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S E R M O N S.

BY JOHN DISNEY, D.D. F.S.A.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

V O L. II.

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L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD;  
T. AND I. EGERTON, WHITEHALL,  
AND I. DEIGHTON, HOLBORN:

M D C C X C I I I :

ADAMS 191.4

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# C O N T E N T S.

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## S E R M O N I.

BOWING AT THE NAME OF JESUS.

EPHESIANS III. 14, 15.

I BOW MY KNEES UNTO THE FATHER OF OUR LORD  
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p. 415.



S E R M O N I.

BOWING AT THE NAME OF JESUS.

EPHESIANS III. 14, 15.

I BOW MY KNEES UNTO THE FATHER OF OUR LORD  
JESUS CHRIST, OF WHOM THE WHOLE FAMILY IN  
HEAVEN AND EARTH IS NAMED.

It is a necessary circumstance of all human language, that the attributes and powers of the deity, and also the affections of the mind of man himself must frequently be spoken of and illustrated by reference to sensible objects. And men, having been wont to use these symbols to express and convey their ideas to others, may, generally speaking, be left to their own understanding and reason to divest them of that dress and covering in which they are sometimes clothed, both by sacred and profane writers, without hazard of mis-interpretation.

In speaking of God it is not unusual to express his omnipresence, by saying “ his eye “ is always upon us;” and, his providence, by “ his eyes are upon the righteous, and “ his ears are open unto their prayers\* ;” or, his power, by “ the arm of the Lord,— “ his stretched-out arm,—his hand is upon “ us ;” or, his special direction, as in the case of the ten commandments, to have been written by “ the finger of God †.” Neither is it unusual to prove certain injunctions to come from him, by adding, “ the “ mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” But none of these expressions are intended to convey the preposterous idea, that the infinite and eternal spirit, which pervades the whole earth, “ to whom all hearts are open and all desires “ are known,” hath eyes, ears, arms, hands, fingers, or mouth; but, figuratively to express his omniscience and omnipresence, in accommodation to the measure of human intelligence, by phrases which convey similar, though much more limited, ideas when spoken in reference to man.

\* Ps. xxxiv. 15. † Exod. xxxi. 18. Deut. ix. 10.

So, likewise, the properties and conduct of the mind of man are oftentimes described in language which, primarily and properly, is only applicable to the body. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, while he is stating to them the extent of the christian dispensation, being himself the apostle appointed to preach it to “ the gentiles, who,” as he says, “ should be fellow-heirs, and of the same “ body, (or society,) and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel\* :” and that “ through Christ,” or by means of the christian revelation, he had had “ boldness and “ access with confidence through faith in “ him †.” Thus persuaded, he exhorted the “ Ephesians not to despair at his sufferings for “ them, which were indeed their glory ‡.”

But on the contrary, it was for this cause, for this universality of the christian revelation, and for the glory he took in performing the will of God, which so evidently appeared in the divine mission of his master, and in his own conversion to the christian faith, that

\* iii. 6.

† iii, 12.

‡ iii. 13.

“ he bowed his knees unto the father of  
 “ our lord Jesus Christ.”

Before we proceed with this truly apostolic prayer of Paul, we may observe, that “ to bow the knees unto the father of our lord Jesus Christ,” can have no other meaning, than to acknowledge his supreme authority and dominion ; through whom alone we live, and move, and have our being ; and “ of whom,” as he goes on to say, “ all the families in heaven and earth are named.” For, his sovereignty over all the systems of the universe, is as necessarily appertaining to the idea of deity, as his government of this small part of the immense works of his creation, which we now behold with our eyes. Similar expressions to those which we are now considering, are also used by the prophet Isaiah \*, “ unto me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear ;” which is also cited by the same apostle in the epistle to the Romans †, “ as I live, faith the Lord, every knee shall bow to

\* xlv. 23.

† xiv. 11.

“ me,

“ me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” And so plainly does “ bowing of the knee” imply the acknowledgment of the authority of God, as the sovereign ruler and disposer of all things, that we cannot readily conceive the expression to be understood in any other sense.

But so singular, and inadequate to the genuine and natural sense, is the construction sometimes given to the language of the scriptures, that when the apostle, in his epistle to the Philippians \*, speaks of the favours shewn by almighty God to Christ, and the final universal prevalence of the christian faith, (in words, which in the conclusion of the sentence declare the supreme, absolute, and independent authority of God,) many christians adopt the literal sense of a familiar expression, and pay that bodily distinction and reverence at the mention of the name of Jesus, which they very properly omit at the name of God. The passage to which I allude is thus expressed; “ Wherefore God hath  
“ highly exalted him, and graciously be-

\* ii. 10.

“ stowed upon him a name which is above  
 “ every name: that at the name of Jesus  
 “ every knee should bow, of things in  
 “ heaven, and things in earth, and things  
 “ under the earth; and that every tongue  
 “ should confess, that Jesus Christ is  
 “ lord, to the glory of God the father\*.  
 It is, I presume, upon the authority of this  
 text, countenanced by the practice of paga-  
 nism on similar occasions, that christian  
 idolaters introduced the genu-flexion at the  
 name of Jesus; and in compliance with a  
 custom, which seems to have been retained  
 among protestants, without considering its  
 nature or tendency, it is practised, even at  
 this day, by some, from whom better things  
 might have been expected. These persons  
 should consider, that if such bending of the  
 knee, or reverence, at the name of Jesus,  
 means any thing, it means too much, and  
 affords a presumptive evidence that they ad-

\* Phil. ii. 9—11. This passage ought to be ren-  
 dered, “ that in the name (i. e. by the authority) of Jesus  
 “ every knee of beings in heaven, on earth, and under the  
 “ earth, should bow;” (i. e. submit to the power of the  
 father.)

mit the superiority of the man Jesus Christ, to the one God and father of all: and if such habitual gesture anyway tends to mislead the understanding, by adopting so gross an interpretation of the passage, as to transfer our religious homage from God, to the person of Christ, it surely ought to be discontinued. If it should be said in the way of excusing the practice, that it signifies very little, and is not generally considered as involving such consequences, then it may well be spared as nugatory and trifling.

But to return to the argument of our apostle in the context of our subject.

Having acknowledged the supreme authority of God, “ the father of our lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth are named;” he proceeds to pray to that same God and father of Jesus Christ, that he would grant that the Ephesian converts might be enabled, by the influence of his superintending spirit, or power, to take up the cross of Christ, profess their faith in him, and be obedient to his commands; that they might be “rooted and grounded in love,”

(i. e. in the love of God, of Christ, of all their fellow-creatures,) for “love,” as he elsewhere says, “is the fulfilling of the law \* ;” and by this means be enabled to comprehend, with all truly good and holy men, “what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;” that is to say, be thoroughly and sensibly impressed with the essential excellence and perfection of God, and live under the proper influence of such improved knowledge : and further, that they might know and understand the “love of Christ,” meaning thereby the principle of love to man, upon which the institution first preached by him was given to the world ; a principle, which, in its purity and extent surpasseth human knowledge and conception, which can only know God in part, and see him, as through a glass, imperfectly †. Finally, in consequence of these advances in our christian calling, the apostle prays that the disciples of our lord might be filled with “all the fulness of God,” might be partakers of the divine gifts then imparted

\* Rom. xiii. 10.

† 1 Cor. xiii.



to the faithful christian, or, having God always before them, in this dispensation of mercy and love, they might the more nearly approach perfection, trying to be perfect even as their heavenly father is perfect.

Our apostle, in the text, and in the argument with which it is connected, inculcates upon the church at Ephesus, and satisfies the jews also who dwelt there, that the disciples of Christ “ bowed the knee” only “ to the “ God and father of their lord Jesus Christ.” This protest tended to convince the jews, that, as on the one hand, the christians bended not the knee to Baal, so likewise, on the other, that they did not give divine honors to their lord and master Jesus Christ, who had been born and had lived among them, and died on the cross by the hands of their countrymen. The jews expected indeed the messiah to be a great temporal prince, and his kingdom to be of this world; but they did not expect him to claim, nor were they disposed to give to him, the ascriptions and honors due only to Jehovah.

Indeed the doctrine of the new Testament is so plain and clear on this head, that, were it

not

not for the systems of theology, which men have fondly formed, it would require more than an ordinary degree of discernment to find any other God there, than the one living and true God. The early christians found none other, nor, until the desire of being wise above what was written had produced the jargon of the schools, do we hear of any other God among christians, but Jehovah.

There is also to be observed in the language of our apostle a beautiful simplicity in speaking of the character of the creator, and his connection with his creatures. He is first spoken of as “ the father of our lord Jesus Christ,” and, immediately after, as equally the parent of the whole family in heaven and earth. Good and holy men are frequently called, in the scriptures, “ sons of God ;” which appellation is emphatically given to Jesus Christ, as well on account of his pre-eminence in all human excellence, as of his peculiar and distinguished designation to reveal the mind and will of God to man. We cannot, therefore, while we know ourselves to be “ heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ \* ;”

\* Rom. viii. 17.

we cannot, I say, give into, or acquiesce in, the doctrines of dark and ignorant ages, which first broached the notions of the eternal generation and procession of the son, or his co-equality and co-eternity with the father; ages, in which schoolmen and divines confounded their understanding in the maze and labyrinth of metaphysical theology, and finally lost their charity in the contest; leaving to their christian descendants nothing but the ill-temper with which they managed their controversies, without any improved light or information to correct it.

In the conclusion of a passage in the epistle of Paul to the Philippians\*, which has been frequently cited to prove the divinity and pre-existence of Christ, and has been as frequently, and very satisfactorily otherwise applied, our apostle goes on to say; “ Every tongue shall confess,” not the divinity or pre-existence of our great master, but, “ that Jesus Christ is lord, to the glory of God the father:” which is a positive declaration, that they should acknowledge

\* ii. 11.

Jesus Christ to be lord in his own proper spiritual kingdom, and that his gospel should finally prevail in bringing all men to the acknowledgment of its authority, and into subjection to truth and righteousness, to the glory of God, the father, whose delegated messenger Christ was, whose mind and will he declared, and whose cause he maintained unto death.

So far, therefore, as these sentiments are the result of our own inquiry and conviction, it is the duty of every individual among us to abide by them ourselves, and to promote them among others. And, while we have employed our time and attention in attaining the right knowledge of our christian faith, it were impossible that either the moral duties of the gospel, or the practical example of our master, should have escaped our observation.

Earnestly as we ought to contend for the faith, and prompt and willing as we ought to be, to sacrifice this world's goods and prospects in support of the unity of God, (being the foundation and corner-stone of all true religion,) against all the sophistry of the  
learned,

learned, or the power of every civil institution, we have the duties of an holy and virtuous life written down so legibly that he who runs may read; duties, concerning which there is no controversy in respect to their obligation, and ought to be none concerning their practice, except in respect to the degree of improvement to which we may attain. Our duties to God, our neighbour, and ourselves, are implanted in the conscience of every man; they are so plain, striking, and universal that the passing stranger and the unlettered peasant will tell us them: the mutual interests of society require the performance of them, inasmuch that those who themselves daringly neglect them, do not wholly deny either the authority of the precepts, or withhold praise from those who observe them.

Whatever may be the received sentiments of the multitude, subject as they are to be influenced by prejudice, interest, or indolence, it becomes us to regard them as fellow-men, and fellow-christians; and, we ought also to be as ready to receive further light and information, from whatever quarter it may  
 come,

come, as we ought to be willing to give it to others, when we have it in our power so to do. As we expect to find mercy with God, and hope, at least, to receive kindness and charity from men; let us consult the true dignity of our character in the scale of rational beings; and, while we resist the dogmas and dominion of others, in the concerns of religion and conscience, let us regard their persons as our brethren.

To conclude. In any and every religious disquisition, in which we may be engaged, let us employ no other weapons than scripture and reason to establish our faith, or to confute the argument of our adversaries; and, let us be careful to crown the whole by exhibiting the strongest proof of its good effect, in our own irreproachable life and conversation.

S E R M O N II.

CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD.

MATTHEW XVI. 16.

SIMON PETER ANSWERED, AND SAID, THOU ART  
CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD.

THE whole of that portion of scripture with which this passage is connected contains much important matter, as it respects the proper nature and character of Jesus; and the foundation whereon he professed to unite his followers in the confession that he was "the Christ, the son of the living God."

But, we will state, and follow the gospel account, without presuming upon any conclusion, before we produce the evidence in support of it. This will be the most certain way to attain the knowledge of the true meaning of our lord in the conversation, which he is here represented to have had with some

of

of his disciples, and, particularly, of his reply to the declaration, or confession of Peter.

The passage before us, and, indeed, the context itself have suffered much from the too prevalent practice of inverting this rational mode of construction, and drawing conclusions from broken and unconnected parts of sentences, which have been found to subvert the true meaning of the whole, taken together. And, probably, the misapprehension of no one single passage in the new Testament has done more essential injury to the cause of genuine christianity, than that which is intended to be the subject of our present attention.

The evangelist Matthew writes \*, “ when  
 “ Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea  
 “ Philippi,” i. e. in the neighbourhood of that town in Galilee-Superior, [which was so called, in compliment to Philip, the tetrarch, and in contradistinction to Cæsarea, a port in the lower Galilee on the Mediterranean sea, and frequently mentioned in the acts of the apostles; both taking their names in honor of the Cæsar family, the former after Tiberius, and the latter after Augustus

\* xvi. 13.



Cæſar\*:] “ When Jeſus came into the  
 “ coaſts,” (or, towns, as Mark† writes,) “ of  
 “ Cæſarea Philippi, he aſked of his diſciples,  
 “ ſaying, whom do men ſay that I, the ſon  
 “ of man, am ?” or, as it may more properly  
 be divided into two queſtions, and rendered,  
 according to the judgment of ſome very  
 learned, and every way competent critics ‡;  
 “ whom do men ſay that I am ? Do they ſay  
 “ I am the ſon of man ?” i. e. the meſſiah.  
 Whichever reading we adopt, though we  
 vary the phraſeology, we do not alter the ſenſe  
 of the queſtion. For, in the firſt, our lord  
 declares himſelf the ſon of man, or a man ;  
 in the other, he preſumes that the people had  
 conceived of him as ſuch, and no other, and  
 intended to ſay, that in ſo doing they had  
 judged rightly.

The diſciples answered, in return to this  
 inquiry, “ Some ſay that thou art John the  
 “ baptiſt ; ſome, Elias ; and others, Jeremias ;

\* Doddridge, v. I. ſect. 88. note (c).

† vii. 27.

‡ See Dr. Jebb’s note on the place, in Dr. Priſtley’s  
 Harmony. p. 115. and Markland’s note in Bowyer’s  
 Conjectures. 4to edit.

“ or one of the prophets.” Which implies, that though there were various conjectures in respect to the identity of his person, all accounts agreed in this, that he was an ordinary man, like ourselves, however greatly favored of God. Some concluded that he was John the baptist, risen from the dead ; some that he was Elias, or Elijah, the prophet, the forerunner of the messiah ; some thought he was Jeremiah, whom the jews are said to have expected to appear among them at that time\* ; while others, in a more general way, thought that he was one of the ancient prophets risen again.

Jesus having thus heard from his disciples, who were present, the several opinions which had been entertained concerning him, in the country at large, brought the question more immediately home to themselves, being desirous to know what notions they, who professed themselves to be his followers, had formed of him. “ He saith unto them, “ But whom say ye that I am? Whereupon, Simon Peter answered, and said, “ Thou art the Christ, the son of the living

\* See Doddridge. v. i. p. 572. note on the place.

“ God :”

“ God :” or, according to Mark \*, “ Thou  
 “ art the Christ :” or, according to Luke †,  
 “ the Christ of God.” The variation in the  
 statement, by these three historians of this re-  
 ply of Peter, in the name of himself and  
 fellow-disciples, affords one strong evidence,  
 among many others, of the credibility of the  
 account ; for, as those who looked for “ the  
 “ Christ,” or messiah, universally considered  
 him as a man, commissioned or appointed by  
 God, the governor of the world, so the de-  
 scription of Matthew and Luke amount to that,  
 and no more. And though they are some-  
 what more explicit in their account, while  
 Mark simply writes “ the Christ,” they, in  
 truth, no more add to the character of our lord  
 by their expressed additional description, than  
 Mark takes from it by his silence. By the ex-  
 pression, “ son of the living God,” nothing  
 more is to be understood, than the most high-  
 ly beloved, and greatly favored of all his crea-  
 tures ; or, the one, most highly honored  
 among the sons of men, as he speaks of him-  
 self in the opening of his inquiry into the  
 opinions entertained of him.

\* viii. 29.

† ix. 20.

The parallel accounts of Mark and Luke close here, except indeed in reciting the charge which Jesus gave them to tell no man what had passed; while Matthew, being more minute and circumstantial in his narrative, goes on to relate, that “ † Jesus answered, and said unto Peter, Blessed art thou, “ Simon Bar-jona; (i. e. Simon the son of “ Jonas;) for flesh and blood hath not revealed “ it unto thee, but my father who is in hea- “ ven.” Blessed are you, and my other disciples, who are with you, who have formed such just and true notions of me; for this knowledge ye have not obtained by any ordinary human means, but, in consequence of your earnest desire, and good disposition to receive the truth, it has been imparted unto you, by the revelation of my father who is in heaven, the God and father of us all.

“ † And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, “ and upon this rock,” (alluding to the real signification of this name,) “ I will build my “ church: and the gates of hell,” (or rather of death,) “ shall not prevail against it.” Meaning, hereby, to assure Peter, and his

\* xvi. 17.

† ver. 18.

fellow-

fellow-disciples, (for whom he had answered, as well as for himself), that upon this confession, that he was “ the Christ, the “ son of the living God ;” i. e. the promised messiah, and prophet, he would build his church : that as a rock whereupon one would erect a building which should have an enduring foundation, against which the rains should descend, the flood should come, and the winds should blow without effect, so by this simple and general confession, without any further description, would he know and call all his future followers and disciples ; that he would look unto them for no profession of faith, other than their belief that Jesus was the Christ, and that he was thereto appointed by his father, who was in heaven.

It is very true, and readily admitted, that this mere belief, or assent of the mind, will of itself be ineffectual to our final acceptance, unless it be accompanied by a suitable life, in all honesty and godly sincerity. But it is hence abundantly evident, that the true profession of christianity, does not necessarily, as some would willingly teach, involve a profession of any particular doctrines, which

men may pretend to deduce from the christian scriptures, and to which they may have attached themselves, from the prejudice of education, the force of habit, or even the result of fair and diligent inquiry; but that this profession is confined to the belief of the truth of the revelation in general. The specific doctrines therein taught, must be differently apprehended according to men's different judgment, and their different means of information. But further, continues our lord, the truth of this plain, and general proposition, that "Jesus is the Christ," and appointed to declare the will of God, shall prevail over all the opposition it may meet with; the "gates of death," the powers of this world, i. e. "the devices of those who have the power of death\*," shall "never prevail against it," or be able to destroy it.

Correspondent with this interpretation, from whence I would deduce the sufficiency of the confession of our faith in the divine authority of Jesus Christ and of his revelation, to denominate us CHRISTIANS, we may

\* See Dr. Priestley's Harmony. p. 115. note on v. 18. and also bp. Hurd's sermons. v. iii. p. 340. note.

justly urge the testimony of Paul. In his epistle to the Romans\*, he writes, that “ the word of faith which the apostles of Christ preached, was, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” The evangelist Luke also in the Acts † relates, that when Paul “ reasoned with” the jews of Theffalonica, “ out of the scriptures, he opened, and alledged” to them “ that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that Jesus whom he preached unto them, was the Christ.” And Jesus himself declares ‡ the sufficiency of Martha’s faith, that he was “ the Christ, the son of God, which should come into the world.” And lastly, John, in his first epistle §, says, “ whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the son of God,” or the messiah, “ God dwelleth in him, and he in God;” i. e. he will see and acknowledge the will of God thus revealed, and un-

\* x. 8, 9.

† xvii. 2, 3.

‡ John xi. 25—27.

§ iv. 14, 15.

der fuch conviction will act agreeably thereto; for God will blefs his difpofition and endeavours after obedience, if he will direct his thoughts and attention to the giver of every good thing.

I wifh to obferve here, that Jefus cannot be underftood to refer himfelf in this converfation, with any propriety or confiftency, to Peter perfonally and alone, to the excluſion of his fellow-diſciples then preſent with him; notwithstanding many learned perſons have ſo apprehended this reply\*.

For, it is moſt probable, that as the company preſent were equally concerned in the interview and in the reſult of the converſation, Jefus would equally addreſs himſelf to them all. And if we conſult the epiſtle to the Ephelians† we ſhall find that Paul tells us that the chriſtian church is “built upon the foundation of the apoſtles and prophets, Jefus Chriſt himſelf being the chief corner-ſtone.”

\* See Dr. Clarke's Paraphraſe of the place, and Doddrige, v. I. p. 573. who appropriate the reply to Peter alone; as does biſhop Hurd. Sermons, v. iii. f. xix. p. 337—339.

† ii. 20.

And,



And, again, he writes to the Corinthians \*,  
 “ other foundation can no man lay, than  
 “ that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”  
 And the apostle John, in the Revelations †,  
 describing the heavenly Jerusalem, (mean-  
 ing, according to some ‡, the future state of  
 christianity; but, according to others §, the  
 future state of happiness in heaven,) writes  
 that “ the wall of the city had twelve foun-  
 “ dations, and in them the names of the  
 “ twelve apostles of the lamb:” that is, ac-  
 cording to the former, “ pure and uncorrupt  
 “ christianity is built upon no other founda-  
 “ tion, but that of the apostles and prophets,  
 “ Jesus Christ himself being the head corner  
 “ stone,” as before stated; or, according to  
 the latter, that “ the twelve apostles of  
 “ Christ had this honour, as the founders of  
 “ the christian church, by Christ’s immedi-  
 “ ate commission and authority; figuratively  
 “ shewing, that they who shall build their  
 “ faith on the foundation of apostolical doc-

\* 1 Cor. iii. 11.

† xxi. 14.

‡ See Pyle’s Paraphrase on the place.

§ See Lowman’s Paraphrase. 8vo. 1773. p. 349, 350.

“trine and institutions, have a right to the  
 “blessings of this holy and happy state\*.”  
 Both of these interpretations are in perfect  
 agreement with the conclusion which I draw  
 from this passage, that Christ addressed his pro-  
 mise to Peter and his fellow-apostles jointly.

But to return; according to Matthew, Jesus went on to declare to Peter, “I will  
 “give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of  
 “heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind  
 “on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and  
 “whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall  
 “be loosed in heaven.” This declaration  
 and promise appear also to be addressed to  
 Peter, and his fellow-disciples with him, for  
 it is the continuation of the same conversa-  
 tion; and, in their name, as well as in his  
 own, he answered the question put to them  
 all by Jesus, just before, in the words,  
 “whom say ye that I am?” The natural  
 and obvious meaning of our lord should  
 seem to be as follows, I will leave with you  
 my disciples, the more particular and inti-  
 mate knowledge of the kingdom of heaven;

\* Lowman's Paraphrase. 8vo, p. 357, 358.

i. e. the true nature of my gospel, by which all men shall know me, and be led to live with God in heaven. And, indeed, in illustration of this promise, Peter, who, though he had no superiority over the other disciples, was the first, in point of time, who preached it both to the jews \* at Pentecost, and to the gentiles in the person of Cornelius †.

But further, to give full effect to this extraordinary knowledge of my kingdom, (of which he said he gave them the keys, in allusion to their ready admission into such knowledge †;) yourself and certain others your fellow-disciples, “ shall have authority to declare what precepts of the mosaic dispensation are superseded, and what are continued; what things are allowed or forbidden to my disciples §.” In other words,

\* Acts ii.

† Acts x.

‡ “ In allusion to the image of the key, as the ensign of power, the unlimited extent of that power is expressed, with great clearness as well as force, by the sole and exclusive authority to open and shut.” See Lowth’s note on Isaiah xxii. 22.

§ Doddridge Par. and note, v. i. p. 575.—but see also the Occasional paper. v. ii. n. 7. p. 26, &c.

ye shall have full commission, not arbitrarily to condemn and pardon, as some would read it, but, to declare the whole law or counsel of God, whereby those who profess themselves my disciples shall be tried, and finally accepted with him, or punished.

After this very explicit conversation which Jesus held with Peter, in the course of which he had avowed himself to be the Christ, or messiah, promised aforesaid; after he had declared that such confession was the descriptive character of a christian; that his religion should survive all opposition; that certain of his disciples, stiled apostles, should have competent knowledge, and be fully empowered to teach his gospel to the world; Matthew adds, (as Mark and Luke have done at the end of their accounts:) that “ then “ charged he his disciples,” (for he was speaking, as was observed before, to others of them, as well as to Peter,) “ that they should “ tell no man that he was the Christ.” This he did, probably, because he might foresee that this declaration of himself to his disciples, which was necessary, at that time on their own account, would prematurely render

render both himself and them obnoxious to the Romans; who might thence unreasonably involve their mistaken notions and conceits of him, with the civil government of Cæsar, with which, in truth, he had no concern. For this, or some similar reason of necessary prudence, he forbade them to publish what he had said to them, knowing that the hour was not yet come.

Having now explained the passage before us, and its context, we will make a few general observations upon the whole of the preceding narrative, which is, in its consequences, of very great importance to all professing christians.

First; on this, as on all other occasions, when Jesus spake of himself, he declared that he was the Christ, or messiah, sent or appointed by his father in heaven to declare his will to men; and, that being thus the most highly honored of all his creatures, and having been born for this purpose, he was emphatically, and, by way of eminence, stiled the "son of God," as declarative of the particular authority by which he acted. In the same sense, Paul, when he exhorts every good man

man to study the scriptures, in his second epistle to Timothy\*, says, they were “ given “ for instruction in righteousness, that the “ MAN OF GOD may be perfected;” meaning, that the best of men may improve themselves by a serious application to the word of God.

Secondly. From the consideration of the broad foundation whereon Christ intended to collect together his followers, and ultimately all nations, we should be led to disapprove of all the little confined notions we may have observed in others; and to correct such as we may discover in ourselves, whereby different societies of christians are tempted to think too highly of themselves, and too uncharitably of others. To profess our belief in one God, “ that he is, and that he is the “ rewarder of them who diligently seek “ him †;” and that Jesus is the messiah, are all the discriminating and fundamental distinctions to be found in the scriptures. But how contrary to this enlarged institution, founded in love to mankind, and whose spirit is the spirit of universal benevolence one towards another; how contrary to this, has

\* iii. 16, 17.

