought, that every passage in it must be strained in order to render it applicable to him. Some pious men, from a high sense of the infinite dignity of Christ, and the importance of his salvation, have put such forced constructions on the words of the Old Testament and the types which it contains, that they have made the subject ridiculous in the eyes of the world. Others have gone into a contrary extreme, and have unreasonably curtailed that evidence which prevailed so triumphantly with the primitive church—that evidence which our Lord himself employed, when, “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded in the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”—Between these, a line of distinction may be drawn. Let a just idea be formed of

the several designs of the types and prophecies. Let it be fully understood, that they could not, and ought not to have been perfectly clear; that this necessary mystery was not to be unveiled, till Christ should come, and the fact explain the prophecy; then I think we shall see, that throughout the Old Testament, there is just that reference to Christ which there ought to be—a reference sufficiently plain for the inferior faith which the pious believers of old time possessed, sufficiently obscure to demand study in the application of it, and yet sufficiently clear to establish the faith and hope of us to whom the Son of Man is revealed.

Whatever contributes to the due understanding of the Oracles of Truth; whatever removes or diminishes the difficulties in them; whatever tends to shew the excellence of Scripture, is practical, useful, and important, and may, therefore, be the subject of a ministerial address. This consideration will justify the discussion of a topic not so immediately addressed to the conscience as the subjects which I generally wish to propose.

SERMON X.

*DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PATRIARCHAL,
JEWISH, AND CHRISTIAN DISPENSATIONS.*

(PREACHED ON CHRISTMAS-DAY.)

LUKE X. 23, 24.

Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

IT is a common but very just observation, that we are seldom duly sensible of the value of our blessings till we are deprived of them. There is in man an unhappy propensity to look at his wants rather than his mercies; to wish his state better, rather than to be thankful for what it is ;

and to contrast his enjoyments rather with some fancied state of felicity, than with the inferior blessings which others possess.

This remark is applicable to our case, under the Christian dispensation. How few persons bless God that they dwell in the “days of the Son of Man!” How few comfort themselves amidst the troubles and sorrows of life, with the reflection, that they enjoy spiritual privileges and mercies of the noblest kind, and in the greatest abundance!—My brethren, do you reflect, that you live in the bright day of the glorious Gospel of the Son of God; that all the treasures of the Divine Wisdom and Goodness are displayed to you; that all the promises of the Gospel are yours? Well may I say to you, in the words of my text, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”

The way to know how much we are distinguished, is, carefully to compare our situation with that of our fellow-creatures. Let us, then, consider our circumstances as Christians, in reference to those of others (an employment very suitable to the design of this day), and we shall perceive what reason we have to be peculiarly thankful.

But before I enter upon this comparison, I would ask, What is your idea of being truly blessed? Does your heart reply, "It is to possess good health and spirits, agreeable friends and sufficient affluence to supply all the comforts and conveniences of life?" If these be your views, there is a wide difference between us in the outset. Christ did not come into the world to bestow on his disciples blessings of this description. All these the heathen may enjoy in as large a measure as Christians; and therefore, if this be the turn of your sentiments, you, of course, cannot consider yourself as "blessed" because you live in the days of Christ. In order to form a true judgment on this point, our minds must be spiritual: we must feel the force of eternal things, and acquire a just sense of the value of the present life. We must place ourselves on some lofty point, where we can command at once the view of thousands of ages; and, from that elevation, must form our estimate of this world, with all its comforts and enjoyments. We must set before our contemplation the great and glorious God, and the unspeakable benefit of doing his will and possessing his favour. We must discern the beauty and excellence of holiness; and must perceive the infinite superiority of the soul to the body. Christianity makes the lowest of its dis-

ciples philosophers in a juster sense than that in which the term was ever ascribed to the philosophers of old ; that is, it teaches them duly to estimate and worthily to love real wisdom. Whoever, therefore, would pass his judgment on the value of Christianity, must have an understanding sufficiently enlightened to comprehend it ; a taste sufficiently pure to admire it ; and a heart sufficiently holy to love it. The sensual, the worldly, the covetous, the dissipated, the frivolous, want the necessary faculties : “ The carnal mind is enmity against God.” “ The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

But I address myself, I trust, to those in this assembly who can duly appreciate that light, and truth, and glory, which the Son of God has revealed. Such persons will enter with pleasure into the comparison which I shall make of our condition in respect to religious privileges, with those, first, of the *Heathen* world ; and, then, of the *Patriarchal* and *Jewish* dispensations.

I. Let us survey the state of the HEATHEN WORLD.—Place yourself, for a moment, amongst them, and consider what would then be your situation with respect to *knowledge* and *virtue*.

1. As to *knowledge*—Every thing among the heathens was obscure and uncertain. They had arrived at no certain conclusions respecting right and wrong. They were in the dark as to the nature of God. His being, indeed, they could not but confess; his power and wisdom were every where apparent;—but what was his character; whether he concerned himself with man or not; whether there were many Supreme Beings, or only One; were questions which to them were covered with an impenetrable veil: and, if any one among them was led to entertain a real regard for truth, he must have been tormented with doubts, and occupied in fruitless inquiries respecting them. All was also dark with respect to the circumstances of man in the world: how he originally came into it; how evil obtained so general a prevalence there; what was the Creator's design in giving us existence;—all this was matter of uncertain speculation. The same darkness and doubt prevailed with respect to the future. Whether man would exist at all after the death of the body; and, if he did, where, and in what manner; were points which no one could satisfactorily determine. Socrates himself, one of the wisest and best of the heathens, although, while pleading his cause, he had ably discoursed concerning the happy state of the good in another

life, yet plainly confessed the uncertainty of all human conclusions respecting futurity, in thus taking leave of his judges: "And now I am going off the stage: it is your lot to live, and mine to die; but whether of us two shall fare the better, is unknown to any but to God alone."

2. In the heathen world, also, *vice* dreadfully prevailed. And what authority was there to check its prevalence? What principles strong enough to enable men to resist it? Their worship was base and degrading, offered in general to idols representing beings who were described as the patrons of corruption. Their ideas were worldly, sensual, and grovelling: they had no sentiments fitted to transport their minds beyond the present scene, or to raise them above the lusts of the flesh. And was not that an awful and melancholy state, in which ignorance and vice thus prevailed? But, alas! how many professed Christians are there among us, who do not discern the misery of such a state! How many, even of these, desire no benefit from the knowledge they possess of the truths of Revelation! How will the heathens themselves rise up to condemn them! Socrates declared, that *he* would be contented to die many times if he could but be assured that those things were true, which he wished to be so, respecting a future state. Some professing Christians, on the con-

trary, who have the knowledge of these things distinctly revealed to them, are indifferent about it. Far from accounting it an evil to live amongst heathens where vice should abound, they would probably prefer it. They desire to be unchecked by the secret suggestions of conscience, or the remonstrances of religion : so true is that remark, which I before made, that it is necessary to be spiritually-minded in order to judge of the value of Christianity.

II. But let us turn our eyes from the state of the heathens, to the fairer view of those who were in some measure enlightened by Divine knowledge. Even here we shall see great reason to be thankful for the higher dispensation under which we live.

Here, however, it will be proper, first to notice some common points of resemblance between the Patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations, by which they were brought into close alliance with the clearer dispensation that succeeded them. They both declared the Unity of God, and the evil of idolatry : they both described the will of God to be the only rule of right : they both affirmed the corruption of human nature, and pointed to sacrifices as an atonement for sin : they both taught men to live a holy and godly life, and, by faith,

to wait for a better, that is, a heavenly country : they both instructed their followers to seek their peace and happiness only in God, and inculcated continual trust and dependance upon him : they both required man to love God, and to obey him cheerfully, uniformly, constantly : they both had frequent, though obscure, references to the Saviour who was to come, and both were under the sanction of the Almighty. Yet, notwithstanding these points of agreement, by which also they approximated to the clearer light of the Gospel-dispensation, many of their privileges and advantages fell exceedingly short of those which we have the happiness to enjoy.

To speak first of the PATRIARCHAL DISPENSATION—One great instance of its inferiority was *its want of clear and sufficient authority*. Probably the laws and observances enjoined by it were first communicated by God to Adam, and transmitted by him to his children. Now it is easy to see that such a religion would become more and more obscure, imperfect, and corrupt in every succeeding generation. Many things would be forgotten, many misunderstood, many improperly added. After the death of Adam, there was no acknowledged standard of appeal, no source of knowledge but tradition. Hence we find that, after a very few ages, idolatry universally prevailed ; and

the true knowledge of God was nearly obliterated from the face of the earth. It does not appear that there were then any stated public ordinances. We do not hear of persons assembling in numbers to worship God. Men had no Scriptures which they could read in order to enliven their affections, to animate their zeal, or to exalt their hope. They had no priests ministering before the altars. Moreover, their views of another state, as well as of a Redeemer, were extremely dark and imperfect; for, however Enoch or Noah or Abraham might look forward to a future Deliverer, and a blessed eternity, it is certain that the generality of men in that day had a very small share of such light and knowledge. Even Abraham himself is represented as stretching forward with eager desire to “behold the day of Christ.” He was aware that an era of great illumination was approaching; and that an illustrious Saviour would descend from heaven. He earnestly desired to “see that day;” and he was specially favoured with an anticipation of it, and “was glad.” In a word, the Patriarchal dispensation was intended to be of no long duration. It was calculated for a few families, rather than for a world. It answered, however, some important purposes: it manifested the need there was of a superior revelation, and it then gave way to the œconomy introduced under Moses.

ON the MOSAIC DISPENSATION we now proceed to offer a few remarks.

The Apostle, in the Epistle to the Galatians, asks this question,—“To what, then, serveth the Law?” If, as he had been stating, the Law could not give life; if it did not disannul the great promise given to Abraham of the blessings to be communicated to the world by a future Messiah, “to what serveth the Law? It was added,” he says, “because of transgression, till the seed should come, to whom the promise was made.” These words supply us with an idea of the precise nature of the Jewish covenant. It made no alteration with respect either to the mode of man’s acceptance, or the duties which were owing to God and man. It did not change either the way of salvation or the general nature of religion: but it was added as a temporary expedient, in order to maintain the knowledge of God and of his laws; in order to enhance the sense of the evil of sin; and in order to prepare the minds of men for that Redeemer who was to rise upon the world, like the sun in his strength, bringing light and life to the nations.—Under the Patriarchal dispensation, men had gradually lost the knowledge of God. They seem to have forgotten him partly through the want of those religious institutions which might have preserved the mind from wandering after the

vain superstitious and idolatrous worship of the heathens. God therefore chose one nation from among the rest of mankind, to be the depository of his truth. He arrested the attention of his people by the most remarkable signs and miracles: he united them in one worship by means of peculiar rites: he captivated their senses by a religion of external pomp; and thus, while the substance of the former religion was preserved, the form and dress were varied. The Divine purpose was thus answered. If a perfect religion was not established; if clear and just views of doctrinal truth were not communicated; yet, under the external covering of ceremonies, the substance of truth was preserved. Every sound doctrine known before was retained and enlarged; every doctrine to be afterwards developed was obscurely shadowed out; and a multitude of restraints and peculiar ordinances were added, in order to secure the public celebration of the worship of the one true God.

Now it is obvious from this account of the imperfect nature of the Jewish dispensation, how earnestly the "kings and prophets," who lived under it, would "desire to see the things which we see," and to "hear the things which we hear."—That dispensation may be considered as having been inferior to the Christian, in the following particulars.

1. It was chiefly composed of types and shadows, of forms and ceremonies.—Its ordinances did but “shadow forth good things to come;” but “the body was of Christ,” who was the perfection and accomplishment of the whole. We cannot wonder, if we consider the ignorance and corruption of man, that the worshippers under the Law should place too high a value upon these ceremonies, and should too little regard the substance. The error arose from the very nature of the dispensation under which they were placed.

2. The Jewish dispensation abounded with severe and burdensome impositions.—The devout worshippers of that dispensation were subject to costly duties, to chargeable sacrifices, to painful abstinences, to troublesome purifications. If but by chance they touched an unclean thing, they were obliged to submit, both to a temporary confinement and to the expense of a sacrifice. They were required to take three journeys to Jerusalem in every year; a requisition often attended with great inconvenience. In a word, they were under “a yoke” which they were “not able themselves to bear.” But the yoke is taken from our shoulders: we are no more subject to severe commands, and painful restrictions; but, like a son in his father’s house, are subject to the law of love.

3. The Mosaic dispensation is inferior to the Christian, inasmuch as the latter *is founded upon better promises* ;—better, as being of a more sublime and excellent nature, as being promises of spiritual and eternal things, such as grace, pardon, peace, and eternal life.—The Mosaic dispensation, considered as a particular covenant made with the Jews at Mount Sinai, promised no other than temporal blessings ; plenty, and prosperity, and the happiness of this life. These were the benefits chiefly held up to view. I do not say, that spiritual and eternal things were not revealed ; but then they were not exhibited with that fulness and clearness which characterise them in the days of the Son of man. Under the Christian œconomy, all the promises are pure and spiritual. It is not a temporal Canaan ; it is not external prosperity ; it is not the pardon of ceremonial uncleanness, that are promised ; but the kingdom of heaven, reconciliation with God, the forgiveness of sin, and eternal life. Temporal gifts indeed are held out to us, as well as to them ; but, with this remarkable difference :—to them, earthly benefits were types and pledges of spiritual ; to us, spiritual blessings are assurances of temporal so far, and so far only, as the Divine Wisdom shall see fit. The spiritual truths proposed before were dimly revealed, and few of the people understood them :

but, for us, the veil is removed, and we “behold the glory of the Lord with open face.” The views entertained by the Jews, of the state of man in another life, were probably gross and carnal : but, to us, the Gospel has perspicuously shown the invisible things of the other world :—it has instructed us in the nature of that heaven which is promised to the righteous ; a state of spiritual joys, of pure and rational delights ; a conformity of our nature to that of God himself, and an endless and uninterrupted communion with him. In this respect, the light of our days was emphatically foretold to be “as the light of seven days ;” and it was declared, that no man should have occasion to tell his neighbour to know the Lord, for that “all should know him from the greatest to the least.” The meanest believer of our day may possess a clearer knowledge than kings and prophets of the former time.

4. Another remarkable circumstance, in which the superiority of our dispensation consists, is, *the larger and more abundant communication of the Holy Spirit.*—To the Jews, it was granted, as it were, by drops : on us, it is abundantly poured forth. The plentiful effusions of the Spirit were reserved, as the great blessing of the evangelical state. It was foretold, that God would “pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon

the dry ground ;” that he would “ put his Spirit within men,” in the Gospel-times, and cause them to “ walk in his statutes, and to keep his judgments to do them.” Hence the Apostle while he styles the Law a ministration of death, characterises the Gospel as the ministration of the Spirit. The Gospel was to make men partakers of a Divine nature, quickening them by the operation of the Spirit, and cleansing them from their sins. Oh invaluable privilege ! Oh glorious distinction ! What a rich consolation for the weak and unworthy children of men, that God will vouchsafe to them the help of his own Spirit to guide them in the way of peace, and to lead them to everlasting glory !

5. Further : The Christian dispensation excels the Mosaic in *the manner of its establishment*.—The Law was delivered with pomp indeed, but with an awful pomp. It was ratified by miracles, which Moses was enabled to perform ; but even these had in them something terrible : they were demonstrations of justice and anger. By his judgments God desolated the land of Egypt ; he overwhelmed Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea ; he punished the Israelites. But when Jesus came, “ the Mediator of a better covenant,” a different appearance was exhibited : “ God” was “ manifest in the flesh,” and came to dwell among us. He

displayed Divine power indeed ; but it was not to punish or to affright mankind. All his actions had one character, and that was a character of beneficence. Innumerable were the miracles of kindness and love, by which the Saviour manifested his good-will to man.

6. The Christian dispensation is superior to the Jewish, *in respect to the spirit of its institution*.—The spirit of the Gospel is a spirit of liberty. We are required by it to “love God with all our heart, and soul, and strength.” We also find him exhibited in it as a Being of such benignity, that those who truly believe cannot fail to love him. This principle of love being once established in the heart, we are left to manifest it in the way most natural and expedient. The positive rights ordained are very few : the yoke is easy, and the burden light. Nothing is required which we do not ourselves see to be reasonable ; nothing which does not evidently conduce to our own benefit.

In a word, to use the metaphor sanctioned by the Apostle, while under the Law, we were at “school under tutors and governors,” and “differed in nothing from servants.” But, now, we are brought home to our Father’s house. Now we are “one with God, and God with us ;” we dwell in peace with him ; we become sons of God by being disciples of Christ : we look up to him

with confidence, and trust to dwell in his immediate presence for ever.

And, as the Christian dispensation in so many points exceeds those which have preceded it, so it will continue without change as long as the world shall endure. God has now given to the world a Revelation adequate to its wants—a system which secures the glory of God, and the happiness and holiness of man. There may, indeed, be periods when the Spirit shall be even more liberally poured out than in the first ages of Christianity. These seasons will arrive: they are devoutly prayed for by the whole Church: they are confidently anticipated in the prophecies of old. The time, blessed be God, shall come when “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas.” But, even then, he will vouchsafe, not a new revelation, but a more glorious manifestation of the old. Nothing need be added; for the work of the Son of God is completed, and it is the office of the Spirit only to give efficacy to that work. All that is sufficient for the conversion, the edification, and the final glory of mankind, has already been accomplished in the dispensation of the Son of God.

Behold, then, my Christian brethren, behold the hope to which God has invited you. Know

your privileges and blessings. How many of the prophets of old, when the Spirit of God had inspired them to foretel of your days, searched diligently to discover of what manner of things they were instructed to speak, and who were the persons to whom such blessings should belong. What would Abraham, what would Moses, what would David, what would Isaiah not have done or suffered, to “see the days” in which you live! They beheld them only afar off, and yet the sight transported them with joy. They called upon the whole earth to “rejoice and break forth into singing,” on account of the great things which God would do for his people in the latter days. These are the “latter days.” The days of glory are those in which you live: the night is spent: the “Sun of Righteousness” has arisen in all its splendour. The full Revelation of God has been placed before your eyes. You dwell in the Church of Christ: all his ordinances are set before you. Every Sabbath are you called upon to taste of the mercy and goodness of the Lord. The seals of his covenant are offered to you; and all the treasures of his Gospel, and all the promises of his word, are daily exhibited to your view. It is surely then your part to *value* and *improve* these inestimable privileges.

It is your part *to value* them.—You ought to

esteem them the chief good of your lives ; a privilege incomparably superior to any other ; a blessing for which, every morning and every evening, upon your bended knees, with the deepest gratitude, you ought to bless God. The Gospel should be your consolation in adversity—a sufficient compensation for all your losses. Of other blessings you may be deprived ; but this will survive the shock of accident, and the ravages of time. But do you value, as you ought, the benefits procured by Jesus Christ? Have you weighed the import of that argument of the Apostle, “ He that spared not his own Son, but hath given him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ?” Let your consciences faithfully say, whether you have duly prized this inestimable Gift.—Let us suppose the day of judgment arrived : you are called to the bar, and hear a voice, saying, “ Here is one to whom much indeed has been given : for this man, the Son of God died : to him the Holy Spirit was offered : the promises of God were continually sounding in his ears : all the Divine love and mercy were set before him, in order to draw him to God.” But if you should have disregarded these mercies and blessings, what will you answer? Will you reply, that your thoughts were too much engaged by the concerns of time and sense to attend to these subjects?

Where, then, was your gratitude? Where was your true wisdom? What will be the force of such an apology before the angels, before the “kings and prophets, who desired to see the things you see, and to hear the things you hear,” but were not allowed so great a privilege?—You are now too much occupied to attend to these things. Occupied about what? About the trifles which perish with the using!—You are now satisfied without these things. Satisfied with what? With joys which will shortly flee away for ever!

I observe, lastly, that it is our first duty—I say again, our first duty—to *improve* the religious advantages we possess. We rejoice that Christ was born into the world. But for what end was he born? It was not only to make atonement for sin, but also to gather to himself a “peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Let us not “glory” in the mere name of Christians. Our business is to consider the ends for which Christ came, to follow him in the regeneration, to appropriate to ourselves his atonement by a lively faith, and to receive his laws as our own laws, and to make his life the model of our own. If we do these things, we shall be blessed indeed—blessed, not because we have been born into the world, but because we have been born in “the days of the Son of Man.”

SERMON XI.

ON THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

1 JOHN i. 3, 4.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

THE Communion of Saints is an article of our faith, which we are taught to profess in that short summary of it which we so often repeat, and which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed. It was probably thought more worthy of mention than other subjects, which, though not specified, are equally material, on account of its importance in a practical point of view. It appears to be inserted in order to remind us, that Christians should

be found united to each other in the closest bonds of love.

The words of the text speak of this communion, or fellowship of souls. And they also enlarge our ideas of that communion, by teaching us to consider it, not as confined to the righteous upon earth, but as reaching to the Father of spirits, and to his Son Jesus Christ. Indeed, the very foundation of the communion of saints is the communion which is first established with the Head of the Church, the Author and Finisher of their faith. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." The Apostle here speaks of that which is the substance of the preaching of the Gospel; namely, the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He had seen Him who was manifested to the world; he had heard him converse; he had touched him with his hands; and this Lord of life, thus made man, he had declared unto the disciples. The end of this preaching of Christ was to unite believers together in him; to make them partakers of one common joy in the Lord, and to cause them also to have fellowship with the Father and with the Son. Before there could be any real communion with each

other, it was necessary that they should be united by one strong and common bond. This bond was faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. By faith in him they were cleansed from their old sins ; they were adopted into God's family, and became the sons of God. By faith they were made partakers of the influence of the Holy Ghost, and sealed with the Spirit, which is the earnest of the possession purchased by Christ. By faith they led a holy life, "perfecting holiness in the fear of God." By faith they all looked up to the same glorious hope of their calling; even the joyful "inheritance of the saints in light," in which they had a sure expectation of being blessed, when this transitory and evil life should be terminated. Thus their communion arose out of a similarity of condition, pursuits, and enjoyments. The subjects of one state, the followers of one political party, the individuals of one family, the members of one society of friends, have fellowship with each other. There is something similar in their views, manners, interests, and pursuits ; and hence they have much intercourse. Even so, the members of the Church of Christ are united by sympathies of the most endearing kind.

But when we speak of the saints as all members of the same family, it is necessary that we consider that family in its whole extent. It is not confined

to the small circle of holy persons worshipping together upon earth. These comprise but a very small part. The whole, who are thus united in Christ, form an assembly whose worth no tongue can describe, and whose number no man can compute. They are a vast body, composed not only of private Christians and of ministers now dwelling together upon earth, but of all those faithful disciples of Christ who have ever lived upon it. Confessors and martyrs, prophets and apostles, priests and patriarchs, saints militant below and spirits triumphant and made perfect above—all these make but one family. They are distinct branches of it; severed, for a little while, by time and space, but not separated by nature.

The family is to be considered as still more ample than this. The angels of heaven, who are subject to Christ, and employed by him as ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation, may be justly considered as comprising a part of it; for they worship the same Lord, they are engaged in the same pursuits; and therefore the Apostle speaks of them as branches of the same family living under the same Head.

Such is the family of God; into which Christ has introduced us, giving to all who are in him, access by “one spirit unto the Father.” Over this family the Father, the Son, and the Spirit preside;

each of them in their several offices holding communion with the members, and the members with them.

1. They have *communion or fellowship with God the Father*.—Truly, says the Apostle, “our fellowship is with the Father.” All communion is reciprocal: God is the Father; the saints are the sons. He is the original Author and Source of all their grace and happiness. He bestowed upon them the inestimable gift of a Saviour. He communicates to them grace: they, receiving that grace, return to him the tribute of praise and thanksgiving. He bestows life and spiritual faculties: they use that life and employ those faculties in glorifying his name and exalting his perfections. He imparts to them of his love; he sheds it abroad in their hearts: they love him in return, and offer to him the free-will offering of a grateful heart. They hold communion with him, by their fervent prayers before the Throne of Grace: and He vouchsafes the grace they request, and the mercy they need. This is their communion with the Father.

2. They *have communion with the Son*. “Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”—This union between Christ and his members is of a very intimate nature, and is the foundation of their union with each other. They are one with each other, because they are

one with him. He took upon him their nature, became bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh; “being made in all respects like unto them, sin only excepted.” He bore their sins, and the curse due to them; and he communicates to them of his Divine blessings and glory: and thus they become “the righteousness of God in him.” He holds communion with his Church, and his Church with him, by daily and stated ordinances; by means of which he conveys to them his grace. The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is emphatically the Communion of his Body and Blood. By ministers also, and by the preaching of the word, there is communion between the Head of the Church and his members. As he is, so are we. Because “he lives, we live also.” We share in his sufferings, in his grace, and in his glory. He is the vine, and we are the branches.