† Heb. xi. 6.

been the conduct of professing christians of almost all denominations, who have been bigotted to the credenda of some system, and have conducted themselves with little charity towards those who differed from them. How many, at a very early period of the christian æra, called themselves, of Paul, of Apollos, and of Cephas ; and, in succeeding times, of Athanasius, of Arius, and of Socinus, each attempting, as it were, “ to divide” and confound the gospel of Christ ; whereas, it is required of us to make our common profession in him alone, as our head, our lord, or master ; and of each of us, separately, to interpret the word of God, according as we shall have learned it, and understand it ; and to follow his holy life in all things, and in nothing more than in his abounding charity, mutually bearing, and forbearing with each other ?

And, while we note the genuine and simple requisition of Christ, we cannot but deplore and protest against the unreasonable demands of men ; against their unjustifiable impositions upon the consciences of their fellow-creatures, affecting to be wise above what is written ; and against every unchristian attempt

attempt to straiten even the narrow way that leadeth unto life ; and to harass and persecute those among their fellow-christians, who exercise themselves in the liberty, wherein Christ, their master, hath left them free.

Thirdly. It may reasonably be the occasion of further concern, when we consider the great degree of darkness and oppression which has followed every perversion of the gospel of truth ; and that every advance in the grand apostacy, in whatever country, and in whatever case admitted, has been attended with a proportionate increase of spiritual tyranny, and civil slavery. We may safely say that these things are not the legitimate offspring of the gospel, which is a law of liberty ; but the natural product of the systems and cunningly devised fables of men, equally contradictory to the whole tenor and spirit of the holy scriptures, and to common sense. In this case, as in others, the observation will hold true, that the corruption of the best institutions too frequently generates the worst and most grievous systems of tyranny. And hence it is, that he “ who came to bring “ peace into the world,” has been made, as  
himself



himself foretold, the innocent occasion of the sword's going forth into all lands where his gospel has been preached, and of " setting  
 " the son at variance against his father, and  
 " the daughter against her mother;" and  
 raising up adversaries against us, " even  
 " among those of our own family \*."

Lastly. Let us, my brethren, impress our minds with this truth, that Christ assures us of the sufficiency of the preaching of himself and his apostles, by telling us that he had authority to reveal the will of God who sent him; and that they also should have the power to declare what things were enjoined, and what forbidden to us. And that we are elsewhere told, by the great apostle of the gentiles †, that though " an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto us, than  
 " that which they preached," we are to reject him.

\* Matt. x. 35, 36.

† Gal. i. 8.



S E R M O N    I I I .

T H E   U S E   O F   L I T U R G I E S .

I C O R I N T H I A N S   X I V .   1 5 .

I WILL PRAY WITH THE SPIRIT, AND I WILL PRAY WITH THE UNDERSTANDING ALSO: I WILL SING WITH THE SPIRIT, AND I WILL SING WITH THE UNDERSTANDING ALSO.

THE result of the apostle's general argument in this chapter appears to be expressed in the words now repeated. Having rejected the use of a foreign language, which was unknown to the hearers, in the offices of devotion, though he had himself a very general acquaintance with the learning of his time; he resolves to "pray with the spirit," or to have his mind devoutly occupied in the employment, but, at the same time, "to pray "with the understanding also," that is to say, in a known and familiar language, using

that purity of sentiment, and simplicity of expression, which are peculiarly proper, and even necessary in the exercise of prayer.

Prayer is a duty of natural as well as revealed religion, and is practised, though under great variety of circumstances, by every nation upon the earth. For, the obligation to pray to our creator and protector is binding upon us from a principle of gratitude to our greatest benefactor; and is chiefly to be attended to and performed, (even in the design of our benefactor himself,) as the mean of our own improvement, by accustoming our minds to the contemplation of his nature and attributes, and our dependance upon him for all we are, all we have, and all we hope for.

This holy exercise recommends itself to our approbation and practice, by its usefulness in all the several scenes of privacy and solitude, in our family and social intercourse, and in the public assemblies for that very purpose: by the exercise of this duty, retirement may be improved to our real edification, and our society with our kindred of mankind may be cemented by mutual love, and the  
 consideration

consideration of the common interest which we have in all the dispensations of God.

Some considerations there are which appear to be primary and essential requisites to the edifying performance of this duty, and others which are highly expedient to that end.

(I.) It is primarily and essentially requisite to the edifying performance of this duty, both in public and private, that we direct our petitions to that being, who is alone capable of hearing, and of answering them; and that we make our offering of praise, thanksgiving and adoration unto none other than the one only living and true God; to him, whose comprehension enables him to know all our real wants, and what is best for us, and who alone has power to supply our necessities. To give divine honours to any other being, how much so ever the practice may be countenanced by numbers, or explained by that temporizing language, which is only calculated to confound the understanding of men, and to give sanction to the grossest superstition, is properly denominated idolatry, and is only pardonable in such cases, where the

ignorance of the worshipper is involuntary and unavoidable.

But, further, to be true worshippers of God, we must worship him in spirit and in truth; we must give up our whole heart and mind to the service in which we shall be engaged; we must enter upon and conduct that service with all possible seriousness, integrity, and simplicity. And though we may not, at all times, attain the same holy fervor, which has been exhibited by some of the most eminent characters in the history of our faith; we may correct our indifference, fix our attention, open our understanding to conviction, and prepare our minds to receive the most favorable impressions from an exercise so well calculated to improve us in every respect.

Nor is the rational worshipper of his God to rise from offering the acceptable sacrifice of prayer, disappointed, much less accused by self-reproach, or distrust, because he does not experience the flash of instantaneous illumination. Such communications are now only the creatures of an over-heated imagination. It is by a serious, rational, and repeated

repeated intercourse with God in prayer, that our tempers and dispositions are gradually improved, and our behaviour, under every dispensation of his providence, rendered more becoming the character we profess.

(II.) It is also necessary, that we offer up our petitions to heaven for such things only, in respect to the present life, as are fitting for our christian warfare, or needful for our comfort as sojourners in this world. For, in laying our wants before him, who knoweth our necessities before we ask, and is more willing to give, than we to pray, we submit our cause to him who can best judge how far it will contribute to our greatest good, to grant or to deny our request.

(III.) It is surely wholly needless to urge the necessity of seriousness, attention, and as much abstraction as possible from all obtruding thoughts concerning things foreign to such a service. And it should be equally needless to dwell upon the advice of Solomon, not to be rash with our mouth, or hasty to utter any thing before God, but to “let our words be few\*.” Agreeably to

\* Eccles. v. 2.

which, it was one occasion of reproof of the phariſees, that they “ made long prayers;” and, for the ſame reaſon, the diſciples of Chriſt were forbidden to “ uſe vain repetitions,” and had a ſhort and comprehensive form given unto them for their future uſe.

But it may ſeem the more immediate object of our text, and, therefore, of our preſent attention, to conſider particularly what it is to pray with the ſpirit, and with the underſtanding; and how this can be beſt effected.

There can be no doubt concerning theſe leading and eſſential characteristics of true genuine devotion, ſo far as they reſpect private prayer; for where the party who ſupplicates the throne of heaven is competently intelligent, his ſpirit and underſtanding will unite, and accompany each other in every ſentiment and expreſſion of piety towards God, and of repenſance and reſolution of amendment regarding himſelf. In the caſe of public prayer, many matters of expediency are to be taken into the account, and to be conſidered and admitted according as their reſpective importance ſhall deſerve: taking  
care



care that we observe this wise caution of our apostle, that “ all things be done to edifying\*.

When we are told that the scriptures are read, and the public prayers of a very large body of christians are conducted, in a language unknown to the congregation, a rational and unbiaſſed mind will require no argument to demonstrate the absurdity of such a practice. Concerning which, any one, unaccustomed to such intolerable mockery of all devotion, would be more inclined to doubt of the truth of the fact, than to want a conviction of its absurdity and impiety.

But another consideration, which is the respective advantages of prescribed forms and extempore prayer, has, at different times, much engaged the attention of protestants: This question, therefore, may deserve our attention, although we may be considered as having in some degree decided it for ourselves, by our practice. Our opinions may, at least, be presumed; but it is nevertheless proper that we should have sufficient reasons to give in vindication of our

\* 1 Cor. xiv. 26.

practice, as well as, on other occasions, of the general hope that is in us.

(1.) It may, in the first place, be observed that the ministers officiating in the congregations of christians are men of like infirmities and weakneses with their hearers. The warmth and ardor of youth, the failure of memory, and intellect in old age, are unequal to the judicious direction of public extempore prayer; and these necessarily incidental circumstances, though they may never deserve blame, are sometimes without remedy. But further, they are also unequal in mental endowments to each other, and, on the pressure of any bodily disorder, or even external contingencies, oftentimes, as we say, unequal to themselves. Hence, not the manner only, but the matter of their devotion, if committed to the effusion of extempore prayer, properly so called, will be very unequally interesting to the hearers; it will sometimes be languid, sometimes violent, sometimes much distracted.

(2.) But, even supposing the most rare assemblage of talents for conducting this work of the ministry extempore, how can they be  
so

fo effectually adequate to the improvement of the hearers, who are not previously acquainted with that service, in which they are expected to join, and to express their concurrence ; for, our apostle's argument, in the case of praying in an unknown tongue, will also apply to that of extempore prayer ; “ how,” saith he, “ shall he that occupieth the place  
“ of the unlearned, say, Amen, at the giving  
“ of thanks, seeing he understandeth not  
“ what is said \* ?”

The right of private judgment is deservedly considered by all consistent protestants, as most sacred in all our religious concerns, and more particularly in all our intercourses with God in prayer ; but to exercise it only in the choice of the place of public worship, or of the person who conducts it, is to relinquish the greatest object of its privilege, and to transfer our dependance upon our own understanding, and the knowledge of our prayers, to the understanding and judgment of another, less competent to the work than ourselves. For we should remember, that when we commit ourselves to the dis-

\* 1 Cor. xiv. 16.

cretion and judgment of others, we also commit ourselves to the indiscretion and passions of men. Hard and oppressive as has been justly conceived the imposition of certain subscriptions of assent to written propositions of human device; the practice, of which we are now speaking, appears to me, to be equivalent to a tacit subscription to doctrinal articles which the person subscribing has never considered: to be a voluntary surrender of our own judgment in a most important point, and whereon we ought, in an especial manner, to determine for ourselves; and, contrary also to the vital principle of protestantism, to repute that confidence in the persons of men, which we refuse to place in any human system of faith and doctrine.

If it should be said here, that all liturgies, or previously composed forms of prayer, are of human composition, the fact is very true, but we deny the consequence which is proposed to be drawn from the observation: because, by such liturgies or forms being printed and published, every member of the congregation has the opportunity of knowing the religious service in which he is expected  
to

to join, and by his previous acquaintance with, and approbation of it, he virtually makes it his own.

(3.) Again. It is very generally acknowledged that the composition of prayer is the most difficult of all others. Every expression should be well considered, sufficiently comprehensive, intelligible, significant, and accurate; for the distance between the creator and the creature equally commands reverence, and forbids familiarity. The circumstance also of a congregation of mixed persons, greatly varied in their private situations in life, requires the most general and comprehensive language; the omniscience of God admits not of vain repetitions, and the dependance of man should shut out every presumptuous thought, “for God is in heaven, and thou art on the earth.”

(4.) Again. It is very observable, that the hearing extempore prayer, while it engages the attention, distracts, or divides the understanding. For, while the ear is given to the words spoken, the understanding is employed in examining and digesting them, and in assenting to or rejecting their meaning either in  
part

part or in the whole : and in the exercise of these faculties, at the conclusion of one sentence, the connecting and succeeding one is in danger of being lost. It may also be further presumed, that the speaker himself, while praying to almighty God, in the presence, and in the name of a numerous congregation, must share in some diversion of thought, in selecting his words, in consulting the proper arrangement of them, and in adjusting the whole to the great and excellent end he may have in view, the edification of his hearers, and the leading them on to their own everlasting happiness ; even if he delivers himself from memory, (which may be more generally the case,) he will be much occupied in the accurate recollection of his composition, and which, after all, will, with respect to the hearers, be liable to all the objections made against extempore prayer.

It is worthy of remark here, that though it is as allowable to praise God extempore, as to pray to him in that manner ; yet extempore psalm-singing, is no where adopted ; but select compositions are used, from the consideration of expediency, that we may sing  
 so

so as to be understood : and this reason holds as strongly in favor of prescribed forms in the case of prayer.

(5.) Again. It is of very considerable consequence that we study to attain propriety and correctness in the composition of our public prayers, not merely for the sake of polished and harmonious periods, but for a much more important purpose, the just expression and conveyance of ideas suitable to the occasion. In this view, a precomposed form has every advantage : for, however extraordinarily favored some men may be in the gift of talents peculiarly suited to this arduous work, there must be very few men indeed, who can say, that the effusion of the instant would not be improvable on a careful revision ; or even that it would be incapable of further improvement, on repeated and future revivals. For all claims to inspiration in the protestant church have no better title than those to infallibility in the popish communion. Imperfections, therefore, have attended the best-digested liturgies, though they have been the production of much thought  
and

and deliberation, and of good and solid judgments.

From this circumstance alone, the hearer of extempore prayer is liable to be more frequently interrupted in his devotions, by a critical attention to the language and composition of the prayers of his minister. A consideration this, which, though it is unavoidable, is to be lamented, for it disturbs that composure and singleness of mind which should accompany our prayers, in every confession of our past offences, and resolution of amendment, in every sentiment of gratitude and thankfulness for mercies received, and in every supplication for future favor and forgiveness.

There are two exceptions indeed to the strict adherence to the use of prescribed forms in congregations, where a printed liturgy is used, but which are only justifiable from considerations of temporary and occasional propriety. Occurrences and events of a public nature will sometimes happen, for which there may be no suitable provision in a public liturgy. And private compositions  
of



of prayers immediately preceding, and at the close of, discourses from the pulpit, are admissible only, that they may the more nearly correspond with the general subject which has engaged the attention of the auditors. In these cases, the service retains the advantage of studied composition, though it is admitted that the matter thereof has not been previously considered by the congregation.

(6.) It has sometimes been said, that to give up the use of extempore prayer is to give up the peculiar distinction of protestant dissenters. This observation affords a very humiliating representation of the proper principles of dissent, and indeed not only an insufficient, but a very unjust state of their case. For the principles of a protestant dissent, are the principles of the protestant reformation; they are founded upon the unalienable right of private judgment, and extempore prayer has been shewn to militate against the proper and perfect exercise of that right. Besides, no small part of that description of christians dissent from the established church, in this our day, because they are fully persuaded of the absolute unity and supremacy of God, and therefore

cannot conform to trinitarian worship; or give the honor due only to the peerless majesty of God, to any other being whatever.

The use of liturgies, therefore, has been introduced among some of their congregations, for reasons similar to those now offered; and to object to them, because they obtrude upon a long received practice among them, (which cannot be supported even on the principle of expediency,) is to urge a weak argument upon a very important question. Surely it is more for the honor of dissenters to adopt a well digested liturgy, giving worship to God alone, in contradistinction to the tritheistic worship of every establishment on earth, than tenaciously to attach themselves to the practice of extempore prayer, and leave the object of their worship, and the language in which it shall be conducted, to the judgment of another instead of their own.

(7.) There is another objection made against the use of a prescribed form, or liturgy, which deserves attention, ; and the force with which it has hitherto been applied, should be lessened by the correction  
of

of that abuse, to which liturgies have, confessedly, been liable.

It has been a fundamental mistake in all the established churches in christendom, to be so tenacious of their respective liturgies, as to object to every revision or correction of them, notwithstanding they must necessarily require alterations, and have needed, and do continue to need them, much more than any other composition. But, without magnifying the absurdity and ill consequences of this over-fond attachment of christian churches to their own systems, their conduct has been justly compared by lord Bacon with that of those who should argue that our churches and chapels will never need repair, while our castles and houses are acknowledged to be continually falling into decay. While, therefore, we see the rock on which our forefathers have been shipwrecked, we may and ought to avoid it ourselves, that in future time, our children, and our children's children may arise, and call us blessed.

To conclude. The arguments which have been advanced against the use of extempore prayer in public worship, certainly

do not affect that practice, when used in the private devotions of individuals; in these every man is exclusively acquainted with the state of his own mind, and will, very properly, change and vary the subject and the forms of his prayers to God, as his several occasions shall suggest. But, in the public congregation, let us, with our apostle, “rather speak five words with our understanding, so as to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue\*”.

\* 1 Cor. xiv. 19.

S E R M O N    I V \*.

THE BLESSINGS OF PEACE.

ISAIAH II. 4.

HE SHALL JUDGE AMONG THE NATIONS, AND SHALL WORK CONVICTION IN MANY PEOPLES ; AND THEY SHALL BEAT THEIR SWORDS INTO PLOUGH-SHARES, AND THEIR SPEARS INTO PRUNING-HOOKS. NATION SHALL NOT LIFT UP SWORD AGAINST NATION ; NOR SHALL THEY LEARN WAR ANY MORE.

THIS passage is a part of a well known prophecy of Isaiah, and is immediately followed by an earnest and affectionate address to the people of Israel to live according to their knowledge of the law of God ; “ O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of Jehovah ! ”

\* Preached on Thursday, July 29, 1784, being the day appointed for a general thanksgiving for peace.

The prophet then proceeds to say, “ their  
 “ land was filled with idols, the work of  
 “ their own hands ; and they bowed them-  
 “ selves down to that which their fingers had  
 “ made. Therefore,” adds he, “ the mean  
 “ man shall be bowed down ; and the migh-  
 “ ty man shall be humbled : and God will not  
 “ forgive them \*.”

We need not to stay to account for this threatened displeasure at the idolatry of Israel, when we consider the low and unworthy ideas which idolatry generates of the deity ; and that, in its consequence, it reduces the human mind to an abject and forlorn state, distressing and pitiable, and makes it think irreverently, not only of the great first cause and author of our being, but most unjustly of his continual providence, and most benevolent dispensations. For these reasons, the jews had been selected and set apart for the better preservation of the divine unity ; and their particular attention was expressly called to this eternal truth, and never ceasing duty ; “ Hear,  
 “ O Israel ! the Lord our God is one Lord.  
 “ And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with

\* Isaiah ii. 8, 9. See Bp. Lowth's and Mr. Dodson's translations.

“ all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and  
 “ with all thy might \*.” And this we find  
 confirmed in the new Testament by our lord  
 himself, where he cites the very words, de-  
 claring it to be “ the first of all the com-  
 “ mandments †.” The uniform language  
 also of Christ and his apostles bears testimony  
 to the same great truth, and to the continued  
 importance of it; and, consequently, to our  
 obligation to make profession of it before the  
 world, when we are so convinced.

With respect to the prophetic description  
 of the messiah’s future kingdom, we are not,  
 we cannot be uninterested, while we ourselves  
 are in any degree impeded to its full  
 completion. The doctrines and precepts of  
 the gospel of Christ are founded upon the  
 most enlarged principles of “ peace on earth,  
 “ and good will towards men;” they are di-  
 rectly calculated to produce these blessings by  
 allaying all animosities, by stifling all resent-  
 ments; by suppressing every thought, word,  
 and deed, which may be likely to injure or  
 offend any one; by teaching not only charity  
 to our friends, and acts of kindness to those

\* Deut. vi. 4, 5.

† Mark xii. 29, 30.

from whom we may receive again, but love for our enemies. And why, but for the indulgence of evil passions, the desire of power, the being unjust to demand what is not our own, and quick to resent and punish some imagined insult to national honor, does nation continue to rise against nation, or learn war any more ?

It is insisted by the friends of the christian revelation, and admitted by its more generous adversaries, that if it has not yet been productive of that peaceable spirit which so eminently marked its founder, and with which it promises, in some distant time, to bless the nations of the earth ; it has nevertheless already greatly contributed to humanize the heart of man, and abate the horrors and ravages of war : if it has not yet prevented men from coming out to battle, it has instilled a spirit of generosity and magnanimity into enemies, which was unknown to the heathen world : it has checked the wanton spilling of human blood after victory has decided in favor of one side, and alleviated the sufferings of the prisoners and captives, who are no longer insulted by being reserved to decorate the

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the triumph of the victor, but are treated with humanity, and experience all the assistance and indulgence which their misfortunes require, or their situation will admit.

It were but an invidious task to inquire into the causes which too often induce men, who are fellow-creatures, formed by and dependent upon the same almighty power, to lift up the sword against each other, which slayeth its thousands, and involves its tens of thousands in sorrow and distress, ere it is returned into its scabbard. But, let the inquiry be made when and where it will, at any former or later period of time, and through any part of the world, we may venture to assert, that the avowed causes of war will ever be found to be infinitely short and unequal to, and utterly incapable of justifying, the fatal consequences which it necessarily brings along with it. And wherever we can come to the knowledge of the real causes of this severe scourge of the human kind, it is much to be feared that they will be seen to be very different from, and many degrees worse than, those which are assumed and held forth as ostensible to the world. How frequently,  
 alas!

alas! have the pride and pique of individuals, or private views and interest, made war to go forth, when otherwise peace would have reigned undisturbed, and every one had been left to have “ fat under his own vine, and “ his own fig-tree, and none would have made “ them afraid \* ;” and neither himself, nor his children have been bidden to have borne arms. On the present occasion of our meeting together, it were far from our purpose, in this place, to enter into a detail of things which are passed and gone. But, if it is as difficult to justify any war, as has been already insisted, that which has been lately closed, is not likely to be entitled to an exemption from the general observation. And yet, while we lament over the blood which has been spilt, the treasures which have been expended, and the losses which have been sustained by individuals, among both the contending parties, we must, as citizens of the world, rejoice in the emancipation and liberty of an extensive continent, and the independence of an injured, a brave, and united people. Nor should it be unremarked by us, that, eventually,

\* Micah iv. 3.

religious liberty has been greatly favored, and has found a place of full and legal security. In the institutions of the new confederated states, all the refinements in toleration, in which we have made some boast, but which we owe more to the temper of our people than to our laws, are lost and buried, where only they should be laid to rest, in a free, full, and perfect establishment of the christian scriptures. The various professors of the same faith, and the same hopes, under however different modes, are equally admitted to the honors and emoluments, as they equally share in the burdens, of the government.

In the events of empires let the nations which remain learn wisdom, and hence-forward limit their power over their distant members by reason and equity; let them make justice and moderation the measures of their government, mutual interest the base, and love the cement of their authority.

The lesson which we have learned is important in itself; and may become both important and useful, if applied to the future occasions of the remaining distant branches  
of

of our empire, and such parts as are not immediately encompassed by the same boundary. Our sins have been very seasonably visited with scourges. Every individual still feels, and feels them sensibly. Poverty will not cover him from, nor will wealth raise him above, the reach of them. Should it not, therefore, be the ardent prayer of us all, that, as we are separately made sensible of our state, we may collectively practise that wisdom and virtue which alone can save us from destruction?

After it had pleased God, in the events of the war, to defeat our enterprises, and accumulate our humiliation in America, it was owing to his providence that we were not given up as a prey unto our enemies in Europe; it was his protecting hand which was stretched out in our defence, and gave us victory by sea. And, after a succession of the most extraordinary events in the course of a few years, almost unparalleled in the history of the world, he has restored us to a state of peace with the surrounding nations, who had united in a formidable league against us, and assisted to rescue the child from under the  
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the authority of the parent, who, in forming too high an opinion of her right, forgot that she had not the power to command subjection.

Upon the final restoration of peace, we are placed in a situation in a great degree, if not altogether, new. In respect to our connections in Europe, our national debt, our resources for the payment of it, may these, by whomsoever ordered, be conducted with prudence, wisdom, integrity, and honor, and may public faith be preserved inviolate.

But, little probability is afforded for this expectation, or for others of internal reformation of law, if we are not at peace with ourselves. It more particularly becomes us, as christians, fervently to pray to God for the restoration of harmony, and a good understanding among our rulers, not only from the desire of a more general prevalence of the christian temper, for its own sake, but that by united counsels we may benefit by the deliberations of public wisdom and virtue, and sound policy, unimpeded by angry contentions; that, by a common consent, the efforts of able heads and honest hearts

hearts may be united and directed to give renewed virtue and vigor to our domestic government, an open and confidential commerce with our late fellow-subjects, and that respect among our neighbouring countries, which may preserve the balance of Europe.

There is one circumstance of our case as a nation, which it may not be unseasonable, to observe.

Religious liberty is enjoyed by us under so much restraint, and so many disqualifications, as to render the exercise of it precarious; it is really so cramped and confined as to obstruct and defeat its natural tendency to advance the glorious truths of the everlasting gospel, by giving perfect freedom to the human mind. It is speaking in the mildest terms, to say, that every law which enacts penalties or civil incapacities upon the profession of our religious faith, is a disgrace to a country professing itself christian, and still more so when it is called a protestant country, inasmuch as the principle which imposes any impediment in the way of the free profession of our religious persuasion, will equally apply to the original protest against the papal corruptions of our common faith.

In this imperfect and unsettled state of religious liberty in this country, more famed in our time for holding up the lights of liberal and useful knowledge to the rest of the world than for walking in the enlightened path ourselves, it becomes the duty of those who are attached to the principles of just and equal liberty, no longer to forbear to apply to the legislature for that relief, which the spirit of our religion, and the nature of the case, so pressing demand. Nor will it be less the duty than the policy, and highly becoming the honor, dignity and justice of a protestant parliament, magnanimously to give the full exercise of that liberty to Britons, which the laws of nature, reason, and religion declare to be their right.

In the expectation of this accession to religious liberty, which must be sought for by a proper and respectful application, let us individually take up a patient perseverance in the hitherto much injured cause of truth and righteousness. To the justice and equity of our plea, let us add an earnest, steady, and repeated importunity. The object is great,  
and

and worth much sedulous seeking for, because ineffimable when obtained. For, until we can profess our faith in Christ, and our own apprehension of his gospel, as freely as we breath the air around us, it will be, humanly speaking, impossible to arrive at the truth; and unreasonable to expect the full influence of the gospel to appear in the lives of christians, while the truths of it are concealed and hidden, and it's genuine spirit uncultivated.

It will further become our duty, on this return of peace to our country, as indeed at all times, to have a watchful eye upon the morals of our people, and to take especial care that our vigilance is supported and countenanced by our own example. A just sense of religion and virtue, and of their real importance to the life that now is, as well as that which is to come, are not among the leading characters of our country, or of the age in which we live. Be it our emulation, according to our opportunity and situation in the world, to promote the knowledge and practice of our duty to God and man, a reverence and love of religion  
and



and virtue. The prospect of great success may not be flattering, in the midst of the torrent of impiety and immorality among us; but neither before God, nor man, are we answerable for more than the means in our power are capable of producing or effecting: the success of any, and of all, our labors of every kind, is in the hands of him, whose instruments and agents we are. Nevertheless, even in respect to the probability of the good to be expected from any thing we can do, it was well observed by a great man now living, that “no one knows  
 “the great good which may be done, even  
 “by one man, a private individual, who  
 “makes it his business; nor can it be too  
 “much lamented, the many opportunities  
 “which are lost, by the great and powerful,  
 “of rendering extensive good to their fellow-creatures, and even that which would  
 “be durable to succeeding generations.”

To conclude. These labors, it should seem, would well and honorably employ our time and thoughts; and to these should be directed all our public energies. The security and improvement of just and constitu-

tional liberty in all it's parts, would advance the influence of religion, and would infuse the spirit of public virtue. We have received a noble inheritance in the fruit of the example and labors of our ancestors, bought at the expence of much blood, and toil, and treasure. Be it our care, to protect it from every depredation of power or time; and to deliver it to our children, exonerated from all those impediments to it's perfect enjoyment, which have arisen from measures of temporary expediency.

S E R M O N V.

THE NATURE AND EFFECT OF SIN.

I CORINTHIANS XV. 56.

THE STING OF DEATH IS SIN; AND THE STRENGTH  
OF SIN IS THE LAW.

It is the design of the apostle, in the chapter before us, to insist upon and to prove the resurrection of Christ, as well from the testimony of the number of witnesses then living, who had seen it, as from the concurring testimony of all the apostles. And, immediately, from the resurrection of Jesus Christ, to infer, and to prove, the resurrection of all his fellow-creatures of mankind.

It is the first and leading characteristic of the christian revelation, that it brought life and immortality to light. In the gospel alone we have full assurance of a future and

immortal life, or, as our apostle writes, that  
 “ as we have borne resemblance to the earth-  
 “ born, we shall also bear resemblance to the  
 “ heavenly; that this corruptible must put  
 “ on incorruption, and this mortal must  
 “ put on immortality.”

This assurance of a lengthened and never ending life, where happiness unspeakable shall attend on the faithful and obedient servants of God here, is more than commensurate to the dispersion of those desponding terrors, which attend the less enlightened walks of natural religion.

Agreeably, therefore, to this statement, when the apostle has unveiled, by adequate authority, and by arguments convincing to human intelligence, these glad tidings of the will and design of the most high, he breaks forth into a triumphant address to death and the grave; “ O death, where is thy sting? “ O grave, where is thy victory?”

To attribute personal characters to moral qualities and ideal beings, and to introduce them as speakers or agents, is a liberty assumed by, and indulged to, every writer. The genius of some languages almost requires

quires it, and all of them admit of this personification, and embodying of words and things. The knowledge of this allowed licence will enable us to explain and illustrate numberless passages both in sacred and profane writers.

Paul, having shewn that "this corruptible must put on incorruption," and, that "this mortal must put on immortality;" and, in so doing, established the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead; observes, that it confirms that fine apostrophe of the prophet, "death will be swallowed up in victory\*." As though he had said; O death, what is now become of thy dreaded sting, since thou art now impotent to destroy? O grave! where is now thy wonted victory, since thou too art disappointed in that thou canst not longer detain thy temporary prisoner? Hence, therefore, we begin to see, that "the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law."

When we first direct our attention to the mortality of our race, the senses and affections of our nature are distressed with the

\* Isaiah xxv. 8. See also Hosea xiii. 14.

awful consideration of leaving the enjoyments and gratifications of the present life; with the thoughts of our final separation from the dearest kindred and friends; and we despond through life, and greatly suffer in the close of it, under the expected annihilation of all that can please and indulge the heart of man, in the hopeless and mortifying apprehension, that we ourselves shall cease to be.

Such will be the suggestions of merely uninformed nature, among the bulk of mankind. That some of the heathen philosophers have soared above these ideas, is most true. Socrates laboured to bring men to the knowledge of one supreme God, and the study of natural religion; and, in his death, spake of entering upon a better life, a state of perfect health, and happiness. But Cicero declared, on some of the most important points, that it was impossible to determine on which side lay, even the greatest probability. Professing, also, on the grand article of a first cause, that, if he had discovered the truth, he durst not have divulged it.

Socrates is generally supposed to have  
borrowed

borrowed his notions, from the faint glimmerings of a future state which were to be seen in the jewish scriptures. But Cicero's philosophy was all uncertainty and scepticism. And as the one did not attain to the persuasion of a future state, the other was not uniformly clear and certain of it, in his own mind. They both walked in a maze, and rested in darkness.

The jewish dispensation was indeed an express declaration of the will of God, infinitely serviceable and seasonable to restore the almost lost worship of the one only living and true God; infinitely beneficial also in delivering the commandments of God, in the plain and clear language of a written law. But, although it received its sanction from heaven, it held forth no rewards beyond those of this world. The temporal prosperity of the jewish polity, is the extent of the express promises of the old Testament. What may be collected from the fate of Abel, from the translation of Enoch, or the promise to Abraham, are only the deductions of human reason, when considered as the evidences of a general resurrection from the

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dead,

dead, and of a future state, It was reserved for the mission of Jesus, who is the Christ, to proclaim and to promise immortality.

As we find our prospect changed, and our intellectual vision extended by the beams of gospel-light, we now look into, and contemplate, that future world which is discovered to us, and anticipate the issues of immortality.

While more contracted in our views, the pains of death were limited to all our little and temporary interests in this world. We knew our loss, and lamented it; but, being ignorant of our gain, we presumed not to explore the future mansions of the dead.

Under the œconomy of the gospel-dispensation, the conditions of our acceptance are again established, and bound upon us, by the highest obligations; and, upon the performance of them, depends the power of death to sting or hurt us.

Sin, which is no other than disobedience to the law of God, written both in the book of nature and revelation, can alone, properly speaking, constitute the sting of death to a serious and reflecting christian. Nature may yet



yet be indulged to feel in the trying and afflictive scenes which attend upon, and are consequent to, our mortality; but nature will be corrected and supported by the cheering belief of the faithful christian, that “this mortal must put on immortality.”

The connections which form our happiness, as they shall not, therefore, be finally dissolved by death, will be more readily resigned, and we shall naturally turn our mind to the contemplation of the future enjoyment of them, without the interruption of sickness, or pain, or sorrow, or disappointment, instead of dwelling, with disturbed anxiety, upon our being about to part with them for ever, in this world, where they are successively accompanied with all those qualifying ingredients to our happiness.

When that awful period shall approach, which brings us to the confines of the grave, the faithful disciples of our lord, who have laboured to live the christian life, and betaken themselves to the consolations of the faith of a rational christian, will receive the unconquerable support of the God of their salvation.

But, while this is our belief and hope, we  
must

must remember also, that horror and despair will assail every unrighteous and unholy person, who only makes an hypocritical profession in Christ, with accumulated distraction and wretchedness of mind, at that time, when they shall be unable to avert, by repentance of heart and reformation of life, the impending destruction from the future presence of God, and from the society of the virtuous and the good. For, in proportion to our knowledge, is our obligation to do the will of God, in all things. And, agreeably to that knowledge, shall be the punishment of the disobedient: those servants who know their lord's will, and do not according thereto, shall be beaten with many stripes; but those who know it not, and do commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes\*.

The apostle Paul himself, indeed, goes on to observe the same thing, when he adds, "the strength of sin is the law." For the obligation to obedience is derived from the knowledge of that law or commandment

\* Luke xii. 47, 48.

which

which enjoins it. And very rare, indeed, are those cases, in which ignorance is involuntary and unavoidable. In civil jurisprudence, the knowledge of law is presumed, and sometimes, even contrary to all probable expectation : and this presumption may be expedient, in order to avoid the greater evil of pretended and feigned pleas of ignorance. But, when we are speaking of the dispensations of the almighty, the presumption is nugatory ; because he hath implanted the knowledge of the great outlines of good and evil, deep in every human breast, and set land-marks which they cannot mistake, or remove, without equal blame ; and also, because known unto him are the thoughts and intents of the heart of every man.

So far as the knowledge of revealed religion is unequally dispensed from the want of its universality, the judgments of God will be proportionate to the light afforded. But, in a country, where the christian religion is openly professed, and where its records and evidences are accessible to every man, that ignorance or unbelief will be inexcusable, which has not been preceded by examination  
and

and inquiry, according to our respective ability, and, consequently, which is not founded upon sober and dispassionate conviction.

Man, being endowed with reason, is bound to exercise it for his better direction; and, having taken all necessary subsidiary aids and assistances to form his opinion, and determine his mind, is guiltless of blame before God, let the dogmas and conceits of men say what they will to the contrary.

It is the reproach of our day, that as one extreme will frequently generate another, mankind have, from implicitly believing too much, passed on, without thought, to believe too little. Disgusted with those subsisting scandals to a reasonable faith, the various establishments of humanly devised formularies of religious doctrine, they have renounced the heavenly religion of the gospel. Because they unhappily tasted only of the polluted and empoisoned stream, they have wantonly refused to drink at the fountain-head of living waters.

Be it our care, as it is our most important concern, that seeing we know that “the sting of death is sin,” and that “the strength of  
“ sin

“ sin is the law ;” be it our care, I say, to imitate the holy and blameless life of our great master, that, avoiding all wilful and deliberate sin, we may never know the keen reproaches, the bitter stings, of a sinner’s death. Be it our care, also, that, knowing the law which regulates our expected obedience, we may deprive sin of all power and strength to seduce and subdue us. To this end, let us be ever watchful over ourselves, and so distrustful of our own virtue, as to avoid temptation, rather than suffer any sin to accumulate the power of habit, and with it the power of making an almost invincible resistance to every effort at our practical reformation.

Nor are these attentions conducive only to the relief and comfort of a few dying hours, but to the real, substantial, and rational enjoyment of every stage of our present life. In youth, in manhood, and in old age, the effect of a truly virtuous and religious principle and conduct is apparent, and very sensibly felt, in every action of our lives. In private life, the principles of true religion and virtue are the source of the most delightful reflections, and the endearments of all social happiness; in  
public

public life, they yield the same desirable fruits, and, being more open to observation, they are universally admired. In prosperity, they temper pleasure with reason, and render it lasting and satisfactory; and, as they dispose us to let others share in our happiness, they excite not envy: in affliction, they are our best support and comfort, which, though we may feel like men, they will enable us to bear, in a manner becoming those, who live in the hope of a joyful resurrection to happiness and immortality.

In fine; as we know the law and will of God, let us cheerfully be obedient thereunto; and as we know also what constitutes the sting of death, let us carefully avoid it, and, more especially that sin which does most easily overcome us. Agreeably to the concluding exhortation of the apostle, let us render “ thanks to God, who giveth us the victory, “ through Jesus Christ our lord.” For this reason, “ my beloved brethren, let us be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the “ work of the lord, as we know, that our “ labour is not in vain by the lord.”

S E R M O N VI\*.

THE PROPHECY OF ISAIAH CONCERNING  
CHRIST.

ISAIAH LIII. 1, 2, 3.

1. O JEHOVAH! WHO HATH BELIEVED OUR REPORT ;  
AND TO WHOM HATH THE ARM OF JEHOVAH  
BEEN MANIFESTED ?
2. FOR HE GREW UP IN HIS SIGHT, AS A TENDER  
SUCKER ; AND AS A ROOT FROM A THIRSTY SOIL :  
HE HAD NO FORM, NOR ANY BEAUTY, THAT WE  
SHOULD REGARD HIM ; NOR WAS HIS COUNTEN-  
NANCE SUCH, THAT WE SHOULD DESIRE HIM.
3. DESPISED, NOR ACCOUNTED IN THE NUMBER OF  
MEN ; A MAN OF SORROWS, AND ACQUAINTED  
WITH GRIEF ; AND AS ONE WHO HID HIS FACE  
FROM US ; HE WAS DESPISED, AND WE ESTEEMED  
HIM NOT †.

THERE is something so striking and cha-  
racteristic in the language of the prophet now  
cited ;

\* Preached on Christmas-day.

† See " A new translation of Isaiah," by Michael Dodson,  
Esq. 8vo. 1790.

cited ; and the application of it to the birth and person of Jesus Christ, is so generally agreed among all denominations of christian commentators, that there can be no misapprehension of the purpose for which I produce it, on this day's solemnity.

The history of our lord's birth and appearance in the world, as we have them recorded by the evangelists, so remarkably answers the prediction of the prophet, that a very moderate acquaintance with the life of Christ, and the circumstances of it, will abundantly satisfy reasonable and candid minds in applying this prophecy of the messiah to the person of Jesus ; and raise their astonishment that the jews would not admit so obvious an interpretation of the words of one of their own prophets.

But, when the pride of a favored people, the prejudices which had grown out of their peculiar distinctions from other societies of men, and the low interests and gratifications of a voluptuous sensual life, are suffered to prevail against better knowledge and a purer religion ; the voice of God, calling their attention to a crucified messiah, " who was despised, nor accounted in the number of  
 " men ;



“ men ; a man of sorrows, and acquainted  
 “ with grief,” though spoken by one of his  
 delegated, and even acknowledged, messen-  
 gers, is scarcely heard, or heard only to be  
 silenced. And where the evidences of the  
 corruption and perversion of the words of the  
 prophet are so notorious, as in the case before  
 us, we shall not exceed the limits of christian  
 charity in saying, that they were wilfully, and  
 therefore criminally, perverted. The jews,  
 who universally looked for the coming of  
 the messiah at the time when Christ was born,  
 were led, by their worldly dispositions and  
 wrong interpretations of their ancient pro-  
 phets, to expect a mighty prince, accompanied  
 with worldly splendor and dignity ; and a  
 dispensation which should admit of indul-  
 gence to their depraved and worldly minds :  
 while these, therefore, were their expectations,  
 the humble appearance of Jesus, who was  
 born and lived among them, who was dis-  
 tinguished chiefly by the innocency and ex-  
 cellence of his character, by his undeserved  
 sufferings, and patient bearing of them, by  
 his labors and zeal to do the will of God, and  
 promote the essential welfare and future hap-

pineness of the whole human race, the preaching of his gospel was “unto the jews a “stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness\*.” And, for the reason why they were so, we need only to consider the reproach, which the improved morals and elevated piety required by the gospel were to the jewish people, immersed in sensuality, and jealous of the rites and ceremonies of a distinguished ancestry. To those who chiefly endeavoured to obtain the friendship of God by sacrifices, and commutations in external services, it was an unwelcome message which called them to the reformation of heart and manners, and told them that repentance and amendment of life were necessary to salvation, and that without practical holiness, virtue, and purity, none would be acceptable to God.

But, for the better understanding of this celebrated passage in Isaiah, we must rightly distinguish the speakers in it, and carefully attend to the form and manner of the composition. For these purposes we shall do well

\* 1 Cor. i. 23.

to avail ourselves of a late, no less just and judicious, than learned criticism.

“ The three last verses of the fifty-second chapter are,” according to the writer to whom I refer, “ the words of God himself, declaring, ‘ That although his servant, the messiah, would be despised and rejected by many on account of the meanness of his appearance, yet he would be very successful in his endeavours to reform the world, and many nations, and even kings, would attend to him.’ ”

“ Hereupon, the prophet, as having lived in the days of the messiah, and having himself observed his progress, exclaims, ‘ O Jehovah ! Who hath believed our report ; and to whom hath the arm of Jehovah been manifested ? ’ ”

“ In which words, he refers to the foregoing prophecy uttered by him in the name of God, and laments that so little success had, at that time, attended the preaching of the messiah : and he then proceeds to describe, as from his own observation, the meanness of his appearance, the manner in

“ which the jewish nation received him, the  
 “ miraculous cures performed by him, his  
 “ sufferings and death, and his burial in the  
 “ sepulchre of a rich man ; and, in many  
 “ parts of this description, he remarkably  
 “ includes himself, using frequently the  
 “ words, we, us, and our ; and in one part  
 “ he calls the jewish nation in the time  
 “ of Christ his own people. ‘ Through  
 “ the wickedness, saith he, of my people  
 “ he was smitten to death.’ The prophet  
 “ having thus described the messiah as dead  
 “ and deposited in a sepulchre, God is repre-  
 “ sented as declaring in his own words,  
 “ That although the enemies of his servant,  
 “ the messiah, had prevailed so far as to put  
 “ him to death, yet, as he had suffered death  
 “ in the cause of truth and virtue, he should  
 “ be raised from the dead to an immortal  
 “ life ; and by his instructions, and by his  
 “ means, a great reformation would be ef-  
 “ fected in the world, much to his own sa-  
 “ tisfaction, and to the everlasting advantage  
 “ of many of the human race.’

“ Thus understood, the prophecy is freed  
 “ from that confusion of persons, which is  
 “ observed

“observed in the common explications of  
 “it, and is clear and consistent in all it’s  
 “parts\*.”

But besides this, other “ prophets have  
 “ not only foretold, in general terms, a great  
 “ revolution that would take place in the  
 “ world by the coming of the messiah, but  
 “ they have delineated some particular cir-  
 “ cumstances attending it, which only the  
 “ eye of omniscience could have foreseen.  
 “ They have marked out the precise time †,  
 “ and place ‡ of Christ’s birth; they have  
 “ described, with wonderful exactness, the  
 “ distinguishing features of his office and  
 “ character: they have displayed, with equal  
 “ beauty and truth, the effects and conse-  
 “ quences of his mission §.” — “ It was the  
 “ prophet Isaiah that foretold, that though,  
 “ in the design of God, he should be for a  
 “ foundation, a stone, an approved stone; a  
 “ corner-stone, precious, immovably fixed;  
 “ and he, who believeth on him, should not

\* See “ Commentaries and essays,” &c. vol. 1. p. 33—35,  
 or Mr. Dodson’s “ New translation of Isaiah.” p. 318—321.

† Dan. ix. 24, &c.

‡ Mic. v. 2.

§ White’s Sermons at Bampton’s Lect. ser. vii. p. 290.

“ be confounded \*;” yet that he should be  
 “ for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of  
 “ offence, to two of the houses of Israel; a  
 “ trap, and a snare to the inhabitants of  
 “ Jerusalem †;” to men, who were guided  
 “ by the springs which in general actuate  
 “ the human breast, such as interest, ambi-  
 “ tion, and the love of sensual enjoyments.  
 “ And particularly it was foretold that of  
 “ the jews, “ many among them should  
 “ stumble and fall, and be broken, and in-  
 “ snared, and caught ‡;” should not only re-  
 “ fuse to build on him as the only foundation  
 “ of their hopes; but should, in their at-  
 “ tempt to shake and overthrow it, be them-  
 “ selves scattered and broken to pieces.  
 “ The same prophet declared, that he should  
 “ veil the eyes of the wise and learned, and  
 “ preach the gospel to the poor and illite-  
 “ rate §; that he should restore sight to the  
 “ blind, health to the diseased, and light to  
 “ those who had been oppressed with dark-

\* See Dodson's Isaiah. xxviii. 16.

† Ib. Isaiah. viii. 14.

‡ Ib. Isaiah. viii. 15.

§ vi. 9, 10, 11.

“ nefs;

“ nefs \*; that he should teach the true and  
 “ perfect way, and should be the great in-  
 “ structor of the gentiles; that kings should  
 “ fall down before him, and all nations pay  
 “ obedience to his authority as derived from  
 “ God †; that his reign should be gentle and  
 “ benevolent; and that the influence of his  
 “ gospel should harmonize the jarring pas-  
 “ sions of mankind ‡, and, together with  
 “ the knowledge and worship of the true  
 “ God, establish peace and purity on the  
 “ earth §.”

And these things were done, “ that our  
 “ faith in him might have every evidence to  
 “ confirm it, that was necessary to give sa-  
 “ tisfaction to modest and impartial enqui-  
 “ rers. The fact in every respect corres-  
 “ ponded with the prediction; and so far was  
 “ the prophet introduced into the secret  
 “ counsels of the divine mind, that when he  
 “ spoke of future events, he appears to be  
 “ relating their past history: for to that  
 “ omniscient God, whose light directed the  
 “ prophet’s eye through the darkest recesses

\* xlii. 1, &amp;c.

† lx. 10.

‡ lvi. 6, 7, 8.

§ White’s Sermons. p. 292, 293.

“ of distant ages, prescience and accomplish-  
 “ ment are the same; and the future and  
 “ the past form but one object. Hence the  
 “ most striking scenes of our lord’s sufferings  
 “ are delineated by the prophetic pencil,  
 “ with the same truth and exactness, as if  
 “ they had been drawn on the spot, when  
 “ the secret volume of the divine decrees  
 “ was unrolled, and when that which had  
 “ been foreseen in vision was exhibited in  
 “ reality\*.”

It were now sufficient to add, that there is scarcely a page in the gospels, which does not represent some one, and oftentimes more circumstances of our lord’s life, which answer to the prophetic description of Isaiah, in the words of our text, or some other parts of the book called after his name. And these, together with the completion of distant and unconnected prophecies in the person of Jesus Christ, and the evidence of the miracles that he wrought, point him out as “ the  
 “ messiah which was to come,” or be born into the world.

\* White’s Sermons. p. 293, 294. Comp. Mark xv.  
 27, 28.



Having now stated, generally, the fulfilment of various prophecies concerning our lord, and his humble appearance amongst men; it shall be my remaining purpose (I.) to consider briefly the person of our lord, concerning which christians at large have so widely differed during the last thirteen or fourteen centuries; and (II.) to recapitulate the general design and principles of the christian faith.

If just apprehensions of almighty God, and of that rule which he hath given us to regulate our lives and purify our faith, may be admitted as likely to influence our conduct in that which is right; these two considerations are of great importance to us, and may very properly employ our thoughts upon this voluntary annual commemoration of the birth of our lord.

(I.) Many, probably the greater part, of us, were taught, in early life, to consider our lord either as partaking in the divine nature and being one with God, the father; or as being a great pre-existent spirit, before the worlds were made. And it is likely that these notions were received and professed by  
us,

us, in great measure, through the influence of education and habit; and in part, from a deference to those institutions which have received the sanction of great names, and of public authority. Whatever alterations our sentiments may have undergone upon further inquiry and the exercise of more mature judgment, there appears to be peculiar propriety, on the present occasion, to attend to the general language of the scriptures upon this subject.

The testimony of Moses and the prophets aforetime, and of our lord himself and his apostles afterwards, appear to be in uniform agreement with each other upon this question, on which the christian world have been so much divided, and concerning which there yet unhappily remain very violent prejudices.

In the old Testament, we read of the messiah as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, to be born of a woman, to be cut off out of the land of the living. In the history of his life in the new Testament, we read all the circumstances of his birth, which mark him to be a man; for admitting his mother's miraculous conception of him, such  
 exception

exception to the ordinary course of generation may be presumed to have been intended by almighty God only to call the particular observation of his countrymen upon him; but it no more conferred upon him a divine nature, than the creation of our first parents, or the birth of our lord's harbinger, John the baptist, gave them any superiority of nature above others, or a title to divine honors. We know, indeed, little of his younger years, except his regular growth to manhood and improvement in knowledge; his dispute with some learned jews in their synagogue, when he was only twelve years of age; his general obedience and filial piety to his parents; and his living in the favor of God and man. When he came upon the public stage of life, in the execution and performance of his mission, we hear of his hunger and thirst, his taking the necessary refreshments to support life, his frequent familiar intercourse with his disciples; his sufferings, death, and burial. In these events, we do indeed see the power of God to have been with him and displayed in his agency; but there is nothing, in these circumstances, to lead us to think, or to admit

mit the supposition, that God had divested himself of his own proper nature, and that he, who is a pure, perfect, and infinite spirit, equally present every where, “ whom “ the heaven and the heaven of heavens “ cannot contain\*,” was embodied in the figure of a man; or even that this same Jesus had any existence before he was born of Mary his mother.

He always paid religious homage to the father, and directed his disciples to do the same; they so understood him, and so they speak of him: they considered him as divinely commissioned by almighty God to declare his will, but never confound him with that one, only, self-existent being, who was his God and our God; from whom he derived his extraordinary authority and powers, to whom he was obedient, and from whom he expected and received his reward.

In the more eminent distinctions of our lord, in his resurrection and ascension, we are not bidden to look upon these events as proofs of his being God, or to be worshipped as such, but as proofs of the power of God,

\* 1 Kings viii. 27.

and seals of his approbation, that “ he had  
 “ made that same Jesus whom they crucified,  
 “ both lord and Christ\*.”

And further, if the person, whom we call  
 Jesus Christ, and believe to have acted by  
 divine authority, was no other than God  
 himself in the flesh, as some have said and  
 still maintain; it is a great impeachment of  
 the honesty and candor of the evangelists and  
 apostles, that they have not dealt more plainly  
 with us, and used more certain and explicit  
 language than they have done: or, we might  
 rather say, that their being wholly silent upon  
 so important an article of faith as this, and  
 appearing even never to have conceived any  
 ideas, answering to the language of the  
 schoolmen, or certain mystic divines since  
 their time, upon this subject, amount to much  
 more than a strong presumption against the  
 truth of what is usually called the athanasian  
 trinity.

Nor can those who consider our lord to  
 have existed before his apparent birth in the  
 world, much better reconcile their notions  
 to the plain and simple history of the gospel.

\* Acts ii. 36.

When Jesus Christ is said “ to come “ down” from heaven, or from the father, and to pray “ for the glory which he had “ with God before the world was :\*” These expressions imply no more, in the estimation of many good biblical scholars, than that all the extraordinary powers shewn by our lord were especially given to him by God, the author and source of every thing ; that God was with him, and aided him with his good spirit ; giving him power, as his ambassador or delegated servant, for the further and final revelation of his will to mankind. And, that almighty God had before known that he should thus declare himself to his creatures of mankind, is no more than an effect of his necessary prescience, or fore-knowledge of all events ; the glory, therefore, to which our lord refers, has respect only to the purpose of the divine mind ; and his prayer to God for it was, in effect, praying that his will might be done, and his design accomplished, as well in the reward intended for his faithful and obedient prophet and messenger,

\* John, xvii. 5.

as in the bitter cup which was given him to drink in order to obtain it.

To consider, therefore, Jesus Christ as having personally appeared as the Jehovah-angel in the old Testament, or to have had any existence before he was born of his mother Mary, appears to exceed the just warrant of the scriptures: and to pay divine honors to this “ mediator between God and men,” though even ultimately intended to the glory of God, the father, were to give unauthorized worship to him, whom the apostle Paul styles in the same sentence, the “ man Christ Jesus\*.”

Again; as he is our great exemplar, and pattern of perfection, exceeding our highest attainments in holiness and goodness; if, through our mistaken zeal, we aim to advance him in the scale of created beings, beyond his true place, “ Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among us, by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did by him † :” we so far endeavour to impeach and destroy the efficacy of his eminent virtues, to defeat his title to the recompence

\* 1 Tim. ii. 5.

† Acts ii. 22.

of reward which he looked for, and to rob ourselves of all advantages to be derived from his illustrious example.