3. *But there is a communion also with the Holy Spirit.*—It is chiefly through the medium of the Holy Spirit that the Communion of the Church with the Father and the Son is maintained. It is the office of the Spirit to dwell with the saints, to abide with them, and to seal them to the day of redemption. This doctrine is frequently declared in Scripture. “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” “If ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your

hearts, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!" The Spirit dwelleth with the saints as in a temple: "Know ye not," says the Apostle, "that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" This union of the soul with the Spirit of God is manifested and cherished, on his part, by communicating to it holy desires; by shedding upon it his sanctifying influences; and by the consequent production of heavenly light and knowledge, and hope, and peace, and all spiritual consolations. On our part, it is sustained by meditation and prayer, by diligence in the use of all the appointed ordinances, by cherishing the blessed influences imparted to us, and by studying to walk in all the commandments of our Lord blameless; for he has declared, "If any man love me, and keep my commandments, my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him." Thus the whole body of the faithful join together in communion with the Father of spirits: all meet at the same Throne of Grace; the saints below, and the spirits made perfect above. They unite in one common feeling, and join in one song of praise, "to Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb."

4. But further, there is a communion *between the saints in this world and the holy angels*.—This does not, indeed, consist in a visible intercourse;

but it is not less real on that account. The Apostle, while describing the several branches of the family of God, expressly says, “ We are come to an innumerable company of angels.” Their intercourse with us is abundantly testified by holy writ. An angel foretold the death of John. An angel communicated to the blessed Virgin the glad tidings of a Saviour to be born. A whole choir of angels appeared to the shepherds, and sung glory to God, on account of the Redeemer’s birth. Angels announced his resurrection, and shewed the place where his body had been laid. Angels carried the soul of the holy but despised Lazarus to Abraham’s bosom. An angel opened the door to Peter the Apostle, and thus delivered him out of prison. Angels were made ministers of prophecy to Daniel, and to the beloved John; and they were employed to bear the golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints. And it will be angels who shall sever the wicked from the faithful at the resurrection of the just. In short, the angels are “ ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation.” They are engaged in promoting the cause of Christ in his Church, and are interested in the welfare of his members: “ There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth.”

5, There is also a communion *between the dif-*

ferent saints who live on earth, as well as between them and those who have departed this life in the faith and fear of God.—These last are still members of the same family, removed into a different part of the house of God. Death makes no change of employments or affections. It only elevates and refines them.

With respect to the saints militant here on earth, it is to be observed, that some kind of communion subsists between all the members of the external church. They are partakers of the same baptism; they make the same profession of faith; they acknowledge the same principles of religion; they hear the same word preached; they sit at the same table, and partake of the same sacred elements of bread and wine. But these things are all external: they are but signs or symbols of little importance, while the spirit and grace they signify are wanting. It is only among real Christians that there can be true communion. And this consists in several particulars, some of which I will now proceed to specify.

The Church of Christ is dispersed through the whole globe, separated by difference of language, by disparity of rank, of age, and of circumstances. But, as if actuated by one soul, they all engage in the same *pursuits*: all make it their chief study to serve and glorify God; all daily bow their knees

before God the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ; all are occupied in reading and meditating on his blessed Word; all are seeking to have their evil natures sanctified, and to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ” their common Lord. These are their daily pursuits; these the works which they feel and avow to be of the first importance. Thus they continue to be occupied, till the day when their Lord calls them to join the family of the redeemed above.

Nor is this communion confined to their occupations. They share also in each other’s *joys*; “joys in which a stranger intermeddleth not.”—They mutually rejoice in Christ, in the honour paid to his name, and in the increasing knowledge of his religion. They rejoice when the light of God’s countenance is lifted up upon their souls, and their joy they love to communicate. They rejoice in the happiness and salvation of each other, no envy dividing the brethren in Christ. Their *consolations* are the same. The blessed Spirit reveals to all the same *truths*, and communicates the same *grace* to their souls.

There is, also, a communion of *sorrows* among the saints. “If one member” of the mystical body of Christ “suffers,” the rest “suffer with it.”—They who are personally strangers, yet feel a brother’s interest in all who love God. They enter into their

! trials, for they are their own: they feel for them, while they behold them struggling with an evil nature and a sinful world. Do they see them affected with bodily pain? They have more than a stranger's compassion for them. Do they hear of their lying upon a dying bed? With the anxious solicitude of brethren, they send up fervent prayer on their behalf, and tenderly sympathize with them, while engaged in the last struggle with the powers of darkness and the body of sin.

Strong also and exquisite is the communion of *love* between the brethren in Christ.—To what acts of compassion does not the love of Christ incite Christians? To what labours of love does it not stimulate them? What candour, what good-will, what readiness to oblige all who love their common Lord, does not the sense of his dying love produce? But, alas! how frequently do the chilling frosts of this cold and unfriendly climate check the growth of this Divine charity. The discovery of hypocrisy, the frowning aspect of the world, the lethargic state of some brethren, the declension or apostacy of others, produce disastrous changes, and separate those whom God had united. Still, however, the members of the Church of Christ, in general, enjoy an union which no ties of party, country, or even kindred, could produce; and they look forward with hope to the day when they shall love

each other, even as they are now loved by their God.

They enjoy, moreover, communion with each other, by much *actual intercourse and conversation in the world*.—They who have the same pursuits, are engaged in the same design, and are interested in the same cause, cannot be contented to remain strangers to each other. They have a communion of subjects upon which they can converse; subjects important as heaven, dear as eternal life. To each other, therefore, they will often open their hearts, and will take sweet counsel together. They will relate their trials, and describe their fears and hopes, with an interest which none except themselves can feel.

They enjoy, lastly, communion with each other in *prayer*.—Their hearts are opened before the Throne of Grace; their affections are kindled at the flame of the altar of God. Here, therefore, in sweet fellowship, the many thousands of Israel meet: here they offer up the same petitions; here they plead for each other in fervent supplication; and, while they unite in adoration and intercession, their affections are enlivened; so that, like the disciples at Emmaus, while holding communion with their Lord, they say, “Did not our hearts burn within us?”—or, with Peter on the Mount, “It is good for us to be here.” Thus, on this

holy day, are all the servants of Christ in every country, in every climate, of every denomination and sect, however separated by distance or by varying modes of worship, united before the Throne of Grace in offering up the same devout supplications, and the same animated praises.

Such, then, is the fellowship to which the Apostle in my text invited the disciples to whom he wrote. Such, also, is the fellowship to which we are called. Here, let us each say to our souls—“What is thy state, and with whom dost thou hold communion? Is it with men of a worldly spirit? Dost thou rejoice only in their pleasures, grieve only in their sorrows, engage only in their employments? Then, thou art of the world, even as they are of the world. But happy indeed art thou, if thou canst say, ‘My delight is with the saints that are upon the earth, and with such as excel in virtue:’ my communion is with the Father of spirits, and with his Son Jesus Christ my Redeemer, and with the angels above. I am also joined with the whole church of the faithful below: I am occupied in the same work, I possess the same comforts, I am warmed with the same love. I feel a brother’s sympathy with the members of Christ. My soul unites itself to them when I approach the Throne of Grace, and my heart burns within me while I converse with them upon the things of God.”—My “brethren

in Christ," such will be our feelings if we are actuated by the Spirit of God.

Numerous are the inferences suggested by this subject. I shall briefly touch on some of them.— In the first place, it suggests to us the necessity of being separate from the world, and of becoming "a holy and peculiar people, zealous of good works." The light of Divine Truth, and the holiness flowing from it, alone lead to that fellowship with God, and with each other, which has been described. "If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship with each other." But "if we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, light with darkness? There can be no communion where there is no similitude. Communion arises from a similarity of disposition and pursuits.

Let this subject also be employed to excite our thankful acknowledgments. What are we, that we should be admitted to fellowship with God? Oh, how glorious is the "hope of our calling!" Let this hope support us amidst the trials of the world, and against the loss of friends, which the devout pursuit of religion may sometimes produce. Is it not enough that we are joined in fellowship with angels and archangels, with the glorious com-

pany of the apostles, the noble army of martyrs, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the holy church universal? Such a communion should fill us with lofty ideas and feelings: the heirs of heaven should not suffer their minds to be grovelling upon earth, or their hearts to be carried away with the love of a polluted world. "Let our light shine before men." Let us live as those who have "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

Let the subject inspire affection also towards real Christians. "Let our love be without dissimulation." Let us shew candour to the followers of the same Master. Are we not brethren, and shall we make each other offenders for a word? Shall those for whom Christ died be unwilling to exercise kindness to each other? Shall those, who are fellow-heirs of the same promise, live as if they were strangers here? Oh let us, for Christ's sake, overlook our petty differences! Let the love of Christ be the central point in which we meet. Let it be employed to cement love between Christian brethren. Let us cultivate a sympathizing spirit. Let us abound in all the sympathies of love, in works of charity, in acts of pity and kindness for each other. Thus shall we shew that we really have fellowship with Christ; thus shall we approve ourselves to be his disciples.

SERMON XII.

ON COMMUNION WITH THE ANGELS.

HEBREWS xii. 22.

Ye are come to an innumerable company of angels.

IT appears to have been a favourite practice with St. Paul, to display to the disciples the privileges and happiness which belong to the state of a real Christian. He felt that happiness, and he enjoyed those privileges, in so great a degree himself, that he earnestly desired others to be made partakers of them. He accordingly gives, in the passage from which my text is taken, a striking view of the superiority of Christian privileges to those of the Jewish Church. “Ye” Christians, he says, “are not come unto the Mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire; nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest”—things calculated only to fill the mind

with terror and dismay; “but ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven; and to God the Judge of all; and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant; and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel.” Such is the society into which you are introduced,—such are the privileges you are called to enjoy.

Amongst the different members of this glorious assembly, into whose society and communion we are invited, we find mention made of “*an innumerable company of angels.*” This may justly lead us to consider as well their nature, as the relation to them into which we are brought by the Gospel-dispensation. It is not, however, as a matter of curiosity, or subject of speculation, that I propose this subject to you; for it is to improvement alone that this day and this place are consecrated. Neither should we give the reins to a fanciful imagination, in considering a subject with which our acquaintance is necessarily so limited. On the contrary, we should, with due modesty and humility, adhere to the word of God, and be content with the information it supplies.

I do not, therefore, attempt to investigate or display the nature of angels. Of the manner in which unembodied spirits exist, we can perhaps at present form no conception. Suffice it to say, that the Scriptures represent the good angels as bright and glorious spirits, who have kept their original state of holiness and happiness, and who delight to employ all the powers with which God has endowed them in fulfilling his will and promoting his glory. Without entering, therefore, into any further explanation of their nature, let me, in the first instance, direct your attention to their number.

It is here said, “Ye are come to an *innumerable* company of angels.”—We find, in the prophet Daniel, a magnificent account given of the angels standing round the Throne of God. “I beheld,” says he, describing his vision, “till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool : his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire ;— a fiery stream issued and came forth from him ;— thousand thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.” Such is the number of the attendants of the Divine Majesty, that language fails in its power to express it. We need remark only, that their

number is worthy of the majesty of Him whose glory as much exceeds all created glory as his nature surpasses ours. David labours, in like manner, to give us an idea of the number of angels. "The chariots of God," he says, "are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." And the beloved disciple St. John, when favoured with a view of heaven, endeavours in vain to express the number of angelic beings with which its spacious courts were filled. "I beheld," he says, "and I heard the voice of many angels round about the Throne; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands."

These passages of Scripture are sufficient to shew that the company of angels is innumerable. Nor indeed should we be surprised at this, when we consider the nature of heaven, the place of their habitation. Heaven is the perfection of the creation of God. It is the grand scene of existence; the court where God himself is said to hold his residence. This world can be considered only as a minute part of his works, and ourselves as creatures comparatively of a low class. The inhabitants of the world "come up and are cut down like a flower;" but the inhabitants of heaven never die. This world itself is but a transitory scene; a stage erected for a little

while ; but heaven endureth for ever. Surely then, considering the majesty of heaven, it might be expected that these glorious beings, whose powers and capacities, and whose duration of existence, are so infinitely superior to those of man, should also be as much superior in number to the inhabitants of this mere point in the dominions of God.

And here allow me to draw an inference from this statement.—Be encouraged, you who are endeavouring to serve God in this evil world, from the consideration of the number of the angelic beings. It is indeed painful to behold the world around you lying in a state of ignorance and wickedness ; to behold so few examples of zeal for God, and ardent love to his name ; of disinterested charity ; of unblemished righteousness. Often, perhaps, are you tempted to cry out with Elijah, “ I am left alone in the earth.” Often, with painful but necessary singularity, are you obliged to dissent from the practice of the world, and to say, “ As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” But be not disheartened by the melancholy examples which crowd around you. If your eyes were opened, like those of the servant of Elisha, you would see that “ there are more with you than against you.” No : you who serve God faithfully and delight to do his

will, you are not the few among his creatures. You are not singular, whatever the surrounding scene may seem to suggest. Those are singular among the works of God, who neglect and despise their Creator ; who are living in rebellion against his will, and have shaken off the yoke of the Divine Government:—those, as you will discover in the day when you shall be permitted to behold God “ face to face ;” those are the few, those are the anomalous and monstrous parts of the creation. You, who are sincere Christians, shall be numbered with “ an innumerable company,”—united to those who are as countless as the sands of the sea ; those holy and happy spirits who have ever loved and served their God. Let us then look up from this evil world to the “ innumerable company of angels.” We, if Christians indeed, are “ come” to them ;—a relation has commenced between them and the “ saints which are in Christ Jesus.” We, who were “ once afar off, are brought nigh to them.” We, who were separated from them, are now united to them. We may consider ourselves as having “ come to” this “ innumerable company,” as our FRIENDS—as MINISTERING SPIRITS—as EXAMPLES—and as ETERNAL ASSOCIATES. Let us examine these four points in succession.

I. In the first place, then, we have come to them as FRIENDS.

Originally, angels and men were as one family. They were the creatures of the same Lord, and partakers of the same nature. There existed between them a community of interests, a similarity of dispositions; and therefore these “bright morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy,” when the foundations of the earth, the habitation of man, were laid. But, by sin, the bond of union was broken. Then angels became the ministers of God’s vengeance against man. It was an angel who “went through the land of Egypt, and smote the first-born in every house, that he died.” It was an angel who brought the pestilence upon Judea for three days, and who lifted up his sword against Jerusalem to destroy it. It was an angel who went into “the camp of the Assyrians, and slew in one night one hundred and seventy-five thousand men.” It was an angel who smote Herod, while seated upon his throne, and impiously permitting the honour to be paid to him which belongeth only to God.—We find angels also employed to sound the trumpets of God’s vengeance, and to pour out the vials of wrath upon a guilty land. Thus angels are employed as the scourges of guilty and impenitent man. But Christians are, by virtue of

their union with Christ, re-united to the angels as friends. Thus Christ is described as having incorporated them into "one family." It was the "good pleasure of God, which he purposed in himself, to gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are in earth." Into what a noble family, therefore, are we, if really united to Christ, incorporated! To what a society are we united! To "Jesus, the Mediator," and to "an innumerable company of angels!" O! ye who are "poor in this world," but are "rich in faith, heirs" of the promises, look to the greatness of your inheritance, and to the dignity of your birth-right in Christ. What, though you may be poor and despised, yet if "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ," if the angels are your friends, have you cause to complain? The angels regard no earthly distinctions; they consider only the love you bear to Christ. They measure your value, not by your interest in the fading possessions of this world; not by the pomp you display, or by the raiment you put on; but by your love to God, and by his love to you.

II. But we are not come to the angels as *friends* only: they are also "MINISTERING SPIRITS, sent to minister to the heirs of salvation."

To call the angels our friends, is a privilege and

dignity which every humble person will justly esteem too great for such a sinful and corrupt being as man. But as their friendship with man springs not from our intrinsic merit, but from the love they bear to the Author of our creation, and from the elevation of a nature at once commanding admiration and destitute of pride ; so this love of God, and this elevation of nature, dispose them to every employment by which God may be honoured, and man be blessed : therefore are they ministering servants to the heirs of salvation.— Thus, in order to intimate the perpetual intercourse between heaven and earth, a “ ladder was displayed to the Patriarch Jacob, reaching from the one to the other,” and the “ angels of God ascending and descending” upon it. Thus, also, when overwhelmed with fear of the power and indignation of Esau, whose approach he expected, was Jacob comforted by God with a vision of heavenly troops commissioned to protect him. “ And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him : and when Jacob saw them he said, This is God’s host ; and he called the name of that place Mahanaim,” or the two armies.— Thus we find them often appearing, and still oftener ministering, to the servants of God in the various trials and distresses to which they were exposed. It was an angel who brought to Elisha bread in

the wilderness, that he might be strengthened for his journey. An angel appeared to Gideon, to strengthen him, and to give him assurance of victory. An angel appeared unto Zechariah, when ministering before the altar, to announce to him the birth of the illustrious forerunner of the Messiah. It was an angel who shewed to the Prophets Daniel and Zechariah, and to the Apostle John, the "things which should come upon the earth." An angel delivered Peter out of prison, and broke the chains with which he was bound. The angels carried the soul of Lazarus, when he died, into Abraham's bosom. An angel stood by Paul, to comfort him when about to be shipwrecked, and to declare to him that no harm should befall him or the persons with him. The angels are said to take charge of the servant of God, "lest at any time he should dash his foot against a stone." The angels also are employed as instruments in the hand of God, to defend the true Christian from Satan, and to defeat his evil machinations against the Church.

What encouraging views does this representation open to us! How, in the midst of perils or in the depths of solitudes, may we comfort ourselves with the idea of being surrounded by the heavenly host! What confidence may we place in their protection, if only we fear and serve God!

Oh! when shall we duly estimate the blessings which accompany the Divine favour.

III. But I go on to consider the angels in another point of view. We may be said to have come to them as our MODELS OR EXAMPLES.

“Wherein,” it may be asked, “can they be examples to us? When we propose a model to ourselves to imitate, we take one like ourselves, who has the same object to pursue, and the same difficulties to overcome.” Now, it is true, that between the angels and ourselves there is an infinite distance: yet, in many points, such a degree of correspondence prevails, that we may justly propose them as objects of our imitation. They are, for instance, examples to us in the objects of their contemplation, in their adoration of God, in the harmony they display, in the love they feel, and in the obedience they render to the Divine command. Let us briefly regard these blessed spirits in each of these points of view.

1. First, then, consider the *object of their contemplation*.—Doubtless, the knowledge of beings, whose powers are so transcendent, must be various and extensive; extending, perhaps, to subjects of which we can form no conception. But it is remarkable, that they are not held up to our view as exploring the depths of science, but as search-

ing into the counsels of Divine love. The mystery of Redemption occupies their attention. The sufferings of Christ, and the riches of his grace, they contemplate with rapture: "That now," says the Apostle, "unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God." And again, speaking of the prophecies which had been delivered of the grace of Christ, he adds, "which things the angels desire to look into." Thus also are the cherubim represented in the temple as stooping over the Mercy-seat, astonished at the grace of God manifested to man, and adoring the great Author of it. In this employment, then, let us imitate the angels. Can we have a nobler object of contemplation than theirs? Can we exhaust that glorious subject which instructs and amazes even them? Here is a subject really sublime and profound, fit to exercise the noblest faculties of the mind—the mercy, the love, the wisdom, the power of God, displayed in the great mystery of Redemption. Let us be ashamed to feel so little interested in contemplations, in which it is the highest dignity of angels to be engaged.

2. Next, The angels may be considered as our examples, in their *adoration of God*.—Man worships God, and so also do the angels of God: and

how do they worship him? Is it a faint and languid, a cold and formal adoration which they offer up when the host of heaven fall prostrate before the Throne, and cry with a loud voice, "Salvation, and glory, and honour, be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever?" If, then, we would learn how to adore God, let us consider their worship. In them we see perfect knowledge combined with perfect love, bending and stimulating every faculty of the soul to offer up a spiritual sacrifice worthy of the great Being to whom it is offered.

3. Again: The angels are examples also in *harmony*.—Could we look into heaven, we should see but one will, and, as it were, but one soul, pervading the multitude of the heavenly host. The united song of the seraphim was, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts: heaven and earth are full of his glory." On earth we meet together, it is true, in the house of God; we kneel at the same moment, we rise together, we listen together to the word of God: but we agree, perhaps, only in these outward circumstances. In the ears of the Lord of hosts, our melody is often discord; for he looks at the heart, and there he beholds corrupt imaginations, earthly affections, wandering thoughts, unhallowed passions, polluting the service, and jarring with the offer-

ing of our lips. But in heaven, as voice answers to voice, so the will meets the will, affections mingle with affections, hearts unite with hearts. All is concord, all harmony; and, as if it were the offering of one instead of myriads of spirits, the worship is one unbroken sacrifice and one uninterrupted song.

4. Next, They are models also in their *love to God*.—How little soever the great Ruler of the universe may be honoured and beloved upon earth, there is no want of love to him in the courts above. Those blessed spirits know not a cold and lukewarm regard to their Creator and Benefactor. *They* love him, as *we* ought, with all their heart, and soul, and strength. Such is the ardour with which their affections kindle and ascend to God, that they are compared to “flames of fire;”—“who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.” They are as “flames of fire,” in the ardour and promptitude of their affections.

5. Thus also they are our models in *obedience*.—Our Lord himself has in this respect proposed them as examples to us, when he teaches us to pray that God’s “will may be done on earth, as it is by the angels of heaven.” In what manner, then, do they perform it? I answer, Constantly, readily, universally, cheerfully. They have no choice,

no will of their own. They choose the will of God. They alike obey and rejoice, whether they be sent to direct the affairs of an empire, or to bring a meal to Elijah in the desert. It is not the employment, but the Governor who appoints it, to whom they bear respect.

Thus, then, my brethren, you see what noble examples you are taught to propose to yourselves. Lift your eyes above the frail children of men around you. If you take the measure of your duty from the worms of the earth, who are as corrupt, as ignorant, as sordid as yourself, your conceptions must be gross, your practice low, your ideas of holiness itself mean and base: therefore raise your thoughts to another world, and behold its blessed inhabitants. These are displayed to you as examples by God himself. They are also placed before you as your associates for ever.

IV. But this brings me to the last head; in which I am to shew, that real Christians are come to the innumerable company of angels, as to their ASSOCIATES.

Here, upon earth, the Christian is an associate with angels by faith, by hope, by communion, by anticipation. But hereafter we, if we be indeed Christians, shall be more intimately united to them. They now rejoice in our peni-

tence, because they see another name written in heaven. They anxiously await the hour of our death, that they may see another soul enter into glory ;—with them, so bright, so glorious, so excellent, has it pleased God of his infinite mercy to fix our eternal habitation. Oh, blessed society, from which all envy, and pride, and anger, and emulation, and strife, shall be for ever excluded! where there will be but one employment, one spirit, one heart, one object,—the glory of our Father and their Father, of our God and their God!

There is one reflection with which I beg to close these observations. How awful is the thought, that every person, who now hears me, is united either to the devils or to the angels! To the eye of sense, we seem to be all mingled together in one body; but, if the veil which conceals the invisible world were removed, we should discover a distinction as clear as will appear when the angels shall separate the wicked and the righteous. God and Satan divide the world. Each has his angels subordinate to him. The “god of this world,” emphatically and awfully so styled, on account of the number of subjects he at present possesses, “rules in the children of disobedience” by his evil spirits; while God sends his

“angels to minister to them that are the heirs of salvation.” And, according to the success of the good and evil angels, in moulding their respective charges to their own nature and character, the objects of their respective superintendance will rejoice with angels, or suffer with devils for ever. Thou, therefore, who openest thy mouth in blasphemy and cursing against God; thou who endeavourest to subvert the government of God, and to loosen the grasp which the obligations of his truth have upon the mind; thou who tramplest upon his laws; thou who slightest the ordinances of his grace, the worship of God, and the word of God:—is it not evident to whom thou art united? Art thou not doing the work of devils? Art thou not already associated with them? Art thou not “treasuring up for thyself wrath against the day of wrath?” Oh, let me conjure you to pause, to consider, to repent! Even for you there is hope. Behold the glorious company of angels. They desire to receive you: they stretch forth their hands to you. In their holy zeal to reclaim the wicked, and to enlarge their blessed society, they carry the everlasting Gospel to all nations. Will you renounce them, to have fellowship with devils? Oh, turn to God, that you may be added to this innumerable company! And *you* who, through Jesus Christ, are

thus united to and associated with angels, see that you do the work of angels. Be conformed to them in your tempers and views. Live like them here, as the best, the only, preparation for an eternal residence and communion with them hereafter. In the contemplation of this glorious prospect, who shall not adopt the exclamation of the Psalmist? "Bless the Lord, ye his angels that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his host; ye ministers of his that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul."