And it very particularly becometh those who advance our blessed lord to an equality with the peerless majesty of God, to consider, that they go a great way, however innocently and unintentionally, to destroy the divine unity, though both the jewish and christian scriptures emphatically declare “ the “ lord our God, to be one lord,” and “ that “ there is none other besides him :” they oppose the example and command of Christ himself, whom they vainly think to honor by such faith ; for he prayed to the father, as his God and our God, and refused all divine honors which were offered him, saying, “ It is written, Thou shalt worship the lord “ thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”

(II.) Let us now briefly consider the general design and principles of the christian faith, as taught by Christ and his apostles. It was a design worthy of the benevolent parent of the world to endeavour to reclaim his rational offspring from idolatry and vice, to the right knowledge of himself, the true  
 God,



God, and to the practice of religion and virtue. To this end, he appointed Jesus to the ministration of his design; and, having spoken of him and the success of his gospel by his prophets aforetime, he accompanied his ministry with miracles, which proclaimed the authority by which he acted, and supported the christian faith against the powers of the world, leagued by the strong tie of temporal interest to gainsay and oppose it.

The doctrines which he taught were repentance and amendment of life, and that a resurrection to a future life of immortal happiness should follow, and be the reward of, a voluntary, diligent, and persevering obedience to the will of God in all things. With regard to himself, he lived only to do the good pleasure of God, and died and rose again in confirmation of the truth of what he had preached. And the criterion whereby men were to know who were his disciples was, whether they believed him to "be the Christ, the son of the living God;" at the same time, this confession was declared to avail nothing, unless accompanied by such an holy and good life as was

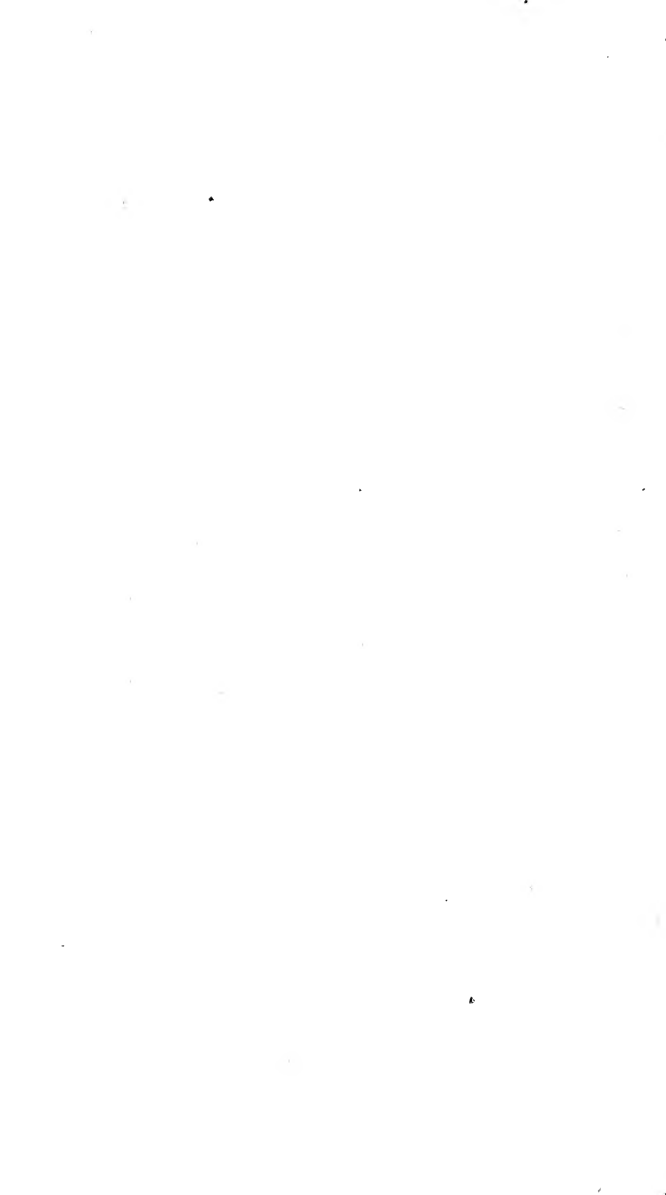
required by the gospel, and became those who professed the religion of Christ to be from God, for, it is written, “ without holiness, no one shall see the lord.”

In how small a compass are the genuine and necessary doctrines of Christ contained, and yet to what length have they been extended by the devices and commandments of men! In how mild, and gentle, and amiable a spirit are the moral precepts of divine revelation preached by Christ and his apostles; and in how contrary a temper are the vain explications and deductions of men maintained by the blind zeal and bigotry of their several partizans! In the gospel, there is agreement with the former revelation, and with reason, the great gift of God; in all human systems, what contradictions and perplexities unintelligible, unmeaning, and unedifying! In the gospel, what simplicity and dignity! In human dogmas and decisions, what mystery, subtilty, and refinement! what degradation of the goodness and wisdom of God!

We, my brethren, see and know these things to be true: let, therefore, the word  
of

of God have its full effect, and shed forth its natural influence upon our whole character; not merely in making a good profession before the world, but in leading our lives in perfect agreement therewith.

May these reflections, founded on facts, which every one's experience brings before him, awaken us to a serious attention to our duty. May we be found among the sincere worshippers of the one true God, and the faithful disciples, in word and deed, of our common lord and master, Jesus Christ. May every additional returning year, which shall be added to our lives, find us more and more fitted and prepared to quit the short and passing scenes of human existence here, with the patience, comfort, and hope of good men, and good christians: and when the grave shall be called upon to give up its dead, may we arise to the enjoyment of that life and immortality, which were brought to light by the gospel.



S E R M O N    V I I \* .

IN WHAT SENSE CHRIST IS A PROPITIATION  
FOR OUR SINS.

I JOHN II. 1, 2.

MY LITTLE CHILDREN, THESE THINGS I WRITE  
UNTO YOU, THAT YE SIN NOT. AND, IF ANY  
MAN SIN, WE HAVE AN ADVOCATE WITH THE  
FATHER, JESUS CHRIST THE RIGHTEOUS; AND  
HE IS THE PROPITIATION FOR OUR SINS: AND  
NOT FOR OURS ONLY, BUT ALSO FOR THE SINS OF  
THE WHOLE WORLD.

THERE have been various opinions entertained concerning the particular people to whom the apostle John addressed this epistle, but it appears most probable, that it was directed to the christians of his time in general, without any particular limitation to the converts from judaism, in preference to those

\* Preached on Good-Friday.

from among the gentiles\*. And in the whole body of this letter, or rather treatise, as some are disposed to consider it, there does not appear any description of the persons, for whom it was more particularly intended, more determinate than that of "little children;" which may, indeed, in the present case, imply the author's own advanced age, and his writing with apostolic authority, but affords no information in regard to whom this letter, or treatise, was addressed. This appellation, however, is familiar to the apostle John, and is used by him several times in his epistles, as expressive of his affection and regard for those, to whom he wrote †.

In the preceding chapter, our apostle had earnestly exhorted and pressed the christians

\* Dr. Lardner is of this opinion, see his *History of the apostles*, vol. iii. p. 273—281. Dr. Benson thinks this epistle was written "to the jewish christians in Judea and Galilee," see his preface to his *Paraphrase*, sect. iv. Michaelis agrees with Dr. Lardner, see his *Lectures* p. 380. but considers it as a book or treatise, rather than an epistle, though John addresses his readers in the second person.

† 1 John ii. 12, 18, 28. iii. 7, 18. iv. 4. v. 21. See also Lardner. *ib.* p. 273.

to lay aside all their wicked habits and practices, declaring to them the “ pure light,” i. e. the perfect holiness, of God, and the utter impossibility of their having fellowship with him, while they continued in their evil courses; but that upon their earnest endeavour to be holy, to walk according to the light and knowledge wherewith they were now blessed, they should have fellowship, or intercommunion, one with another, and “ the blood of Jesus Christ would cleanse them from all sin;” that is, the gospel-revelation, the truth of which was sealed by the blood or death of Jesus, promised forgiveness of past offences upon sincere repentance and amendment. “ If,” in answer to this, “ we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sins,” (i. e. repent of and forsake them, for these are inseparable in the scriptures,) “ God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” In other words, upon the confession of our sins and repentance, God will give us his blessing and protection to enable us to persevere in

such our christian calling, and to maintain that character which is so highly becoming it.

The chapter before us then opens with the words of the text; " my little children," or young converts, " these things I write " unto you, that ye sin not;" that, notwithstanding the forgiveness of God promised to the sincerely penitent, ye may be persuaded to avoid all sin, and by this timely information, and the prospect of the great things which the gospel hath discovered, ye may keep yourselves from the pollutions of the world. In this case, " to say that we " have no sin," or dispositions to what is wrong, " would be to deceive ourselves;" and " to say that we have not sinned," would be " to make God a liar," who hath planned this gracious dispensation for our amendment, and thence designed it to be the means of our final salvation.

But " if any man do sin," says our text, " we have an advocate with the father, Jesus " Christ the righteous, and he is the propi-  
 " tiation for our sins, and not for our sins  
 " only, but also for the sins of the whole  
 " world." The language here used by our  
 apostle,



apostle, and also some similar passages in the new Testament, appear to have been greatly misapprehended, insomuch that they have been interpreted to support not only false, but dangerous and fatal, conceits in religion. But the sense and whole scope of the apostle may be expressed in this, or some such-like address to his new converts; "If any among us, my fellow-christians, after we have endeavoured to correct our evil habits, agreeably to the precepts of the lord and master whom we profess to follow and obey, and in which we have in some degree succeeded should ever in future be overtaken in sin, through the infirmity and weakness of our nature, we may yet look up to God with the assurance of pardon and mercy, if we sincerely repent of our past offences, renew our holy resolutions, and proceed onward in the amendment and reformation of whatever is amiss in us; for we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ the righteous, that is, by embracing the rational faith and holy life of the gospel preached by Jesus Christ, we shall succeed to, and obtain, the promises of forgiveness and future happiness which

which are there held out to us. The great preacher of righteousness is, indeed, the propitiation for our sins, being the instrument or agent in the hands of God, who, by his death and following resurrection, confirmed the truth of the revelation which he had made of the will of God, in regard to the future life and hopes of his rational creatures. "And," says our apostle, "he is not only thus the propitiation for our sins, but equally also for the sins of the whole world, of all men, of gentiles as well as jews, of all ranks and conditions, of every nation and people in every succeeding age of the world, who shall receive the gospel, and be thereby led to repent of their sins, and to obey the laws of God, and to imitate the character of Christ."

In this view, and under this figure of speech, whereby the person who suffered is placed for the dispensation which his death confirmed, that event may be justly considered as a propitiation, and Christ the advocate, or intercessor, for the christian world. But by no reasonable construction of the words can his death be understood to be a literal atonement for the sins of mankind;

or a satisfaction to the demands of justice from an offended God, or an inducement to the exercise of his abundant mercy towards the human race: for this were to sanctify the cruel and unprovoked murder of the holy Jesus, and to transfer the expiation of the sins of all offenders from their own repentance and contrition, to the sufferings of the innocent; and thence resolve the justice and mercy of almighty God, the benevolent parent of all nature, into injustice, cruelty, and oppression.

But, in aid of these general observations in behalf of a rational interpretation of this particular passage, besides its agreement with the avowed design of the gospel, and its consistency with the general language we find there, I would remark some circumstances which will justify it upon the principles of strict criticism.

The expression, which is particularly deserving of our attention is, “ he is the propitiation for our sins;” and it is peculiar to the apostle John in this epistle, where it is twice used, exactly in the same manner, here and in the tenth verse of the fourth

fourth chapter. The apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews\*, speaks of Christ being an high-priest to “make reconciliation” “for the sins of the people,” as we render the original words; which do not signify to appease an offended or angry God, but, as the phrase has been frequently shewn to signify in other places, to remove, or make sins to be passed by, that no notice may be taken of them; to make them to be no obstructions to the favor of God. For, in the present case, there was no anger to be removed; for, out of pure love and kindness to man, God commissioned Christ to declare his will. And he who out of love and good will delegated him to this office, could not want to be appeased, or turned from anger, by him †.

Again. “It must always be remembered that Christ did not first make his father propitious to us; for he was so, antecedent to our lord’s birth, as John himself writes ‡; ‘Herein is love, not

\* ii. 17. εις το ιλασκεισθαι τας αμαρτιας του λαου.

† See Sykes’s Script. doct. of redemption, p. 275.

‡ I John iv. 10.

“ that we loved God, but that he loved us,  
 “ and sent, or appointed, his son to be the  
 “ propitiation for our sins.’ Christ was the  
 “ means by which the love of God had it’s  
 “ full effect ; and as he died in the confir-  
 “ mation of the truth of his gospel, by  
 “ which he aimed to make us friends to  
 “ God, and to declare to us the terms of  
 “ salvation, and shew us the way to avoid  
 “ sin, he is called a propitiation for our  
 “ sins with the father, as having been the  
 “ chief instrument by whom God has shewn  
 “ himself kind to all \*.”

The gospel of Christ has, indeed, placed  
 before us life and death, in very plain lan-  
 guage ; nor is it less obvious to remark, that  
 obedience to the terms of that gospel is the  
 inseparable condition of obtaining the pro-  
 mises of happiness and immortality which it  
 holds forth. And they give a very unjust  
 and degrading representation of such the  
 revelation of the will of God, who, from  
 a desire to advance the nature and media-  
 torial office of the holy Jesus, go beyond the

\* See Sykes’s Script. doct. of redempt. p. 316, 317.

compass of the written word; for they strike at the essential attributes of the one only living and true God, and describe him as a capricious and arbitrary tyrant, who is, in truth, an absolutely immutable, and perfectly wise, and just, and reasonable being. Nor do they appear to be less mistaken, when they consider the mission and sufferings of Christ, as designed to compensate for our defects in holiness and moral rectitude, and to obtain our salvation, while we live an unholy and wicked, or useless life. This gospel of Christ will, as we are assured upon his own authority, and agreeably to the principles of natural justice, contribute to the greater confusion, and increase the condemnation of those who, while they profess their faith in him, shall be disobedient to the precepts which he has delivered. There neither is, nor can be any composition or commutation with God for sins committed against his law; but, in proportion to our knowledge and opportunities, he requires of every man to repent and walk in newness of life, perfecting holiness in the true fear and love of him.

The positive institutions of our religion have not escaped being placed in this light, any more than particular or incidental passages in the scriptures; and, it is to be feared, they continue to be so considered by some: although, in truth, they are only the means to an end, and were designed as significant memorials to recommend, and not as expiations to supersede, moral virtues. These, while they bring to our minds the whole character of the great captain of our salvation, should also animate us to fight our christian warfare in a manner becoming the servants and soldiers of Jesus Christ.

But when it is thus said, and it may be truly said, that the design of the christian dispensation, as well in the doctrines which it teaches and the ordinances which it appoints, as in the principles and practices which it inculcates and enjoins, was to bring men nearer to God, and to promote their own real happiness, by making them more holy before him, more virtuous in themselves, and more kind and benevolent to each other, in the hope and expectation of future happiness and immortality :  
when

when these things are said, it may very aptly be further inquired, by the very friends of revelation, How it comes to pass that so little of true christian holiness, virtue and benevolence, or of the true christian spirit, is to be seen in the bulk of those, who, under different denominations, profess themselves the disciples of the holy and excellent publisher of this institution?

The truth of this observation, must be acknowledged, as far as it concerns the matter of fact; nor can it be too much lamented. But the reflections which are consequent thereupon should, strictly and properly speaking, be confined to, as indeed they only concern, persons who profess a faith which they do not believe, or what is nearly equivalent, which they will not suffer to influence their life and conduct. The christian dispensation, as such, cannot share in those reflections, which are occasioned by the very disavowal of it; nor be any way considered as the cause of those practices, which are directly contrary to the letter and the spirit of the gospel. However clear, determinate, and specific, any civil law may be,  
for



for the punishment of vice and profligacy, and for the encouragement of virtue, it's operation will not be universal in the prevention of those very offences against which it was directed, but they will sometimes be committed under very aggravating circumstances.

The gospel is a written law, of the highest authority, and enforced by the sanction of future rewards and punishments: and, like other rules of action, of inferior obligation, it is left to it's free course. If, therefore, men will prefer darkness to light, and follow the evil inclinations of their own minds, after they are fully apprised of the consequences, the gospel is not answerable for their failures in virtue. A perfect law has been laid before them, which is also a law of liberty, and, if they fall away from their obedience to such law, after they are convinced of the authority and rectitude of it by the evidences which apply to the conviction of rational minds, the shame and disgrace of their defection belong not to the gospel, nor is such misconduct any just reproach to it, but wholly concerns the temper and disposition

sition of mind of those, who, in such cases, so far renounce the discipline of the gospel, by indulging themselves in the gratification of appetite and passion, and sacrificing to the temptations and pleasures of the world.

How much of this practical defection from the holiness of the true christian life and character, has arisen from false representations of the christian faith may, indeed, nearly concern some to inquire. But, whatever may be the cause of, or may contribute to give countenance to, the wicked or careless lives of professing christians, it cannot be the religion of Christ.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to distinguish the use from the abuse of religion, on account of the truth or error which they are respectively adapted to establish; for mankind have not only been greatly misled, but are not unfrequently disposed to deceive themselves. They have been taught to think disparagingly of almighty God, the invisible and infinite creator and governor of the world; to consider him as having been embodied and having suffered, only to appease his own wrath. Hence they have been brought  
to

to pay divine worship to Jesus Christ, who was no other than his chosen messenger and servant, who himself renounced all divine honors, and, together with his apostles, prayed only to the one God and father of all. Mankind have also been told to repose themselves in the supposed atonement and satisfaction of this their great master and leader; and some have been bidden to have confidence in their own absolute predestination and election with the kind parent of the world, in despite of an unholy and wicked life: they have been encouraged to look for a commutation with a just and infallible God, by prescribed prayers, penances, and fasting, in the place of that "holiness, without which," the apostle Paul says, "no one shall see the lord."

Thus have the good effects of the excellent principles and pure doctrines of the gospel been defeated; and it is no secret that these ill offices have been done the christian revelation by those, from whom better things might have been expected. May we not then cease to wonder that the religion of Christ has not produced more and better fruit, since it has been so long veiled

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under

under misrepresentation, and disguised by human inventions? And is not the present state of things in the world just what might have been expected, unless the gospel had been supported by a continued miracle, which, while such interposition might have answered the unreasonable demands of some men, would have destroyed the benevolent design of the giver of all good?

In support of this sentiment, and in exculpation of the gospel, we may generally remark, that the hardiest sceptic has never seriously endeavoured to charge the christian revelation with giving countenance to any immorality whatever. Particular passages have been garbled and perverted, but these have afforded so slender a pretence that they have been relinquished, as being unequal to the purpose, almost in the instant in which they have been adopted; for when examined, they have been found to be in perfect agreement with the tenor of the whole book, favorable to virtue, and perfective of human happiness\*.

\* Some instances are observed in Sykes's "Principles and connexion of natural and revealed religion," p. 298—300.

Notwithstanding

Notwithstanding we are now disposed to a serious observance of this day, let us remember that it is no-where particularly required of us in the scriptures; and that there are no small difficulties, at this distance of time, in the way of ascertaining the exact annual revolution of the event which it is intended to commemorate. Nevertheless we may, by every act of social worship, improve our time to considerable advantage. A just and serious consideration of that great and important event which is now more immediately before us, and of its consequences, is always commendable and can never be unseasonable, how much soever chronologists may be unsettled with respect to the time when it happened.

Every act of social worship to almighty God is pleasing and acceptable in his sight, when the worshippers occupy their hearts and minds in the humble spirit of true piety and devotion: not that God receives any accession of honor by our services, but because it is a mean calculated to improve our knowledge and reverence of him and his laws, to promote good-will among men, and ulti-

mately to make us wiser, better, and happier than we should otherwise be.

On all appropriated occasions, like the present, we are naturally led to consider some particular principle, or doctrine, of that religion which we profess to receive as of divine authority. It, therefore, becometh us to improve the subject by suitable reflections in our own minds, for there we must look, under the blessing of God, for the source and security of our christian temper and moral conduct.

It is no small evidence that our religion is of God, that all it's doctrines are in themselves worthy of him; and, as this argument must have had it's weight in determining our persuasion, it most assuredly becomes us to take care that we do our parts to walk worthy of that faith which we profess; that we study our religion in all it's branches, no less in it's practice than in it's theory; that while we honor the one only true God with our lips, we may serve him faithfully and assiduously in our lives.

## S E R M O N VIII.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

## PROVERBS XXII. 6.

TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO: AND  
WHEN HE IS OLD, HE WILL NOT DEPART FROM IT.

THE proverbs of Solomon are trite, short, and unconnected lessons of universal instruction. They are, therefore, an exception to the general canon of interpretation, which requires our diligent attention, and, probably, the application of some critical learning, to the investigation of the context. Such kind of examination is, oftentimes, indispensably necessary for our security against misinterpretations, and, for want of it, the scripture-inquirer has, in not a few instances, been led into the grossest errors. Hence it has happened that, in various cases, a passage, (whether of a sacred or profane writer,) has

been understood in a sense quite contrary to the design of the author, and consequently been made to support an opinion or doctrine which it was the intention of the writer to discountenance, or refute.

In a discourse on our present text, this prefatory examination is needless. The subject seems to apply directly to our understanding, and to our knowledge of human nature. The province, therefore, of the preacher is to explain the compass of the text; to remark our obligation to a due attention to the advice given by the wise king; and to enforce the observance of it, by stating the consequence of our neglect of his salutary counsel.

Systems of education are now become very numerous, and, like all other systems, partake of the respective singularities of their several patrons, according to the judgment they have formed of the nature of the human mind. In the midst of this variety, there are some, among the modern, with whom their predecessors in the science of instruction do not agree, and with whom the wisdom of our fore-fathers scarcely held one common principle. Those whom I mean, are they who aim to make a sacrifice  
of



of every thing which goes to the making up a good man and good christian, to the flip-pant, loose, and deceitful acquirements of what is commonly called, "the man of the world," in the worst sense of those words.

The force of habit is always very powerful, in some persons it is almost irresistible; hence come we by that common proverbial expression, "custom is a second nature." It is upon this principle, that Solomon delivers the wise and friendly admonition of the text. "Train up a child," says he, "in the way he should go;" in other words, lead him early into the paths of religion and virtue, and you will take the surest way to secure his continuance in them, for "when he is old, he will not depart from them." The justice of this reasoning is almost universally admitted, because the truth of it is very generally experienced. There are no general observations which do not admit of some exceptions, but they are more rare in this remark of Solomon, than in many other cases. And as our own conviction arises not only from what we may observe daily passing before our eyes in the world,

but

but from the knowledge of ourselves, we have the greater reason to be satisfied of the high importance of giving early instruction to our children in the nature and practice of religion and virtue, and of paying a diligent attention to the successive efforts of their young and intelligent minds.

There is also another observation which may be very suitably applied to the present question, and which comes directly home to ourselves, and it is this; let us for a moment suppose the lessons of instruction to be perfect, the method of teaching them to be faultless, and to be pursued without intermission, yet, after all, "example is of more weight than precept." Without the concurring support and sanction of example, the minds of children are naturally led to suspect the obligation of those duties which are taught them; and, under this suspicion, all good impressions are effaced, and the instructions of the parent or master never reach, much less do they sink down into, the heart of the child or scholar, there to take root, and thence to bring forth their fruit; but are forgotten, until the want of them is discovered in their maturer years,

as the only proper and sure basis of a manly and christian conduct.

It is not to be understood that this habit will reduce the man to such a piece of mechanism, as that, on the one hand, he cannot deviate from "the way in which he should go;" or, on the other, that such habit will destroy the principle of virtue, by substituting in its place an unmeaning and lifeless round of action.

In answer to either of these suppositions, which are, in themselves, unfriendly to virtue, let it be observed that as we enjoy, from nature, capacities of election of good and evil, so, in that respect, education leaves us where it found us. But we derive from a good education the power and opportunity to improve our faculties, to enlighten our understandings, to enlarge our minds, to strengthen our virtue, and to perfect the happiness of ourselves and others. The mind of man uneducated is like a rich field uncultivated; and as the one, when suffered to run to waste, will generally produce the rankest weeds, in proportion to the fertility of the soil; so too often, alas! will the other run into the gratifications

tifications of boundless passion, and into all the impieties of an irreligious and profligate spirit. And God hath equally ordered, in the constitution of our sublunary concerns, that man shall improve and make fruitful his understanding by instruction and application, as he hath ordained that he shall till the earth by labor, and subdue it by the sweat of his brow.

It is of no less general concernment, and the main purpose of my argument, that the subject-matter, or object, of instruction be wisely chosen, as well as prudently conducted. In short, I wish to enforce the obligation we are under, to give our children a truly religious, as well as what we denominate a liberal education. What acquirements are necessary to particular situations in life, in regard to the several ranks, professions, or occupations among us, it is not my present design to inquire. These are varied, according to the great variety of circumstances which attend the proposed prosecution of them. But, as creatures endowed with reason, by the bounteous giver of all good, and further favored by a revelation of his mind  
and

and will concerning us, we are all accountable to him for the right use and exercise of these his distinguished blessings; we are all equally, and, before all other things, concerned to obtain the right knowledge, and live in the regular practice of our duty to God, and to our fellow-creatures of mankind.

And it becomes us, as christians and protestants, to look into our bibles for just notions of God, and of our duty to him, and there we shall best find all that is necessary for us to know. We shall there find that he is declared to be “ a spirit, and they who  
 “ worship him, must worship him in spirit  
 “ and in truth \* ;” that “ the Lord our God  
 “ is one Lord † ;” that “ there is none else  
 “ besides him ‡ ;” that he is “ king eternal,  
 “ immortal, invisible, the only wise God § ;” that we can “ neither hear his voice at any  
 “ time, nor see his shape || ;” that “ he is  
 “ excellent in power, and in judgment, and  
 “ in plenty of justice \*\* ;” that “ he is  
 “ greatly to be feared, and his greatness un-

\* John iv. 24.            † Deut. vi. 4.            ‡ Deut.  
 iv. 35.            § 1 Tim. i. 17.            || John v. 37.

\*\* Job xxxvii. 23.

“ searchable ;”

“searchable \* ;” that he liveth for ever  
 “and ever † ;” that “he is from everlast-  
 “ing ‡ ;” that “he is the same yesterday,  
 “and to-day, and for ever § ;” and “with  
 “him there is no variableness, neither sha-  
 “dow of turning || ;” that “he made the  
 “world, and all things therein \*\* ;” that  
 “he is the blessed and only potentate; the  
 “king of kings, and lord of lords †† ;” that  
 “his understanding is infinite ‡‡ ;” “and  
 “known unto him are all his works from the  
 “beginning of the world §§ ;” that “he only  
 “is holy ||| ;” that “the earth is full of his  
 “goodness \*\*\* ;” that “his mercy endureth  
 “for ever ††† ;” but that “without respect  
 “of persons he judgeth according to every  
 “man’s works †††† ;” “know, therefore, that  
 “the lord thy God, he is God, the faithful  
 “God, who keepeth covenant and mercy  
 “with them that love him, and keep his  
 “commandments, to a thousand genera-  
 “tions §§§§.”