SERMON XIII.



ON THE EFFECT OF SEEING GOD AS HE IS.



I JOHN iii. 2.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God: and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

WHOEVER entertains a proper view of the nature of this life, the miseries to which it is subject, and the corruptions with which it is defiled, will frequently be looking forward towards another state of existence with anxious curiosity and humble hope, and will often meditate upon the partial discoveries and obscure intimations which the Scriptures afford concerning the nature of that state. Partial and obscure as they are, they serve, however, to convey some important lessons of instruction to us with respect to our duty in the

present life. They reflect a light by which its true character and condition are more distinctly traced ; and thus render our researches into the mysteries of the future world, while made under the guidance of Revelation, a source not of useless gratification to curiosity, but of real and practical improvement. It is in this view that the passage of Scripture contained in the text has been selected. It gives a glimpse of the eternal state, and presents a very striking idea, which it will be edifying to pursue and to develop.

“ Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” “ Beloved, *now*,” in this fallen and sinful world, “ *are we the sons of God.*”— God considers us as his sons, having adopted us into his family, sent his Son to become our Redeemer, and his Spirit to sanctify us, and having also given to us many great and valuable privileges denoting our adoption. “ And it doth not yet appear what we shall be.” The nature of the glory which we shall hereafter possess, in consequence of so high a title, is not yet clearly revealed ; but this we know, that when Christ shall be manifested in his glory, and take us to himself, “ *we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*” It is this last clause, which contains the striking idea to which I have alluded. It seems

to intimate, that the glory which we shall enjoy in the kingdom of Christ, will consist in a perfect resemblance to Christ; and it leads us to consider, as the means of our attaining that glory, the contemplation of our Saviour "as he is." By this full and distinct view of the glory of our blessed Lord, we shall be transformed into the same image from glory to glory. It is also evidently implied in these words, that though in heaven we shall see God "as he is," yet we have not that view of him in the present life. They present, therefore, to the mind four distinct points of consideration.

I. That in this world we do *not* see God *as he is*.

II. That in heaven we shall see him as he is.

III. That this view of the Divine Being will have a transforming efficacy to make us resemble him. And,

IV. That the glory and happiness of heaven will consist in our being thus conformed to the image of God.

I. In this life, then, *we do not see God as he is*.—In propriety, it cannot be said that in this world we see God at all. We see his works, but we do not see Him. We behold no embodied or personal Divinity. There are instances, how-

ever, in which He has been even *thus* visible to human eyes. Though we know and are assured by the clearest demonstration of reason, that God is every where and at all times present with us, it will still be found, that no proofs of this kind, however strong, will produce on the mind of man, as at present constituted, the full effect of sensible appearances; and it is, perhaps, on this account, that although God has no visible form permanently appropriate to him, he has yet been pleased, on some particular occasions, in condescension to human infirmity, to make himself perceptible to the bodily senses of his creatures. Thus he revealed himself to Moses, first, as a flame of fire in the midst of a bush. Afterwards, he passed by him, and manifested to him a part of his glory, as he stood in the cleft of the rock. It was, indeed, only a partial and transient view; "for no man," said God, "can see my face," my full glory, "and live." A similar manifestation was afterwards made to the Israelites on Mount Sinai; not indeed in any distinct shape; but "the mountain was seen as if to burn with fire, and there were thunderings and lightnings and earthquakes." Thus, also, were visible tokens of the Divine Presence exhibited to the Prophet Elijah: "Behold, the Lord passed by; and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and

brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave." The Shekinah in the temple displayed a permanent symbol of the Deity; a luminous glory first filling the whole temple at its dedication, so that the priests could not bear to remain in it, and afterwards continuing to occupy the space within the veil which concealed the Holy of Holies. To Isaiah God manifested himself in a vision; and he "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly; and one cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried; and the house was filled with smoke." Without dwelling on the manner in which God was pleased to give an actual view or impression of himself to Daniel, to St. John, and to others, it is proved by the

instances already adduced, that though God is properly invisible, and always equally diffused throughout all space, he may yet sometimes concentrate the radiance of his power and glory, and give such visible indications of his immediate presence, that he may be said without impropriety to be seen. But these are rare exceptions from the ordinary course of events, and do not militate against the general truth of our first proposition, *that in this world we do not see God as he is.*

And this is true, not only of the person but of the attributes of God : even the most obvious perfections of the Deity, his power and wisdom, are not so conspicuously revealed in the present state of existence as to be immediately comprehended in their full dimensions. This is partly owing to the imperfection of the human faculties. The dimness of man's intellectual vision is such, that he cannot clearly or steadily discern the Divine Attributes. Thus though "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work," it yet requires a mind gifted with more than natural powers to perceive the full glory of the Creator displayed in the moon and stars ; in the magnitude of their size, in the velocity of their motions, in the harmony of their order. We see only the surface of nature's

wonders, and can often form but the most inadequate notions of the interior and more admirable mechanism, which we are not permitted to explore. Not only, however, are our faculties inadequate to the full comprehension of the works of God, as exhibited in this world, but these are themselves of a lower order, and intended only for a temporary duration. Even the heavenly bodies, brightly as they display the glory of God, are made to continue only for a short period; for ere long these heavens themselves shall be consumed, and "the elements shall melt with fervent heat."

But it is important in this view to remark, that the state in which we live is a state of sin and defilement; and, therefore, every thing we behold is under a curse. The great Creator has yielded to merited degradation the world which he once pronounced to be very good. We behold inscribed on it every where the characters of imperfection; the display of justice as well as of mercy; the marks of anger as well as of goodness. Evil is suffered to blend itself with the works of Divine Benevolence, to tarnish their glory and obscure their excellence. The character, in which God appears to us, is one suited to our state as fallen sinners. Here he is a Judge, administering correction, and punishing the guilty. He has re-

served for another world the full display of his benignity and love. Neither personally, therefore, nor in his moral attributes, can we be said to “see God as he is.”

II. But, secondly, *in heaven we shall see him as he is.*—This implies two things; first, That our own faculties will be sufficiently enlarged to take a proper view of his glory and perfections; and secondly, That these will be exhibited to us in a clear and comprehensive light.

1. There must be an enlargement of our minds—an expansion of our faculties—before we can fully understand the glory of God, even when it is displayed to our view. It is not sufficient that the object should be set before us, unless, on our parts, we possess the seeing eye and the understanding heart. The ox and the horse behold the wonders of creation, but cannot recognize in them the hand of the Creator; and were we translated to heaven itself, with our present faculties and views, however we might stand astonished at the exterior splendour of that dazzling scene, we should perhaps be little able to appreciate its less obvious, but more sublime, glories. But ere that blessed period shall arrive, we shall receive faculties suitable to our new state of existence, and to the enjoyment of that happiness

by which we shall be there surrounded. The grossness of corporeal senses will no longer form the medium of perception. It will probably be conveyed in a far clearer and more direct mode, somewhat corresponding to our idea of intuition; so that even the same object may then give impressions infinitely more luminous and comprehensive than we now derive from it. But to whatever elevation the several faculties of our minds may then be raised, it is in their freedom from pollution and imperfection that their most important improvement will consist. It is the corruption of our nature, which in this world prevents our more distinct apprehension of the glory of God. By sin, the understanding is darkened, the mind rendered frivolous and foolish, the attention diverted from grand and sublime objects to the most insignificant trifles, the relish for moral excellence, and the perception of the beauty of holiness, impaired. By sin, the affections are become base, earthly, sordid: a proneness is acquired to relish evil rather than good, to contemplate what is gross and carnal rather than what is pure and spiritual. We have neither the power nor the inclination to turn our view from the objects of time and sense, and to fix it on the less intelligible, and to us less interesting, concerns of the eternal world. But in heaven

the mind will be for ever freed from these disorders : it will be attracted at once by pure and spiritual subjects, and be led with steadfast attention, and unwearied pleasure, to contemplate the perfection of what is holy, great, and excellent. Nor is it only by the elevation of our mental faculties that our knowledge of God will then be promoted, but by the removal also of those external impediments which at present retard the progress of that knowledge. In this world, our investigation of spiritual subjects is perpetually interrupted by the intervention of temporal concerns : but in heaven, no anxious cares about a subsistence will call back our thoughts ; no distressing association of painful remembrances will distract us ; no temptations of Satan, the world, or the flesh, will harass our minds, or break the chain of our meditations. All without and within will correspond, and will unite to facilitate the acquisition of that Divine knowledge, which (as we have reason to think) will be at once our chief occupation and our highest enjoyment.

2. But further, as our capacity of knowing God will in heaven be enlarged, so his works will there more clearly manifest his glorious attributes. That state of imperfection, which here, in some degree, veils, and even disguises, their proper character, will then be removed. The

Divine wisdom, holiness, and benevolence will be displayed on every side in all their glory and brightness. They will demand instant admiration, and gratitude, and love. They will no more need comment, or explanation, or proof, than the existence of light, when the sun shines in meridian splendour. And as, in the future state, the works of God will thus more fully magnify him, so his presence will then be peculiarly manifested by such a display of visible glory, as is not at present granted to the eye of man. The city of God has "no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." "And there shall be no night there: and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light." A more expressive and glorious idea cannot be presented. Here we are illuminated by the light of the sun; but the Lord God himself will be the Sun of that place, and his rays will fill every part with glory, as he originally did the temple, when the priests could not stand before its dazzling lustre. We shall, therefore, see and feel, that "in him we shall live, and move, and have our being." We shall rejoice in his presence, and in his light we shall see light. But this conspicuous revelation of the presence and glory of

God will particularly be displayed in *Jesus Christ*. In him the perfection and glory of the invisible God are embodied and rendered visible to man. He is his beloved Son, "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person:" and so full and perfect is his identity with the Father, that, according to his own representation, he that hath seen the Son hath seen the Father also. The Son was the visible display of the Father's glory even in this world. He came among us "the true light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world." And "the Word was made flesh:" and "we beheld," says the Apostle, "his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." It is to him that the Apostle particularly alludes in the text: "When *he* shall appear." This term is not used of the Father, but is employed to express the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, with ten thousand of his saints and angels, to take his people to dwell with him for ever, and to execute vengeance on those that know not God. Hence the Apostle, in his view of heaven, after saying that "the glory of God doth lighten it," adds, "and the Lamb is the light thereof." And when Isaiah beheld the Lord of hosts sitting upon his throne of glory, we are assured by the Apostle that this was the Lord Jesus Christ, who is King

of kings and Lord of lords ; and when John beheld the hosts of heaven falling down before the Throne and worshipping. “ Behold,” saith he, “ I heard the voice of many angels round about the Throne, and the beasts, and the elders ; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice ; Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.” This then will be the illustrious proof of the immediate presence of God : these will be the glorious means by which we shall see him as he is. “ No man hath seen God at any time. The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”

III. It was proposed, in the third place, to shew, that this view of the Divine Being will have a transforming efficacy to make us resemble him. “ We know we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” It is scarcely necessary to observe, that there is an allusion here to the case of Moses, who, when he was favoured only with a glance of the Deity, received so much himself of the glory which he beheld, that the Israelites could not look upon him ; or rather, perhaps, we may say, that this occurrence was intended as an

apt type and illustration of the manner in which we shall hereafter receive glory ourselves from the contemplation of the blessed God. It is a general law throughout the creation, that every thing great and good is derived from God. All wisdom, power, and goodness are but the reflection of the same qualities in him. And therefore it is very conceivable, that in heaven, where the communication between the Creator and his creatures is more direct and express than it can be here, the Divine glory may also be attended with a transforming efficacy of a more signal and immediate kind. Of the properties of the Deity, there are some indeed which seem absolutely incommunicable to man, such as his eternal existence; but there are others, of which we shall doubtless be in some degree susceptible. What portion he may please to impart of his wisdom and power we can but very imperfectly conjecture; but that we shall derive from the view of him as he is, a considerable resemblance in all moral excellences, there can be no question. The analogy of the present state of existence demonstrates, that in all example, whether good or evil, there is an assimilating efficacy; and there can be no doubt, if we extend the analogy still further, if we were condemned to dwell in the regions of outer darkness with Satan and the infernal spirits, exposed

to the view of perpetual malignity and deceit, we too should become malignant and deceitful. Assailed with rage and execration, our passions too would be kindled ; and where we were hated, we should soon learn to hate in our turn.—But not to pursue further this awful contrast, let us suppose ourselves placed in those blessed regions, where the mercy and love of God shall surround us on every side with inexhaustible profusion. In those regions of eternal tranquillity, should not our souls possess an unruffled calm? Seeing nothing on every side but happiness, could we fail to be happy? Or could we behold the triumph of eternal love, without loving also in return? Where all were endeavouring to increase our happiness, would not our hearts surely burn with a general glow of gratitude? Where all were wise, should we not learn wisdom? Where the beauty of holiness was every where diffused, could we be otherwise than holy? Thus there will necessarily be a general tendency in heaven towards a continual increase of peace, happiness, love, wisdom, and holiness. Christ will communicate to all his servants, and they to each other, every good. Out of his fulness shall we receive even grace for grace imparted to us. And, in reference to this assimilating influence, we are told, that even our bodies shall be made to resemble the glorified

body of Christ. "We look for the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself," or to assimilate all things to himself. Thus "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

IV. It remains, in the last place, to observe, that the glory and happiness of heaven consist in being thus conformed to the Divine image.—This needs very little explanation. There is, in fact, but one kind of glory or of happiness. And in God this glory and happiness are found in an infinite degree. Just in proportion, therefore, as we attain to these excellencies, we must of necessity resemble him. The resemblance to him is the exact measure of that attainment. Let us then correct our views of heaven. Let us no longer consider it as a place of happiness of what kind we know not, or conceive of it so meanly as to compare it to the most perfect pattern of temporal enjoyment; rather let us view it as the abode of happiness, because there our resemblance to the Divine Nature will be perfected. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Thus

to contemplate heaven, is to have the nearest view of it which perhaps it is possible on earth to obtain.

By way of improvement on this interesting subject, let it be observed, that it teaches us the *necessity* of becoming pure and holy in this life, in order to obtain an entrance into the kingdom of glory above. “He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure.” It is impossible that God can admit into his kingdom the impure and unsanctified. It is indeed the very object of the Gospel, to prepare us for heaven by purifying us in this state of probation. That dispensation is intended to display the impossibility of our becoming happy without being holy : to shew us the nature of God, and thus to convince us that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”

But the subject also illustrates the *means* of becoming holy ; for holiness is communicated in this world precisely in the same way as it is above. By contemplating God “as he is,” that is, according to the true description of his character given in the Gospel, we become like him. Thus the Apostle teaches us ;—“We beholding as in a glass,” or mirror, “the glory of the Lord” (that is, his glory reflected in the face of Jesus Christ), “are

changed into the same image from glory to glory." The Gospel is expressly intended to be a true and comprehensive exhibition of God, and not merely such as we view in nature; for there, though we see his power and wisdom, we do not fully learn his holiness, mercy, and love. When, therefore, we study the Bible; when we meditate most deeply on the nature and character of God as there unfolded; when we pray to God for the influence of his grace and Spirit (in which act of devotion we place ourselves, as it were, in his presence, and contemplate his glory); then we take the means the most efficacious to assist our endeavours to resemble him. Then we prepare ourselves in the best manner in our power on earth, to be transformed into his image; for, in fact, the same method will be pursued above. When we die, we shall not so much change the means of resembling God as find their efficacy increased. God grant, therefore, that as we cherish this hope, we may thus "purify ourselves, even as he is pure;" that when he shall come again, with power and great glory, we may be made like unto him in his eternal kingdom, where with the Father and Holy Spirit he reigns evermore!

SERMON XIV.

UNDUE REGARD TO REPUTATION A SOURCE
OF UNBELIEF.

JOHN v. 44.

How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?

OUR blessed Lord here assigns a reason for that unbelief with respect to his Divine Mission which he found so generally prevalent, and for which, on ordinary principles, it is so difficult to account. The miracles which he performed were most numerous and striking, and of unquestionable authenticity. His doctrines were most just, sublime, and worthy of a Divine Revelation: yet the great majority of the Scribes and Pharisees did not believe in him. Now all unbelief is to be accounted for upon one of two principles; either that there is not sufficient evidence to justify

belief, or that the mind is not in a fit state to receive the proper impression from that evidence. In the present instance, the former was clearly not the case: the evidence was full and indisputable. The latter, therefore, was the true cause; the minds of the Scribes and Pharisees were not in a fit state to give due weight to the miracles performed by Christ, to pay a proper attention to the nature of the doctrines delivered by him, to appreciate their value, or to judge impartially of their origin. And the particular reason why their minds were thus indisposed is assigned by our Lord: they received "honour one of another." Their reputation amongst men was the chief object of their solicitude; and, therefore, they were eager to receive those opinions which the world held in honour, and reluctant to embrace those of which the reception was generally discreditable.—The disciples of Christ were, in general, not only of poor and mean condition, but considered as fools and dupes by the wise, and opulent, and honourable of that day; and therefore, a man who was influenced by regard to character *could not* believe in him. It was morally impossible that he should. Had he seen, indeed, the faith of Jesus generally received by those whose esteem he valued, he would have believed on him also; that is, he would have

sacrificed to the love of reputation in another way, and made the faith of Christ to minister to his vanity. But to embrace the cause of Christ, at a period when it was calumniated and despised, required an independence of mind and a love of truth, which are incompatible with the selfish emotions of vanity. Nay more; it required a supreme desire to please God, and a just regard to his approbation as the only true honour. Whoever sought, in the first place, the honour which cometh from God, would have necessarily become a disciple of Christ; for that principle would have induced him to judge by scriptural rules; to compare the character of Christ with that foretold of the Messiah by Moses and the Prophets; to give due weight to the nature of the miracles performed by Jesus; and, above all, to study carefully his doctrines, with a view both to their intrinsic excellence, and to their correspondence with Scripture. He, on the other hand, whose ruling principle, like that of the Pharisees, was ambition of worldly reputation, would be open to none of those sources of conviction, and would therefore continue to disbelieve.

This subject naturally leads to the consideration of three points.

I. The nature and evil tendency of an undue regard to reputation.

II. The excellence of the principle of supreme regard to the favour of God. And,

III. The connection between such a principle and the cordial reception of the doctrines of the Gospel.

I. *The nature and evil tendency of an undue regard to reputation.* I say an *undue* regard, because there is a *proper* regard to the opinion of our fellow-creatures which is both useful and laudable.—Samuel appealed to all Israel respecting the integrity of his life. St. Paul called the Jews to witness that he had lived in all good conscience both before God and man. But, properly speaking, it is a good character rather than reputation which a man ought to seek. The love of reputation (by which is meant the love of worldly applause) results from the gratification which that applause administers to vanity. It is therefore founded on a selfish and corrupt principle. We may value the esteem of others, especially of the good, as a test of our own character : we may value it also as an instrument of power, enabling us to do good ; for a man who does not possess the esteem of his fellow-creatures can do nothing useful in society. We may seek it therefore in a moderate manner, as we seek any other of the blessings of life :—but we must

not make it the end and aim of our conduct ; we must not use it as a motive, or be guided by it as a rule of action ; we must not value it so highly as to be elated by its possession or dejected by its unmerited loss. Our aim must be to do what is right in the sight of God, and our rule must be the word of God. If, while we steadily adhere to these, we obtain the good-will of our fellow-creatures also, it is a cause for thankfulness ;—but in the opposite event, we are to console ourselves by the remembrance that they are but fallible and sinful creatures like ourselves ; that their judgment may be erroneous ; and that, if it is not agreeable to that of God, their approbation can confer no real advantage, nor their censure attach any permanent disgrace. “ For what is man, whose breath is in his nostrils ; or wherein is he to be accounted of,” in opposition to God ?

There may be an undue regard to reputation prevailing even in those cases in which the opinion of the world seems to be entirely despised. An affectation of singularity, a direct contrariety to the maxims or conduct of the world, may spring from the desire of reputation only directed in a peculiar channel. By a bold deviation from the ways of the world, and a professed contempt of its opinions, we may be aiming at the character of

mental independence, and seeking in singularity that reputation which, in the ordinary modes of thinking and acting, we have not sufficient ability to attain. In general, however, it is by the dread of being singular that an undue esteem for reputation is evinced. We are anxious to follow the world: and to think and act with those around us. If I pursue such a line of conduct, or embrace such doctrines, what will people think or say of me? is the question which naturally occurs to minds influenced by this principle; and with them it is a question so weighty as to bear down all sense of duty and regard to the will of God. Now, the evil of being guided by such a principle is very great.

1. It robs God of the glory due to him as the supreme Sovereign and righteous Judge of the world, and ascribes to men that honour and glory which are due to him alone. For throughout the whole creation, in heaven as well as in earth, the holy and blessed Creator ought to be acknowledged and treated as God by every creature. But to treat him as God implies, that we honour and worship him with a supreme regard; that we yield him an implicit obedience: that we seek his glory as our chief aim in life; that his authority is decisive with us, and his will our only law. He therefore who is guided by the love

of worldly reputation as his principle, is in a state of rebellion against God. He fears, honours, loves, and obeys the creature more than the Creator, and has transferred to man the affections and the allegiance due to God. Now, are we to suppose that this can be endured by the Supreme Ruler of the universe? Is he to be dethroned, that a creature, such as man, may usurp his place? Can there be greater moral guilt than this? If this principle were to prevail generally, it would amount to an entire subversion of the Sovereignty of God, and it would introduce into the world all the anarchy and misery which the supreme dominion of the Wisest and Best of beings can alone prevent. The order and harmony of the creation would be destroyed, and its beauty defaced. Other sins are a breach of some *particular* command: they are acts of disobedience, it is true, but they do not strike at the root of all obedience: this is the sin of rebellion, the highest of crimes, against the Sovereign Power; because it impugns the very right of legislation, and refuses obedience upon principle.

2. Again: The evil of such a principle will be apparent when we consider how base and mean is its nature, as contrasted with obedience to the Divine Will.—When a man obeys and serves God, he obeys and serves a Being who of all others is

confessedly the wisest, the greatest, the noblest, and the best:—but if he devote himself to the opinion of his fellow-man, he chooses as his master a poor dependant creature, in nature as weak, as fallible, as ignorant, and as degraded as himself: he submits to be the slave of folly, and the victim of caprice; for what rule in general is so false as that of man's opinion; what guide so uncertain as his judgment? Reformation, besides, is absolutely impossible, while this principle is pursued: for it sets up corruption itself as the standard by which right and wrong are to be measured. Our vices, whatever they may be, are sanctioned by those whom we have chosen as the directors of our consciences, but who are at the same time the sharers in our iniquity; and we secure indulgence by making the partners in our frailties the judges of our guilt. Indeed, after all, what is it but to make our *own* opinions our standard, where we seem to be guided by those of the world? The love of reputation is but the love of self. As we seek the good opinion of mankind because it flatters our pride and vanity; so we are guided by the opinions of the world, because those opinions are in general our own: nor do we ever differ from the world, except where our interest or our caprice leads to the deviation.

It is further evident, that such a servile regard to our reputation will be highly prejudicial to others. For it will induce us to flatter them, and to palliate and conceal the defects of their character, in order that *they* may be pleased with *us*. A man, therefore, who seeks only to stand fair in the opinion of the world, is of necessity a man of no principle. He must take the complexion of the company : he must say what will gain the good opinion of those with whom he converses, not what will be agreeable to truth : he must suppress what would be painful and unpleasant, however necessary or just. Honour, integrity, truth, justice, religion, must be sacrificed at the shrine of his own selfishness and vanity. This is his aim and object ; and thus their good is entirely out of the question, and his own vanity must be gratified. The gratification of these feelings is his exclusive aim ; and in this pursuit, the glory of God, the interests of religion, and the real good of his fellow-creatures are disregarded. It is an important circumstance, upon which too much stress cannot be laid, that whatever is wrong in the view of morals and religion is also in every other respect disadvantageous. This is wisely appointed by Providence, in order to promote the great ends of the Divine administration ; and it generally is found to take place in reference to

the present subject of consideration. Another remark, therefore, which may be made upon this subject is, that those who give up the honour which cometh from God, in order to gain the esteem of man, usually fail in their object. God is the best and kindest of masters, as he is the greatest ; but the world is a hard master, difficult to be pleased, capricious in its taste, quick to discover defects, severe in its censures, and implacable in its displeasure. How many, besides Wolsey, have painfully regretted their injudicious preference of the world's opinion to that of God, or of their own consciences ! The fickleness of the world, the bubble of popular applause, the vanity of dependence on man, are themes which, even to satiety, have been the subjects of discourse. And it should be well weighed by those who give themselves up to court the world's esteem, that while those who seek it the most ardently are often found to seek it in vain, it is frequently bestowed most liberally upon those who never seek it at all, but whose only motive of action is a conscientious desire to please God. So true is that expression of the Divine Sovereign, " Those that honour me I will honour ;" that is, cause to be honoured ; and " they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

II. In opposition to this false and corrupt principle, let us consider, in the second place, the nature and excellency of that principle by which we ought to be guided ; namely, that of *seeking the honour which cometh from God*.

The man who is guided by this motive sets God ever before him as his Supreme Lord, whom he is bound by every obligation readily, constantly, universally, implicitly, supremely, to obey. Whether the commands of God, therefore, be easy or difficult ; whether they be agreeable to the maxims and practice of the world or not ; whether he shall be despised and ridiculed, hated and persecuted, or esteemed and applauded, for his obedience to them, makes no difference in his conduct. He intensely feels the value of God's approbation, and its sufficiency to compensate the loss of every earthly good. He considers, too, the extreme shortness of this life, and learns therefore, to attach little value to human approbation. He is besides convinced, that even in this short life the hope of God's favour and the consciousness of acting according to his will, communicate a peace infinitely exceeding that which the favour of the world can confer ; and he looks forward to the period, soon approaching, when those who have lived to the world, and to themselves, shall call on the rocks and hills to hide them from the face

of Him that sitteth upon the throne. He reflects, that a whole eternity is before him, and that through this eternity it will be the favour of God from which alone he must derive all his happiness and every good. Finally, he considers that God is not only his Judge, who will surely bring into trial every thought of his heart, but his Sovereign too, and his constant Benefactor; and that to rebel against him is the very height of baseness and ingratitude. Every principle, therefore, of reason, of wisdom, of religion, requires him, in all things, to consult his will and to seek his approbation.

Now the excellency of such a conduct is obvious and indisputable. The principle upon which it is founded is of the utmost possible *purity*: it is alloyed by no mixture of imperfection, but, consisting of regard to a Being infinitely pure, is itself infinitely pure also.—It is also the *simplest* and the *noblest*: the simplest, because it has but one end in view, which it pursues with undeviating steadiness; the noblest, because that end is the glory of God.—It is a principle *fixed and permanent*. The opinions and taste of men vary in every age and in every climate; but the will of God is like himself, “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;” the same as revealed to the Patriarchs; the same as manifested by his Son Jesus Christ; the same upon earth while directing

the conduct of the saints, as in heaven while influencing the sentiments of angels and archangels. —It is a principle *always productive of peace and happiness*; for it secures the blessing of a quiet conscience, can bear the test of the most rigid self-examination, and on retrospect is always so satisfactory as amply to compensate to every man the privations to which it may have exposed him. It thus infuses a calm of mind which no other principle can confer, and leads to a settled tranquillity and “peace which passeth all understanding.” And here applies the remark which has been already made, but which cannot be too often repeated on account of its importance, that what is right is always the most advantageous. The fear of God may expose a man for a time to suffering; but it will carry him through that suffering, and will ultimately produce infinitely more satisfaction and happiness than sinful compliance could have done. If he have God and his own conscience on his side, what need has he to fear? He has that which will support him equally in a palace and in a dungeon: he has that which will render him intrepid amidst the wreck of worlds, and even in the awful entrance into eternity.

III. Such being the general character of this excellent principle, let us, in the last place, ob-

serve *how admirably adapted it is to dispose us to a ready reception of the doctrines of Christ*; and, on the other hand, how opposite is the effect of an undue regard to the opinions of men.— We well know how much the understanding is biassed by the state of the affections. It is evident, therefore, that where the love of reputation operates in the heart, the mind is predisposed to receive that doctrine, and to believe that system, which is the fairest in human estimation. But even if the error of that system is suspected, there will be no integrity of mind sufficient to secure its full investigation; no sense of the importance of truth sufficient to teach perseverance in that investigation till the truth is discovered; no fortitude of mind to bear the contempt and reproach which may follow an open confession of that truth. In fact, the man who follows the world, and seeks human esteem alone, has nothing to do with principle, or with investigation, or with truth. He has no claim to independent reflection. He is the slave of those whose opinion he courts, and must not venture to think or believe but as they bid him. It is not to a character like this, that it belongs to pursue the calm investigation of truth, even in its secret recesses; to avow it when it is in disgrace; to bear contempt and ridicule for it; to suffer for it with a martyr's

constancy. No : this requires a sterling nobleness, a magnanimous independence of thought, a high superiority to all selfish considerations ;—and it is only by the influence of some great principle operating on the mind that such magnanimity can be imparted. Such a principle is a supreme desire of the favour of God. Where that dwells in the soul, it immediately elevates it to the contemplation of noble and divine objects, communicates to it a cast of thinking by which it at once discovers the dignity and glory of Divine Truth, however despised, or degraded, or obscured ; and is at once determined to pursue it as not less congenial to its own feelings, than agreeable to the will of God. Hence a pious Nicodemus, a devout Joseph of Arimathea, a guileless Nathanael, a just Zaccheus, an upright Centurion, were already disposed, by the fear of God, to embrace the religion of Christ ; and, having received the truth, to suffer for it : while, on the other hand, the Pharisees, whose religion was only a disguised species of vanity, and whose hearts were alive only to human applause and worldly reputation, were the grand enemies of Christ ; of Him, who neither in his person nor his doctrines professed any thing which would gratify vanity, or minister to pride,—but who, on the contrary, bid his disciples take up their cross, deny themselves, and

follow him who had not where to lay his head ; who had no wealth or honour of this world, and taught his disciples to renounce the love of these things ; who commanded them to be humble, to take the lowest place, and to set their affections on things above. The contrariety of such declarations to the spirit and temper of the Pharisees, is too obvious to need illustration. The Christian principle was as opposite to that of the Pharisees, as light to darkness, or heaven to hell.

Now there is the same evil at this day in the love of human estimation ; the same power in it to indispose us for discovering and relishing the true religion. Would you therefore be the disciples of Christ, your first principle must be to value above every thing the favour of God. Pray to that God from whom every thing good and perfect proceedeth, that he would fill your mind with the deepest conviction of the infinite value of his favour, that you may act every day and in all things in such a manner as you think will please him. This must be your first principle ; and then learn to give less weight to the opinions of men : dare to set light by their ridicule and censure, and value less their applause. Ask yourself whether the world in general fear God and act according to his will ; if they do not, they are no safe guides

to follow. Take the Bible into your hand, and let Christ become your Guide. If there is any thing commanded by him that is contrary to the spirit and maxims of the world, be not ashamed to practise it; and, in a humble but manly spirit, avow your determination to conform yourself in every thing to his will. With such a principle you will not fail to perceive the excellency of all that Christ has proposed for your belief, and commanded for your practice. It will approve itself to you as being congenial to your views and disposition. Such a disposition will serve to correct many mistakes into which you might otherwise fall, and to discover to you many excellencies in the truths of Christianity which you would otherwise overlook. But this disposition is the gift of God. Pray for it, and it will not be denied to you: and whilst you pray, act. Be faithful and upright in doing every thing which you believe you ought to do; and in giving up whatever you are required to resign for the sake of God. Then you will see the force and the truth of the words of the text, and the impossibility that those should believe aright who seek honour one of another, and not the honour which cometh from God only.

SERMON XV.

ON THE CAUSES OF UNTHANKFULNESS.

ROM. i. 21.

Neither were thankful.

THE heathen world is condemned by the Apostle, not for the want of knowledge which they could not possess,—for no man will be condemned for wanting that which he had not the opportunity of attaining,—but for not acting up to the knowledge which they either did possess or might have possessed ; in other words, for their criminal negligence and inattention. They in a measure, he says, “knew God.” From beholding his works, they might easily infer him to be a gracious and compassionate Being. For “the invisible things of him,” that is, his attributes, “are clearly seen in the creation of the world ;”—for this the words evidently mean ;—“being understood” (or manifested) “by the things that are made” (by the whole

frame and order of the world), “even his eternal power and godhead.” They were, therefore, inexcusable when, knowing him to be a Being of eternal power, glory, and goodness, they did not glorify him as such a Being ought to be glorified; they did not offer him a worship corresponding to these glorious attributes, “neither were thankful;”—they did not, as they ought, feel grateful for his goodness, nor render to him the homage of obedience for the innumerable benefits which they had received at his hands. And, in consequence of their thus criminally neglecting to act up to the light they possessed, God “gave them up” to the folly of their own minds. “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” in their religion, and profligate in their conduct; till, at length, they were abandoned by God and given over to condemnation. Of such importance is it, my brethren, to be faithful to the light imparted to us, and thankful for the blessings we have received from God.

Now the blessings which those heathen nations had received were only those which God has given to all mankind;—the blessings of light, of heat, of fruitful seasons, of health, of the faculties and senses of the mind and body. They understood, comparatively, very little of the real goodness of God. His mercy in the redemption

of mankind, the Gospel of his Son, the influence of his Spirit, were not made known to them. Still, however, they were highly culpable in their want of thankfulness. They knew enough of the goodness of God to demand gratitude at their hands, and therefore to justify their condemnation for the want of it. But with how much more force does this argument apply to us, who have the Gospel, with so many other blessings, committed to us! If they were condemned for their unthankfulness, surely our guilt, if we are thankless, infinitely exceeds theirs.

Gratitude to others for benefits received is so plainly a duty, that it is superfluous to establish it by argument. Neither is it less obvious that the duty is great in proportion to the number and value of those benefits. It follows, therefore, that the duty of thankfulness to God is of the highest and most binding nature, since the number and value of his favours are infinitely great. I do not think, indeed, that any persons will, in plain terms, deny the obligation of gratitude to God. Their want of thankfulness does not spring from any doubt, either as to the abstract principle or as to the particular duty of gratitude to God. But the fact is, that they do not perceive God to be so truly a benefactor to them as he is. This point, then, requires to be made

the subject of our consideration. I shall, therefore, in the present discourse, endeavour to assign some of the causes from whence this mistake as to the beneficence of God arises.

I. One cause of our thanklessness to God is, that *we are apt rather to rest in second causes than to trace our blessings to their Primary Source.*—The view of man is generally too confined. He looks at what is near and immediate, rather than at what is more remote. Does he receive any good, it appears to be the fruit of his own labour, of his prudence, his exertions, or of the kindness of his friends. To these, then, the gratitude appears to be due; and to these, and these alone, it is generally offered. The fact, however, is, that the Original Mover and First Cause is the Being to whom our thanks are chiefly due. For—take a similar case. I am desirous of serving a friend. Perhaps the way in which I can most effectually serve him, is by persuading a third person to do something for his benefit; and I accordingly urge this person, and prevail with him. To whom, in this case, is my friend really indebted? Is it to me, or to the third person? While his thanks ought undoubtedly to be given to him, they are yet principally due to me. I am the grand

mover and author of this benefit. My kindness is not diminished by the intervention of the means I have chosen to employ.—But although the validity of this reasoning may be admitted in the case of a human benefactor, it is too apt not to be admitted in considering the agency of the Almighty. The man who obtains food and raiment by his own labour does not always ascribe it to the bounty of God. He feels little gratitude to him who first gave fertility to the earth; who waters the grain with his showers; who ripens it with his suns; and who adapts it to the powers of digestion and the purposes of nourishment. Suppose then you deemed it right, before you conferred a favour upon your child, to require of him, as a condition of the gift, some previous exercise or labour—would he, when he received it, argue justly, if he were to say, “I do not owe this to my parent, but to my own labour?” Would you not answer—“I appointed that labour as the means by which the end was to be secured: I promised the blessing; I pointed out the means, and ensured success to them.” The fact is, the favour is enhanced by the appointment of the means where a merciful end is secured to the use of those means. This we discover in other cases, but not where God is the Author of our success. But for the blindness

of our understanding, or rather, perhaps, the ingratitude of our hearts, we should, at once, refer every mercy to the Supreme Cause, and observe with astonishment the variety, the extent, and the uniformity of his goodness. We should trace to his love for man the system of the universe. To give light to man, He created the splendour by which we are surrounded. To feed him, he caused food to spring out of the earth. To gratify him, he strewed the face of Nature with flowers, and planted it with groves. To recruit his wearied body, he appointed rest and sleep. He gives success to our labours, and he breathes kindness into our friends.—The day approaches, my brethren, when we shall see that all blessings of all kinds, in all places, and at every period—the tenderness of parents, the affection of friends, blessings apparently the most spontaneous and the most costly, the comforts of life, and the joys of eternity—are all the gifts of a heavenly Hand. Would to God, that we could at once make this discovery! This indeed would open to us new prospects, would almost replace us in Paradise, would display to us its Author walking again amidst the scenes of his own creation, and pronouncing every thing to be good. Why should we doubt his presence, merely because he is not revealed to the

bodily eye? Why should we doubt his goodness, because he is pleased to impart it by the intervention of means and instruments? Paradise was not less replenished by his bounty, because he appointed Adam to dress the garden. The bounty of the monarch is not the less, because he distributes it by the hands of his ministers.

II. A second cause of our unthankfulness to God is our defective view of his Providence.—We feel grateful to God when we can readily and distinctly trace any mercy to his Providence. And this is at once recognized in peculiar and striking instances, as in cases of remarkable deliverance or unusual success. But it is greatly to be lamented, that even our acknowledgment of the agency of God, in some instances, should become a means of diminishing our sense of his agency in others. And this is the case, if, by acknowledging him to act only in particular cases, we exclude the sense of his general interference. The fact is, that God does not act in one case more than in another. He indeed more distinctly reveals to us his agency in some instances, that we may learn to recognize it in all. He sometimes ceases to employ instruments, in order to shew us, that when instruments are used, it is still He who works. Far be it from

me to check the grateful emotions felt by any person who has experienced what is termed a *particular* Providence. But this I must say, that the very idea of a particular Providence arises merely from the weakness of our understanding, and our imperfect conception of the Divine agency. For, if we saw the agency of God as it is seen in heaven, we should discover that his providence is as distinct, as particular, as minute in one case as another; that "particular" and "general" are the language of human infirmity: that what is signal and peculiar in our eyes, is common in his; that his hand is always employed; that the "God of Israel never slumbereth nor sleepeth."

A striking instance of this misconception appears in the very meaning assigned to the word "*Providence.*" Men call it a "Providence," when they receive some unexpected deliverance or blessing. But they do not call a loss, or a disease, or a misfortune, a Providence. Yet the term Providence means an instance of God's special care over us. And are we competent judges of the nature of the Divine dispensation towards us? It is certain that on this point the views of God differ most widely from our own. He calls that good which we deprecate as evil. In this case, then, whose views of good are to

be surrendered? Shall God give us blessings only according to our conception of them? Or shall he exercise his own superior wisdom, and impart real good, even though we resist it, though we weep over it, though we pray against it? I fully believe, that in that invisible world, in which we shall be able to form a true conception of the goodness of God, we shall discover mercy where we once discerned only severity, and shall thank God for the disappointments, the trials, the sufferings endured below, as the most signal instances of his providential care.—When it is inquired, “Who will shew us any good?” it is of great importance first to determine what is “good.” Now, in truth and reason, that is good which is durable, which is eternal, which is holy, which unites the soul to God, the Fountain of all good: and that is evil which is transitory, which is polluted, which tends to no good moral end, which is sensual, which alienates the soul from God. Allow this to be just, and it gives us a key to the Divine administration, which unlocks many of its difficulties, and establishes the goodness of God, where, perhaps, it is apt to be least recognized by his creatures. Many, for instance, are disposed to think they have no particular grounds for thankfulness; that their lot has even been hard, and their mercies few;—

that the Providence of God has been rarely extended to them. But on what is this conception of the dealings of God with themselves founded? Evidently on this principle, that nothing is good but temporal good. If God had given them unusual success in their undertakings, or unexpected accessions to their fortune, and health to enjoy their prosperity, then, indeed, they would have acknowledged themselves debtors to his mercy. But under different circumstances as to outward things, they acknowledge no such obligation. Thus falsely do we estimate our condition. Is it not evident, that such a judgment allows no importance to those gifts which are represented in Scripture as the chief of the Divine mercies? The worldly sufferer thinks little of the bread of eternal life which has been offered to him, of the inestimable gift of the Son of God, of the innumerable promises that, if he will trust God and serve him, God will be a Father to him, and will "never leave him nor forsake him." He forgets the unwearied patience and forbearance of God, sparing and blessing him when his sins called for vengeance. He forgets the strivings of the Spirit of God within him; his secret suggestions and admonitions to his conscience. He forgets the various mercies, even of a temporal kind,

which he has enjoyed ; the health, and the daily sustenance, the vigour of mind, the perfect use of his senses, the kindness of friends, the affection of a wife or children, the alleviations of sorrow and the mitigations of pain. All these are passed by as of no value. The mind is morbidly fixed upon something which it passionately desires, and foolishly esteems the only good, and cries, " Give me that, or I die. Give me that, or I possess no mercies." Thus Ahab pined and fell sick, and lay upon his bed overwhelmed with distress, because he could not obtain the vineyard of Naboth for " a garden of herbs." He could not perceive that he had any mercies to be thankful for, while he could not gratify this wish of his heart. And thus it is with mankind in general. They look not at what they possess, but at what they desire. Otherwise, on a just comparison, it would clearly appear, that the gifts even of the most afflicted, when duly estimated, exceed, in an infinite degree, their privations and sufferings.

III. It is a third source of unthankfulness to God, that men *do not consider themselves indebted to him, except for peculiar or distinguishing mercies.*—For the mercies they share in common with others, they think little gratitude is due.

Now I would wish such persons to consider, whether the diffusiveness and extent of the bounty of God form any just cause of unthankfulness. What would they think of a child who should say, “ I am not indebted to my parent ; for he feeds, and clothes, and takes care of my brothers and sisters, as well as of myself ? ” Is it only some exclusive blessing which will excite your gratitude ? Must you have something which distinguishes you from others, to call forth your thankfulness ? Must your pride be gratified to make you thankful ? Then, in truth, your gratitude is only a modification of your pride.—The fact is, my brethren, that the very extent of those blessings we share with others, demands additional gratitude. Indeed, such mercies are, in all respects, the most valuable. Compare such a gift as the light and heat of the sun, with any petty comforts granted to an individual, and observe its superiority. All private mercies may be compared to the dew which fell only upon the fleece of Gideon. But general mercies are like the dew of heaven descending, not alone upon the single fleece, but on the general surface of nature, refreshing the thirsty fields, and clothing them with verdure and beauty.—Surely the blessing cannot be lessened to me because others also are blessed. It is to be measured by the value of the gift, which is

not diminished because others partake of it. Every one ought, in this respect, to consider himself as the only inhabitant of the world. In this case, how grateful would he be for the various mercies around him! But, if so, I desire to know why the enjoyments of others should diminish his gratitude, when their happiness does not interfere with his, or the sense of their comforts diminish his own?

IV. But I pass on to notice a fourth cause of the unthankfulness of man,—a cause I am sorry to assign, because deeply disgraceful to human nature. I may say, then, that *the very number of the mercies of God tends to diminish our gratitude for them.* Painful and affecting consideration! Yet, alas! it is just. For, examine the common feelings of mankind: is it not evident that some extraordinary instance of the bounty of God excites more gratitude than the more valuable mercies of every day? The continued enjoyment of our senses, the nightly refreshment of sleep, make scarcely any impression, because they are common and continual. But if a sense, apparently lost, is restored; then we feel much gratitude to our Benefactor. The same disposition is seen in other cases. If a parent gives to his children something new and unexpected, they are more thankful than for their

daily food and clothing. Thus, also, although the unexpected bounty of a friend may at first excite thankfulness; yet, if repeated every day, it is received with diminished gratitude, and at length the withholding of it is resented as an injury. If it be urged in reply, that this springs from a principle in human nature; I allow it to be so: but it is surely no amiable or excellent principle. It shews that the sense of gratitude does not keep pace with our mercies; but, on the contrary, is blunted by the repetition of them;—an infirmity which argues a depraved nature and a corrupt heart; a disposition which is banished from heaven. Nor is this the full extent of the evil. From the same depravity it arises, that the very feeling of obligation is attended with pain, especially where the debt is large. Men love to be independent, and therefore hate an obligation. And, however affecting and terrible the fact may be, the same spirit of independence denies even the gratitude we owe to God.

V. I add only one more source of unthankfulness to God; namely, a *prevalent view of his character as a just and holy, rather than as a kind and compassionate God.*

It is unfortunate for us, that when we first begin to hear or think of God, it is generally, rather as a Lawgiver or Avenger of sin, than as

a kind and merciful Parent. We enjoy his mercies, without knowing their Author. We find them in the world, and find thousands around us enjoying them in common with ourselves : but soon we discover pleasures we should wish to enjoy, or dispositions we should be glad to gratify. But we are forbidden, and, perhaps, told, “ If you enjoy them, God will be angry—God will punish you.” Who, then, is God? A Being, we begin to imagine, great indeed and powerful, but at the same time strict and terrible ; a Being who will one day call us to judgment, and condemn to eternal torments those who disobey him. Thus, the first impressions of God formed on the mind (which have a considerable future influence on us) are unfavourable to Him ; for we do not then perceive that his justice is only a modification of his mercy, and that he never acts arbitrarily in restraining or commanding his creatures, but only with a view to their good. On the contrary, we become accustomed to look upon God only as a Judge. We see and feel many evils in life, and are ready to ask, “ Why does not God, if he is so merciful a Being, prevent them?” It is in vain, therefore, to expect much gratitude where such a view is entertained of the Divine Being. Dread is scarcely compatible with gratitude and love.

These, then, are some of the principal causes of that want of thankfulness to God which prevails in the world. We ascribe to second causes too much, and to the Primary Cause of all good, too little. We entertain false views of the providence of God. We mistake the nature of good. We underrate the mercies enjoyed by us in common with others. We undervalue our own ordinary mercies. We early imbibe partial and unfavourable views of our Creator.

A very different idea then of God, my brethren, ought to prevail. We ought to look upon him as the best, most gracious, and most amiable Being ; as our constant Benefactor, kindest Parent, wisest Counsellor, and unceasing Friend ; whom, to know, is to love ; in whose “ presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.”

O that I could give *you*, my beloved flock, such a view of the gracious God whom we serve, as would cause you to esteem his service “ perfect freedom ! ”—May the Spirit of God bless what I say, to promote, in some degree, so excellent an object ! *Amen.*

SERMON XVI.

THE TARES AND THE WHEAT.

MATT. xiii. 28—30.

The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.

THE chapter from which my text is taken contains a variety of parables tending to illustrate the nature of that kingdom or church which Christ was about to establish in the earth: One circumstance is especially noticed—that it should not consist exclusively of those who, like the Head of the Church, should be holy and without guile; but that it should comprehend a mixture of the wicked and the righteous. This fact, which subsequent experience has but

too sadly confirmed, is expressed and illustrated in the Parable of the Tares. "Good seed" was to be sown in the Church:—such doctrine was to be delivered as was calculated to produce the fruits of righteousness alone, and to collect within the Christian pale a "holy and peculiar people, zealous of good works." But "an enemy" should sow tares also. Corrupt principles and affections, proceeding from another hand than that from whence the good seed came, would spring up and produce men of corrupt minds and unholy lives. These, however, should be permitted, in the wisdom of God, to continue in the Church, together with the righteous, till the great day of judgment, in which a final separation should take place. The Christian Church; then, taking the word in its wider signification, consists of good and bad mixed together. It is like a "net cast into the sea, which gathers of every kind; which, when it is full, they draw to shore, and sit down and gather the good into vessels, but cast the bad away."

Since it has pleased Divine Wisdom thus to permit the tares and the wheat, the wicked and the righteous, to grow together, let us consider what duties arise from such a state of things, and what useful purpose it may be designed to promote.