\* Pf. cxlv. 3. † Rev. iv. 9. ‡ Mic. v. 2.  
 § Heb. xiii. 8. || Jam. i. 17. \*\* Acts xvii. 24.  
 †† 1 Tim. vi. 15. †† Pfal. cxlvii. 5. §§ Acts  
 xv. 18. ||| Rev. xv. 4. \*\*\* Psalm xxxiii. 5.  
 ††† Psalm cxviii. 1. ††† 1 Pet. i. 17. §§§ Deut. vii. 9.

Thus

Thus much may serve for the account of the nature and attributes of that great God with whom we have to do, as we read it in the holy scriptures, unmixed with the conceits and inventions of men. He is the creator, father, governor, and judge of the whole earth; and to him alone is due all praise, thanksgiving, and dominion. But, how shall we worthily praise, or properly thank him, except in the holy conduct of our lives? or how shall we duly acknowledge his dominion, except by an obedience to his laws? And how shall we know how to obey him, as we ought to do, unless we are taught the measure of our obedience? To give praise, and thanks, and obedience to him, are nothing more than what in gratitude we owe to him, as our greatest benefactor; they are nothing less than what he requireth of us, as his creatures. And the right enjoyment and best security of our own happiness, as well in this world as the next, demand the faithful observance of these conditions at our hands.

Shall then our duty to God be so plain and evident before our eyes, and shall we neglect

glect to inculcate this great and first commandment to our children, and, if length of years be given us, unto our children's children? Much more ought we frequently to reflect, amidst the conflux of parental anxieties, that an early religious education is the best fortune, as it bids the fairest to secure to our children temporal happiness, by teaching them the government of their passions; resignation to the will of a great, and kind, and just, but terrible God; and contentment with, and the innocent enjoyment of, the many blessings which he bestows upon every one of us. An early religious education brings after it the best assurances of future happiness, by making us, in the vigour of our days, and in our departing moments, in our lives, and in our deaths, acceptable to God, and capable of the enjoyment of heaven when we shall be there. How wretched then must that parent be, who can, upon a serious review of his own conduct, and in defiance of self-partiality, charge himself with the loss of these invaluable possessions and expectations to his children, whom God, all nature, and the world



world tell him, with one voice, he should have “cherished as his own flesh\*,” and “have brought up in the fear, and nurture “of the Lord†,” and have made them capable of their inheritance, as “heirs of God, and “joint-heirs with Christ ‡?

After the consideration of our duty to God; which is comprehended in “loving him, “with all our heart, with all our soul, and “with all our mind;” and is declared by Christ to be “the first and great commandment;” let us pass on to our duty to man, which is styled, “the second, and “like unto it;” and consists “in loving our “neighbours as ourselves.” “On these two “commandments,” saith the same person, “hang all the law and the prophets§. We must, therefore, direct our instructions to the teaching and inculcating the duties of this second commandment, for the obligations to the discharge of them are the same as to the discharge of our duty to God, “they are “like unto them;” and, indeed, so far inseparable, according to the apostle John, that

\* Ephes. v. 29. † Ephes. vi. 4. ‡ Rom. viii. 17.

§ Mat. xxii. 37—40.

“ if a man say, I love God, and hateth his  
 “ brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth  
 “ not his brother, whom he hath seen, how  
 “ can he love God, whom he hath not seen?  
 “ And this commandment,” adds he, “ have  
 “ we from him, that he who loveth God,  
 “ love his brother also\*.”

When questions of nice speculation are raised by vain and subtile reasoners, upon the nature and obligation of moral duties, through “ the opposition of science, falsely  
 “ so called †,” which lead only to “ doubt-  
 “ ful disputation †,” and “ minister” not  
 “ grace unto the hearers §;” it becomes us to call to our remembrance that it is written,  
 “ I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and  
 “ will bring to nothing the understanding  
 “ of the prudent. Where is the wise?  
 “ Where is the scribe? Where is the dis-  
 “ puter of this world? Hath not God made  
 “ foolish the wisdom of this world ||?”  
 We must also remember and consider, that

\* 1 John iv. 20 and 21.

† 1 Tim. vi. 20.

‡ Rom. xiv. 1.

§ Ephes. iv. 29.

|| 1 Cor. i. 19, 20.; referring to Isaiah xxix. 14.  
 and xxxiii. 18.

all nice unedifying distinctions in the duties of the second table, and their respective and relative obligation, are lost in the consideration that the interpretation of this law was delivered by our lord, who was delegated by the same authority that dictated the law itself, and is couched in such unequivocal and explicit terms, as are beyond the reach of sophistry, however acute, and of ridicule, however pointed, to confute. “ All things,” says our lord, in his sermon on the mount, “ whatso-  
 “ ever ye would that men should do to you,  
 “ do ye even so to them : for this is the law,  
 “ and the prophets\*.”

It would carry me beyond my purpose to enlarge upon this duty, which meets the reason and conviction of all mankind. One observation may not, however, lose its effect. If we wish to receive justice or mercy from others, we must give to them the same measure that we expect from them, under similar circumstances. On the same principle, what a mockery of all truth and prayer is it, for any of us to pray to God to forgive us our tref-

\* Matt. vii. 12.

passes and offences as we forgive those who trespass against, or injure, us, while in our hearts we retain all the resentment of an unforgiving spirit, if not the secret designs of a determined enmity !

Thus much, in regard to the first and main objects of education, considering ourselves as christians. All desirable acquirements and dispositions, which we can wish to have taught to our children, will follow in the ordinary course of a well regulated education ; they will follow as the natural consequence of their minds being first set right, and their attention afterwards kept to the genuine and uncorrupted influence of true religion. I would not, however, be understood to discourage a reasonable and proper acquaintance with men and things, or an attention to personal accomplishments. These deserve a certain portion of time and pains, but they should be made subordinate to objects of greater importance, and taught accordingly.

Religion does not require of men either the secluded, idle, or useless lives of monks ; or the rough, unpolished manners of the wild inhabitants of woods and mountains.

Every

Every individual is a citizen of the world, and should enter into the world with the qualifications that are calculated to carry him through it with honor, reputation, and advantage. There is no necessity to reject those exercises which contribute to health, or the gentler ones which give the free use of the limbs, or a grace to the person. Neither ought good manners and urbanity, in behaviour to be neglected, which set off and recommend even the more essential duties of religion. Let these be done, but, on no account or pretence whatever, leave the other undone: but it will become us to take especial care to prevent our young people from being drawn into an unlimited indulgence in those dissipating customs, which, however trifling in their beginnings, are always uncertain, and oftentimes vicious, in their end, and as certainly lead to the neglect of those important duties, which our christian character requires of us.

Notwithstanding these evident truths, we have heard, in our own time, of some, who perhaps would have been offended not to have been called christians, but who have delibe-

rately and avowedly inculcated the breach of the laws of God, and the principles of common honesty among men, only to further the advancement of our youth to worldly honors and distinctions ; and taught to comply with the prevailing fashion of the day in things neither innocent, nor indifferent, rather than to be single in virtue. They have laboured to confound all distinction between virtue and vice, and to recommend art and duplicity before integrity and plain dealing. They have even polluted the acquisition of knowledge by perverting the application ; and that which should have been made subservient to virtue has been, with much ingenuity, converted into the instrument of vice. These doctrines have not been taught the world, in one case at least, without their patron's name, but have had all the countenance they could derive from the sanction of an high title and great wit, and appeared under the further advantage of being the mature counsel of a fond father to his son. And such too has been the sacrifice to fashion, on the part of the readers of these books, that they have been as assiduously dispersed,

as

as they were hastily admired, as if the false conceits of the present age had not before sufficiently wreaked their vengeance on the morals of the people, or satiated their malice against religion, morality, and decency. This popular applause of a plea for a profligate and unprincipled spirit, because it was dressed in an easy and elegant attire, is, however, no less a reflection upon the true taste of our nation, than it is an indication of the low state of its moral virtue.

But to return; if we may, in this place, employ a small portion of our time, on the method to be pursued in education; we should observe, that the natural tempers and dispositions of youth are as much unlike each other as their countenances, and vary, oftentimes, as much in the same family, as they may differ from those of the most distant inhabitants of the earth. One rule, therefore, will not suit all scholars; but there is one rule which should invariably govern all teachers, and that is, an easy and unobserved accommodation of their lessons and expectations to the disposition, temper, and ability of their pupil. The very idea of a task implies difficulty,

and generates disgust; for an early age is not calculated to contend with difficulties. An extraordinary genius, indeed, will consider the same thing as trifling, which another of inferior talents will find to be insurmountable; and when two youths, of such unequal abilities, meet together, the one will be made vain, and the other stupid, unless great judgment be used on the part of the teacher. It is the business, and will be the care, of the discerning master, to dispose of these aspirants in places respectively suitable to them; and with strict impartiality to meet both of them, on their own ground, so that each may be employed with as nearly equal advantage to themselves as their different faculties will admit: and the consequence will be, that the one will avoid that vanity which would be dangerous to himself in the acquirement of real learning, and offensive to others; and the other will be spared the discouragement and chagrin, which would prevent the prosecution of study, or application, in parts less brilliant, but not less useful. Hence also would be preserved in both an ingenuous and innocent emulation in their several laudable pursuits.

The



The master must literally copy the example of the apostle Paul, if he hopes to see his labors rewarded with success; he must be all things to all men, in order that he may gain some.

The acquisition of knowledge, though in itself boundless, is not difficult in its several successive stages; and these are by many subsidiary helps rendered easy, and by an expert teacher may be made inviting to the pupil. As the prospect opens, the eye expands itself, and the judgment improves; first observing each object distinctly, and then travelling forward with a clear remembrance of the whole. And how often might the reflections of the judicious teacher make the wisdom and goodness of God shine with resplendent lustre upon the mind of his young companion! How often might he observe to him, his justice, mercy, kindness, and benevolence; in fine, his good providence in and over all his works! Hence the lesson and application (even in what may, in a certain degree, be called foreign knowledge,) would jointly tend to make religion appear  
like

like what it really is ; and every art, and every science, contribute it's just share to the display of the attributes of the deity, and to the illustration of the beauty, œconomy, and harmony of the creation ; and, consequently, to the religious and virtuous improvement of the learner.

With the faithful discharge of this duty by parents, and the observation of these rules by teachers, I am persuaded, that, with the blessing of God, we should not hear of so much profaneness and impiety, or so much indifference to the cause of truth and the gospel ; that we should not see the principles of true honor and common honesty disregarded, or the cause of infidelity so much countenanced. A full conviction of mind would then prevail, that there is a God, and that he alone is to be worshipped ; that he appointed Jesus to be the Christ, and commissioned him to shew mankind the way to happiness, and to declare that there will be a day of judgment hereafter, and a future state of rewards and punishments, when each shall receive, of the great and impartial judge,

judge, according to what he shall have done in the body, whether it be good or evil.

So far as these considerations are calculated to promote religion and virtue in the world, may God bestow his blessing upon them, and plant them in the hearts of us all.



S E R M O N IX.

THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE HAS NO COGNIZANCE IN MATTERS OF RELIGION.

ACTS XVIII. 12—16.

WHEN GALLIO WAS THE DEPUTY OF ACHAIA, THE JEWS MADE INSURRECTION WITH ONE ACCORD AGAINST PAUL, AND BROUGHT HIM TO THE JUDGMENT-SEAT, SAYING, “ THIS FELLOW “ PERSUADETH MEN TO WORSHIP GOD CONTRARY “ TO THE LAW.” AND WHEN PAUL WAS NOW ABOUT TO OPEN HIS MOUTH, GALLIO SAID UNTO THE JEWS, “ IF IT WERE A MATTER OF SOME “ INJUSTICE OR WICKED MISCHIEF, O YE JEWS, “ REASON WOULD THAT I SHOULD BEAR WITH “ YOU : BUT IF IT BE A QUESTION OF WORDS, “ AND NAMES, AND OF YOUR LAW, LOOK YE TO “ IT: FOR I WILL BE NO JUDGE OF SUCH “ MATTERS.” AND HE DRAVE THEM FROM THE JUDGMENT-SEAT.

IN this account, which the evangelist Luke has given us of a warm and vehement prosecution

prosecution of the apostle Paul at Corinth, we are informed of the charge brought against him; and of the just and upright conduct of Gallio, the Roman magistrate, before whom his cause was heard. And this, as it respects the principles of our common faith in the christian revelation, in so important a point of view as their independence upon human laws, (instituted for the better regulation of mens temporal concerns in civil society,) deserves our particular attention. And it is the more necessary to state, (as occasion may serve,) the intrepid spirit of the great apostle of the gentiles, and the wise reasoning of Gallio, since it is an opinion no less favored by many reputedly judicious persons, than destructive of the life and spirit of true religion, that there is an intimate and inseparable alliance between a civil and religious establishment; an alliance, which converts the gospel of Christ into an engine of political ordinances; while, in truth, the gospel wholly disowns every connection with them, other than by teaching it's disciples to be good men and good christians,

christians, it necessarily instructs them to be good citizens.

Nevertheless, while one class of men zealously maintain this alliance between the institutions of Christ, whose kingdom was expressly declared not to be of this world, with the institutions of civil society which have no concern with any other; while this unnatural connection is argued on the one hand, there are others, who, with very different views, charge the gospel with being silent, if not adverse to that love of our country, that genuine unadulterated patriotism, which ought to animate every man in the maintenance and defence of the just and equal liberties of his fellow-creatures.

The answer, however, to these last objectors is short. The gospel, while it has disowned all alliance with any particular system of government, and renounced connection with all of them, as such, recommends that mutual love and philanthropy, those reciprocal good offices of brotherly kindness, that general benevolence, and unbounded charity, which rise superior to the little distinctions and partialities of  
 separate

separate states, but which are admirably calculated equally to form the governors and the governed, among all nations, to the practice of religion and virtue, and to the enjoyment of prosperity. And the promise of heaven's happiness is tendered to the holy and the good of every country in the world, whether doomed to groan under the galling chains of slavery, or to live in the fairer regions of equal liberty, just and impartial liberty.

But to return to the consideration of the tumultuous seizure of Paul at Corinth for "persuading men to worship God contrary to the law;" and the conduct of Gallio consequent thereupon.

Paul had, it seems, exercised his ministry at Corinth, in preaching the word of God there, "a year and six months." During this time, it is more than probable, that much offence was given to the jews by the plain doctrines, and strict moral precepts of the christian revelation. But the result of their aversion and opposition to our apostle was at length brought to that one charge of "persuading men" (meaning chiefly the jews) "to worship God, contrary to the law."



“law.” This crimination was considered as comprehending his many delinquences in doctrine; upon this they prosecuted his condemnation; and, from the general temper of their own people, and the too ready accommodation of the deputy-governors of the Roman provinces, distant from the seat of empire, assured themselves of his conviction.

To teach the “worship of the father in spirit and in truth, as Jesus also taught\*,” was to speak blasphemy to the ears of this infatuated people. To “preach Christ crucified, was to the jews a stumbling-block, and unto the greeks foolishness†: to argue the cause of a suffering messiah, from the amiable and unaffected life of the holy Jesus, though in him were fulfilled some of their own prophecies, was to destroy the flattering expectations which they had formed of his sustaining the character of a great temporal prince.

However, it ought to be observed, that it makes no part of the charge against Paul, that he persuaded men to worship any other God, than the one only living and true God,

\* John iv. 24.

† 1 Cor. i. 23.

Jehovah, who indeed is equally pointed out as the only object of religious homage and adoration in the christian, and in the jewish scriptures; but that this worship was to be paid, as they expressed themselves, “contrary to their law.” In other words; Paul taught, along with the other apostles, that it was no longer limited to any particular place or mode, either to mount Gerizim, according to the samaritans; or to Jerusalem, according to the jews\*; but that “in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him;” that is, so far as to be called into christianity †.

But Gallio reasoned well, and rightly interpreted the Roman law, as it applied to the case of Paul then before him. For since the disciples of Christ worshipped the same one supreme God with the jews, whose worship was allowed all over the Roman empire, and protected by special edicts and decrees in most, perhaps in all, places through

\* See Bp. Pearce on John iv. 21. note (F.)

† See Acts x. 35. and Bp. Pearce on the place.

which

which Paul travelled\*, it was fairly to be presumed, by an equitable construction of the spirit of such laws, that Paul had an equal right to that protection which the strict letter of them afforded to the jews themselves.

However, we have reason to think, that Gallio went further into the merits of the question, than merely leaving this matter to turn even upon an equitable construction of a written law. Nor may we suppose that he was either so ignorant of the case, or so indifferent to the consequences of his judgment, as some have been disposed to believe. For, when Paul was about to enter upon his defence, he prevented him from proceeding, by addressing himself to the concourse of jews present, and telling them, that if the crime, of which the prisoner was accused had been “ a matter of wrong or “ wicked lewdness” (or, rather, a matter of some injustice, or wicked mischief,) reason required that he should patiently hear what they had to say; but “ if it was a question

\* See Lardner's “Credibility,” vol. i. p. 422, but more particularly p. 387, and seq.

“ of words,” (i. e. about some particular opinion or doctrine,) “ and of names,” (i. e. whether Jesus may be called the Christ \*,) or “ of their law,” (i. e. whether it obliges all men to be circumcised, who go over to the worship of your God,) “ he would “ be no judge of such matters. And he “ drave,” or dismissed “ them from the “ judgment-seat.”

With respect to the intrepid spirit of the persecuted Paul, though in this case displayed only by a silent and manly fortitude, it cannot be too much, or too frequently, commended. We were before told that he had very narrowly escaped the rage and tumult of the same people at Thessalonica †. And it may be observed that the time of his continuance at Corinth discovers no haste, or impatience, to desert his post and station in that city: and his perseverance is as commendable as his integrity. So again at Ephesus ‡, where Demetrius and his craft-

\* “ Perhaps, he means (says Dr. Lardner) of matters, “ about which the difference is so small, that it is a controversy rather about names than things.” See *Credibility*. vol. i. p. 429.

† Acts xvii. 5—9.

‡ Acts xix 35—40.

men were alarmed for their wealth. So also in Judea\*, and afterwards at Rome †, the determined spirit of the great apostle carried him through all the opposition of his enemies. In all these cases, the simple justice of his cause disposed the magistrates in his favor: the corrupt Felix indeed, “willing to shew the jews a pleasure, left Paul bound ‡;” but this servile compliance only perpetuates the infamy of the Roman governor of Judea, who, when he had failed of extorting money from the prisoner, dared, in violation of every principle of justice, to leave the innocent in prison, to gratify the rage of his bigotted and unrelenting persecutors.

On the contrary; the conduct of Gallio in the case of the same apostle, when he was brought before him, is deserving of our particular observation, and constitutes, in the example of an heathen, the right and proper behaviour of every christian magistrate on all similar occasions.

The little we learn concerning the personal history of this most excellent and

\* Acts xxii. xxiv, xxv. † xviii. 16. 30, 31. ‡ xxiv. 27.

valuable man is, that he was the elder brother of Seneca the stoic philosopher; and was then deputy-governor, or pro-consul of Achaia, (which formed a considerable part of Greece\*,) under the emperor Claudius Cæsar; and he is said, upon very good authority, to have been a man of much wit and good sense; and, if we may credit his brother, of a sweet and gentle disposition, of much generosity, free from all vice, and universally beloved †.

With regard to his behaviour, in the case of Paul now before us, Gallio acquitted himself as one who knew his duty, and entered into the spirit of the laws which were to regulate his decisions; and who would not stoop to violate either, by sacrificing his conscience and his trust to the temporary, however earnest, importunities of an enraged populace.

\* Including all that part which lay between Thessaly and the southern coast of Peloponnesus, according to Pausanias, as cited by bishop Pearce; see note on Acts. xviii. 12.

† Dionysius, Statius, Tacitus, and Seneca, cited by Dr. Ibbot, in his "Sermons," vol. ii. p. 433. See also Dr. Lardner, "Credibility." vol. i. p. 369. and bishop Pearce, on Acts xviii. 17. note (1.)

But,

But, besides the inflexible integrity of Gallio, shewn in his firm adherence to the tolerating spirit of the then subsisting laws of pagan Rome, perhaps we should attribute some share of the credit to the influence of that sweetness and generosity of temper which Seneca ascribes to him; and, probably, to an improved and liberal understanding. So strongly was he persuaded, even from the evidence of his persecutors, of the innocency of the prisoner, that when Paul was about to reply to the charge, in vindication of himself, Gallio, as was before observed, spared him the labor of shewing the many wrongs he had suffered, and the unrighteous treatment he had received, by formally renouncing all cognizance of the cause, and declaring his civil jurisdiction incompetent, and even foreign, to it's decision. And he persisted in the same opinion, when, presently after, he was witness of the popular fury of the jews against Sosthenes, the convert, declaring that "he cared not for any  
 " of those things," i. e. that he would not enter into the question, or be a judge of such matters\*.

\* See Acts xviii. 17. and bishop Pearce thereon.

But, before we close our investigation of the conduct of Gallio, we should be careful to distinguish, that the leading principle of his dismissal of the complaint against Paul appears to have been the toleration at that time allowed by the Roman government to the jews, and which, by a liberal and equitable construction, he extended to the christians. But, inasmuch as this extension of the liberty of worshipping God, according to every man's persuasion, wanted the support of the express letter of the law, so far the Roman code was defective; for the benevolent principles which, in the present case, influenced the man were not to be found, in the same extent, in the edicts of the empire.

In the application of the preceding history to ourselves, we shall naturally be disposed to derive from it all possible advantage to the cause of religious liberty in our own day. To this end, we shall do well to consider not only the nature of religion in general, but the peculiar nature of the christian dispensation, which now illuminates our hemisphere. This last revelation of the will of God teaches a religion so congenial with every species of  
rational



rational liberty, that (without those mutual stipulations which are contended for by some as the essentials to an alliance between church and state, as it is termed,) we shall find, wherever the truths of the gospel are professed in the greatest simplicity and purity, there is enjoyed the greatest perfection of civil liberty. They are plants which thrive best in the same soil and climate; and the careful cultivation of the one will seldom fail to improve the growth of the other. While they cease to be linked together by violence, both will advance to maturity. Civil liberty will give to every man the perfect enjoyment of all his powers to serve his country, his friends, his family and himself, in their best worldly interests; religion will form him for future happiness. But, as well may the ivy which entwines the oak boast, that it supports the trunk, as civil institutions plead the support they give to religion, properly so called. For, from that moment in which any particular profession of faith is exclusively countenanced by the laws of civil society, and made to seek protection from them; from that time the church is made an engine, or an “ally  
“ of

“ of the state; is converted into the means  
 “ of strengthening, or diffusing, influence; or  
 “ regarded as a support of regal, in opposition  
 “ to popular, forms of government, which  
 “ have served only to debase the institution,  
 “ and introduce into it many corruptions  
 “ and abuses\*.”

It is not only the nature of our holy religion to thrive best, independent of all alliance with the state; but it is necessary to its vital principle that it should breathe the freest air, and be left to its own operations on the human mind, without any foreign controul, except, indeed, in those rare instances, where uncommonly weak, or very wicked men, make the cause of religion the pretence and excuse for crimes against the state. The apostle Paul expresses himself in very intelligible language, on this head, in his epistle to the Romans †, “ Who art thou,” says he, “ that judgest another’s servant? to his own  
 “ master he standeth, or falleth: yea, he  
 “ shall be holden up; for God is able to  
 “ make him stand.”

\* See Paley’s “ Principles of moral and political philosophy.” 4to. 455.

† XIV. 4.

The province of the civil magistrate is limited to the cognizance of overt acts against the peace and interest of society; and for this, among other reasons, because of his insufficiency to the knowledge of the motives and intentions of men; and also, because it was not in the contemplation of the founders of civil society to empower the administrators and dispensers of it's laws to interfere with matters, which did not affect the interests for which it was instituted. And, it is no novel observation, that the enjoyment of every blessing of society is as consistent with men's holding different opinions in religion, as with their being of different sentiments upon questions in philosophy or general science.

Let not, therefore, the magistrate think, that “ he bears the sword in vain, unless he  
 “ employs it in the cause of God and reli-  
 “ gion. It was not put into his hands for this  
 “ use, nor can it be applied to this purpose  
 “ with any good effect. It was given him  
 “ for quite other ends, and he will find work  
 “ enough for it in deciding civil controver-  
 “ sies, without meddling with those of a  
 “ religious nature; in executing judgment  
 “ and

“ and justice between one man and another ;  
 “ in breaking the jaws of the wicked, and  
 “ plucking the spoil out of his teeth. I say,  
 “ these, and such-like particulars, will af-  
 “ ford the magistrate sufficient exercise for  
 “ his sword, without turning the edge of it  
 “ against,” what he may call, “ false doc-  
 “ trine, heresy, and schism\*.”

Finally. In the virtuous exercise of civil authority, whose only just and legitimate title is derived from the consent of the people who are governed by it ; in the exercise of this authority, within it's own proper sphere, in preventing as well as punishing offences against the peace and good order of society ; in protecting “ personal liberty, “ personal security, and private property ;” while it relinquishes every shadow of power or influence over the minds, and open professions of men in the great business of religion, in which none are concerned, but the great searcher of all hearts, and the separate conscience of every individual ; we might hope to see much of the ill-will and angry bickerings

\* See Job xxix. 17. and Dr. Itbot's “ Sermons,” vol. ii. p. 465.

among men, and a great deal of the misery which is occasioned by them, to cease and depart from among us; we should then hear no more of those odious distinctions which are affixed to diversities of opinion, which are unavoidable, while we continue to be men, and which, when they are conscientiously and candidly pursued, instead of being blame-worthy, are honorable to those who hold them. If each were permitted to follow the unbiaſſed dictates of his own religious persuasion, then might we see peace and harmony universally prevail among all the denominations of religioniſts in our land. We might then adopt the beautiful language of Iſaiah.

“ The wolf taketh up his abode with the  
 “ lamb; and the leopard lieth down with the  
 “ kid: and the calf, and the young lion, and  
 “ the fatling come together; and a little  
 “ child leadeth them: and the cow, and the  
 “ ſhe-bear feed together; together their  
 “ young ones lie down; and the lion eateth  
 “ ſtraw as the ox. And the ſuckling playeth  
 “ on the hole of the aſpic; and on the  
 “ den of the baſiliſk the new-weaned child  
 “ layeth his hand. They neither hurt, nor  
 “ deſtroy, in all my holy mountain; for the  
 “ land

“ land is full of the knowledge of Jeho-  
 “ vah, as the waters cover the depths of  
 “ the sea\*.”

In this happy state of things, Cæsar would receive all that was Cæsar’s right; and every one would give to God the things which were God’s. The supreme governor of the world would receive the reasonable service of his rational creatures, according to the measure of their information and ability, unclouded by the decisions of human ordinances, and unbiaſſed by the hope or fear of human authority.

In the mean time, while impediments are thrown before us, which, “ are at all  
 “ times attended with ſerious inconveni-  
 “ ces; which check inquiry, violate liberty,  
 “ and enſnare the conſciences of the clergy,  
 “ by holding out temptations to prevarica-  
 “ tion: which, however they may expreſs  
 “ the perſuaſion, or be accommodated to the  
 “ controverſies, or the fears of the age, in  
 “ which they were compoſed, have, (in pro-  
 “ ceſs of time, and by reaſon of the changes

\* Iſaiah xi. 6, 9. See Bp. Lowth’s and Mr. Dodſon’s  
 “ Tranſlations.”

“ which

“ which are wont to take place in the judgment of mankind upon religious subjects,) come at length to contradict the actual opinions of the church, whose doctrines they profess to maintain; and even to perpetuate the proscription of sects and tenets, from which any danger has long since ceased to be apprehended\*.”

So likewise, while some immediate legal pains and penalties, and certain civil incapacities, which are no less founded in bad policy than injustice, are suffered to remain in our statute-books, suspended from execution, only by the tolerant disposition of individual rulers, or by the better temper of the times, it becomes our duty to sue for the removal of these rocks of just offence, and to seek relief from the injuries to which their continuance will leave us exposed, in every way consistent with the peace of society, with decent respect to our legislators, and with the justice we owe to ourselves, and our posterity.

So long as any of these unjust re-

\* See Archdeacon Paley's "Principles of moral and political philosophy." 4to. p. 568.

straints upon our christian liberty are continued, it will be our duty and our honor publicly to profess Christ before the world, according to our several persuasions, with all openness, plainness, and sincerity, lest, by temporizing with the seducing accommodations and temptations of the world, we should deny our master before men, that he will deny us before our father in heaven, and we should lose the approbation and favor of God promised to the good and faithful servants of Jesus Christ.

Should it ever be the sad portion of any of us to be reduced by persecution to the alternative of choice, whether we would obey God, or man, judge ye which determination will give us peace at the last, and be our heart's desire, when we shall stand before the judgment-seat of Jehovah, our God. May we, in that trying moment, take up the cross of Christ, and follow him.



S E R M O N X.

COMPULSION IN RELIGION UNWARRANTABLE.

LUKE XIV. 23.

AND THE LORD SAID UNTO THE SERVANT, GO OUT INTO THE HIGHWAYS AND HEDGES, AND COMPEL THEM TO COME IN, THAT MY HOUSE MAY BE FILLED.

THE immediate import of this parable of the supper-feast related by Luke is, in general, the same with that of the marriage-feast recorded by Matthew in the twenty-second chapter of his gospel. Both of them are generally understood, by commentators of very different opinions in other matters, as referring to the rejection of the doctrine of Jesus, first by the leaders among the jews, and afterwards by the bulk of the common people ;

and to the subsequent offer of it to the gentiles.

That this is the true meaning of our lord, in these parallel places in the two evangelists, seems to admit of little doubt. In the application of them to our own cases, we may not be so well agreed even among ourselves, though our opinions may tend to the same, and ultimately meet in one point.

The light of the gospel has been displayed by all the accumulation of evidence, external and internal, from prophecy and miracles, from the reasonableness of its doctrines, and the harmony of the dispensation. It was not offered by its great preacher to the weak, the credulous, the enthusiastic, or superstitious; but it was, and is, offered to the sober understanding of God's rational creatures. The gospel itself, its faith, its doctrines, its institutions and its hopes, are only a mean to lead and influence us to the performance of those conditions, upon which our future happiness depends.

It is our business, therefore, to consider, how this work of love and kindness has been treated;

treated; how this invitation has been received by us. And this will lead us, of course, to consider the nature and weight of those several excuses we may have made to ourselves, not for refusing the faith, or despairing of the hopes, but for neglecting the precepts of the gospel. For the design of the father of lights was not to invite us to take upon ourselves the mere name and profession of christianity, but to awaken in us the vital principle of all religion; to call us to virtue and holiness, without which none shall see the lord; and to make us followers of the blessed Jesus in word and deed, as well as to believe him to be the Christ, and that he derived his authority from the parent of all.

It is very possible, if we set ourselves ingenuously to inquire into the many omissions of our duty, of which we may have been guilty, that we shall be obliged to confess, with shame, that they owe their beginnings to no better, or more substantial and satisfactory, reasons than we find were offered in the parable in the gospel. The purchase of a piece of ground, the making trial of a yoke

of oxen, the engagements in domestic life, and similar indifferent and temporary matters, we may severally have pleaded with ourselves in excuse for superior attentions; or we may have given up ourselves to the indulgence of an highly criminal indolence, when possibly the exertions of the whole man were required. But, while these are among the things which ought not be left undone, they are of very small moment compared with our obedience to the call of our heavenly father, in respect to things which make for our eternal happiness. And, if we wholly engage and devote ourselves to secular concerns, which bring so little profit, and so short enjoyment, and reject the benevolent offer made to us, through the goodness of God, we may expect to be left in the same impenitent state, to which the jews themselves were consigned.

But it is not so much my design to enlarge upon the whole parable, as to consider a particular expression, which we read in the concluding part of Luke's account of it, and which I recited as my subject.

The commonly received version of our  
bibles,

bibles, after stating the invitation both to the leaders and the common people among the jews, reads, “ and the servant said, Lord, it is “ done as thou hast commanded, and yet “ there is room. And the lord said unto the “ servant, Go out into the highways and “ hedges, and compel them to come in, that “ my house may be filled.” It is almost needless to observe here, that the direction to “ go out into the highways and hedges,” implies the invitation being given to travellers, who, desirous of pursuing their journey, had only stayed to rest and refresh themselves under the hedges\*; and is understood to have respect to the gentile world at large. Indeed, the extent of the invitation shews, not only the great design of almighty God, who wished to call all men, from one side of the earth even unto the other, to the knowledge of him and of his laws; but more than implies the fitness of the religion of Jesus, for that universal reception, which, in God’s own time, it was intended to obtain among the nations.

\* See Harmer’s “ Observations on divers passages of scripture,” vol. I. p. 463.

The mode, however, whereby this advancement of the gospel of Christ should be promoted by men, as instruments in the hands, and doing the work, of God, has been variously interpreted. In great measure, it has been treated according to the persuasion which men have previously taken up, or brought with them to the reading of the scriptures : and it has not seldom happened, that the inflamed passions of men have sought shelter and countenance from one single word, in the passage before us, for all the outrages which have disgraced the history of the christian religion ; “ the whole of which is little more, “ than the history of the struggles of different sects to “ overturn the systems of others, in order “ to build up their own ; but the great lesson, which every sect, and every individual “ of every sect, ought to learn from it’s “ refusal, is, moderation \*.”

But to return. The papists, very confidently indeed with the unhappy tendency of

\* See Bp. Watson’s “ Preface to his Collection of Tracts.” p. xiv.

their principles, have maintained the right and expediency of compulsion in the concerns of religion; and, to that end, have repeatedly consigned their imagined and devoted delinquents to the secular arm. And protestants, who have eagerly insisted on the contrary sense, not only of the passage before us, but of the whole tenor of the gospel; and who have supported in theory and debate the perfect freedom of religious opinions, have, in their practice, thrown every impediment in the way of the full and free exercise of that very liberty for which they have so successfully pleaded. This has been done, sometimes, by open persecution, but more frequently by holding out ample emoluments with one hand; and denying the scantiest pittance, and bestowing reproach and hard names, and imposing civil incapacities, with the other. These are more silent, but not less efficacious means of producing compliance; but, inasmuch as they are equally the support of error, equally the offspring of bigotry and intolerance, and equally contrary to the gospel, they are justly to be repro-

bated by every candid and intelligent christian, by every consistent protestant.

But it has happened in this, as in several other questions, that the gospel is charged with being the source of that, with which it even holds no manner of fellowship. The master of the feast is, indeed, represented, as we read, to say unto his servant, " Go out  
 " into the highways and hedges, and COM-  
 " PEL them to come in, that my house may  
 " be filled." And it is no longer since, than about the close of the last century, that a long controversy was carried on, (between Bayle and Jurieu,) upon this very passage. But, notwithstanding the irrefragable arguments which were produced by the protestant writer, it is too probable, that, on this question at least, the disciples of each continued faithful to the standard of their respective champion.

The translation made use of in our common version, it is apprehended, conveys an idea totally foreign to the intention of our lord, wholly unauthorized by sound and fair criticism, and, indeed, wholly subversive of the first principle of all religion, which necessarily



rily implies and requires perfect freedom and volition.

(1.) If we would learn the intention of the speaker, we must call to our minds the circumstances in which he is placed, and the parable he is relating; now he states, or supposes, the master of the feast engaged in earnestly inviting guests to partake of his supper; and surely on no occasion could compulsion, properly so called, be less necessary, or more improbable or unbecoming, or more contrary to custom. It is very unusual language to hold out to the multitude; and it is wholly inadmissible, in the present case, that the servant should be bidden to “compel,” that is, to use any force or violence to bring the people to partake of a banquet, which may be supposed to have afforded the necessaries of life, and, probably, many of its pleasurable gratifications.

(2.) If we advert to what may be deduced in favor of our interpretation, in the way of critical remark, we may add, it is certain that the same original word is used both by Matthew and Mark\* in the sense now con-

\* Matthew xiv. 22. and Mark vi. 45. *αναγκάζω*.

tended

tended for. Both these evangelists make use of it, when they recite (as we read in the passages) that Jesus “constrained” his disciples to get into the ship, in order to pass over the sea of Galilee.

Again; the same word occurs in the epistle to the Galatians\*, where, in our bibles, it is rendered by the word “compel,” though the passage means, as in our text, no more than to “persuade;” for there Paul reproveth Peter for the inconsistency of his conduct, who, being a Jew, not only lived after the manner of the Gentiles, but employed himself in compelling or persuading the Gentiles to become Jews †.

So also, when our Lord conversed with certain women, after his resurrection, concerning the evidences of that event being to be found in their own scriptures, they are said to have “CONSTRAINED him to abide “with them that evening, the day being “far spent †.” So again, Lydia is said, by the

\* ii. 14.

† See particularly Lardner’s ‘History of the Apostles,’ vol. iii. p. 163. note (E.) ‡ Luke xxiv. 29.

same apostle, in the Acts\* to have “constrained” Paul and his associates to enter into her house. In which two last places, though the original word † is different from the former one, used by Matthew, Mark, and Paul, it conveys no idea of violence; the application of it is, therefore, direct to our purpose.

In confirmation of these observations, it has been further insisted, that some of the classic writers have used phrases couched in even stronger terms than that before us, where it is, nevertheless, very obvious, that the intention of the author was only to express an earnest invitation, or solicitation to do such, or such a particular thing ‡. And in the several places which have been cited to this purpose, where similar expressions are insisted to have been used in this moderate sense, they are so understood in agreement with the evident design of the writer, which

\* xvi. 15.

† παραβιαζομαι.

‡ As, “prece cogit,” by Horace; “Confiliis compulsum,” by Cicero; &c. for which see Bp. Pearce note (B.) on Luke xiv. 23. See also Elsner Obs. vol. i. p. 244, 245, referred to by Doddridge on the same verse.

is acknowledged, on all hands, to be the first, and an indispensable, canon of rational criticism.

(3.) If, to the foregoing observations, we add the consideration of the nature of religion, we shall find still further reason to look with abhorrence at every thought of compulsion; we shall utterly and for ever discard every tendency in our conduct to the spirit of intolerance.

By religion, I mean to express all that we ought to do upon a principle of duty to God; and as he alone knows, and principally respects the motives of the heart, he only is competent to decide upon the purity or rectitude of our minds. Hence the province of religion is, in its principle, though not always in its effect, beyond the power of man who knoweth not the intentions of the heart of his neighbour, and can only judge of him by external appearances, which are deceitful in themselves, and only to be determined upon, through the further fallacious medium of his own judgment. But, besides all this, no man can absolutely direct and rule his own mind; he cannot think as he  
will

will, but as things appear to him; he is indeed directed and influenced by evidence, but the same evidence (from a variety of causes) will lead different persons, and even the same persons at different times, to very opposite conclusions. In this unavoidable disagreement between one honest inquirer and another, and sometimes between the same man and himself, who is there on earth qualified, or impowered to decide? To his own master, every man must stand or fall. What service, what good purpose then can compulsion or violence do in the genuine and proper business of religion? It may indeed extort a profession of any thing, however false or absurd, but it is impossible to work conviction; it may forbid the tongue to speak, or the hand to write, but it cannot convince the mind; it may make, and oftentimes has made men hypocrites, but it never did, it cannot, make one true disciple.

Under the christian dispensation, more especially, we read of persuasion, exhortation, and example, as the only means of convincing men of what we may consider as  
 their

their errors; and, if we add to these, admonitions, we have all the methods which are expressly provided in the gospel, even to reclaim vice.

Thus every man's religious faith and principles are really incapable of any external controul, and the man himself ought to be allowed to follow the spontaneous convictions of his own mind. The effect, indeed, of such his faith and principles, as we have already said, will be more observable by men, and they will be led to judge of the parent-tree by the fruit which it produceth; for it is justly observed by the apostle James\* that  
 “ pure religion, and undefiled before God,  
 “ even the father, is this, to visit the father-  
 “ less and widows in their affliction, and to  
 “ keep himself unspotted from the world.”

But, while we endeavour to persuade men to give to the profession of religion that freedom which belongs, and is essential, to it; while we labor also to discountenance all compulsion and force, where it can have no good effect, and must do a very material injury, as well to the dispositions and temper

\* i. 27.

of him who offers the violence, as to the peace and liberty of him who suffers under it; we may spare a little time to consider the various shapes, in which these burdens on the consciences of men, and these hinderances to the propagation of the pure religion of the gospel, may be presented to us.

(1.) In the days of our fathers, these heavy grievances and most unchristian practices appeared in open and undisguised prosecution; and the perpetrators of every act of cruelty, which the wit of man could devise against their brethren, gloried in their shame and dishonour. All ecclesiastical history unites to unfold this melancholy truth, that the world has been deluged in misery and blood; and thousands of God's rational creatures have been offered up to the mistaken judgment, and furious zeal, of their fellow-mortals. This looks if the vice and wickedness, which men have introduced into society, were not complete until they had perverted the last, best gift of heaven, which was intended by almighty God to promote their present peace and comfort, and their everlasting happiness, and had made it, (according to our lord's prophecy,) the occasion of  
carrying

carrying fire, and sword, and desolation throughout all lands\*.

We trust, however, for the sake of religion and humanity, that the day is hastening, not to us alone, but to the world at large, when it will cease to be the practice of every denomination of religionists, to destroy men's lives, or to abridge their liberty, because they differ from them in their religious faith, under the infatuated persuasion, that they are thereby doing an acceptable service to the God of their lives, and the author of their being.

(2.) But there is another mode of impeding the free course of true religion, and corrupting its stream. Less general offence is taken against it, because its operations are less observed by the world, although it blinds the sight of it's hundreds, and strikes at the peace of it's thousands; although it per-

\* " There have been several idolaters, jews, mahometans, and christians, several reverend inquisitors, *compellers to come in*, propagators of the faith by sword, halter, and faggot, who have been viler persons than several atheists; and religion may be corrupted to such a degree, as to be worse than unbelief."

JORTIN'S Remarks on Ecclesiast. History, vol. i. p. 128.



verteth men's judgment, and turneth them from the unbiaſſed purſuit and maintenance of truth, by ſapping the very foundations of ſincerity and integrity. I mean the eſta- bliſhment of ſyſtems of certain religious doctrines to the excluſion of others; and the inſeparably annexing to ſuch ſyſtems large ſecular emoluments and advantages. A practice equally juſtifiable in popiſh, as in proteſtant communities; and productive of the ſame wretched and deplorable confe- quences in both. All ſuch human ſyſtems, of whatever deſcription they be, or how much, or how little, ſoever they partake of each other, alike purchaſe men's com- pliance with many things confeſſedly not right; they place hired ſentinelſ at every avenue to the good work of reformation; like a bribe, they pervert the judgment; they connect the temporal intereſt of great numbers with the retention of abſurd though eſta- bliſhed opinions, in their collective capa- city, which ſingly they neither approve, nor can defend; they conſtitute temptations, which every man cannot reſiſt; and, not ſeldom, when they have gained their victory

over sincerity and truth, destroy the peace and happiness of their victims.

We may perhaps be told here, by some who affect the appellation of "moderate men," that in all this there is no compulsion, and that the consent of the party subscribing is voluntary. In strictness of speech, this may, in part, be true: but the spirit of our objection goes much further than this equivocal defence will reach. The imposition objected to will be found to reduce men to a sad and trying alternative, wherein much must be allowed to prejudice, to influence, to connections, to pressing necessity, and to the avoidance of reproach. All these, together or separate, though they may not be irresistible, are certainly very powerful, enemies to an impartial rectitude of judgment, and to a corresponding manly and christian conduct; they are fatal to truth, by stifling and discouraging all inquiry; and, lastly, they greatly distress the minds, and prevent the usefulness, of many honest and conscientious men, except indeed, in those few cases, where their own sentiments do really agree with the system to  
which

which they attach themselves, or where they cultivate a fashionable indifference to certain obligations of religion, in order to prevent the pungent consequences of reflection.

To conclude. In whatever degree the mind is unduly influenced to make fallacious professions of religious faith, whether by compulsion in it's roughest and coarsest dress, or by the more plausible and circumventive means of public confessions and articles of faith, they are equally unwarranted by the word of God, though not equally discountenanced by the present practices of the nations of the earth. Hitherto, mankind have protested only against persecution, and that from a principle of humanity; but the time will come, when, from a just judgment of the nature and spirit of true religion, and because of the wrong and oppression done to it's professors, they shall universally remonstrate against the subjugation of their understandings and consciences to the doctrines and commandments of men.



S E R M O N    X I.

CAUSE OF SEPARATION FROM ANY ESTABLISHED CHURCH.

REVELATION XVIII. 4, 5.

I HEARD ANOTHER VOICE FROM HEAVEN, SAYING, COME OUT OF HER, MY PEOPLE, THAT YE BE NOT PARTAKERS OF HER SINS, AND THAT YE RECEIVE NOT OF HER PLAGUES. FOR HER SINS HAVE REACHED UNTO HEAVEN, AND GOD HATH REMEMBERED HER INIQUITIES.

THIS passage, in the revelation of the apostle John, has been much disputed between the two great classes of professing christians. Protestant writers have not only very confidently applied, but exclusively confined, it to the church of Rome; the Romanists have, as might be expected, not less peremptorily and zealously disowned

that it contained any prophetic description of the state of their church\*.

Upon a dispassionate view of the design of the apostle, and the subsequent events in the christian church, it may probably be found, that both the contending parties are more concerned in the prophecy, than either of them may be supposed fully to apprehend, or willing to admit.

But, that we may not officiously obtrude an opinion without some reasonable degree of proof, or anticipate a conclusion, from whence we can only derive blame upon our fellow-christians, and be led to observe a larger waste and devastation arising from the corruptions of christianity, than we might before have apprehended; we will consider our text as we find it in the new Testament, and apply the facts in ecclesiastical history, with that impartiality which belongs to the friends of, and inquirers after, truth.

Our apostle, in this same chapter, represents the fall of spiritual Babylon, in lan-

\* Even Grotius and Hammond applied it to heathen Rome, while Mede and Henry Moore applied it to Rome christian. See Pyle on the Revelation. Preface p. xvi.

guage expressive of the same certainty as if it had actually taken place, just as the prophets Isaiah\* and Jeremiah † had before pronounced of the political state of ancient idolatrous Babylon, saying, “ Babylon is fallen, is fallen,” though the actual fall of that monarchy was not till many years after their prophecies. And as those prophets foretold, that that great city should “ become a desert, and an habitation of wild beasts ‡,” so shall this corrupt communion, by the judgments of God, and the utter confutation of her false doctrines, and the abolition of her idolatrous worship, become desolate, hateful, and contemptible. Because, what the prophet said of the first Babylon || that “ her golden cup § had made all the earth drunken; the nations have drunken of her wine, and are mad;” is much more eminently true of this idolatrous church\*\*.

\* xxi. 9. † li. 8. ‡ Isa. xiii, 19. 22. Jer. l. 45.

|| Jeremiah. li. 7.

§ See Blayney's note on this verse and on chapter, xxv. 15.

\*\* See Pyle's Paraphrase of these verses. Revelation, xviii. 3, 4.

The prophecies of Daniel, Paul, and John, severally expressed by “ the little “ horn of the fourth beast\* ;” by “ the man “ of sin † ;” and by “ the seven-headed “ beast having the name of blasphemy on “ his head ‡ ,” and the woman arrayed in “ purple sitting upon that same seven-headed “ beast || ;” as also, by “ the beast in ap- “ pearance a lamb, but in speech a dragon § ,” and by “ the false prophet\*\* ;” are only so many descriptions of the general apostacy of the christian church, and belong, in different degrees, to some or other of the many, or rather to all, defections from the truth, simplicity, and integrity of the gospel, from whence soever they have arisen, or by whomsoever they have been, or are, professed and propagated. The protestant may, indeed, from a well-intended zeal, be induced to labor to fasten these characters, and to affix the seal of the grand apostacy upon papal Rome ; and, in this work, I am so far from being disposed to arraign his judgment, that I readily ad-

\* Dan. vii. 8. † 2. Theff. ii. 3—12. ‡ Rev. xiii. 1.  
 || Rev. xvii. 3, 4. § Rev. xiii. 11. \*\* Rev. xix. 20.



mit that there is a striking and expressive likeness, between the type and anti-type, which is preserved in the similarity of features and general cast of countenance in both. But I am yet to learn that the prophecies, which relate to it, are exclusively the faithful representations, and portraitures of that part of the christian world alone; or that the likeness, both in the letter and spirit of such prophecies, is not to be found without the pale of the Roman church.

We shall, here, do well to remember, that the apostle John hath said, in his first epistle\*, not only that “ antichrist should “ come,” but, that even in his time, there “ were many antichrists.” In like manner, it is apprehended, that a dispassionate inquiry into the state of the christian church at this very hour would exhibit a very considerable part of it under the same description. We need not fix our eyes eastward to discern the melancholy prospect, but if we carry them through the continent of Europe, and over the isles thereof, we shall see many antichrists: for as the knowledge of the gospel has travelled west-

\* ii. 18.

ward,

ward, the sad corruptions of that best gift of heaven have, by hasty strides, taken the same circuit, and accompanied it's rapid progress, as the shadow keepeth pace with the substance.

The unhappy league which has been so universally formed by the powers of this world, between the religion of Christ and the secular designs and interests of men, has naturally tended to that corruption of the gospel, of which we complain: and so long as it is suffered to be made the instrument of civil power, and the convenient engine for effecting political purposes, it must necessarily, not only be corrupted, but it's benign and heavenly nature be concealed under, almost impenetrable darkness; and the happy influence it is calculated to have over the mind and disposition of man, totally destroyed. For this reason, it's beautiful and attractive form is faintly to be discerned, and the understandings of thousands of God's rational creatures are either chained down under the ponderous mass of human superstition, and figments of man's device; or, men mistaking this ungraceful disproportionate edifice,

built

built with untempered mortar, for the work of a different architect, and, at the same time, justly conceiving of it as unworthy of the hand of God, they are unhappily led to disbelieve that gospel of truth, with which it bears no resemblance, and indeed has no connection.

But, these being general observations, which may be admitted or denied, as persons may be previously disposed, let us, for our greater satisfaction, recall to our memories some of the chief and most obvious notes and characters of this apostacy which we, by a kind of common consent, hear so generally lamented; and of that antichristianism which has created such dark and thick clouds, that even the light of the glorious gospel, the revival of letters, and a more liberal spirit, can hardly either penetrate or disperse.

(I.) Among these prophetic characters it has been often insisted, “that we are to look for antichrist within the proper limits of the Roman empire.” And to this is applied the prophecy of Daniel in his “ famous vision of the four kingdoms,” who says

says expressly, “ that among the ten kingdoms into which the fourth, or Roman, shall be divided, another shall arise\* ;” that is, as all interpreters agree, “ the kingdom of antichrist †.”

But, admitting that antichrist was to arise in the east, and to arrive at great temporal power within the Roman empire, it by no means follows that it's spread was to continue limited within the fluctuating boundaries of that government. And, indeed, allowing that popery constitutes one part of this prophecy, we see the fact to be clearly against any such limitation; for this corruption of the faith continues the established religion, not only of countries beyond the contracted dominions of the bishop of Rome, but of nations which are well disposed to dispute his sovereignty even in spiritual concerns, without any inclination to question the doctrinal faith of that church. Just in the same manner, as our eighth Henry transferred the supremacy from the Roman pontif to himself,

\* Dan. vii. 7, 8. compare with ver. 24.

† See bishop Hurd's Sermons at bishop Warburton's lecture. 8vo. 2 edit. 1772. S. xi. p. 347.

while

while he retained all the doctrines of popery, and renounced all allegiance to that power which had complimented him with the title of “defender of the faith,” for writing against Luther; a distinction, which was unmerited in the first instance, and unbecoming at any time; but which has been continued by his successors, who have professed the protestant faith, although the title itself was of so base an origin. On the occasion of this high-sounding honor being given to that prince, it was well observed to him, by some one, more judicious than himself, “Sire, let you and me defend each other, but leave the faith to defend itself.”

(II.) Again. It is frequently pretended, that the seat of this same antichrist is exclusively confined to the city of Rome, because an angel is made to interpret John’s symbolic vision of a beast with seven heads, and ten horns, and a woman arrayed in purple, in the following words, “The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth; and the ten horns, which thou sawest, are ten kings; and the woman  
“ which

“ which thou sawest, is that great city, which  
 “ reigneth over the kings of the earth \*.”

However precise and determinate this description may be, it has been disputed with much learning accompanied with acute and specious argument, even in reference to the seven hills whereon this city is said to be situated †. But, granting all that can be concluded from the precision of these marks, we are again led to observe, that though the commencement of the reign of antichrist should originate from this quarter of the world, we are no more warranted in confining its dominion within the jurisdiction of the pope, than within the walls that surround the city of Rome.

( III. ) To the foregoing marks of antichrist, others are accumulated, particularly the character of the apostle Paul’s “ man of sin,”

\* Rev. xvii. 3, 4, 9, 12, and 18.

† See the acknowledgments even of bishop Hurd in his Sermons on the prophecies. Sermon xi. p. 351—358. Also two papers in the Whitehall-Evening-Post, in the month of March 1776, signed Irenæus. Constantinople, as well as Rome, was situated on seven hills. See “ Commentaries and Essays,” vol. ii. p. 146.

that

that he, “ as God, sitteth in the temple of  
 “ God, shewing himself that he is God\*.”  
 But, surely, this is more aptly and significantly interpreted when it is understood to have reference to any and all undue exercise of power over the faith and consciences of men, in things immediately pertaining to their intercourse with God, than by any limitation of meaning which would apply it to the church of Rome alone. It may be very true that that church is sufficiently marked by its intolerance, to make it the principal figure upon the canvass; but there appears no reason why we should not ascribe to the rest of the group, that portion of blame which their share in the same practice deserves.