I. We may learn from it, that SOMETHING MORE IS REQUIRED OF US IN ORDER TO BE REAL CHRISTIANS, THAN THE OBSERVANCE OF EXTERNAL FORMS AND CEREMONIES.—It is not enough that we are baptized in the name of Christ, make a profession of faith in him, attend his house, are members of his Church, and are partakers of the most sacred rites which commemorate his death. All these things are common to the whole body of professing Christians; to the bad, as well as to the good; to the “tares” as well as to the “wheat.” But from all this we can no more rationally conclude that we are really members of the Church of Christ here, and shall be partakers of the blessings of his kingdom above, than a Jew would conclude with certainty that he was entitled to the blessings promised to the seed of Abraham, because he was born of Jewish parents, and admitted by circumcision into the covenant of God. For, as the Apostle argued, “he is not a Jew” (entitled to all the blessings belonging to that chosen race) “who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and that is circumcision which is of the heart; in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” So we may justly

reason, with regard to the Christian Church—"He is not a Christian who is one outwardly, neither is that baptism which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Christian who is one inwardly, and baptism is that of the heart: that regeneration, of which baptism is only the outward and visible sign."

We are all, I fear, too apt to take it for granted that we are Christians (unless some very gross transgressions disturb our consciences), because we are born in a Christian country, and bear the name of Christ: but the representation given in my text ought to render us careful that we possess a better title to Christianity. The great question with us should be, "Are we members of the internal church?"—But what is the internal church? What is it which constitutes a right to that holy and venerable title of Christian? Where is the line to be drawn between those who are Christians by profession only, and those who are Christians indeed?—With respect to some persons, whose sins are numerous and great, there may be no hesitation in classing them among the "tares:"—and with respect to some righteous persons, whose righteousness shines forth like the sun in the noon-day, there can be no doubt but they belong to the number of real Christians. But the bulk of mankind

may be said not to come under either of those descriptions. Their state is more indeterminate. It may indeed be truly said, that the distinction between merely nominal and real Christians consists in the wickedness of the one, and the righteousness of the other. This does establish an effectual separation between them in the nature of things; and this separation is clearly discerned by that God who "seeth the heart;" and who will one day "judge every man according to his works." But let it be remembered, that "wicked" and "righteous" are terms which bear a different import with different people. Many persons think themselves righteous, at least not wicked, who, it is to be feared, will appear in a different light at the day of judgment. If, therefore, the righteous and the wicked are here mixed together under one common name of Christians; if it requires much attention to draw the line of distinction between them; and if it is to be feared that many persons deceive themselves with the hope of being Christians, because they are members of the external church, is it not incumbent upon us all seriously to inquire what constitutes the scriptural title to the name of Christian, and impartially to examine whether we may claim it? Let us not appeal, for the safety of our state, to the general customs of the world.

The "tares" grow up in the church, as well as the "wheat." Let us not make our boast of external forms and privileges. The wicked, as well as the righteous, may be partakers of them. Nothing but a lively faith in Christ, influencing the heart, and producing the fruits of righteousness, can render us Christians in the sight of God.

II. Hitherto we have noticed only the duty which the mixture of the righteous and the wicked ought to impress upon us, of examining seriously to which class we belong. It is proper next to state SOME PECULIAR ADVANTAGES WHICH MAY RESULT FROM SUCH A DISPENSATION, BOTH TO THE WICKED AND TO THE RIGHTEOUS.

1. And first let us consider the *advantages arising to the wicked* from this mixture in the Church of Christ.

If it be any mercy that sin is in any measure restrained, it is a mercy that the righteous are continued in the world. For their presence, in a variety of ways, tends to stop the progress of sin, and to promote the practice of holiness. The influence which they possess, not only by their unblemished life, but by means of their natural connections, by the ties of relationship and

friendship, is used by them for the most important purposes. Their conduct in their necessary intercourse with the world, their maxims, their general spirit and temper, are like leaven, which pervades the mass, and gives a character to the whole. If all persons were wicked, it is obvious the evil would extend itself far more widely and rapidly than when checked, as it now is, by the presence and holy endeavours of the righteous.

Again ; The wicked derive great benefit from the presence of the righteous, in the participation of many mercies and blessings which are communicated to an unworthy world for their sake. Ten righteous persons would have saved Sodom. The whole posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were spared and blessed, through many successive generations, on account of the piety of their ancestors. Children inherit the prayers of their parents,—often the most valuable legacy which they can receive ; and a blessing descends upon a whole family, or nation, for the sake of the righteous contained in it.

But the great purpose for which the righteous appear to be left among the wicked is to instruct and reform them. The wicked, through the presence of the good, have the benefit of holy examples. Hence, they not only see in the Bible the excellence of religion, but they have proof

of the practicability of its duties, in the lives of those of "like passions" with themselves; of men endued with a nature as frail, and assaulted by as many temptations. Perhaps their friend, perhaps their brother, once, like themselves, careless and corrupt, is now become a devout worshipper of God, and lives in obedience to his will. What a call is this from God to themselves! What an instance brought home to them, of the excellency of holiness and the power of grace! What just remonstrances also are now likely to be made to them; what affectionate entreaties, and what constant attention paid to their spiritual welfare! If they continue in sin, they have to resist the reproaches of conscience, and the force of example. What can they now plead in apology for their conduct? Will they say, that the customs of the world in which they live are too strong to be resisted? They see before them those who have effectually resisted these customs.—Will they plead the vivacity of youth, the power of their natural temper, or the violence of their passions? They see those who are as young as themselves, who were once, perhaps, not merely as much, but even more, under the power of their passions, now living under the controul of religion.—Do they urge the distraction of business? There are some employed in the same

occupations with themselves who, nevertheless, make salvation their principal concern.—Is poverty or prosperity, is sickness or health, made the plea for neglecting their souls? Let them look around : witnesses stand up on every side, to testify that these circumstances form no exception to the possibility of serving God.—Are they at a loss to know what is real religion ; or, through inattention, do they neglect to read the description of it in the Sacred Writings? Behold the living model set before their eyes.—If, in the society of the righteous, they must be struck with something in their views, sentiments, manners, and habits, contrary to their own, which at once condemns themselves and supplies the model they need : they “ see their good works,” and learn to “ glorify their Father which is in heaven.”

2. Let us, secondly, consider in what light the *righteous* should view this mixture of the righteous and the wicked in the world, and what advantageous influence it ought to have on their conduct.—Is it true, then, that you who make a profession of religion are as “ a city set upon a hill, which cannot be hid?” Are you the “ salt of the earth?” Is it by the shining of your light before men, that they are to be led to glorify your Father which is in heaven? Is your example to be the comment upon Scripture? And is your conduct to be the

most powerful preacher of righteousness to an unrighteous world? Are the honour of religion, the glory of Christ, and the salvation of your fellow-creatures, in a great measure intrusted to you? “*What manner of persons, then, ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?*” Say not with Cain, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” but consider, that it has pleased God to continue the righteous amongst the wicked, in order that the latter may be benefited. Let the impression, then, they receive from you, be favourable to the interests of religion. Little will people regard what they hear, if what they see does not correspond with it. The tongue may deceive, but actions speak the truth; and to them alone will the world give credit. Remember also, that one instance of evil, one inadvertent action, one unguarded expression—I had almost said, one imprudent look—has more power to harden, than many righteous deeds have to reform. Consider, moreover, how necessary it is you should use all the influence you possess over others for beneficial purposes. Your children, your servants, your relations, your friends, are placed by Providence immediately under your care; and from what they hear from you and see in you, they will form, in a great measure, those ideas of the utility and necessity of religion which will influence their future life.

It is an obvious inference to be drawn by the righteous from the mixture of bad and good in the Church, that they themselves are placed here to be tried. True friendship is proved only by a season of adversity: true wisdom discovers itself in difficult and intricate cases: and, in like manner, true piety displays itself in a world of temptation and corruption. It would be an easy thing to be religious where all are religious; where the strong tide of custom impels us in that direction. But God places his servants, for the trial and improvement of their piety, in a sinful world. They have to struggle with evil customs, and to display their love to him and their regard for religion, not merely before a few persons agreeing with them in sentiment, but before the world, and that part of it "which lieth in wickedness." The reality of Daniel's fear of God was proved, by his persevering in prayer when it was forbidden. The sincerity of the faith of the primitive Christians was tried by the persecutions they endured. To suffer reproach, or contempt, or loss, for Christ's sake, is often more difficult than to be active in exertions for his cause. In the world, in short, there are abundant opportunities for the trial of the reality of our principles and piety.

A further advantage arising to the righteous from their continuance in this evil world is, that

it furnishes them with greater opportunities of honouring God than even if they were removed at once into the kingdom of heaven. For in heaven many holy qualities cannot be exercised, for which we have here continual opportunities. Here is the "faith" and "patience of the saints:" there faith will be superseded by sight; and patience will have no place, where there is no suffering. Here we have the opportunity of standing up faithfully and courageously for the honour of God, and of proving our love to him by our actions: but in heaven there will be no evil customs to resist, no sinful affections to mortify, no bad men whom we may reclaim, and whom we may thus lead to join us in glorifying God.

Learn then, O Christian, to value this life as an opportunity of honouring God; very short, indeed, but very precious. We are too apt not to discover the value of opportunities till they are lost. We lament that we live in a world of sorrow and sin, and we hope soon to be admitted into a more pure and holy residence. But, when admitted there, if any thing could give us pain, it would be to consider how many opportunities, once possessed, of honouring God, are now irretrievably lost. *There* will be no sick to visit, no naked to clothe, no afflicted to relieve, no weak to succour, no faint to encourage, no corrupt to

rebuke or profligate to reclaim. A new sphere of virtues will present themselves; brighter, indeed, and more glorious than those which presented themselves on earth, but not affording such opportunities for manifesting the love we bear to God. Happy are they who labour "while it is called to-day."

III. Having thus examined the subject proposed to you, I shall conclude with two observations of a practical nature.

1. In the first place, the mixture of the righteous and the wicked, far from supplying to the righteous an excuse for not profiting so much as they ought by the means of grace, is rather an argument for their giving themselves up more fully to do the work of God, while the opportunity of doing so is afforded.—And how infinitely important is the present period of their existence! How much may they do in it, both to glorify God and to benefit their fellow-sinners, and also to qualify themselves for the inheritance of the saints in light! Actuated by these views, let them be careful to improve their necessary intercourse with the wicked, to their mutual advantage. Let them not deem the time spent in their society lost. There are means of turning it to good account, which a

mind duly sensible of the infinite value of the present life will discover, and a heart impressed with the sense of Divine things will eagerly embrace. Let them beware of esteeming the present state of things useless and uninteresting ; of merely *suffering* life as a kind of necessary evil. Let them not so engage in earthly pursuits as to forget the noble ends for which a Christian is destined, and the manner in which he is called to accomplish them. Let them always remember, that, as there is an essential difference between the tares and the wheat, such a difference must also discover itself between the righteous and the wicked ; a difference which ought not to be lessened by a gradual accommodation to the customs, and manners, and maxims, and habits of the world. And, in fine, let them always bear in mind, that it is the “ fruits of righteousness ” which constitute the essential difference between the “ wheat ” and “ tares,” and which will regulate the final separation of the good and bad. They who have lived together here in the external church will be separated by the angels, “ who shall gather out of the kingdom of Christ all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth : then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

2. Lastly, while we see the “wheat” and “tares” thus permitted to grow up together till the harvest, let us call to mind, both the difference of their nature and the cause of that difference. The tares, or weeds, cannot produce food for the nourishment of man. In like manner, there is an absolute difference of nature between the righteous and the wicked. The righteous possess a new nature implanted in them by the Holy Spirit. They are become “new creatures in Christ Jesus.” Once unprofitable and corrupt, through faith in Christ they have been made partakers of the influence of the Holy Ghost.—Such, then, is at once the difference and the cause of it. Christ has become a quickening principle in them. He giveth life to the dead, strength to the weak, wisdom to the ignorant, and grace to the corrupt. Let us therefore, my brethren, call upon him to plant us in his field, to watch over our growth, to water us with the dew of his grace, and, at length, to “gather us into his garner.”

SERMON XVII.

ON INDECISION IN RELIGION.

I KINGS xviii. 21.

How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.

THERE are few persons, perhaps indeed there are none, who have renounced the service of God from a deliberate principle. Few intend to forsake God, or directly to oppose his will. But too many do so indirectly, through negligence or indecision. They do not seriously consider who God is, and what he requires. They do not lay to heart their obligations to him. They acknowledge in general, that they ought to pay obedience to him; perhaps they intend it, and even attempt to serve him in some points; but they allow their attention to be occupied, and

their resolutions to be frustrated by other objects: They lose sight of God and his laws: and then they indulge their own evil passions, and sin against him. The sense they have of their obligation to serve him is not sufficiently strong to fix them steadily and uniformly in the path of duty. Objections against a strict obedience arise, which they take no pains to combat. They waver in their principles, and still more in their practice. Their whole conduct, as to religion, is indecisive. They halt between two opinions, and thus neither serve God nor follow sin unreservedly.

This was the character of the Ten Tribes of Israel, to whom Elijah addressed the words of my text. That was an unhappy day for the Church on which the Ten Tribes revolted from the kingdom of Judah, and erected a distinct kingdom. The whole religious œconomy of the Law was founded upon the supposition, that the temple was the centre of worship for all the children of Israel: thither were the tribes to go up. But as the permission of this union in religious service would have tended to bring the kingdoms again under one head, it was the policy of the kings of Israel to introduce variety into the worship. For the dissolute and profane, temples were built to Baal: for the religious part of Israel, altars

were erected to Jehovah. Thus the people halted between two opinions. A diversity of religious opinions produced, as it usually does, an unwarrantable species of candour ; an indifference about the truth, and a sceptical spirit concerning it. Without denying Jehovah to be God, they inclined to believe Baal to be a god also. They acknowledged Jehovah to be Lord ; but they presumed to worship him upon unhallowed altars, and in places unauthorised by his Law. Thus there was no zeal for the honour of God. Men learned to view, with almost equal regard, the altars of Jehovah and the neighbouring temples of Baal. They neither served Baal nor the Lord heartily, but contented themselves with paying a superficial worship to either. This indifference in religion the prophet justly reprobates. “ How long,” says he, “ will ye halt between two opinions ? ” Fluctuate no longer in this manner. Baal and Jehovah cannot both be gods. Come therefore to a decision ; determine which is truly God. If, upon serious examination, you discover Baal to be the true God, worship him ; obey his rites, and with all that zeal which he requires :—but if Jehovah be the true God, then follow him, and him only ; worship him with your whole hearts ; give yourselves up to him ; fulfil all that he has commanded.

If we allow for the present difference of circum-

stances, how many shall we find among ourselves who are influenced by the same spirit and adopt the same conduct as the Israelites! They do not despise religion: they acknowledge its necessity, and they approve of its precepts. They are shocked at the profane and dissolute part of mankind, and wonder that men dare to act in a manner so contrary to the commands of their Creator. They attend the house of God, and hear with pleasure the preaching of his word; they are to a certain extent religious; but they are far from serving God with their whole heart. Their religion amounts only to a general approbation of what is excellent, a faint desire to be more holy, and a compliance with those precepts of God which cost them little trouble and self-denial. There is nothing decided in their conduct: they halt between two opinions: they attempt to unite the service of God and mammon: they make a compromise between religion and the world; and thus they neither take pains to know the whole of their duty, nor are they solicitous to live up to what they know. They are not at ease in their consciences with respect to their state, and yet they are not so dissatisfied with it as seriously to set about a reformation: but they go on from year to year in a middle course between total negligence and real religion.

I conceive, my brethren, the state which I have described to be very common, and particularly in those places where religion is much insisted on, and where a total neglect of it is therefore generally known to be very wrong. Perhaps there may be some persons of this description in the assembly to which I am now speaking. Do I not address some whose consciences already say to them, "Thou art the man?" Permit me, then, to apply to you the words of the Prophet, "How long will ye halt between two opinions?" If the approbation of men, or if the possession of the things of this world be the only good, then pursue it with your whole heart; but if the Lord be God, and if he demands your entire service, then follow him faithfully and fully.

I. In treating of this subject, I shall first point out the evils of your present state.

These are indeed very various. If your heart is not right with God, however the decency of your conduct may be respected, or what is amiable in your character may be admired, I am constrained to consider you as yet destitute of a truly religious principle. You want the main spring which should move and guide your actions. Two forces operate upon you, which are contrary to each other; and thus the full effect of each

is obstructed. You are not honest and sincere; and without honesty and sincerity, what real good can be expected? You receive no full enjoyment from any thing you do. Too much enlightened to join in those sinful pleasures in which the profane and dissolute find their happiness, you are excluded from their enjoyments; and on the other hand, you enter too little into the spirit of religion to derive happiness from that source. You desire what you cannot have without contracting guilt: you have no taste for that which you might enjoy. Miserable state! what can be more wretched than to have conscience perpetually disapproving your conduct, and to be consequently doing habitual violence to conscience. Alas! seldom or never are you cheered with its encouraging testimony, that all is well with you—that you have borne a decisive testimony to the Gospel, and faithfully followed the truth. When does it whisper peace to you, in the prospect of illness or death, and say, “Fear not; the Lord whom you have served will be your defence and your comfort?” On the contrary, it so speaks that you choose rather to stifle its voice and to avoid reflection respecting your final state. Nor is it to conscience only that you have done violence: the Spirit of God has been grieved; he will not reside in the heart which gives him no

cordial reception ; he will not seal those to the day of redemption who halt between two opinions, who serve mammon as well as God, and are unfaithful to the light which has been communicated to them. Look, then, into your condition. What progress have you made in a religious course? Are you not barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord? Do you not blush to think that there has been in you no evident improvement, perhaps, for years together? Is not even the light you once enjoyed darkened, so that now your feelings are benumbed, and religious truths have lost much of the glory in which at first they appeared? What do you experience of the consolations of the Gospel?—You see others happy in the knowledge of Christ. They possess peace of conscience: they have a hope full of immortality: they walk uprightly with God, and obtain dominion over sin: you see them holy in their lives and happy in their deaths. But when do you enjoy such peace? When do you hold communion with God? When do you, through faith in Christ, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory?—Do you inquire the reason why they are so much more happy than you? I answer; It is not because they have more learning, or a better understanding, or passions naturally less corrupt:—it is that their hearts are right with God. Their eye is single, and there-

fore their whole body is full of light. Your eye is not single ; hence all is darkness. You possess neither light nor hope, nor grace nor peace ; nor do you derive satisfaction from the world. Your conduct brings neither credit to your religious profession, comfort to yourself, nor glory to God.

Let not those, who thus halt between two opinions, think that I speak too harshly. The danger is, lest they speak too smoothly to themselves. Great evils, it will be allowed, require strong remedies ; but the evil of their own case is not seen by them to be great, and therefore they are content that mere palliatives should be administered. I wish to shew them that their state is dangerous in proportion as they imagine it to be safe. Were they totally profligate, they might admit the necessity of a total change in their principles ; but now they conceive a little amendment to be sufficient, and thus the remedies to which they resort are too weak to do them any good.

Oh ! let me convince you, that religion requires the whole heart ; and that if your heart be not right with God, your conduct cannot fail to be unworthy of your Christian profession,—your views of religion will probably be cloudy, and your souls comfortless,—you will be strangers to

that peace which passeth all understanding, and to that hope which is full of immortality : in a word, you will be wretched and self-condemned without either the spirit or the consolations of religion.

II. What then, it will be said, are we to do? If you ask this question in all seriousness and sincerity, I refer you to the words of the prophet : “ How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him ; but if Baal, follow him.”—These words imply, first, that you should deliberately consider ; and secondly, that you should act according to the result of that consideration.

1. The prophet requires the children of Israel to reflect whether Baal or Jehovah were God.—In like manner would I exhort you seriously to consider whom you will serve, God or mammon. Our Lord instructed all his disciples to sit down first, and count the cost before they became his disciples. His service was not to be without trials and dangers, and therefore they were to ask themselves beforehand whether they could bear them, and whether they deemed the comforts and hopes he set before them a sufficient compensation. Take this advice. Contemplate, on one hand, all the pleasures and

advantages which the world can offer : give them their full value : observe how agreeable they are to your present nature ; how gratifying to your corrupt appetites : set before you all the earthly happiness which it is not improbable you may possess : imagine yourself to meet with great success, to enjoy an envied prosperity, to escape disease and calamity, vexation and care, and to live long in this scene of temporal felicity, not a cloud obscuring the continual sunshine of your life : contrive, as Solomon determined to do, that nothing shall obstruct your happiness ; that your pleasures shall be too refined to satiate at once, and that, though you withhold nothing from yourself which your sight desires, yet you will not sin so grossly as to incur either loss of reputation or the accusation of a tormenting conscience. Is not this as much as this world can promise ? If it is prudent to give up religion for any thing upon earth, it surely may be sacrificed for this. Make, then, the determination. Form a deliberate plan, according to which you shall be free from all religious restraint. Let this life be your portion. Abide by the system you have established, and follow it resolutely and to the end. Cast off the fear of God, regard to a future state, and all apprehension of an hereafter.

But methinks I hear you reply : “ This is more than I can do. What would it profit me, if I were to gain the whole world, and lose my own soul ? Even were I to have all that I could wish, I must die, I must appear before God. Ah, what can be considered as an equivalent for the loss of the soul ! ”

Your reply is indeed just. Yes : it is a truth which I pray God to engrave in the deepest lines upon your heart. The man is wretched beyond description, whatever be his temporal enjoyments, who has not the blessing of God. “ In his favour is life, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore.” Contemplate Dives and Lazarus, and say whether you do not feel this to be true. Make, then, a fair estimate of what you will both lose and gain by a life devoted to God. Place, on the one side, that loss of some of the pleasures of life and of the favour of the world to which you will be subject ; calculate the self-denial you must exercise, the conflict you must sustain ; do not delude yourself in respect to any of the sacrifices which must be made ; know their full number and weight :—but at the same time estimate, on the other hand, at its true worth, the favour and blessing of your Creator. Take into your account the value of that peace of God which

will dwell in your soul, the privileges of his adopted children, the blessedness of drawing nigh to him in fervent prayer, and of enjoying frequent and delightful communion with him. Consider the sweetness of meditation upon his promises accompanied with a humble hope that they are yours. View the felicity of being delivered from the slavery of evil passions, and of enjoying that liberty which is found in the service of God. Think of the light of God's countenance lifted up upon you, of having the Spirit of God for your Guide and Comforter, and of being partaker of all the benefits purchased by the precious blood of the Son of God shed upon the cross. Think also of being united to all the excellent and faithful in the whole world, and of being partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. Reflect upon the privilege of having God for your Father, Christ for your Redeemer, the Spirit for your Sanctifier, and heaven for your eternal home. Carry your thoughts beyond this terrestrial scene, and see what God has laid up for them that love him; a happiness pure as heaven, and durable as eternity. Sum up these various blessings, and then can you halt between two opinions? Can there be ground for a moment's hesitation? By what sorcery are we so bewitched, as not to perceive that God alone is the Source

of happiness, and that they are vain who depart from him ?

Oh, thou Fountain and Source of all that is truly good ! Thou who didst contrive and form the beautiful frame of this earth, with all that ministers to the good of man ! Thou who didst create the happiness of the world of spirits, and who diffusest by thy presence unspeakable joy amongst the blessed inhabitants of heaven ! Thou Being, full of glory, bliss, and goodness, and who alone communicatest them to others ! How art thou injured, when we imagine that thy service is not perfect freedom ! Into what intellectual darkness and depravity are we sunk, when we compare Thy service with that of an idol, or of this polluted world ! How is it that we do not intuitively perceive that obedience to Thee is the true happiness of man, and that we can have peace in our souls in proportion only as our will is united to thine ! Dissipate the mists which cloud our sight, and make us to feel that we are wretched when we depart from Thee !

III. " If then the Lord be God, follow him."—
If, my brethren, you are convinced, as I hope you are, and as I am sure you ought to be, that there is no real peace but in God, determine to seek your happiness only in his service. How

this should be done, I shall endeavour in some degree to explain.

1. Be persuaded, that *those things in which your corrupt mind promises you pleasure do but deceive you.*—They are all splendid delusions: they are lying vanities. Have you not found that they have already deluded you? How long must you be misled before you will be convinced? How often be disappointed before you are persuaded that the ways of sin are not happiness, but death?

2. Lay it down as a maxim, that *whatever sacrifice for God appears painful, does but appear to be so.*—To suffer for Religion's sake is not so dreadful as you imagine. What though you encounter the frowns of the world; the smiles of God will more than compensate for them. What though self-denial be your lot; yet it carries with it its own reward: and self-indulgence, as you have found, does not give the felicity it promised. Be assured, that God by religion points out the way to happiness, while Satan by sin directs you in the road to misery:—shall you hesitate which path to take?

3. Be persuaded, that *true peace and comfort are only to be enjoyed by those whose hearts are right with God.*—To halt between God and mammon is to possess the comforts of neither,

but the pains of both. Give yourself, therefore, up unreservedly to God. Act for him openly and explicitly. Renounce all temporising maxims. Shew plainly, that you have cast off the fear of the world, and the love of it; that you are not ashamed to confess Christ before men, nor unwilling to bear his cross.

4. Remember also, that *you must be consistent*.—Your conduct must be good, as well as your profession bold. Do not parley with any sin. Do not love the things of the world, while you renounce the men of the world. Endeavour not merely to keep within the verge of salvation, but advance into the midst of the Church of Christ. A lukewarm, temporising spirit has been your bane. To combine a little, and only a little, religion with much of the world, has been your fault. Thus you have done the work of the Lord deceitfully. Now be honest and sincere in his service.

5. *Make a stand against whatsoever you know to be wrong*.—Reverence your conscience. One single compliance makes a dreadful inroad upon your peace. It brings darkness and guilt into your soul. “Beloved,” says St. John, “if our conscience condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.”

6. And lastly, *walk in the Spirit*.—Look to

Jesus Christ, the Author and Giver of all spiritual strength. Let all that is past teach you this great truth, that if left to yourself you will either have no religion, or that only from which you will derive a poor lifeless form of godliness without spirit or power. Christ must be all in all to you, and in the power of his Spirit you must trust. Consider, that he is made of God unto us wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Severed from him, you can do nothing. Abide therefore in him: pray to him; confide in him; read the promises of his word for the confirmation of your faith. Receive him as your Prophet, Priest, and King; and then you shall know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

SERMON XVIII.

—

*THE FALL AND PUNISHMENT OF DAVID
ILLUSTRATED.*

—

2 SAM. xii. 7.

And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.

IT is a circumstance worthy of notice in the Sacred Historians, that, in their accounts of the servants of God, they record their vices as well as their virtues: they represent them in their real character, and attempt neither to palliate their faults nor to exaggerate their excellencies. The history of David is, in this respect, remarkable. He is represented, on the one hand, as zealous in the service of God, attached to his worship, in no instance giving way to idolatry, the prevailing sin of the times, and as honoured for these qualities with the high title of “the man after God’s own heart.” On the other hand, his character is described as stained with some gross offences;

and both these offences, with all their aggravations, and the exemplary punishment which followed them, are faithfully recorded.

These sins of David, to which the words of my text refer, and the effects which followed them, are the subjects I would propose for our consideration on the present occasion; in order to which, I shall examine in detail several parts of his history.

I. The *circumstances of David previous to his fall* deserve our attention.—For several years he had been in a state of great trouble. Even his life had been often endangered. He was hunted by Saul like a partridge upon the mountains, and compelled to take up his residence in the caves of the desert. But it was not in this state of trial and affliction that he offended. During this period, we see him exercising, in a remarkable degree, the faith, the resignation, the humility, the patience, the meekness of the servant of God. But now God had brought his troubles to a close. He had bestowed on him, first, the crown of Judah, and afterwards that of Israel. He had blessed him with prosperity on every side, and had given him “the necks of his enemies.” For some years he had been the most powerful monarch in that quarter of the world.

These were his circumstances when he fell. Now it would be too much to affirm, that these circumstances were the direct causes of his sin. They may, however, have tended indirectly to it, by inducing that state of the heart in which it is least qualified to encounter temptation. Such is often the effect of prosperity. It cherishes a worldly and sensual taste. It indisposes the soul for self-denial, watchfulness, and humility; graces not called into exercise in prosperity. It relaxes our application to the Throne of Grace; for where there is a fulness of enjoyment, there is likely to be little ardour in prayer; where the soul is satisfied with earthly blessings, it does not aspire to such as are spiritual and heavenly. Perhaps prosperity thus operated upon David. Perhaps he had become less watchful, less fervent in secret prayer, less afraid of sin, more vain, more confident, more disposed to the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. And thus temptations, not formidable in adversity, at once overwhelmed the soul disordered and enervated by prosperity.

Surely this statement may teach us to recognize and lament the depravity of human nature. The very mercies of God are made the occasions of sin. Such is man, that he would probably be less guilty if God were less compassionate. This statement also may serve to reconcile us to the

afflictions which prevail in the world. Perhaps the removal of these might tend, more than any other cause, to the increase of sin; and thus, in the end, to the final increase and aggravation of misery.

II. Consider, next, *the peculiar temptation which is suffered to present itself to David, and the way in which he encountered it.*—This, my brethren, is a world of trial. Christ himself was tempted; and it is in the order of Divine Providence, that no one should wholly escape it. Temptation indeed has its uses, as well as its dangers. Perilous as it is, the Lord can and will overrule it for good, to those who humbly and devoutly call upon him.—But let us follow David through his trial. The temptation arose—a temptation sudden and great. Now then was the trial, in what manner he would act; and doubtless there had been times innumerable when this servant of God would at once have fled from the temptation, and thus have broken its spell. He would have “resisted the devil,” and the “devil would have fled” from him. But now, alas! he gives way to the seduction. He calmly descends from his palace with a determination to bring the evil of his heart into act, and to perpetrate the crime which the tempter had suggested

to him. This we may conceive to have been the turning point in David's career. No man can altogether resist the approach of unsolicited temptation. No man can, perhaps, entirely prevent such temptation laying hold of the imagination and feelings. But to parley with it, this is a voluntary act. And it is in this, in its being a voluntary act, that the guilt of sin consists. Thus, in the case of David, "lust conceived, and brought forth sin." The "anointed of the Lord" is "taken in the snare of the ungodly," and goes "like an ox to the slaughter, not considering that it is for his life."

Oh! had David paused but for one moment; had he retired awhile to deliberate upon his conduct; had he but put up one prayer for Divine help; had he passed on even to the duties of his kingly office, so as to divert his thoughts into a different channel; the snare might have been broken, and he have escaped. But, alas! David is left a melancholy monument of what the best man may become when he forsakes his God, and when his God, in consequence, abandons him.

III. Observe, thirdly, *the state of David after his first sin, and his progress to new offences.*—What must David have felt after the perpetration

of the first crime? Immediately the sense of the Divine presence, the inspiring hope of Divine favour and eternal glory, would withdraw from him. Did he at the hour of prayer, according to custom, go up to the temple of the Lord, methinks the holy rites and the sacred place would reproach him, and say, "We are pure." Perhaps his own sweet Psalms might upbraid him with that emphatic question, "Who shall go up to the house of the Lord, who shall ascend his holy hill? Even he that hath clean hands and a pure heart."—Does he retire to his closet, and there touch the sacred harp? Alas! his heart would be in no tune for the songs of Zion.—Would he join those with whom he once "went in company to the house of God, and took sweet counsel in Divine things?" The sense of guilt would leave his tongue dumb, and his heart hard.—How could he meet his servants, or converse with those whom he used to reprove or exhort? Alas! their looks, intently fixed upon him, and meaning more than could be uttered, would confound him.—Does he join his partner in sin? The guilty hours spent with her would be embittered by reflections on the ruin he had brought upon her soul.—But let us return to his history. The consequences of his crime were becoming visible, and the once noble and generous David now resorts to low

artifices to conceal his guilt. He sends for the injured husband. He treats him with a subtilty unworthy both of himself and of his loyal subject, endeavouring to impose upon him a spurious offspring. How must the noble refusal of the brave warrior to sleep in his bed while the "ark of God was abroad," and the armies of Israel were encamped to fight the battles of his beloved though treacherous sovereign, have stung him to the heart! And doubtless this was but one of many daggers which his crime had planted in his bosom. When deceit, however, could not prevail on Uriah, a fresh crime must compel him; a crime at which the pure spirit of the monarch would once have shuddered. But neither would this avail: the faithful soldier, even when overcome with wine, refuses to yield to the royal tempter. What could be done? Crime leads on to crime. David, therefore, urged by a dread of detection (though what was human detection to a man already judged of God!), determines to add murder to adultery; to destroy one of the most faithful of his servants; to murder him even whilst shedding his blood in his own defence; to murder him by an act of perfidy of the basest kind!

Here let us pause to consider what David once was, and what he is now become. Once, he was the leader of the Lord's people, the first

in the sanctuary, the zealous restorer of Divine worship, the sweet singer of Israel. Who, that had once heard his pious melody, his devout addresses to God, could have conceived that he would so fall? Had it been predicted, would the prediction have been credited? Who shall not tremble for himself, when he contemplates the fall of David?

IV. But let us next pass on to a more advanced stage of his history. *The criminal schemes of David had now taken effect*, and Uriah could no more disturb the bed of the seducer and murderer. But when there remained no obstacle to enjoyment, the Divine Hand suddenly arrested him in his guilty career. God sent Nathan the prophet to convince him of his guilt.

Let us praise God, my brethren, who was pleased thus graciously to interpose to save his servant from everlasting destruction. It doubtless was an act of the Divine mercy by which he was rescued; for would a heart so hardened, a conscience so seared, a soul so habituated to sin, have returned spontaneously to God? It is, however, perhaps, allowable to conceive that his former prayers might come up as a memorial before God, and plead for him who now could

not plead for himself. In prayer, we often cast in the seed of an harvest which will be reaped, perhaps, at some remote period. Who can say, when he prays to be delivered from temptation; of which he does not now discern even the distant approach, how greatly such a prayer may be needed, and how immediately and mercifully it may be answered?

But to return—The mode in which it pleased God to touch the heart of the offender is remarkable. To the claims of justice and the feelings of generosity, David, though greatly fallen, was not entirely lost. Therefore, in a parable constructed so as to touch him at these yet accessible points, the prophet addresses his conscience, and rouses him even to pass sentence on himself in pronouncing a severe verdict on a supposed criminal. What self-deceit is there in the human heart! David kindles with indignation against the man who takes a lamb from his poor neighbour, and yet remains insensible to the flagrant iniquity of seduction and murder. At length, however, he opens his eyes upon his guilt; his heart is softened; he stands self-condemned before the prophet. The account, especially of this part of the transaction, given by the sacred historian, is very brief. It might hence appear, that the penitence of David

was comprised in the single expression, "I have sinned against the Lord;" and that the prophet immediately answered, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." But it is not unusual in Scripture to represent one event as immediately following another, when in fact a considerable time intervened. And this is probably the case here. There may have been two visits of Nathan to David, at a considerable interval of time;—one, in which the judgment was denounced; the other, in which the message of mercy was communicated to the penitent. However this may have been, we shall perceive, by comparing this history with the language of David himself, in the Psalms, that his repentance was sincere, and his grief profound. In the Fifty-first Psalm, a psalm of penitence for this transgression, we find the most humbling confession of guilt and misery, and the most fervent supplication for mercy. In the Thirty-second Psalm, written, as it would appear, on the same occasion, we find him speaking of his "bones waxing old through his weeping all the day long," and of the hand of the Lord being so heavy upon him, that his "moisture was turned into the drought of summer." In any case, we know that neither David nor any other sinner could return to God but by the path of deep humiliation and unfeigned repentance.

V. We come, finally, to notice the dreadful *consequence of this transgression*.—Where God forgives, he does not always wholly spare. He may so pardon the sin as not to inflict upon the sinner eternal condemnation, and yet punish him severely. And such was the case of David. Besides the wound his soul had sustained, and which, perhaps, might never afterwards be entirely healed, we find the remainder of David's life harassed by perpetual sorrows. He had acted perfidiously to his servant; and his own son acts perfidiously to him. He had committed adultery with Uriah's wife, and Absalom committed adultery with his wives; David indeed secretly, but Absalom in the sight of the sun. He had exposed Uriah to the sword of his enemies; and behold he himself is driven from his throne before his enemies, and his palace is defiled with blood. Indeed, from that time the "sword departed not from his house;" but violence, and dissension, and blood, rendered the remainder of his life wretched: so that the inhabitants of Jerusalem, acquainted with his sin, would doubtless discover the hand of God in his calamities, and say,—“This hath God wrought,”—for they would perceive that it was his work.

Having thus passed through the several stages

of this affecting history, I shall beg, in conclusion, to found upon it a few practical observations.

1. In the first place, it may teach us to *guard against declension in grace, and watch against temptation*.—If temptation is urgent, my brethren, flee from it, and think of the fall of David. Alas! where is the man that may say, “I shall stand,” when David fell? Indulge no presumptuous security. He who at any preceding period should have predicted the fall of David, would have been charged, perhaps, with predicting impossibilities. Alas! our strength is in the consciousness of our weakness, and in earnest prayer to God for help and support. Let no man rely upon his early virtues—David the inspired Psalmist fell.

2. A second lesson to be learned from the fall of David, is that of *charity and tenderness in judging of those who fall*.—Call them not, my brethren, as the world are too apt to call them, hypocrites. David was no hypocrite—but David fell. And where is the man, who, if solicited by strong temptation, and unrestrained by Divine grace, might not fall to lower depths than David?

3. Finally, let us *beware of employing the fall of David as a plea for sin*, and of presuming that *such a restoration as his to favour and holiness will be granted to ourselves*.—Before we

can build upon the hope of a restoration such as his, our circumstances must be those of David. To sanction such hopes, we should resemble him in his zeal and love, in the prayers by which we have supplicated, and the songs by which we have glorified, our God. And, even then, have we any security for pardon, any promise of mercy, any right to expect that a prophet should be sent to rouse us to a sense of our condition? Was such a restoration due to David? Is God bound or pledged to bring the sinner back who wilfully departs from him? Nor is this all: should the pardon be granted, as in the case of David, and the restoration to God take place, consider, if your restoration resemble his, it is no unqualified blessing. His sorrow was acute. All the billows of the Divine indignation seemed to pass over him. The arrow of God pursued him. The "iron entered into his soul."

Thus, whatever encouragement the story of David may supply to the real penitent, (and to him, blessed be God, it does give encouragement), it affords none to the sinner who, presuming upon the Divine mercy for restoration and pardon, daringly violates the Divine commandments.

In a word, the whole of this history exactly harmonizes with every other part of the Sacred

Record. It displays to us the fallen and destitute condition of man—his exposure to temptation—his rapid progress in sin, if left to himself—his immeasurable obligation to God, if restored and saved—and, finally, the unchangeable character of God as a hater even of that sin which he may ultimately pardon.

SERMON XIX.

—

ON THE GRADUAL PROGRESS OF EVIL.

—

JAMES iii. 5.

Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth !

THE design of the proverbial expression which the Apostle here uses, is to intimate the importance of little things, which are apt to be despised and neglected, as being of little or no consequence ; whereas, in the end, they are productive of the greatest effects. It is a great point of wisdom to know how to estimate little things. Of those which are evidently great, every one can see the importance : but true wisdom looks at these great objects before they have arrived at their full size. She considers, that it is principally in this earlier state that they come under the power of man, and can be arranged, modified, increased, or extinguished at his pleasure ; whereas, in a more advanced stage, they

set at defiance all his efforts. On the contrary, it is the part of folly to wait till evils have attained their maturity before they are attacked; for then, that which might at first have been easily crushed, becomes irresistible.

Behold a conflagration! With what dreadful fury it rages! The largest houses are devoured by it in a moment! The strongest fall victims to its uncontrollable power! Yet this fire, which now resists the united wisdom and power of man, originated from a small spark, and might at first have been extinguished by a child.

Look also at yonder tree, which is now so firmly rooted in the earth, which rears its lofty head so high, and bears its flourishing honours so thick upon it! It was once only a small seed: it was then a tender plant, so slender and so weak that the foot of accident might have crushed it, the overshadowing of a weed might have suffocated it, or the hand of negligence or wantonness have torn it up. Thus does Nature point out to us the growth of the strongest things from weak and almost imperceptible beginnings.

Behold also the traveller! He is at a long distance from the end of his journey. A step seems to be of no consequence to him. For what is a step, compared with the many miles which he has to travel? But it is by these successive steps

he is carried on, till at last he arrives at his desired home. Mountains, vallies, and plains, the prospect of which even fatigues the eye, are all at length surmounted by the constant application of those little steps which appear at first to bear no proportion to the immeasurable distance.

Such a stress does the established order of nature teach us to lay upon little things. And if we look into the moral world, we shall find that they are not there to be considered as of less importance.

Behold an abandoned and hardened murderer, who is about to receive from the hands of public justice the ignominious punishment due to his crimes! You survey with astonishment and terror his vices; you are shocked while you consider his daring profligacy, his furious passions, his avowed defiance of God and man, his hardness of heart, and his universal depravity. Would you know by what means he arrived at such a dreadful pitch of sin? It was one little step taken after another, which brought him to it. He began with neglecting the worship of God, proceeded to breaking the Sabbath, resisted the remonstrances of conscience, indulged his passions without controul; to gratify them, he pilfered and stole: one act led on to another: one crime prepared the way to another: till at length he became such

a monster of criminality, that it was no longer consistent with the safety of mankind that he should be permitted to live. But would you know what was the seed which produced this evil fruit; what was the principle which uniformly operated upon him, and induced him to risk the loss of his wealth, his reputation, and his life: it was this, the desire of present gratification. Yes, it was this, which is thought of no consequence by almost all mankind; which is even cherished by many, as the chief source of pleasure; which, when it once prevails and overcomes the bounds of reason and religion, produces those dreadful effects that leave no hope of amendment, and almost necessarily terminate in irresistible ruin. Behold how great a matter a small fire kindleth!

Contemplate also the unhappy woman whose licentious conduct has banished her from the society of her own sex, and whose scandalous profligacy and shameless impudence make her shunned by all but the most worthless of the other. In her countenance and conduct appears not so much as a single trace of the amiable graces which should characterize her sex. See her brought to a state of sin, which excites disgust even in the wicked; and to a state of misery, shame, poverty, and ruin, which shock even the

hardest heart! To what shall we attribute this dreadful accumulation of crime and wretchedness? What powerful cause has produced it? Perhaps it may have been one, the evil of which is little suspected. It is, indeed, a small spark which kindleth such a fire. It may have been only the love of admiration. That vanity which is seldom considered as any crime, which is even cherished while it does not become immoderate, as being in some respects pleasing; that vanity which teaches the arts of captivating, which studies the effect of dress, and is employed in adorning and decking the person; that vanity is the author of this wide-extended ruin. It is the little seed from which it has grown and arrived to such dreadful luxuriance. It is true, it does not always produce such deplorable effects; but we are to consider its tendency, if it were not restrained and counteracted as it generally is. The fear of shame, the opposition of better principles, the authority of those who are revered or dreaded, the clashing of self-interest or evil passions, or the wholesome discipline of adversity, check in many cases its luxuriance, and stifle its growth: so that its proper tendency and effect are not discerned. Still the eye of Wisdom, and the light of Religion discover them, and shew all the evils which afterwards may appear, if circum-

stances are favourable to their growth ; which are already contained in it, and, if suffered to expand, will presently shoot forth and bear fruit.

Many useful remarks will present themselves to the reflecting mind upon this subject ; some of which I shall venture to set before you, being assured that they are of considerable importance, as they relate to our conduct as men and as Christians.

1. Let me remark, then, that *evil passions, in their early stage, do not wear the disgusting appearance which they afterwards do when they are carried to excess.*—The buds even of the most noxious weeds appear pretty. The most savage animals, while yet young, only amuse us with their gambols as they lie in ambush for their prey or spring upon it. But however harmless their mirth may then be, it is easy to perceive in it the spirit which by and by will tear to pieces, with fury, the quivering victim. Pride and vanity, self-will and anger, lust and deceit,—all of them when yet in their infant state, exerting themselves only upon trifles and doing no material injury,—appear to have something pleasing in the eyes of the world, and, instead of being concealed, are often brought forward in order to produce admiration. Thus will unthinking parents often laugh at the vanity of their children, and please

them, and amuse themselves by gratifying it. But, in the eye of a true Christian, every vice is still sinful, and ought to be checked. He considers its principle, which is equally corrupt whatever the fruits of it may be. He does not judge by the effects it has yet produced, but by those which it has a tendency to produce when it meets with no interruption; and he considers the principle as often the more dangerous, because it is not yet attended with any effects that are strikingly bad,—is then less suspected, and likely, therefore, to be less resisted.

2. I observe further, that *the foundation of all great vices is laid in those little things which often are scarcely noticed, or scarcely appear to need correction.*—It is by little things that habits are formed and principles become established. They may be considered as little in one sense, as producing immediately no very extensive mischief; but they are by no means little, if we consider the effect they have in producing the general habit, and in establishing those principles which lead to the worst consequences. Little things may be considered as indications of a bad habit and corrupt principles; and in this view, they are by no means unimportant. They resemble the spots or eruptions which sometimes appear in the human body, which are of no material

importance in themselves, but are of great consequence when they are considered as indicating a general unsoundness of constitution. It should be remembered, that principle is as truly sacrificed by little offences as by great ones.

3. I remark also, that *little sins are the steps by which we travel on to greater acts of transgression.*—No one becomes extremely wicked at once. This would be as unnatural as it would be to travel a great distance without a number of intermediate steps. The gradations of sin are innumerable, and almost imperceptible. Now temptation has, in general, but little force, except when it solicits to those sins which have often before been committed, or which are but a single degree beyond what we have been accustomed to commit. And thus persons are brought, not suddenly, but gradually and imperceptibly, to practices and principles which would once have astonished and shocked them.

4. It follows therefore, that *little sins are what, most of all, ought to be attended to and resisted.*—Watch against the beginnings. The spark may soon be extinguished, but the conflagration rages with irresistible fury. The first channel by which confined waters run over their banks may soon be stopped; but by and by it becomes a torrent which tears down the mounds, and spreads itself

with desolating fury. Here therefore religion will most successfully operate, in restraining at first, in preventing, in checking the evil disposition as soon as it arises; in watching against those little sins by which corrupt principles and corrupt dispositions are chiefly gratified and nourished. Here also Religion chiefly employs itself. Morality and the laws of men restrain from the commission of gross vices: on these accounts, a man will not steal or murder: but true grace discovers itself in opposing not those evils only, but all kinds of coveting, all kinds of hatred. It is the heart which true grace rectifies. It begins with cleansing and purifying the principles of action and the fountain whence all good or evil proceeds. The real Christian considers himself as bound to serve God with his spirit. A clean heart and a new spirit he seeks to obtain. He cannot be contented with a practice which, according to the usual standard of the world, is considered as blameless, while it permits worldliness of heart, love of filthy lucre, a desire of the applause of men, and a prevailing habit of self-indulgence. True grace discovers itself in resisting these, which are the parents and nurses of other sins. The Scripture says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do thereafter." Now this wisdom

and good understanding are very much displayed in observing and checking these common, and, as they are too often termed, little offences, which escape the notice and censure of others, though they are in truth only the issue of the most corrupt part of a most corrupt nature. It is the excellence of God's law, that it is so spiritual as to admit of none of these. Human laws meddle only with the pernicious effects of evil principles; but the law of God goes to the principle itself, and requires that to be mortified and annihilated. It admits of no composition with it. It charges with guilt that vanity which gratifies itself by the superior manner in which it has displayed some trifling accomplishment, and that pride which is even thought decent and respectable. These before God it accounts the symptoms of corruption and depravity. That emulation, which with many is the only source of energy, and which has been too inadvertently encouraged, it condemns as a work of the flesh, the offspring of false views, base ends, and corrupt motives. That inordinate desire of pleasing, which is often thought an essential part of the accomplishments of education, it censures as an undue preference of man to God, and frequently the cause of a sacrifice of truth to the prejudices and vices of men. That self-will, which wears the honourable guise of

freedom and independence, it condemns as often originating in a proud spirit which can brook no controul, and which is impatient of submission. In these and in many other such things, pointed out by the word of God to be sinful, and evidently originating, when traced up to their source, in a selfish gratification of the corrupt appetites of the flesh, the Christian sees and laments the depravity of his nature. In resisting these consists a great part of his employment. Here is his self-denial exercised. Here is the true spiritual warfare experienced,—the flesh against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. He says not of those transgressions which are passed over by the rest of the world without notice, that they are little sins or trifles: but he looks upon them as serious indications of a corrupt nature, which must be renewed; as cherishing and encouraging that corrupt nature, and strengthening its strength; and as leading on and habituating the mind to still greater and greater degrees of guilt and corruption. There is not a vice which is so destructive and odious as to be beheld with universal abhorrence but we may trace in ourselves the seeds of it, or even the plant growing up; and it is the business of religion to eradicate it, before it is advanced to its full size and strength.