In like manner, “ the beast coming out  
 “ of the earth; and having two horns like a  
 “ lamb, and speaking as a dragon†;” although very expressive of the church of Christ claiming great and tyrannical civil power, will as clearly include all societies of christians, who

\* 2 Theff. ii. 4. See, however, a different interpretation in Mr. Nisbett’s “ Illustration of various important passages.” 8vo. second edit. p. 75—141.

† Rev. xiii. 11.

do, or who affect, the same thing, though some may relax many degrees from the extreme rigour and oppression of the Roman church.

(IV.) There are three other notes of antichrist, which may be generally described “ by that triple brand impressed upon him “ of a tyrannical, intolerant, and idolatrous “ power\*.”

But are these marks to be confined to the Romanists, only because their church has been said by others, to “ pride herself in the extent of “ her sway, and the fire of her zeal, and only to “ quibble with us about the meaning of the “ term idolatry †?” This, however, is ascribing to the papists, more than they will readily accede to; and leaving out others, who, though they may formally disown, have an undoubted right to some share in, these characters. The faithful page of history will demonstrate, that though the papists have distinguished themselves by their tyranny and intolerance, they have not wholly monopo-

\* See Bp. Hurd's Sermons, p. 368.

† See ib. p. 380.



lized these articles to themselves. Protestants of every denomination, whether episcopalians or presbyterians; whether lutherans or calvinists; whether athanasians, arians, or socinians, have occasionally given into that zeal, which has, in some cases, without knowledge, and, in others, contrary to better knowledge, led them to commit acts of the highest oppression, cruelty and wrong; insomuch, that their contests and successive dominion are written in characters of blood. The church of Rome blushes not to own it, because the extirpation of what she calls heresy has been her glory. The church of England, to say the least, retains enough in her constitutions and in the statutes of the realm, to call loudly for reformation; neither shall we find the disposition of the presbyterians of the last century in any degree better than their other protestant brethren, if we look into an ordinance of parliament of 1648 \*, which punished the un-

\* See the ordinance passed 2d May 1648, in Scobell's Collection of acts, &c. p. 149, entitled, "For punishing "blasphemies and heresies;" wherein offences there mentioned are ordered to be punished "by death without "benefit of clergy:" and among these are the denial of the doctrine of the trinity, &c.

believers in the athanasian trinity with death.

If we consider the charge of idolatry, as one mark of antichrist; it may be observed, that some protestant divines have, in their arguments with the papists, touched this part of the subject with all possible gentleness and delicacy\*. For they very well knew, that idolatry consisted in giving divine honor to any other, than the one true God; and that it does not alter the nature of this crime, whether such honor be paid to any created, or inferior being; or to a molten, or carved, image; or any other pretended resemblance of the deity. On this account, it should seem, the same writers have chosen to prove the charge of idolatry against their adversaries, from their making of other and more mediators, besides the "one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus," rather than to rest too much upon their taking from the honor and worship due to the invisible God alone, by prostrating themselves before representations in wood and stone. They were not to learn, that there remains so much to be professed in their

\* See Bp. Hurd's "Sermons." Serm. xi. p. 382, &c. respectively.

respective systems, which is very exceptionable and reprehensible, that their arguments, unguarded, like a two-edged sword, might cut both ways. For instance; a trinity in unity, and an unity in trinity, is at this hour retained alike in the established creed of the papist and the protestant; and the consequence is no other than might be expected, for when the protestant objects to the incomprehensible and unscriptural transubstantiation of the elements in the celebration of the lord's supper, the papist fails not to attempt to reconcile him to one difficulty, by reminding him of another, and thence endeavors to convince him, upon his own principles. In both cases, he must equally abandon his reason and understanding, and alas! the scriptures afford as feeble a support to the protestant's trinity, as to the papist's real presence.

Lastly. There is no interpretation of any of the prophecies relating to the time of the rise of the man of sin, or antichrist, which, in the most distant degree, affect the argument we are upon. They have indeed been so singularly fulfilled in the history of the

empires of the world, as to leave no doubt in the mind of the protestant christian, of the high authority of such prophecies, or of their rise and gradual accomplishment. But we still meet with nothing which discriminates the boundaries of this antichristian power which was to arise in the church; and this is the only part of the subject with which we are at present concerned.

Thus it appears that it is not from the consideration even (1) of the part of the world where this power was to arise; (2) of the seat or throne in which it was principally to be established; (3) of what kind it's sovereignty was to be; (4) of the attributes with which it was to be invested; (5) at what season, or about what time, and for how long a time it was to continue; from none of these considerations, I say, can we discover such plain and distinguishing characters of antichrist, as to confine that appellation to the church of Rome. We may indeed “ admit that these correspondencies  
 “ are signal enough to merit our attention,  
 “ and even to justify our pains in looking  
 “ further into so curious and interesting a  
 “ subject ;”

“ subject ;” but then this concession ought to be made not merely with a view to fasten them on our neighbours, but the better to observe how far we ourselves may be concerned in their fulfilment.

Upon this review of the state of the arguments concerning the important subject before us, it becomes the duty of every christian church, or community, to consider, and to take especial care, that they reform the abuses and corruptions which have been introduced into their religious faith and formularies respectively, as also that they correct any unjustifiable methods they may have practised, in order to support and propagate them. It is their duty, individually, to forward the cause of reformation, and, collectively, to review, revise, and effectually to reform their institutions, in every point, wherein they offend against the word of God and the genuine principle of protestantism, so as to leave no one opprobrious or disgraceful mark remaining in their forehead. For, although papal Rome may have encompassed a large aggregate of these indubitable marks, and be herself, in this respect, the “ abomination of

“ the earth ;” there are many churches in christendom, of various denominations, which, while they differ indeed in many important articles of faith, nevertheless retain much of the evil spirit of “ the mother of harlots.” And it reflects no small scandal upon all these churches, when we consider how frequently and uniformly they have shewn, not only a disposition determinately averse to be reformed, but have carried themselves in the most hostile manner towards every measure which tended that way, even to a degree of infatuated obstinacy almost peculiar to ecclesiastical concerns. The authority of the scriptures, the most clear and conclusive reasoning, the urgency and expediency of reformation, together with the most affecting remonstrances, have been oftentimes pressed home, but have been employed in vain. But, notwithstanding this unpromising appearance, the zeal of a sincere christian will enable him to pursue the good work of reformation, with unabating ardor. So long as he is persuaded of the many grievous things retained and professed in the established religion of his country, his integrity and  
conscience

conscience will tell him, in plain and unequivocal language, that he cannot innocently continue in that communion, by whatever name it may be called. “ Come out of her, “ my people, that ye be not partakers of her “ sins, and that ye receive not of her “ plagues,” “ are plain and decisive words,” (says a living prelate,) “ and if allowed to “ be spoken of the church of Rome, bring “ the controversy between the protestant “ and papal christians to a short issue\*.” And according to another right reverend author, “ although to forsake the external “ communion of a church, where there is “ no urgent necessity for such a procedure, “ be without excuse; yet, when a separation “ must either be made, or we must partici- “ pate with others in matters which appear “ to us to be sinful, no reasonable man can “ have any scruples, as to the part he ought “ to take. Not every separation then, says “ he, from the church, but a causeless sepa- “ ration only, is to be condemned: and the “ true reason, why protestants hold them- “ selves bound to leave the society of papists,

\* Bp. Hurd. ib. p. 416.

“ is not so much because the latter are  
 “ known to maintain errors in doctrine, and  
 “ to have introduced corruptions in worship,  
 “ which the former disavow; but because  
 “ they impose these errors and corruptions  
 “ upon others, and have so ordered the terms  
 “ of church-fellowship, that we must join  
 “ with them in these things, or in nothing.  
 “ This it is which fixes the mark of anti-  
 “ christ on the church of Rome, and renders  
 “ it unsafe and unallowable for christians of  
 “ other denominations to unite with it in  
 “ matters of religion. The imputation of  
 “ schism, therefore, fall it where it will,  
 “ lights not justly on us: the danger and  
 “ the punishment annexed to such a crime,  
 “ it becomes them more particularly to con-  
 “ sider, who have made it impracticable for  
 “ others to associate with them, by requiring  
 “ unlawful conditions of communion\*.”

Thus far the learned bishop wrote in justification of the separation of his church from communion with the church of Rome. But it is very obvious to remark with what entire

\* Bp. Hallifax's " Sermons at bishop Warburton's lecture." p. 370, 371.

complacency



complacency this reasoning is advanced by one, whose separation has received the countenance and support of a legal establishment; and, in this confidence, with what perfect indifference the same argument is heard, when pleaded by other separatists against similar impositions, no less grievous to be borne. Indeed, the whole of this reasoning will, upon protestant principles, apply more conclusively in behalf of a rational dissent from the established church, than in support of the protest made by the church of England against the church of Rome.

The principles of a rational and protestant dissent are not only justifiable, as being founded in reason and revelation; but they are honourable, as they bespeak obedience to God, rather than to man. For every consistent protestant, who is persuaded of the fundamental errors in the principle and faith of the established church of his country, and thereby conceives of them as partaking of the nature and genius of antichrist; such an one, I say, is called upon, by every thing that is dear to him, in addition to his protest against popery, to avow a dissent  
from

from that description of protestantism, even though he stand alone, and be literally left to be a church unto himself. However he may esteem and love many individuals of such communion, he is first, and above all other things, bound to pay no deference to human authority, to worldly interest, to accustomed habits, or even to strong affections, in the great affair of religion, and in his duty to God. As it is the honor of our nature to pursue rational inquiry, it is it's glory to follow the convictions of our own minds; and not only to protest against the corruptions of one church, and to dissent from those of another, but to protest against and dissent from every established church upon the earth, wherein we conceive adequate occasion to be given.

May not we, therefore, my brethren, be bold to say, without offence, that there cannot be better reasons for separation from a church, in which the consent of it's ministers is required to an almost infinite number of abstruse propositions contained in it's articles or confession of faith; and in whose ordinary services of public worship, prayer is offered to other beings, besides the one, eternal, invisible,

ble, only living and true God, to whom alone all religious homage is due. We may, indeed, be induced to forbear to use words of particularly strong and significant import, and which the occasion would justify, out of deference to the feelings of others, and with a view to keep under our command our own passions; but we are nevertheless bound to rule our conduct without regard to the persons of men. If we profess to believe in one God, we must give unto him our wholeselves, without recurring to those complex subtilties which destroy the unity of God, and confound the understanding of man in the inexplicable investigations and distinctions of those, who are wise above what is written. Let us, who have "come out of her," so acquit ourselves that we "be not partakers of her sins, and receive not of her plagues;" for, if we be right in our application of the concurring prophecies of Daniel, Paul, and John, "her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities."

SERMON



## S E R M O N    X I I .

BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.

MATTHEW XII. 31.

WHEREFORE, I SAY UNTO YOU, ALL MANNER OF SIN AND BLASPHEMY SHALL BE FORGIVEN UNTO MEN: BUT THE BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST SHALL NOT BE FORGIVEN UNTO MEN.

It was upon our lord's restoring to his sight and hearing one who was "brought unto him, possessed with a demon, blind and dumb," while the persons present were desirous of acknowledging him to be "the son of David," that is to say, the Christ or messiah, that the pharisees ascribed the miracle to the power of a supposed evil spirit. "This man," said they, "doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub the prince," or chief, "of the demons."

Notwithstanding this insinuation, and that  
Jesus

Jefus knew their motives and defigns in fuch falfe afcription of the power by which he acted, he condescended patiently to reason with them upon the improbability of the power of this fupposed evil fpirit being exercifed againft itfelf. And, inafmuch as fome among themfelves had practifed exorcifm, they muft alfo, upon their own fuppoftion, have been the agents of this fame Beelzebub. “ If I caft out demons,” concludes he, “ by “ the fpirit of God, then the kingdom of “ God,” (in the miffion of the meffiah,) is already “ come unto you.” For, “ as no “ one can enter into a ftrong man’s houfe, “ and fpoil his goods, except he firft bind “ the ftrong man, and then he will fpoil his “ goods;” fo, likewise, unlefs I act by a power greater than that of Beelzebub, I cannot deftroy his works.

“ Wherefore,” adds he in the words of the text, “ I fay unto you, all manner of “ fin and blafphemy fhall be forgiven unto “ men: but the blafphemy againft the holy “ ghofit fhall not be forgiven unto men.”

The better to illuftrate our fubject, we will firft confider that offence which “ fhall “ be

“ be forgiven,” and then that which, it is here said, “ shall not be forgiven.”

(1.) The words, “ all manner of sin and blasphemy,” in their unconnected import, are words of very extensive comprehension; but if we recollect that the conditions of their being forgiven us are our sincere repentance and amendment, no material objection will remain against the general doctrine. But this, it is apprehended, is not the proper exposition of them in the passage before us, as a little attention to the context will abundantly shew.

The “ sin and blasphemy” which, it is here said, shall be forgiven, include and express only the sin of blaspheming or evil-speaking of Jesus, as the son of man, in such instances as calling him “ gluttonous, a wine-bibber, and a friend of publicans and sinners\* :” and charging him with “ perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar †.” “ For such sins as these committed against men, the Jewish law appointed sacrifices and penalties ‡ ; and when these were complied with, it is

Matt. xi. 19. † Luke xxiii. 2. ‡ Lev. vi. 1, &c.  
“ said,

“ said, the priest shall make atonement for  
 “ him, and it shall be forgiven him; so that  
 “ such sins may well be called pardonable  
 “ ones\*.”

We may, therefore, more properly understand the offences, however blame-worthy, which are here pronounced to be pardonable, to be no other than the speaking falsely, unjustly, and disrespectfully, with a mischievous design, of the private or personal character of Jesus: but, because these licentious indulgencies of thought and speech did not directly affect the authority of his mission, as the messenger and prophet of God, they are regarded as of inferior consideration, and considered in the same point of view, as the raising any false and injurious report of any other man would have been, by the mosaic institution.

(2.) This interpretation will be further established by the examination of the second part of our subject, in the sequel of the passage before us, which adds, “ but the blasphemy against the holy ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.”

It has been the misfortune of some inter-

\* See Bp. Pearce on Matt. xii. 31. note (1)



preters, who have given into the notion of the personality of the holy spirit, to fall into a mistake, which confounds, if it does not destroy, all consistency in their own system. Some of these have, in their well intended zeal to magnify the sin against the holy ghost subverted the established order and gradation of their own assumed orthodox faith, by giving a pre-eminence to the third, before the second person in their trinity; for they have endeavoured to prove, that while offences against the son were venial, those against the holy spirit were unpardonable.

But, throwing all system apart, let us return to the words of our lord, as they stand in connection with the rest of his discourse, and we shall find their plain and natural meaning, when they were addressed to the pharisees, (who reported Jesus to have wrought his miracles through the power of Beelzebub,) to have been, that the wilfully ascribing, against their own reason and conviction, those extraordinary evidences of the power of God, which he exhibited before them, to any other than to the divine author of all things, whose creature and instrument

he was, would not be forgiven. And, indeed, the importance of the subject was an high aggravation of the offence; for such an imputation as they contended for, would have destroyed all the credit and authority of revelation, which, if it ceased to be of God, or of his appointment, was wholly undeserving of any notice or attention in the world. Neither does this language of the pharisees appear to have been the result of serious inquiry and reflection, but of the deliberate prostitution of their understanding to the little prejudices of their party.

It is added, in the verse following the text, that this “ speaking against the holy ghost, “ would not be forgiven, neither in this “ world,” or rather in this age, “ neither in “ the world,” or age “ to come.”

According to which reading, “ this age” means the jewish one, the age while their law subsisted, and was in force; and “ the “ age to come,” means that under the christian dispensation\*.

Under the jewish law there was no for-

\* See Heb. vi. 5. and Eph. ii. 7.

giveness for wilful and presumptuous sins: concerning which it is said\*, the soul which doeth ought presumptuously, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people, because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandments. With regard to the age to come, or the christian dispensation, no forgiveness could be expected for such sinners as these pharisees were; because when they blasphemed the spirit of God, by which Jesus wrought his miracles, they also rejected repentance the only means of forgiveness †.”

“ But still it is not to be concluded from hence, that, if they repented of this blasphemy, they could not obtain forgiveness. The observation of an ancient writer (Athanasius) is very material and just. He says, “ Christ does not say, to him that blasphemeth and repenteth; but, to him that blasphemeth: and therefore he means, to him that continueth in his blasphemy; for with God

\* Numb. xv. 30, 31.

† See Bp. Pearce on Matt xii. 32. note (K.)

there is no sin that is unpardonable." And the truth of this observation will appear from the following instances. Jesus said \*, "who-  
 "soever shall deny me before men, him will  
 "I also deny before my father." The threatening here, is as strong as in the present case of "blasphemy against the holy ghost:" and yet when Peter shortly after denied Jesus before men three times, joining oaths with his denials, yet upon his repenting, and "weeping bitterly," he was not only forgiven, but continued in his apostleship."

"Again; when Jesus was on the cross, some of the rulers "derided him, saying, "He saved others, let him save himself, if "he be Christ the chosen of God†." By which words it appears, that they acknowledged Jesus to have wrought miracles, and yet rejected him, denying that he wrought them by "the spirit of God:" and yet Jesus prayed to his father, that they might be "forgiven ‡."

"To this may be added, that in this chapter §, these pharisees, who had blas-

\* Matt x. 33.

† Luke xxiii. 35.

‡ Luke xxiii. 34.

§ ver. 38—40.

phemed

phemed against the holy ghost, asked for a sign, and our lord gave one to them, (viz.) the sign of the prophet Jonas. And what could this sign be given for, unless for their conviction, and for disposing them to repent, and in consequence of this to be “forgiven?”

“From all which, it may, I think, be concluded, that to “speak against the holy “ghost,” (as those pharisees did,) was, therefore, not to be forgiven in that age, or in the age to come, because no means of obtaining forgiveness for it were to be found in the jewish law, or under the christian dispensation: but that, however, upon their repentance, they might be forgiven and admitted to the divine favour\*.”

A further question will naturally arise here and that is, How will this doctrine apply to us of this time, at the distance of so many centuries from the working of the miracles

\* See bishop Pearce on Matt. xii. 32. note (κ.) For the outlines of this illustration, I am indebted to the labours of this learned prelate; and as I think this representation of the subject to be just, so I could not do better than avail myself of his remarks, and acknowledge my obligation.

of Jesus, of which we have not the same evidence, as the pharisees, who were his contemporaries?

The ingenuous answer to this inquiry seems obvious. The doctrine will apply so far as we shall find ourselves in similar and equivalent circumstances with the pharisees. If we have not the same, we may have as strong evidence of the miracles of Jesus, as matters of fact. And, if we refuse the conviction which they were wrought to produce, though not indeed for the same reasons as the pharisees did, yet for reasons perhaps more trifling in themselves, or equally insufficient to bear down the testimony in their favour, we must be content to abide by the same consequences.

One jot or one tittle of the word of God will not pass away till all be fulfilled; and several of the discourses of our lord were expressly recorded for our admonition and instruction, and intended honestly to be applied to the various cases and situations of us, upon whom the ends of the christian age are come.

While we scorn the disgusting pride of the self-sufficient pharisee, it will become us to take care to improve ourselves in the meek  
and

and amiable character of the holy Jesus. But while we guard our hearts against all spiritual pride, let us give especial attention that we be not infected with the prevailing indifference to the principles and practice of our holy religion.

We must not, however, stop here, and imagine that this negative quality will be sufficient to justify us before God, or ourselves. The profession of a religious faith requires a faithful adherence to its principles in every occurrence in life, and in all our intercourse with the world. Surely we may say, that religion, no less than virtue, insures its own reward; its promised future recompense is infinitely greater, and the present peace and happiness which it produces in those minds, which commit themselves to its governing principles, the love and fear of God, exceeds all that this world has to offer. And, however some men may be occasionally disposed to deride every serious attention to the duties of piety to God, and of justice and charity to man, they secretly respect those who scrupulously preserve a conscience void

of offence towards God, and who walk uprightly and honourably among men.

Nor is this sincerity in our religious profession, or this inflexible integrity of principle less necessary on the account of others, than on our own. The happy effects of good example are great and many ; and, as members of our christian community, we ought to consider ourselves under particular obligation to promote the religion of Christ in the hearts of men, and to “ let our light so shine “ before them, that they, beholding our “ good works, may glorify our father who “ is in heaven.” And if there be one kind or degree of rational felicity more noble and animating than another, it must be found in the reasonable hope and assurance of having brought over to the light, the marvellous light of the gospel, some of our fellow-creatures who had walked all their lives in darkness, or in having saved from sin a wavering brother, or reclaimed an offending one.

A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. In like manner, they who conscientiously profess



ness the faith of Christ, even among a christian people, are more minutely observed than those, who, regardless of all principles of religion, comply with its ordinances for no better reason than because custom and the laws of their country, require them. The influence of fashion and of law, in such cases, favours not the conversion of these men to the vital principles of the christian religion, but provokes their ridicule of the evidences and doctrines of the christian dispensation. And they turn their wit, not merely against the impositions of men, but against the credibility and reasonableness even of that religion which is pure and undefiled before God.

But, in a more especial manner are those christians who secede from the religious establishment of their country, called upon to take heed unto themselves and to their ways. Their countrymen are, from their very situation, like so many watchmen placed over them, and, though they have no exclusive right to call them to any account, they will spare neither their observations, nor their reproaches, where any occasion is given for them.

An

An holy and virtuous behaviour forms that armour of God which is necessary for us to wear in our christian warfare. Let, therefore, righteousness be our breast-plate, for it is the natural and only impenetrable armour of man. It affords security to every thing that is justly dear to him during his conflict with the world; it adds the highest dignity and gracefulness to his character; and will not only save him from "all manner of sin and blasphemy," which admitted of atonement under the jewish dispensation; but from the commission of every sin against the spirit or power of God, which will not be forgiven, without the deepest contrition and repentance.

S E R M O N XIII.

IMPEDIMENTS TO THE RIGHT KNOWLEDGE  
OF THE SCRIPTURES.

2 PETER III. 16.

IN ALL HIS (PAUL'S) EPISTLES ARE SOME THINGS  
HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD, WHICH THEY THAT  
ARE UNLEARNED AND UNSTABLE WREST, AS  
THEY DO ALSO THE OTHER SCRIPTURES, UNTO  
THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION.

THE apostle Peter, towards the conclusion  
of this his second and last general letter to  
the church of Christ, recites the expectations  
entertained by christians of a future state of  
increased and endless happiness, " wherein  
" dwelleth righteousness;" and earnestly  
exhorts them to improve the intermediate  
long-suffering and forbearance of God by  
unwearied diligence, that they may, at the  
coming

coming of the last day, “ be found without  
“ spot, and blameless.”

This, says he, was the object of the preaching and writings of his beloved brother-apostle Paul, “ according to the wisdom,” or extraordinary illumination, given unto him,” who, in all his epistles to the several churches, had treated of those high and important subjects. “ In which” writings\*, however, he adds, “ are some

\* See Benson on the place, vol. ii. p. 430. note (i.) Cardale’s “ True doctrine,” 2d. edit. introd. p. 53—55. note. “ Theo. Repof.” vol. ii. p. 462—464. and Lardner’s “ Hist. of the apostles,” vol. iii. c. xxiv. p. 406—409, and 446, 447. Beza, Mill (Prolegom. 1484) and Benson prefer the reading *ev eis*, (i. e. in which epistles) supported by the authority of the alexandrian and six other MSS. as well as the syriac, arabic, and æthiopic versions. Markland (in Bowyer’s conjectures) and Griesbach adopt the common reading *ev ois*, (i. e. in which things.) Mr. Nisbett, does the same, see his “ Illustration of various important passages,” &c. p. 179—193. Mr. Wakefield also, in his note on the place, reads “ *ev ois*; viz. on this subject;” and translates the passage accordingly, “ as indeed in all his letters, speaking in them upon this “ subject, which hath some things hard to be understood.” The critical reader will examine the evidence, and determine for himself.

“ things

“ things hard to be understood, which they  
 “ that are unlearned and unstable, (or rather  
 “ unwilling to learn, and unsteady,) wrest,  
 “ (or torture,) as they do also the other scrip-  
 “ tures, unto their own destruction.”

This passage, with its context, will suggest many important considerations, which it may be of use to us to apply, (so far as the intention of the writer will admit,) to the present state of the christian world; and upon which we should reflect with that seriousness which is due to the authority of an apostle, and to the great interest which is involved in the right direction of our thoughts and attention to a subject of such importance.

(1.) It appears, in the first place, most evident, that the designs of the two apostles were in perfect agreement with each other, and that their discourses and letters addressed to the several christian societies, or churches, then planted in the eastern world, were solely intended to turn them from that gross idolatry, which, at that time, so generally prevailed, to the worship of the one living and true God; to improve and purify their life and manners; to save them by means of the  
 knowledge

knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ, from being entangled in, or overcome by, the pollutions of the world; and to raise, establish and confirm in them the belief and expectation of a resurrection to future life and happiness.

To these great ends were the united endeavours not only of Paul and Peter directed, but also those of Christ himself, and all his apostles; in season and out of season, in labours they were most abundant; ever ready and willing to spend and to be spent for the sake of that faith which they believed and taught, and of those followers who were willing and desirous to adhere to the cross of Christ. For this end Christ lived; for this end he died, and was raised again: establishing, in his own life and sufferings, a noble example of all those virtues which he inculcated as essential to form the character of his disciples; and affording also, in his resurrection from the dead, the most decided evidence of his divine mission; and, consequently, the most satisfactory assurance that we also shall awake from the sleep of death, and arise to the fruition of immortality. In meekness,  
humility,

humility, and charity to all men; in patience and resignation to the divine will, he is the grand exemplar of all the rational creatures of God.

The history of his life, by the four evangelists, forms a narrative the most artless that ever pen immortalized; the ingenuous simplicity with which it is written is unrivalled and inimitable. Many other histories are very deservedly received as credible, but none have stronger internal marks of truth, than the gospel of Jesus Christ. In no other record are the moral duties of life more plainly laid down, or more forcibly pressed upon the conscience of every man; in none other is the practice of religion and virtue promised so great rewards; rewards, which, being unconnected with temporal prosperity in the general dispensations of God, the virtuous and the good are bidden to forbear looking for until after this busy, mixed, and short probationary scene of things shall be finally closed.

(2.) It was, however, the objection of the adversaries of the gospel in the time of our apostle Peter, and admitted by him, that in  
the

the writings of Paul, there “ were some “ things difficult to be understood.” But the difficulties objected must have been different, in the first age of the christian church, from those which have been started in these later days. In the former time, the very coming of Christ was the fulfilment of some of the most important prophecies of the jewish scriptures, and should, therefore, have been acknowledged by those who received the scriptures of the old Testament: but the jews were, nevertheless, so reluctant in renouncing the ceremonies of their law, and so unwilling to embrace a suffering Messiah, that they resisted the accumulated evidence which accompanied the mission of Jesus.