5. *This subject presents useful lessons of instruction to parents.*—They form the minds of their children. And it is too much to be feared, that many of those unhappy persons who have been brought to ruin have been brought to it chiefly by the operation of those very principles which their parents instilled into them and encouraged. From them, perhaps, they imbibed the love of dress and the desire of admiration. Their parents nursed and fostered their infant vanity. From their parents they received the habits of indulgence which led them to consider wholesome restraint as an intolerable evil. By them they were encouraged to display their childish wit at the expense of the follies or infirmities of their neighbours, and taught to cultivate an uncharitable or deceitful disposition. The parents added fuel to their dawning resentments, adopted their trivial quarrels, and thus taught them malice and revenge. From their parents they imbibed the love of money: and by them were taught to value others, not according to their real excellence, but according to their wealth and the advantages to be expected from them. From their parents they learned to make no account of religion, and to consider the Bible as a dull, useless, or a dangerous work. And can parents be surprised, if, after the pains they have

thus taken to implant and to cherish evil principles in their children; can they be surprised, if they reap the fruits of it themselves? Can they be surprised, if by and by they see their children immersed in pleasure and sensuality, profligate and licentious, influenced by no good principles, or mainly instigated by the spirit of gain? Can they wonder if they find their children disobedient and irreverent to themselves, and injurious and cruel to others? Can they wonder if they see them live disliked and die unpitied? Surely these are but the consequences which might be expected from such an education. It was formed upon a plan which tended to cherish and cultivate vice; and the pains taken could not be expected to be otherwise than productive in a soil which is of itself so fruitful of evil, that we see the wisest and most judicious methods of instruction and the most pious education not always able to eradicate it.

6. *The consideration of the subject of my discourse should lead us also to deep humiliation on account of our great corruption, and to earnest prayers for the grace of Christ to pardon and to cleanse us.*—Persons who have superficial views of their duty, and low apprehensions of the evil of sin, are ready to look upon themselves as tolerably moral, while they are free from

gross vices ; and therefore they regard themselves as needing no repentance but what is occasional, no habitual watchfulness, no constant prayer, no daily endeavours to obtain the grace of God. But let those little sins which are every hour committed, those seeds of vice which are continually springing up in the heart, those ebullitions of a corrupt fountain from which the life is never free, be taken into the account, and we shall perceive the need we have to be earnest in our prayers to be sanctified and to be pardoned. Alas ! when nothing appears wrong to the superficial observer, all may be wrong within. The state of the heart, the general system, may be totally wrong and corrupt. Every principle of action may be polluted. The fear of man, the love of applause, the desire of self-indulgence, the thirst of lucre, may be the springs and the only springs of action. One may succeed another, occupy the whole heart, and influence the whole conduct, without its being directed for one hour by the pure principle of love to God or real benevolence to man. Here in the heart is the lamentable power of corruption seen ! Here we have need to be cleansed ! The tree must be made good, before good fruit can be expected : the fountain must be made sweet, before its waters can be so. Here, therefore, we must begin. We must pray to God to give us a new heart. We

must be engrafted into Christ Jesus, the living vine; and, by union to him, receive a new power to bring forth new fruit.

7. *And as we see evil arrive at its perfection by small gradations, so let us remember that good advances in the same manner.*—We should not despise little things, either in what is good or bad; for, as the apocryphal writer observes, “he that despiseth little things shall fall by little and little.” The character is formed very much from the repetition of little acts; and a progress in religion is made by small successive steps, none of which ought to be despised. And be not discontented, because you cannot at once arrive at those things which are most excellent. To attempt too great a height at once often tends to discouragement. Try to do a little, and that little will prepare you for more. Take the first step, and that will prepare the way for a second. Use the same rules of prudence in religion which you find useful in the ordinary affairs of life. In this respect, imitate the children of the world, who are often wiser in their generation than the children of light. Above all, seek to obtain that holy principle which respects God, and which acts out of love to his name and gratitude to him for his goodness. This will rectify the whole of your conduct, and each successive step you will then take will lead you nearer and nearer to Him who is the Source of all good.

SERMON XX.

—◆—

THE NATURE AND VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE.

—◆—

PSALM lxxxix. 47.

Remember how short my time is. Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain ?

THE Psalmist composed the psalm of which the words just read are a part, under very great depression of mind. Disappointed in hopes which appeared to be founded on the promises of God, and reduced to a state of the lowest misery and distress, he surveys, as was natural, the miseries of human life, and considers its shortness and its vanity. Impatient of the sufferings allotted to him, he at length breaks out into the prayer of my text, “ How long, Lord, wilt thou hide thyself? For ever? Shall thy wrath burn like fire? Remember how short my time is. Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?” “ Oh spare the rod

of thine anger! Consider how short my life is, even at the longest; how much more so under thy punishment! For we consume away in thine anger, and perish under thy wrathful displeasure. Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain, as they appear to be, if their life, vain and short as it is, is still to be abridged and rendered more miserable by thy severe chastisements?"

The affections upon which such an address is founded, are very natural to a person in the situation of the Psalmist. It is not to be wondered at if he should see every object through a gloomy medium, and, beholding the shortness of life and the vanity of it, should be ready to conclude that all men were made "in vain," or "for nought," as it is rendered in the old translation.

In another point of view, however, short as human life is, it does not appear to be in vain. On the contrary, the most important purposes may be answered by it. We shall therefore divide this discourse into two parts, correspondent to these two different views of the value of the life of man.

I. If we consider life, then, as it is in itself, and form our estimate of its value only by the degree of temporal enjoyment it is capable of affording, it will appear to be very vain indeed;

and man will almost seem to be made for nothing.

1. Consider how *short* life is!—It is represented in Scripture by every image which can denote things fugitive and transitory. It is as a dream; as a watch in the night; as a shadow that departeth; as grass which in the morning groweth up and is green, and in the evening is cut down, dried up, and withereth. All that is certain of life is what is already past. And how short does that part of it appear! Ten or twenty years, when we look forward to them, appear to be of long duration: but when we review them as already spent, every mind is struck with the justice of the reflection, how soon are they gone! And at the end of the longest life, long as it may appear to the young and thoughtless, yet the man of fourscore years, who from experience knows how to make a better estimate of its duration, will tell you, that to him it appeareth only as yesterday that is past.

2. Consider its *uncertainty*.—Short as the period of life is when extended to its natural termination, how often do we see that period shortened, perhaps forcibly; broken suddenly, without warning, in the midst of apparent health and strength, which promised the continuance of many years! Thus man dies, and his expectations perish. His schemes and plans for the successful

completion of which years were still wanting, as years had already been spent in promoting them, are all cut off in a moment; cut off as it were by accident, and not through any want of prudence or attention on his part; without any regard to the useful or beneficent designs which he was employed in advancing. Alas! how little does death consider our plans! The deep-laid schemes of villainy, or the righteous purposes of the just; the enjoyment of long-sought pleasure just within the reach, and the honest endeavour to provide for a numerous and indigent family, are, with equal abruptness, broken off and for ever terminated by his resistless stroke. Who can say of any project that he has formed, that he shall accomplish it? Who can say, 'To-morrow I will do this, or will go there?' For who knoweth what to-morrow may bring forth?

3. Survey also the *sufferings* to which life is exposed in this short existence.—Take notice of the natural calamities which belong to man; the diseases of which the seeds are sown in his frame; the various accidents to which he is liable, and from which no prudence or foresight can exempt him. Look at the history of man, and see what he suffers from his own species. Observe the dreadful effects of wars and the barbarous desolations of which we read in history. Recollect

what cruel tyrants there have been in the world, who have been permitted to sport, as it were, with the pangs of their fellow-creatures. Think how many have been undone by unjust laws, judges, or witnesses; what terrible proscriptions and cruel persecutions have wasted mankind. Indeed, the history of the world is little else than the history of a series of distressing and cruel events; and a very large part of it, however things may be palliated and gilded over, can scarcely be read by a benevolent man without astonishment and horror. In short, what spectacles of misery present themselves every where to the eye, which, if this life be the whole of existence, force us to say, Why hast thou made all men in vain!

4. Look also at the *business* of life, the very end for which most men live, and the same reflection will forcibly recur.—I say nothing of the labour and discipline which are necessary in order to form us for active life, the difficulty with which proper employments and stations are obtained, the hardships we may have to encounter, the frauds practised upon us, the risks we run, and the disappointments we meet with, even in the pursuit of a bare subsistence. Of these I say nothing, though in truth they are felt very acutely: years of labour and exertion, of prudence and forethought, cannot be utterly lost, as they often are, without the most painful emotions.

But what is the business of life in itself? What is the end for which so much toil is endured, so many cares and anxieties suffered? Simply this; to go on suffering the same anxieties and cares, and enduring the same toil. How great a part of mankind is doomed to labour hard, in order to gain by the sweat of their brow—what? Merely provision, in order that life may go on, and the same round may be continued. And even those in more affluent circumstances; those whose labours have been successful, and who have acquired all that their hopes could aspire to, what have they obtained? Still their one great object is to carry on life; to continue the enjoyment of health; to guard against its decays; to refresh the body with rest and with food, that existence may be prolonged in the same unvarying round. And may it not be asked, Is this all? Is the repetition, year after year—the same succession of food, and rest, and solicitude, and vanity, and short and mixed pleasures, and hopes, and disappointments;—is this life? How many possessed of all the advantages which fortune could give them, yet weary of them all, have exclaimed, Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain!

II. Such reflections as these naturally occur to every person who sits down to survey human life, and to compute the sum of its value. He

will consider the large proportion of time in childhood and youth necessary to prepare us for life, the amount of what is consumed in taking the rest and food which our bodies require, the quantity employed in procuring necessary subsistence and the conveniencies and accommodations of life; and after all these are reckoned up, these means of living, rather than life itself, how little of it remains! What a shadow is life! Lord, wherefore hast thou made all men for nought?

But however obvious such a view of life may be, and however natural such reflections upon it, that view is imperfect and those reflections unjust. However naturally that view of it upon which such reflections are founded, may present itself to those who esteem the enjoyments of this life as their only hope, and who have met with disappointments in it, it is nevertheless partial and defective. Let us look at life in another point of view; let us consider it as giving us an opportunity of doing the will of God; let us take it in connection with a future state; let us associate it with the redemption effected by our blessed Saviour; and then life, short as it is, and uncertain as it is, will acquire a new value, and we shall see that God has not made man in vain.

1. He has not made all men in vain, if we consider the value of doing the will of God.—What

is life? Is it merely eating and drinking, and enjoying sensual pleasures? Is that to be called life in man which he shares in common with the brute beasts that perish? Do we so forget our dignity? Why have we an immortal soul capable of knowing God and serving him? Here then an important view of life opens itself to us. We live not to eat, and to drink, and to labour; but we eat and drink, and labour, in order to live; that is, to fulfil the will of our great Creator and to glorify his name. Now this is done when his will is made the chief rule of our lives, and his glory the end of our actions; when we exercise dispositions proper to our stations in life and agreeable to the duties we owe to him. In this light the events of life are comparatively of little importance: it is the duties they call forth which are really so. In this light it is indifferent whether a man be rich or poor, fortunate or unfortunate in life. These are only circumstances; these are trials to call forth the exercise of proper dispositions. These are only means to produce an end, and that end is to honour and glorify God by resignation and trust in adverse circumstances; by humility and thankfulness in prosperity; by a diligent discharge of those duties which God has ordained in every situation and station in life. In this view, life is not to be regarded as given in vain,

because we meet with hardships and disappointments : let the great object of life be to serve God, and these hardships become only secondary considerations, such as are indeed of little moment compared with the great end of life.

This, my brethren, we must own, is a just view of the subject, when we consider it in connection with the powers and capacities which God has given us. But are we acting according to this view? To what, then, are our desires and hopes chiefly directed? To the attainment of the things of this life? To procure all the means for carrying on life with more comfort, and less inconvenience, and less danger of suffering? Alas ! besides that this is a vain expectation which we cannot realize, we are mistaking the very end of life ; we are wrong in the very foundation on which we build. What else would a brute beast, that perishes, desire? No : propose to yourself another end of life, an end unconnected with circumstances and events which it is not in your power to controul ; propose to yourself the fulfilment of God's will ; study that will ; let it be your object to do it : and then there will be no reason to complain that God has made his creatures in vain.

2. Consider also human life in reference to a *future state*, and its importance will rise upon us.— If, indeed, God had terminated our existence with

the present life, we might have been ready to exclaim, Wherefore has God made man in vain ! But when we carry our view forward to that eternal state of which this life is but the beginning, and in comparison of which it is but a moment ; when we reflect that the soul which quits the dying body, and the body dissolved into corruption, shall again be united and shall live for ever and ever in a new state ; when we consider that this eternal life will be either miserable or happy according to the manner in which we spend our short existence here ; surely this life is not in vain : it becomes of infinite importance,—an importance proportioned to that infinite happiness or woe with which it is necessarily connected.

Alas ! how short-sighted is man ! How blind to points of the first importance ! How eagerly are all his thoughts, his hopes, and fears engaged in forming plans and contriving schemes for the enjoyment of to-morrow, or of the next year, or of the next fifty years ! It matters not which we take : they are all expressions of the same meaning ; they are all equally as a moment of time with respect to eternity. But, alas ! what folly is it that with such care about the body which is dying, the world which is perishing before our eyes, time which is perpetually disappearing, we should so little care about that eternal state in

which we are to live for ever, when this dream is over! When we shall have existed ten thousand years in another world, where will be all the cares and fears and enjoyments of this? In what light then shall we look upon the things which now transport us with joy, or overwhelm us with grief? What trifles will they all appear! And now they appear comparatively trifles to the mind which duly contemplates and realizes eternity.

Eternity! Awful word; at the sound of which we awake as out of sleep! Eternity! Before its view, how do the councils of princes, the plots of ambition, the revolutions of states, and the fates of empires, shrink into nothing! Ye immortal souls, whom I address upon the most important subject, ponder, I pray you, upon that eternal state to which you are swiftly carried by the flood of time! You see your fellow-creatures around you dying; you take a hasty glance at the shifting scenes around you, the harmony and end of which you see not; you ask, Why was man made in vain; why does he come into life only to be dissolved again? Alas! you mistake; you see man going out at the gate of death, but you see not the extent of country behind. All the busy tribes of men whose memorial has long perished here; these all are living in another state, whose happiness and misery, objects and attainments, are upon

a scale infinitely greater than all the things of this transitory life. And is it so, indeed, that your happiness in that state depends upon your life here? Who, then, can speak in terms of sufficient emphasis of the value of this life? Awake thou that sleepest! Awake thou that dreamest of days and years; awake to contemplate ages! Thou that lookest at a family, a sect, a tribe, survey assembled worlds! Thou that art oppressed with the pains and aches and weakness of a vile body, behold a spiritual body pure and free from infirmity! Thou that buryest all thy hopes in the earth upon which thy foot treadeth, see what a state of immortality and glory remains after this earth is burned up, and the elements have been dissolved with fervent heat! Oh, look to that state; let all your hopes center in attaining a happiness which only then begins to exist, when all the schemes of worldly greatness and worldly bliss are extinguished, to live no more!

3. Survey human life also in connection with *the work of Redemption*, and we shall find that man is not made for nought.—Are the days of our pilgrimage here few and evil; and does the life of man seem to be only a mixture of vanity and vexation? Yet see how the glory of Christ the Redeemer, and of God through him are connected with it. What a value is stamped

upon life ; what dignity upon the world, when we behold the only Son of God taking upon him that life, and coming into that world ! Are men made in vain, when the only-begotten of the Father gave his life as a ransom for theirs ? Here indeed we see the honour of man : he may become one with Christ, and Christ with him. Much as his life is chequered with vicissitudes, degraded by meanness, defiled by pollution, burdened with cares, oppressed with sorrow, and abridged by death ; it is more than ennobled by the solicitude which the Almighty has expressed for it ; by the bounty of Heaven, which daily ministers to its necessities ; by the love of Christ, who gave his own life a ransom for sinners ; by the offices he undertakes in behalf of those who make application to him ; by the means of grace provided for the benefit of their souls ; by the promises of the Gospel held out to them ; and by the influences of the Holy Ghost shed abroad in their hearts. Is man, then, made in vain who has the Spirit of God for his Guide, the Son of God for his Redeemer, the Almighty for his Father, the Gospel for his support, and heaven for his home ? No : he is blessed and favoured indeed. He is honoured with privileges and blessings resembling those of angels. But what am I saying ? Are men in general so honoured ? Alas ! with respect to many, we must

still say, Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? But in what state are we, my brethren? Is it our care to be found united to Christ by a living and true faith? Is it the great employment of our lives to be partakers of that grace and peace which he communicates? Have we renounced the world, with its pomps and vanities? Do we say in our hearts, Away with its glittering, perishing follies; I seek more substantial blessings; I have an immortal soul, I seek its salvation; I am a sinner, and I labour to be delivered from my sins; I want to enjoy communion with God my Creator, and to be made meet for a better world above? If such are our hopes and desires, we are really living to great ends; we are enjoying life in the only sense in which it deserves that name. Without this we have still to learn the very end for which life was given to man; for which he was created and placed in the world.

Lastly, is life of so much importance, and yet is *it short also*? What an additional value does it acquire even from this circumstance, which seems at first sight to diminish its worth! In this view, a day, an hour, is of great importance. If life is *so uncertain*; if almost the only thing certain in life is that we shall die, and we know not how soon; what manner of persons ought we to be?—Are we laying this to heart? Do we say to

ourselves, "Life is too important to be trifled with; too valuable to be wasted in things which have no importance beyond the present period? I have a great work to do, and little time in which to perform it. Death is at hand: the Judge is at the door. Oh, let me improve the precious though fleeting moments! They may be improved so as to make me partaker of the favour of God, and of eternal happiness." Short as life is, it is long enough to answer this purpose; and when it has done this, it matters not how soon it is terminated. It will be continued to greater advantage in another state. Happy is the person who acts under these views. They are the views which Christianity gives of this world and this life. May it so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom!

SERMON XXI.

—

THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF PILGRIMAGE ON EARTH.

—

HEBREWS xi. 13.

And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

IT must be allowed, that the Patriarchs and other members of the Jewish Church, before the Christian æra, did not enjoy so clear and distinct a view of the nature and blessedness of the life to come as we do ; for it was Christ who was to bring life and immortality to light. But, on the other hand, it is evident, that the dispensations of God with many of them were such as tended to give them just views of the vanity and emptiness of this world, and to teach them to desire earnestly that happier state of future existence which was but obscurely revealed to them. Of this we have a striking

proof in the course of life which God appointed for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They had been called out of idolatry, as one chosen family to whom God manifested himself with peculiar favour. They therefore eminently appeared as a light shining in the midst of the general darkness which overspread the rest of the world; and their posterity of the Jewish Church, who received their most distinguished privileges through them, and, on their account, would naturally look up to them, and to every circumstance of their lives, with peculiar attention and reverence. To what course of life, then, did God call their father Abraham, his chosen servant? Was it to a life of ease, comfort, and enjoyment? Did he choose for him the most delightful country, subject it to his dominion, and on his account bless it with double fertility? No: Abraham had no land assigned to him, or country which he could call his own. So far different was his lot that he was commanded to quit for ever his native land, his house, his family, his connections, his countrymen; and to wander about in a strange land, dwelling in tents without a fixed or certain habitation. Surely the moral to be learned from this appointment of Providence could not be obscure. It was evidently the design of the Almighty that it should for ever impress on the hearts of his people a

persuasion, that it was not in this world that they were to seek their happiness ; since Abraham, the friend of God, and the distinguished heir of his blessing, had not found it a place of enjoyment ; —but that, sitting loose to this life and all its comforts, as well as all its cares, they were to look forward to another state in which the effects of the Divine favour would be more eminently conspicuous. Had there been no blessings but those of a temporal kind, surely the Canaanites among whom Abraham sojourned, had been happier than the venerable Patriarch favoured by God himself. They had houses and lands, cities and towns, a country and a people. Abraham had none of these. The conclusion is evident. He could not but “ look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God ;” for he that so lives confesses that he is a stranger and pilgrim upon earth, and declares plainly that he seeks “ a country. And truly, if he had been mindful of that country from whence he came out,” if he had thought it so desirable a thing to have the blessings of this life, “ he might have had opportunity to return ; but now he desires a better country, that is, a heavenly ; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called his God, for he hath prepared for him a city.”

But did not God *afterwards* give the *descen-*

dants of Abraham a country,—a land flowing with milk and honey, and abounding in cities, high and fenced up to heaven? It is true—he did; but he had first instilled the principle, and given the rule, according to which they were to enjoy it. He had trained them to consider all worldly possessions as worthless, when compared with the blessings of Heaven. Thus they were taught to enjoy as those that enjoyed not; and still to consider themselves as strangers and pilgrims upon earth.

What God teaches to one man he teaches to all. Truth is not to be confined to an individual or to a tribe; it belongs to the universe, and is applicable to all mankind; and when God imparts it in a remarkable manner to any particular person, it is that by his means it may be communicated to many. It was not Abraham therefore, merely, or Isaac, or the Jews that were to consider themselves as strangers and pilgrims here; but all mankind, and especially all Christians. The whole tenor of the Gospel illustrates and confirms this lesson, and impresses it with still more force than even the former dispensation. The address of the Gospel is this:—“Ye are pilgrims and strangers in this world: ye are not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world. Set your affections on things above, not on things

on the earth; for" (to put it in a still stronger light, to use an image still more forcible) "ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

It is of unspeakable importance to have a practical conviction of this truth. If we have not a just view of the nature of this life, we shall be fundamentally wrong; we shall be wrong, not merely in an immaterial or in a collateral point, but in the very principle from which we act. To have a right knowledge of this life, is as necessary as to know ourselves or to know God.

Let us, then, consider in what respects the image of our being pilgrims and strangers here applies, and what tempers and dispositions it supposes us to possess.

The Christian is a pilgrim and a stranger upon earth, because he is not at home there; has not there taken up his rest; has not obtained there that state of established happiness which alone can satisfy his soul. It is not there that he even desires or seeks his happiness; he is merely passing through the world; his home is in another country, a land afar off, a land glorious and infinitely preferable to this;—there his heart is, there is the rest he earnestly desires, there are concentrated all his hopes of happiness; onward, therefore, he travels; and though sometimes weary with

many a painful step through rough and toilsome ways, yet he is revived by the thought of being continually nearer home, and that thought supports him in the tedious journey. When the traveller meets with beautiful prospects, verdant meads, cooling streams, delicious fruits, and hospitable entertainment, they cheer and gladden his progress : he enjoys them as refreshments by the way ; but they do not tempt him to loiter, or to forget that he is still far from home. He surveys the countries through which he passes ; he observes their manners, he mingles in society with their inhabitants, but still he is not at home : he still feels himself a stranger, whose chief business it is to prosecute his journey through these foreign countries, until he arrives at his own.

Such too, in a general point of view, is the state of the Christian pilgrim. Let us enter more particularly into it, and consider the dispositions and views which, as a pilgrim and a stranger, he is supposed to possess.—He is supposed, then, to have heaven in view, as his *home*. A man's own home is to be considered as the place which, above all others, he values and loves. It is true that other countries may be more beautiful, other houses more convenient and splendid ; but the laudable attachment to home, which seems implanted by nature in our hearts, is apt to over-

balance every recommendation to which other dwellings can lay claim. Home is the spot where the social feelings reside, where all that is dear and sacred seems to be centered; the secure and peaceful asylum where happiness herself seems to fix her favourite habitation. And in this sense should heaven be the Christian's home. It is to be supposed, therefore, that he knows it well; that he is well acquainted with all its advantages; that he is familiar with the various and exquisite scenes of enjoyment it affords; that it is suited to all his ideas of happiness, and that therefore he looks towards it with longing expectation to be there, as the traveller who, having ascended the summit of some high mountain, and surveyed the extensive prospect around him, fixes his eye upon that point of the horizon where lies his beloved home, and gazes upon it with such intenseness as almost to persuade himself that he perceives the well-known spot to which he hastens.

In this respect, however, it is to be feared, that the greater part of nominal Christians are exceedingly defective. With them, too often, heaven is not a home. They hope, indeed, that when they die they shall go to heaven, because they believe that it is a place of great happiness; but still, were it left to themselves to choose when they would go there, it would be very long before

they went. Were it left to them to choose their seat of happiness, it would not be heaven. They have already a home here; and they value heaven as a kind of representation of that home—lovely on account of its similitude to it, and because every thing which embitters that home will in heaven be removed.

Not so with the real Christian, who is a pilgrim and a stranger here: he dwells, fondly dwells, upon the contemplation of heaven as his true home; and he values it, not on account of its likeness to this world, but its dissimilarity. There he shall be with God and with Christ; there he shall possess a pure and holy nature; there he shall no more be overcome by temptations, or have to struggle with a perverse disposition;—there he shall dwell in a land where God is loved and worshipped, with perfect, cheerful, and constant devotion; where there is knowledge without ignorance, truth without error, and enjoyment without sin. These are the particulars which, from being always desired and frequently contemplated, are deeply engraven on his heart, as constituting the happiness of heaven. Without these, he sees there can be no true felicity; and that country, by whatever distance he may be separated from it, is still his home where he hopes ever to dwell, and to which his fondest desires ever tend.

The idea of our being pilgrims and strangers implies that we are *travelling* towards our home. A stranger, it is true, may sit down and dwell contentedly in a country in which he is an alien ; and he may forget his home and native soil ; but when the metaphor of a stranger and traveller is used, such a case is not supposed : it implies, on the contrary, that he is active and unwearied, restless and impatient, in the prosecution of his journey, being continually spurred on by the desire of arriving at the place on which all his thoughts are fixed.

Justly does this image illustrate the case of a real Christian. His main business, his chief interest in life, is to attain to heaven. He does not leave it to chance whether he shall arrive there or not ; he does not contemplate it as a good about which he is indifferent ; but he makes it the first object of his solicitude, as it is that of a traveller to return to his home. For this purpose, he consults the Oracles of Truth with earnest attention, to know the way, as a traveller who has to pass through an intricate and unknown country examines the map : he seeks direction from those who have travelled on the same road : he prays earnestly for Divine guidance : he watches with a godly jealousy against every thing which may retard or obstruct his progress :

he is ready to pluck out the right eye, or to cut off the right hand: he esteems not father nor mother, houses or land, in comparison with the salvation of his soul. And as a traveller often feels a gloom when he reflects how far he is yet from home, or is gladdened when he considers that such a space is passed over; as he mourns when unexpected accidents retard his journey, and rejoices when he can pursue it with uninterrupted rapidity: so the Christian at one time reflects with pain that he has been loitering in his course, or has strayed out of the road, or gone backward in his path; but at another is inclined to hope that he has made considerable progress, and is ready to believe the difficulties of the journey almost over. His hopes and fears, however, both rise from the same source: his success and his disappointment contribute to the same end;—all things tend to increase the desire of home, under the influence of which he still travels stedfastly onward.

But, alas! with how many is the case dreadfully the reverse! How many are there who take no steps in the path towards heaven! Well might our Saviour say the way was narrow, and few there be that find it; for if we judge by the ordinary pursuits, and hopes and pleasures, and fears and pains of the Christian world at large,

I fear we shall find but few who are evidently travelling towards heaven as their home. The principal aim of a man's life cannot well be concealed from others;—and when we see a prevailing desire to be rich or comfortable or respectable in this world; when we see men anxious mainly upon points which respect these pursuits, and willing to converse upon no other subjects, and to read no books but such as relate to them; when we see them never apparently interested about their souls, never inquiring with solicitude the way to heaven, never afraid lest they should mistake it, never joyful in the hope that they have made a progress in it; when we see all this, surely we cannot do violence to reason so far as to say, that these men look upon heaven as their home, that they are pressing towards it with the impatience of travellers who are hastening to the end of their journey, or that they are using their utmost efforts to have an abundant entrance ministered to them into the celestial kingdom.

The image contained in my text supposes also, that a truly religious person does not *set up his rest* in this life as if he were at home. He does not build his chief hope of felicity upon the possession of the things of time and sense.—The man of this world has no thought of happiness beyond this life. Exclusively devoted to schemes

of earthly enjoyment, he encircles himself with friends, amongst whom he spends his hours of leisure : he contrives amusement, and variety in amusements ; and if his sun of prosperity shines unclouded, he is at rest, he has all that his heart can wish. So in idea had the rich man in the Parable, who determined to erect larger barns, and to multiply his stores. But, alas ! he who builds his hopes upon this world builds upon the sand. He who expects what God has declared to be hopeless, must be disappointed. God has pronounced a curse upon the earth, and upon the man who looks to it for happiness ; and foolish is he who thinks to evade that sentence. Instead of his being able to say, " Soul, take thine ease," behold the reverse which frequently takes place ! Friends are removed, neighbours are contentious, children become disobedient, splendour palls upon the sight, amusement becomes insipid, losses and disappointments succeed, health decays, passions corrode the mind, diseases and pains torment the frame ; and the boasted Babel of human bliss crumbles into pieces, leaving only a melancholy ruin as the monument of the folly of the projector.

Not so with the real Christian—*he* confesses himself a pilgrim and stranger here below, and therefore does not build on this world his principal

hope. I say, his *principal* hope—for he does not *refuse* the rest, and peace, and other temporal blessings which God has provided for him. He receives them with thanksgiving and gratitude to Him who gave them. But then he does not desire them as his portion. He continually looks beyond them. He travels on to heaven amidst a country smiling with verdure, still valuing his home as dearly as if the scene around him were barren, and the road rough and painful.

The same principle also leads him rightly to estimate the disappointments and troubles of life. Shocks severe to nature are received by him, though not without emotion, yet without despair. When he mourns, it is not as one without hope. He has not lost his all, when he loses much.

However dreary and toilsome the journey, he refreshes himself by remembering the nearness of his home: with whatever opposition he meets, with whatever difficulties he struggles, under whatever embarrassments he labours, his consolation is still, that it is but for a little time, and that he shall soon be at home. “Shall I be dejected,” he cries, “because in this journey of a day the accommodations on the road are defective? Am I to despair, because the inn in which I lodge is uncomfortable? O rather let me hasten on my journey, and pursue my ultimate object with

more eagerness : in this I shall suffer no disappointment. In heaven will be all the happiness my soul can desire. Gird thyself, then, O my soul ; hold on thy way without being dispirited ; yet a little while, and ample amends will be made for every suffering. In the mean time, therefore, let not my faith and my patience fail.”

This view of the world also serves to give a just estimate of *death*.—To Christian pilgrims what is death ? It is the end of their toilsome journey. They have arrived at home : they have reached their Father’s house, and are received like children long expected and greatly desired. Should we repine that the fatigues of the journey are over ; that the wearisome way which cost many an hour of suffering is now ended ; that its difficulties, its pains, its dangers, are now surmounted ? Is it a matter of grief that the weary traveller has entered into the rest he has so long desired ; that the end, so long pursued, is attained ; that the prayers, so often made, are fully answered ; that the fears, so often felt, are banished for ever ; that the hopes, so often the source of comfort, are now lost in a blessed reality ? No ! Death in this view is not a scene of terror, but the joyful entrance into bliss : not the extinction of all our pleasures, but the happy termination of every sorrow. “ Blessed are the dead which die

in the Lord: even so, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours.”

To conclude—Much, we see, depends upon the view we entertain of the nature of this life; much of our peace of mind, and still more of our religious progress. Hence, it appears, a worldly mind is far more incompatible with religion than is generally supposed. That it may be an obstacle to piety is commonly admitted; but, in fact, it is much more—it is its absolute destruction. Religion supposes a spirit and temper which cannot consist with a worldly or selfish principle. Hence also we learn the necessity of being principally solicitous for the welfare of our souls. Heaven is a home to those only whose dispositions and views are prepared for it. There must be something heavenly in the state of the temper and inclinations before its enjoyments can be desired. And, above all, there must be a knowledge and love of that blessed Redeemer who has purchased heaven for us, in order to make us meet for it.—Let not the careless and indifferent; let not those who are “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God;” let not the worldly, the selfish, the sensual, flatter themselves that heaven is their home. They deceive themselves, if they think so. They are of this world,

and their nature must be renewed after the Divine image, before they can be admitted into that seat of purity and holiness.—Are we then numbered amongst those who are treading in the steps of Christ, following him as our pattern and guide, studying, as his subjects, to be conformed to his will, purifying ourselves even as he is pure? Never, till this is our true state, can we claim a portion with those for whom he has provided mansions of glory in the world above. Seeing that there remaineth a rest for the people of God, and that we have the promise of entering into that rest, let us constantly entertain a holy fear lest any of us should seem to come short of it; for we are made partakers of Christ, if we “hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.”

SERMON XXII.

ON FASTING.

PREACHED ON THE SUNDAY PRECEDING A
PUBLIC FAST.

2 CHRON. XX. 3.

And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

AS there may probably be some persons amongst us, who have never understood the nature of fasting as a religious service, or even seriously inquired into its design and utility, I propose in this discourse to give as plain and full an account of it as I am able ; answering, at the same time, the objections which may suggest themselves against its use.

A fast, then, may be defined to be a voluntary abstinence from food, as a token of our humilia-

tion before God. Repentance, it is true, is seated in the heart. There may be deep repentance, where it is not manifested by any outward sign or expression:—and, on the contrary, there may be much of the outward marks of repentance, where there is no inward feeling; no real sorrow for sin, or strong desire to avoid it.

It may here, then, be asked,—“Of what use is this outward sign? If we do not possess the repentance which it signifies, it is an act of mockery before God; and, if we do, God who sees our hearts cannot need to be informed of their state by any external expression.”

To this I answer, in the first place, that if we have no real repentance in our hearts, the outward expression of it is but mockery. It is indisputable that those who are decidedly and manifestly impenitent had better not pretend to fast; for such fasts are an abomination to God. Such were the fasts which were kept by the hypocritical Israelites, and condemned by the Prophets. “Wherefore have we fasted” (they said), “and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold” (it is replied), “in the day of your fast, ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.” In other words, in those public fasts, in which they went up to the temple with great solemnity and appearance of

devotion, they privately at home spent the day in pleasure, and exacted of their servants their usual labour. "Ye fast," it is added, "for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness." Instead of cleansing your hearts, you are indulging thoughts of anger and strife, and devising schemes of injustice and oppression. "Ye shall not fast in this manner, to make your voice to be heard on high," if you would have the Almighty answer you. "Is it such a fast as this that I have chosen? Is it for a man to bow down his head as a bulrush, to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?" Do I, that is to say, want you merely to cover yourselves with sackcloth, and put ashes on your head; and bow down your heads mechanically, as a bulrush bends before the wind, without any real submission of the heart! "Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?"—It is evident, that a fast, disgraced by such insincerity, could not be acceptable to a pure and holy God. It was mere hypocrisy, and therefore God says to such corrupt worshippers. "Bring no more vain oblations: incense is an abomination to me: your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble to me, I am weary to bear them." But would you have your fasts acceptable, then let your practice correspond with your worship:—

“ Wash you, make you clean ; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes ; cease to do evil, learn to do well ; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.” It is plain, then, that where the heart is not interested, and where sin, so far from being repented of and forsaken, is even cherished on the fast-day itself, such fasting is abomination in the sight of God. The case of such persons is clear. They had better not pretend to fast, than fast in such hypocrisy.

But there is a large class of persons of a different description, who may, perhaps unjustly, apply to themselves what is denounced in Scripture against those gross hypocrites : I mean, such persons as secretly acknowledge their sinfulness before God, and would willingly manifest their penitence if not restrained by the fear of ostentation. Now I beg leave to remind such persons, that fasting, like all other external acts of religion, is not appointed merely to shew that we are religious, but also to assist in making us so. The great bulk of a congregation which worship God on the Sabbath, consists of persons who acknowledge themselves to be far from being in all respects what they ought to be ; but who come to church, both that they may learn their duty, and that they may obtain help of God to

practise it. It is sufficient that they are sincere and possess a real desire of amendment in order to justify their worship of God. If none were to enter the house of God but those who are already pious, by what means are others to become so? We attend the ordinances of God in the hope of improvement, as the sick attend a physician. By nature we are all corrupt; and the use of religion is to reclaim us. This, however, is often effected only by slow means; by endeavours frequently faint at first, but becoming, through God's blessing upon the means used, more and more successful. We worship God, not as angels, but as sinful men; not so much to glorify him, as that we may be improved and saved ourselves. Now this being the case with the bulk of mankind, how ought they to act with respect to fasting? Doubtless exactly in the same manner as with respect to the other appointed modes of worship. They should consider it as an institution calculated to be highly useful to them, if they employ it properly; and therefore it is their duty, and ought to be their business, thus to employ it. Now I would ask such persons, Have you no sins to answer for? Have you not incurred God's displeasure? Ought you not to live in a much holier manner than you do? If your consciences answer, as I doubt

not they will, in the affirmative; then why should you not humble yourselves before God? Here is an opportunity offered you of so doing. Here is a day set apart, on which it is not merely convenient to fast, but on which it is your absolute and solemn duty to humble yourselves. Why, then, should you not embrace this opportunity of acknowledging your sinfulness, and imploring God's pardon and blessing? If you still say, It will appear ostentatious; I answer, that if you alone were to keep the fast, it might wear the appearance of ostentation: therefore, in such a case, the rule ought to be most strictly observed, "Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head," instead of covering it with ashes, as was usual on such occasions, "that thou appear not to men to fast." All ostentation is odious and criminal. But, on the contrary, in the case of public fasting, it becomes a duty, not only really to fast, but to shew openly your compliance with a prescribed service, and gladly to embrace the opportunity of humbling yourselves before God; and if you still feel a reluctance to comply with this ordinance, examine your hearts, to discover whence this reluctance springs. Is it not your duty to humble yourselves before God? Then, why do you not perform it? Or what good reason can you give for neglecting it? May there not be other and more questionable motives mixed

with your dread of ostentation? To say nothing of more serious causes of unwillingness; causes which go to bring into suspicion the very existence of religion in the heart; may it not be, that you are unduly afraid of appearing singular, that you shrink from the ridicule which may be awakened by this open profession of religion? It undoubtedly requires some degree of fortitude to avow a determination to be religious; and, in many cases, the fear of shame acts where we least suspect it.

But again it may be urged, "*If we feel repentance in our hearts, God, who sees our hearts, does not require to be informed of it by any external expression.*"—No: but the same may be affirmed of prayer, Why should we pray? God knows our wants, and does not need that we should formally state them to him. The same also may be said of all the means of grace which God has appointed. If our hearts are right with God, what occasion is there for using them; and if they are not, what benefit can arise from their use? All such reasoning proves too much. It is founded upon a false view of human nature, and of the means by which God changes and rectifies the heart. God, it is true, could infuse grace into the heart; could make us angels in a moment; but it is not his will so to do. He appoints certain means to that end; the efficacy of which, if they are diligently and devoutly

used, is certain, though often gradual and slow. Admitting, then, that a man does not feel the repentance and humiliation which he ought to feel, yet ought he not to feel them? And ought he not to seek them in the channels which God hath appointed for communicating them? If he calls to mind his sins; if he considers the majesty and holiness and goodness of God, against whom he has sinned; if he makes use of outward humiliation, as an indication that he ought to feel, and desires to feel, inward humiliation, he at least does that which has a tendency to produce it. I am sure that a contrary conduct has no such tendency. The words of our blessed Lord are strictly in point;—"To him that hath shall be given." Let a man endeavour to do what he can, and what he ought; and however imperfectly it may be done, the blessing of God will rest upon his endeavours. If, however, the question be repeated, When a man feels real repentance in his heart, what occasion can there be for the external expression of it? I answer, that, in proportion as men feel it, they will be disposed to shew it. No truly pious man can be unwilling to attend any ordinances or means of grace, which are calculated to call his religious feelings into exercise. Indeed, where the feelings themselves exist, the exercise of them is not only natural, but necessary. The very idea of true humiliation of heart implies

every thing humble and lowly in the outward demeanour.

But there may be some disposed to argue; “Admitting all that has been said, why should fasting in particular be selected as an external mark of humiliation?” I answer, that had it been the will of God, doubtless something else might have been chosen. But, yet, none other occurs to me as a less objectionable expression of sorrow and humility. Fasting, it should be remembered, has always been the public token of humility; and this in heathen nations, as well as amongst Jews and Christians. Now this alone furnishes a strong plea for its adoption and continuance. It is sanctioned by the highest antiquity, and by the most general usage; enjoined of God upon the Jews; practised by our Saviour and his disciples; and recommended by them to the Christian world. Nor is this all;—fasting, it may be confidently said, has all the qualities which might reasonably be expected in an external act of humiliation. In the first place, it is a duty easily practised; requiring no apparatus; connected with no expense; simple in its own nature; equally adapted to all ranks, climates, and places. Moreover, it involves, as every mark of humiliation should, an act of self-denial; and this act, not so severe as to unfit it for general use, nor so slight as inadequately to express its meaning.

It has, moreover, this peculiar recommendation, that it is an act connected with the mortification of those very appetites, whence many of the sins, for which we thus humble ourselves, proceed. Fulness of diet and unrestrained indulgence of appetite are frequent sources of intemperance, lust, pride, and extravagance. That act, therefore, has surely a singular propriety, which has a tendency to correct the evil for which it expresses our contrition.

Still it may be objected, that fasting may disorder persons of weak health, and thus indispose them even for the service of the day. Undoubtedly it may: and therefore such persons are not only allowed, but bound, to use great caution in the performance of this duty. God is not a harsh master: nor does he ever enjoin such duties as are either impossible or injurious. Under the Jewish dispensation, indeed, a total fast was sometimes enjoined under severe penalties. But the spirit of the Christian system insists only on the principle, and leaves the application of it to the case and conscience of the worshipper. It requires repentance, humiliation, and mortification of the flesh, but leaves us to shew that repentance, to discover that humiliation, and to practise that mortification, as circumstances may admit, and our consciences direct.

If, therefore, it is asked,—What rule can you

lay down as to the length and nature of abstinence? I answer,—None—and none is required. It is a voluntary act of self-denial. One man may be able to fast far longer than another, without the same mortification to himself, or injury to his constitution. Another cannot even fast at all; and yet may be equally desirous of humbling himself before God. Let no one, then, judge or condemn another. The Apostle's rule applies, in this respect:—"Meat commendeth us not to God; for neither if we eat, are we the better; neither if we eat not, are we the worse:" supposing, that is, in both cases, that the person eats or abstains uprightly and conscientiously. In like manner, no precise rule can be laid down respecting the kind of food which we may use. Formerly a far too artificial, as well as a too general, rule was established—that to eat fish was compatible with fasting, but to eat flesh unlawful. In whatever right motive such a rule originated, it was obviously overstrained, and misapplied in a multitude of instances. The only rules, perhaps, which can safely be laid down are these:—To abridge yourself of all food which you can without injury spare; and, in using necessary refreshment, to use such alone as is least gratifying to the palate. Some self-denial ought to be exercised. This is essential to the nature of a fast; but the degree

of it must be measured by every man's conscience and constitution. In general, it would appear, that one entire meal might be spared. But I am ashamed to dwell on minute circumstances. Let there be the real wish to humble yourself before God. Feel strongly and deeply that you are a sinner, desire earnestly to manifest your contrition, and you will be at no loss to determine in what manner it shall be shewn. One point is to be remembered, that it is a *voluntary* sacrifice. No person should be compelled to fast. Its very essence is, that it is voluntary, a willing act of humiliation before God.

To this last statement it has sometimes been objected, that a "public command to fast is a species of compulsion, and therefore inconsistent with the notion of a voluntary act of humiliation." But to this I answer—that all which is done by the command of Government is this: it renders that convenient which might otherwise be very inconvenient, and that practicable which might be otherwise impracticable. It is proper, that when the judgments of God visit a nation, it should humble itself before Him. It is proper also that this humiliation should be as general and as solemn as possible. A day, therefore, is set apart by authority, in which all may fulfil the universal duty. It is rendered generally practicable and convenient, by a general suspension of

business. Whether, indeed, a man will avail himself of this opportunity of humiliation, is a matter which lies between himself and his God. But let him remember, he is responsible to God for refusing; and therefore let him carefully weigh his reasons for such refusal. I am not speaking of those cases where a conscience, scrupulous but perhaps ill-informed, may interfere with the discharge of this duty. But, in all others, every good man, I should imagine, would joyfully use the prescribed occasion of drawing near to God, and prostrating himself before him, in order to enliven his repentance and strengthen his resolutions, to confess his wickedness and pray for grace to subdue it. A day thus spent is indeed a day redeemed from the folly and vanity of life:—And here let it be observed, that the mere abstinence from food constitutes but a small part of the solemnity of a fast-day. The essence of the solemnity consists in the religious and holy manner in which the day is spent. It is a day of humiliation, as well as a day of fasting; and indeed these two things are inseparable in their nature. The fasting is only a part of the humiliation. But humiliation supposes the heart to be brought into a right disposition; and this demands retirement, self-examination, and religious exercises. This, then, my brethren, I would earnestly press upon you. If all cannot fast, all can enter into their

chambers, and supplicate their God. If, then, you desire to know how you are to keep the fast, I refer you to your own hearts. If they are deeply sensible of the injury you have offered to God, you will at once discover in what manner you should keep the day. You will be much alone. You will use extraordinary prayer. You will direct your attention to your own individual sins. National guilt is made up of the guilt of individuals, and national repentance of individual repentance. You will confess your guilt before God. You will select for meditation those passages of Scripture which are particularly appropriate to penitents, such as the Penitential Psalms. You will earnestly implore the pardon of your own sins. You will extend your prayers also to national events and public characters. You will pray for the king, that he may be protected and blessed; for the parliament, that they may have wisdom from above to guide them, and that all their consultations may tend to the glory of God and the good of man; for the ministers of state, the judges, the magistrates, the clergy, that each, in their several stations, may fulfil their solemn and appointed duties. Thus you will prepare your heart for the worship of God; and thus prepared, you will worship him in his house with a devout spirit. You will endeavour to join in the service

without languor or distraction. You will carry the same spirit and temper throughout the day. It will not be to you a day of worldly business ; of recreation, of idleness, of worldly conversation, but a day consecrated to God, and devoted to religion. A fast-day, kept universally in this manner, would indeed be a national blessing.

4 There is yet another objection which might be urged, especially by some of the poorer classes—that it is unreasonable to expect them to give up a day's labour, and to abridge their diet who scarcely ever enjoy a full meal, and whose families can ill spare even the labour of a single day. Now, it must be admitted, that there is something apparently unequal and hard in the case of the poor. I allow, that a greater sacrifice is made by them, if they keep the day holy, than by others. I would contend also, that the rich ought not to let their workmen suffer in their temporal comforts by such an appointment. Still I would say to the poor what I before said to others—"Remember, it is a voluntary sacrifice : God enjoins no man to make it who is unwilling." But though the sacrifice is greater in your case than in that of others, it is surely not too great to make for Him who gives you life, and food, and raiment, and all which you possess. Remember, my poorer brethren, this life is not all your existence. It is only a very small

part of it. Do not therefore call that time lost which is not spent in labouring for the body; God can easily restore tenfold your loss in the present life, and can give you life eternal. There are many who labour and toil incessantly without effect, because the blessing of God does not give success to their labours. I do not say, that piety will always better your worldly circumstances; but this I say, that no man will really be a loser by serving God. Piety will at least prevent the excesses arising from debauchery, extravagance, and folly. The wages of a single day are a cheap price for habits which secure a blessing to every day of our lives.

Such then, my brethren, are some of the most common objections to fasting, and such some of the advantages which may be expected to result from it.—As to the first, I think you will see, that little importance is to be assigned to them. The benefits of public fasts, on the contrary, are established by a succession of facts in the history of the world, as recorded in the Scriptures. God had declared that he would destroy Ninevah; but Ninevah repented, and turned to the Lord with fasting, and the Lord pardoned it. Ahab, who was said to have sold himself to work wickedness, at length humbled himself and fasted, and “put on sackcloth;” and God said to his Prophet,

Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself: I will not bring the evil in his days." Jehoshaphat, in the chapter of our text, is described as suddenly attacked by a large army. He set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast. And, on the very day of the fast, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, proclaiming that the Lord himself would fight for Judah, and destroy the enemy. And, accordingly, the army of Jehoshaphat stood still, and saw the invaders perish by their own hands. These, my brethren, are so many monuments erected for the consolation and instruction of after-ages. They console us by the assurance, that the true penitent is the peculiar charge of Heaven. They teach us a lesson never to be forgotten by kings, nor by their people, that "righteousness exalteth a nation, and that happy is the people who have the Lord for their God."

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

1920

6 27 54