It should, however, be observed, in justice to those whom we thus arraign, that the testimony of the divine authority of the christian revelation, which we read in the prophecies of the new Testament, was necessarily defective with respect to them, is greatly strengthened with regard to us: for, while we are convinced by their completion; their reason stood aghast at the threatened destruction of their temple, and their civil polity,  
the



the dispersion of their race, and the rise and reign of anti-christ.

The change of situation changes the ground of objection. It is allowed that the prophecies of the christian scriptures, which were most opposed to their prejudices, were, of all evidence, the least admissible with the jews; for, indeed, to say the truth, a prophecy is no evidence of a divine mission until completed by the event. But it yet remains to be resolved, how they could hold themselves excusable for their unbelief, who were eye-witnesses of the mighty works which Christ wrought, and which could not have been performed but by the special assistance of almighty God. Besides; the spirit in which Christ came; the doctrine which he taught; the purity of his life, and the amiable and benevolent temper in which he resigned it; all these conspire to confirm his pretensions of being commissioned by almighty God to be the promised preacher of righteousness, and the messenger of immortality to man. At this distance of time, in which our lot is cast, from that period when our lord lived upon

the earth, those very prophecies which afforded no evidence to his contemporaries, have cast such a splendor of light upon the truth of the christian religion, that they have marked, in characters as strong as if they were written with a sun-beam, Jesus to be the promised messiah, the highly favored and delegated messenger of God. This evidence from prophecy acquires continued accession of strength from the revolution of time; it increases with the succession of ages; and though it has been confirmed to us and our fathers, by so many and such a series of events as nothing but omniscience could foresee, or omnipotence effect, it will for ever improve upon our children and our children's children, so long as the world shall remain.

The difficulties in the christian scriptures, at this time of day, are of a very different sort. They arise from the fluctuation of language, and the inaccuracy of transcribers; from our ignorance of certain laws, manners, and customs; also from our want of information respecting temporary circumstances and local considerations,

considerations; to all of which they occasionally refer: they arise also, sometimes, from our being imperfectly acquainted with the particular notions maintained at the time when they were written. These are the chief causes that there yet remain “some things hard to be understood.”

But, while this is admitted, it is, at the same time, insisted with equal justice and candor, that no truth which is important to the present or future happiness of mankind, is affected by these difficulties; that they are no other than such as must unavoidably exist, without a continued miracle wrought to remove them; and such a miracle as would weaken, instead of improving, the rational evidence of the christian dispensation, which is now submitted to our examination. The present subsisting uncertainty of interpretation, where it does occur, whether it turns upon a different reading or depends upon the critical skill and discernment of the reader, affords, at once, an open field for the exercise of the reasonable powers of the human mind upon its noblest employment, and for the display of that charity

towards his fellow-creatures which should peculiarly mark the character of the true christian.

As in the laws of nature, so also in the laws of revelation, there will be difficulties which the limited capacity of man cannot explore, but contradictions cannot exist in either, while perfection resides with the one great author of both. The divine counsels are directed by unerring rectitude; and, where they cannot be unfolded, they, surely, ought not to be presumptuously impeached by man; for who, among the sons of Adam, the creatures of yesterday, can measure the wisdom of him, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain? Who can find out God to perfection?

While such are the unequal attributes of the creator and the creature, it were the greatest injustice to conceive of the deity as requiring more than he has given; or, that while he has given to man a rational nature, he should expect from him the relinquishment of that nature, and the intire resignation of his mental endowments. in the great concern of religion; a submission this, at once, unbecoming

coming his dignity and destructive of his distinguished privileges, and of every end for which life was given him.

No, the service which God requires of his rational creatures, is a reasonable service. He requires the free exercise of the understanding, and that honorable conduct which results from it, and which their own heart and mind shall finally approve.

Error preceded by honest inquiry, is infinitely preferable to that torpid acquiescence which affects to repose itself on the judgment of other men; and which, though it possibly may have no worse motive than indolence or timidity, (both of which, however, are highly blameable,) is always suspicious, and ought to be suspected by those who sacrifice the pre-eminent character of their nature, and the high privileges of the gospel.

But this rejection of the use of our reason in matters of religion does not always originate in diffidence and distrust. In some breasts, the pride of the human heart is inclined to disdain the subsidiary aid of revelation, and to think so highly of itself as to conceive all subsequent communications from

the God of reason intirely needles. But surely, in no case can the pride of man more widely mistake its own interest, than blindly to contemn that further illumination which claims to come from the father of lights, which was designed to improve and elevate his mind, and to carry his contemplations and his hopes beyond this little orb, in which his days are few, his capacity limited, his enjoyments interrupted, and his departure ever at hand.

There are, however, other difficulties in the way of rightly understanding the apostolic writings, besides the affected sufficiency of human reason. And these difficulties arise from the contrary extreme, and owe their existence to presumption; to the abuse and prostitution of the human intellect to the prejudices of an early, or a vicious, scepticism; a scepticism, that has been generated from a perverted or a neglected education, or produced by the gratification of passions incompatible with moral righteousness.

The misapprehension of the scriptures of the new Testament has been also owing to the same cause, which, in similar cases, prevented

vented others from receiving those of the old. The unteachable, or intractable, as our apostle justly denominates them; those who are obstinately set upon following their own lusts and passions, upon courting the world and being occupied in its pleasures, and making their abode here, as if this were the whole of their existence; these will not listen to those divine lessons of sublime morality, which carry the mind into eternity, and promise only the happiness of a future existence; these will not relinquish the present momentary pleasures of sense, for the future enjoyment of an eternity of bliss.

To this description of some revilers of revelation, may be added another class; and they are those who are unsettled, wavering, and unstable, not perhaps so much in opinion as in resolution, not so much in faith as in practice. There are many men, who, with dispositions favorable to virtue and religion, take not into their contemplation the whole importance or full extent of the christian faith as an operative principle, but who attempt something like a compromise or accom-

modation between the pleasures of the world and the virtuous abstractions of the true disciple of Christ. These men are so uncertain and have such a flexibility of manners, that they are found the associates of very contrary characters; and, at different times, and in different situations, are scarcely to be known to be the same persons. This variableness in conduct implies a great unsettledness in principle; like a ship without mariners, or with such as are very unskilful, they are tossed, and even endangered, by every rolling wave, and every breath of air.

As, in all these situations, men are led virtually to reject the light of revelation from very unjustifiable motives, the gracious tender of the revealed will of God will, therefore, increase their condemnation before him; and those very scriptures which were given for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, they will, in the apostle's words, "wrest or torture to their own destruction."

But how contrary are all these characters to him, whom we may stile the man of God; who



who, taking the volume of the scriptures in his hands, proceeds to exercise his reason in the attentive study of them, and who forms his final judgment, by the sober conviction of his mind; who, having satisfied himself of the obligation of the christian faith, lives in obedience to the christian principles; who looks up to God alone, the only object of his religious worship, as the sovereign creator, disposer, and judge of all things; and practises universal benevolence and philanthropy, (made necessary in the very constitution of nature, and recommended by the gospel,) upon the principle of brotherly love and charity for all men.

Seeing now, my brethren, that we have inquired into the real cause why some things in the sacred writings are hard to be understood, and have observed that these difficulties in their utmost extent do not affect any important truth, respecting faith or morals; and have also proceeded to account for the objections that are oftentimes raised against revelation from the pride, unteachable temper, or unsettled disposition of men; it becomes our immediate business to see that we ourselves

ourselves are not included in their number, or involved in the consequences of such unwary conduct.

And, as our argument has been grounded on the observation of the apostle, let us take along with us his admonition at the conclusion of it; for whatever degree of conviction he may have wrought upon our minds, that conviction will be questionable to others, and insufficient to produce any advantage to ourselves, if not attended by that exemplary behaviour which is the natural and genuine fruit of our christian faith, and highly becoming our pretensions to the christian character. “ Seeing, therefore,” says the apostle, “ that ye know these things before, “ beware lest ye also being led away with “ the error of the wicked fall from your “ own stedfastness\*.”

\* 2 Pet. iii. 17.

S E R M O N    X I V ,

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DOCTRINES OF THE  
GOSPEL,

I TIMOTHY I. II.

THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL OF THE BLESSED GOD.

WHEN the apostle Paul was engaged in reciting in this letter to Timothy the general directions which he had before given him in respect to his conduct in his ministry and exhorting him to charge his disciples, that they should teach no other doctrine than the christian hope, it was both just and natural to observe to him that the moral character of his hearers and followers, and every part of their conduct, that was contrary to “ sound doctrine,” should be estimated and judged, according to “ the glorious gospel of the “ blessed” or holy “ God.”

It

It was also, not only both just and natural, but peculiarly becoming the character of our enlightened and intrepid apostle, ingenuously to declare that the gospel contained that “found doctrine,” and was the law by which they were to rule themselves here, and to be judged hereafter; and, further, that that law was of God, or, in other words, revealed and promulgated by a divine authority.

The law of the gospel is well filed by the apostle James\*, “the perfect law of liberty;” whereupon he also adds, that, “whosoever looketh into it, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, that man shall be blessed.” The simple import of the very word “gospel” is, neither more nor less than good news, or good tidings: and it is related by the evangelist Luke†, that the angel announced at the birth of Jesus, that it should be the cause of “great joy to all people.”

Two inquiries are suggested by our text and context. The one is; whether the gos-

\* James i. 25. † Luke ii. 10.

pel is from God, i. e. of divine authority? The other, what constitutes the sound and fundamental doctrines of the gospel, and what determines their relative and ultimate importance?

In speaking to a christian audience, it should seem to be no great presumption to consider the divine authority of the gospel to be admitted on all hands. And, though a minister of this gospel is no less judiciously occupied in his proper province when he is stating and examining the evidences, than when he is inculcating the precepts of the christian revelation; yet, in consideration of the great diversity of opinion which prevails among christians themselves with respect to its injunctions, it will better correspond with my present design, and the view I propose to take of our subject, to confine our attention to these two inquiries: What constitutes the sound and fundamental doctrines of the gospel? and what determines their relative and ultimate importance?

It has often been observed, and cannot be too often repeated, that the word of faith which Paul preached was, that “if we  
“ should

“ should confess with the mouth the lord  
 “ Jesus, and should believe in our heart, that  
 “ God hath raised him from the dead, we  
 “ should be saved\* ;” in other words, we  
 should be christians : and provided we lived  
 agreeably to the law of Christ, we should be  
 partakers in the great salvation held forth in  
 the gospel.

To this short creed of fundamentals, (which  
 to be efficacious must include a behaviour in  
 every character and relation in life, regulated  
 by the general principles and precepts of the  
 christian law,) it has been the infatuated  
 policy of almost all bodies of professing chris-  
 tians to superinduce a long catalogue of their  
 own conceits and dogmas, in which no other  
 church or society are agreed, and in which  
 there is, not seldom, as little agreement among  
 themselves.

In order to correct this fatal source of  
 much evil, some individuals have, from prin-  
 ciples and motives more charitable at least,  
 gone into the contrary extreme, and have  
 taken so very different a view of the subject,

\* Rom. x. 8, 9.

that they have earnestly contended for the non-importance of all doctrinal opinions, saving indeed certain credenda, somewhat enlarged from the brief, but satisfactory, confession required by the apostle Paul.

But doctrinal opinions eventually become practical opinions : some of them have a direct tendency to give us just and honourable conceptions of almighty God and of his government of the world, and from thence to regulate and influence our moral character. And further, it appears to be the duty of all the rational creatures of God to inquire into, and determine, these things for themselves, according to the best of their ability and opportunity : not as matters of idle curiosity, or “ fables, which minister questions, rather than religious edification,” but as inquiries which ultimately reconcile man to the wisdom of the ways of God, and vindicate the reasonableness of the christian’s hope. But, inasmuch as every man is not able to pursue these inquiries with the same attention and advantage, they cannot be of universal obligation. It is, therefore, granted, that a faith in any of the doctrines of the gospel is no further

urther necessary than as means are afforded of prosecuting a successful inquiry into them ; and that he who hath one talent, and improveth it in its own course and measure, is equally the good and faithful servant of our common lord and master ; but from them, to whom more is given, more will be expected.

Christian charity, indeed, which is the brightest ornament in the circle of christian virtues, and will not suffer us to think, much less to impute, evil to others, may more consistently excuse every honest inquisitive mind, whose researches may terminate in error, than him who supinely regulates his faith by another's creed. For, where the human intelligence is adequate to investigations of this kind, and other circumstances concur to provide leisure, no doctrine of the glorious gospel of the blessed God is, or can be, indifferent.

I will mention some doctrines which have been expressly given as instances in proof of the contrary position. The several disputes among christians concerning the fall of man, justification, the resurrection of the body, and the



the intermediate state between death and the resurrection, are the very questions which have been denominated of this class\*. Now, although it may readily be admitted, that some men may see any of, or all, these questions in very opposite lights from others, and at the same time be equally as good christians, and as much in the divine favor, as any of those who may think differently; yet this concession is made upon the supposition that they have inquired into the evidences which relate to these questions respectively. The impartial inquirer cannot, indeed, command the result of his examination, but he may command attention in the search after truth: and that question cannot be wholly unimportant, concerning which it is necessary to consult the oracles of God. Indeed, these doctrines, if they cannot be said directly to affect the truth of revelation, certainly give a right or a wrong, a true or a false, representation of facts contained in the new Testament, and should, by no means, be received upon trust, or rejected with in-

\* See Dr. Price's " Sermons on the christian doctrine," p. 16—25.

difference. And, according as men's minds are impressed with opinions on these questions, they will be disposed to think more or less favorably of the revelation with which they are connected.

Some writers have carried this spirit of indifference to opinions as such, so far, as to say, that "the great differences of opinion with respect to the person and offices of Christ affect not the doctrine itself of our salvation by him: and that, however they are determined, the foundation of our hopes remains the same."

The gospel of Christ itself is no otherwise any foundation of our hopes, than as we receive it on sober and rational conviction, and obey it in our lives. What question, therefore, can, in the first place, more affect its credibility, than that which respects the person and offices of Jesus Christ, the founder of our faith and the captain of our salvation. A question, which establishes, or destroys, the connection between the old and new Testament; which makes the religion of the gospel to harmonize with, or to repel the principles of the religion of nature; which  
represents

represents almighty God as the sole creator and governor of the world, or only a sharer in the creation and direction of it, or as his own subordinate instrument in exerting his omnipotence. Do these alternatives draw after them no conclusions of importance? or rather, do they not deeply concern the credit, and, consequently, the influence of the christian revelation?

It has, indeed, been said in the way of argument for the contrary position; “ Suppose a man to have lost a rich inheritance, and to be languishing under a distemper which will soon cut him off forever from this world. Suppose, in these circumstances, a benefactor to appear, who brings with him, at the expence of much trouble, a remedy for the distemper and administers it to him, saves his life, and at the same time restores him to his inheritance, and to riches, splendour and happiness. Would he, in this case, it is asked, be very anxious about determining whether his benefactor was a native or a foreigner, a private man or a prince? Or whether the toil which he had gone through

“ to save him was derived from his own  
 “ spontaneous benevolence, or from an in-  
 “ strumentality to which he had submitted  
 “ in order to convey the benevolence of  
 “ another? Though such inquiries (says  
 “ my author) might engage his curiosity,  
 “ would he reckon them of great importance  
 “ to his interest? Would he not, whatever  
 “ the true answer to them was, have equal  
 “ reason to rejoice in the service done him,  
 “ and to be thankful for it\*?”

When these things are said to us by way  
 of illustration, the answer is obvious, and it  
 is only to be wondered that it did not occur  
 to the objector. The person thus relieved, in  
 any of these supposed cases, would certainly  
 extend his inquiries after his benefactor  
 much farther than the objector admits; and  
 this he would do from different, and  
 much better, motives than mere curiosity.  
 He would, in the first place, be desirous of  
 knowing whether his benefactor was the  
 principal or the agent of another, that he  
 might proportion his gratitude, and regulate  
 his behaviour, according to the concern he

\* Dr. Price's "Sermons on the christian doctrine." p. 15.

had in administering or procuring his relief. He would wish to know his rank and situation, that he might make his acknowledgments of gratitude in the manner, and according to the rules, which prevail in civil society. In short, to take our leave of this familiar illustration, he would wish to know, whether it was to the blessed Jesus he owed the kindness he had experienced, that he might acknowledge the obligation as due to a friend; or, whether he ultimately received it from almighty God, to whom, and to whom alone, he renders the homage of the whole heart. In other words, he would be ready and desirous to pour forth his gratitude to God, in acts of pious praise, thanksgiving, and adoration; but to his messenger, Jesus Christ, he would pay no other respect than should be due to a creature of God, and the chosen instrument of doing his pleasure. Hence his lips would adopt the language of his heart, and properly distinguish the kind and measure of acknowledgment due only to the creator, from that which may be due to the creature: hence also, he would do nothing derogatory to God who giveth not

his glory to another, neither would he omit the respect and thankfulness due to his approved lord and master.

The honest vindicators of the opposite sides of all these questions may be equally sincere, and, consequently, equally good christians; but inquiry into them is the duty of all, who are not naturally incapable of it; and without such inquiry, the truth itself is maintained only by accident. And although it is readily granted, that no one will be finally condemned merely on account of his opinions, it nevertheless remains material, if not essential, to the general happiness of mankind, that they hold opinions worthy of God, and consistent with revelation. It is, moreover, so far from being an indifferent matter to individuals, that it is a clear and positive duty, incumbent upon them, to inquire into all religious truths for themselves, and to profess their belief, according to their serious conviction.

There is more of the spirit of christianity in being backward to condemn others, than in suffering our zeal to impose upon them our sentiments. And it is certainly more  
safe

safe to err in matters of faith, than in matters of practice, because while the understanding is convinced, error is innocent.

Nevertheless, while man is endowed with the reasonable faculties which distinguish his nature, he must do violence to himself not to inquire so far into the nature and attributes of the deity, as to be satisfied that they are incommunicable: he must do violence to himself as a christian, not seriously to inquire into the person and offices of Christ. These inquiries are certainly important in themselves, and important to every individual in their consequences: the result cannot be considered as indifferent, in any other way whatever, than as not hazarding his future condemnation, because such result is the operation of his understanding, not of his mere will; and being the consequence of an honest and diligent inquiry, it cannot fail to meet the approbation and favour of God.

But further; when our christian inquirer hath satisfied himself in respect to these doctrines, and more especially of the proper and absolute unity of God, it becomes him, from every principle of truth and integrity, to pro-

mote and advance what he so conceives and apprehends to be the truth to the utmost of his power. There appears to be no medium between stifling and promoting the truth; for not to promote it by all honorable and competent means, is to desert it. Oppressed and opposed as it is by the powers of this world, there is the greater occasion for the unwearied diligence and animated exertions of all its friends. And so flattering is the opening scene which the present century, and even our own day and country have afforded, (notwithstanding any temporary appearances to the contrary,) that though the labourers may be few, the harvest promises to be plentiful. We also may with good reason indulge the pleasing expectation that in God's good time, not only our little island, but all the nations of the world will learn righteousness, and acknowledge the one only living and true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath appointed to declare his will to man.

Under a full persuasion of the truth of the gospel, and that it is what the apostle Paul describes it to be, "the glorious gospel of the ever-blessed God," I cannot tell how  
it



it is to be purified from its various corruptions, but by a return to the first principles of our christian faith, and christian liberty. Observe, therefore, that the unity of God is as necessary to his very nature, as any attribute which is ascribed to him: and that to believe that Jesus is the Christ, or promised messiah, and that there will be a resurrection of the dead to eternal life, is, to admit the authority, and to embrace the hope of the gospel.

These appear to be so many inseparable and essential parts of the christian scheme: and if all opinions are not equally important in themselves, which is admitted without reluctance, it is, nevertheless, equally important, that concerning them there should, at least, be full examination and conviction.



S E R M O N    X V .

SUPERSTITIOUS APPROPRIATIONS OF  
ORDINARY EVENTS,

ACTS XXVIII. 4.

NO DOUBT THIS MAN IS A MURDERER, WHOM THOUGH  
HE HATH ESCAPED THE SEA, YET VENGEANCE  
SUFFERETH NOT TO LIVE.

THE human mind, untutored by the exercise of reason, frequently shews a disposition to adopt spontaneous and undigested opinions concerning those various events, which we generally consider as constituting the prosperity or adversity of man ; nor has reason been at all times able to dispel those dark clouds which the imagination has conceived to be gathering, and to threaten the subversion of his present and final happiness.

Whether

Whether this be the effect of the injudicious observations of others, which we may have heard in our infancy, or of notions and prejudices taken up by ourselves, before our reason had unfolded itself, no general rule may be able accurately to determine.

It is sufficient, as well in illustration of our subject, as in the application of it to our present purpose, that this presumptuous interpretation and construction of the secret counsels of God universally prevailed in the heathen nations, and hath not yet taken its leave, even of the regions enlightened by the christian dispensation. It appeared, indeed, in much stronger colours before the propagation of christianity, and continues the same in those countries, where the light of the gospel hath not shined; but, to the reproach and scandal of christians, it is to be found even among them, and, in many cases, is so deeply seated in their minds, by their own folly, and the corruptions introduced into their faith, that it may be found as difficult an enterprise wholly to expel superstition from the christian church, as from the heathen temple.

We must not, however, use any other  
means

means to extirpate this evil, than those which are consistent with the love we owe to our brethren of mankind, and the benevolent principles of that religion which we wish to plant in the place of superstition.

In cases, where these shall fail, far better will it be that our fellow-creature should remain the slave of error, than that he should be made the victim of that zeal and enthusiasm which employ persecution and intolerance to work the ostensible conversion and reformation of the rational creatures of God.

Let us now attend to the history before us, of which our text is a part.

When Paul was successively arraigned before Festus and Agrippa, he was adjudged by both to have “committed nothing worthy of death\*.” Having, however, in order to his own full vindication, made his appeal to Cæsar, it was necessary that he should be sent to Rome to prosecute the further hearing of his cause before the emperor †.

\* Acts xxv. 25. xxvi. 31. See also xxviii. 17—20.

† Ib. xxv. 6.

For this purpose he embarked from Cæsarea, with other prisoners, on board a vessel; and from the very particular narrative of the voyage and shipwreck, which we read in the Acts \*, it is very probable, (as bishop Pearce observes,) that Luke, the writer of this account, was on board the ship in which Paul sailed.

The vessel which conveyed our apostle was wrecked in its passage, in the Mediterranean sea, but it is added in the account, that no lives were lost †; the crew and passengers escaped on the fragments of the wreck, and came safe to Melita, an island situated in that sea between Sicily and Africa, and now called Malta. There have indeed been disputes among the learned, whether the island on which Paul was cast was the present Malta, or another of the same name; but, from the course and circumstances of the voyage, the general opinion seems, with great probability of truth, to determine for the former.

The inhabitants of this island, now consisting of the order of St. John of Jerusalem, commonly known by the name of the

\* Acts xxvii.

† Ib. xxvii. 44.

“ knights

“knights of Malta,” were originally a colony of the Phenicians or Carthaginians, and were unacquainted with the language of the Greeks and Romans, though they had borrowed many words from them; these, (although on this account considered by the Romans as barbarians,) received the unfortunate navigators with every act of hospitality, which their distressed situation required. In the course of this commendable entertainment and relief of those who had suffered shipwreck, as Paul was laying a bundle of sticks upon the fire, a viper came from among some part of the wood which had begun to grow warm, and fastened on his hand.

No sooner did the islanders see the animal hang on Paul’s hand, notwithstanding that its escaping from among the fire-wood, and fastening on any one who stood nearest, were no more than probable and ordinary events; no sooner, I say, did these people observe this circumstance than they drew the conclusion mentioned in the text, very agreeably to their own superstitious notions, but by no means to be justified by the premises: “no doubt,” said they, “this man is a murderer,

“derer,

“ derer, whom, though he hath escaped the  
 “ sea, yet divine justice suffereth not to live.”

The same hasty and injudicious opinion would have been entertained of those eighteen persons on whom the tower of Siloam fell, but we have the authority of Christ for placing it to the account of ordinary causes and events, and not to the account of any particular judgment of God\*.

It is the proper character of superstition to run into extremes. Consequently, when the people of Malta found that Paul shook the viper from off his hand, without suffering any injury from its having fastened itself there, they suddenly changed their minds, and said “ he was a God.”

Opinions adopted without examination, and not founded in reason, are, like the fickle fancies of a creative imagination, seldom long maintained, but fluctuate as passion, prejudice, or caprice shall suggest: they are also uncertain in their course, because they are not influenced by any regular principles; and from the same defect in their rise and progress, one extreme is generally followed by

\* Luke xiii. 4.



another and opposite one, and both of them equally distant from the truth.

The people of Melita, upon seeing the viper fasten on Paul's hand, did not hesitate; we find, to pronounce him, "a murderer, " whom, though he had escaped the sea, yet " divine justice suffered not to live."

If we only try this rash conclusion by any other ordinary events in human life, we shall discover the error and folly of it. For, if it were just and true, in this case, it would prove the vengeance of heaven to be levelled against every reasonable living creature, whom, nevertheless, we know and believe that the God of mercy regardeth with a favorable eye. For, who is there, we may ask, among the sons of men that is exempted from all, or even any of, the injuries, afflictions, crosses, and disappointments incident to this our earthly pilgrimage? In the language of Solomon, do not we every day see "all things come alike to all: that the " same event is to the just, and to the " wicked; to the virtuous and pure, and " to the impure; to him who sacrificeth,

“ and to him who sacrificeth not \* ?” How then shall we presume, from our own weak understandings and short-sightedness, to discriminate the different trials of different men, when we may so easily mis-interpret the dispensations of God’s love and kindness into marks of his wrath and displeasure ; and deal out the threatenings of his vengeance, where he is designing to preserve, purify, or reclaim his rational creature ?

The common events of life, whether prosperous or adverse, constitute its necessary discipline, and they jointly contribute to improve our temper and disposition, and to increase our happiness by teaching us to repose the most intire confidence in the providence of God. Even every supposed affliction, or cause of sorrow, is connected with, and may be productive of, our moral improvement ; and from every apparent evil may be extracted some real good. So far, indeed, does this representation strictly correspond with the truth, that the very same argument is used elsewhere by our apostle himself † as proving the particular love and

\* Eccles. ix. 2. Dr. Hodgson’s Translation.

† Heb. xii. 6.

regard of God for us; “whom the lord  
“loveth,” saith he, “he chasteneth, and  
“scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

But, inasmuch as men are still sometimes disposed to form hard conclusions from the misfortunes of their neighbours, and by such conduct to add to the load which they are already perhaps ill-able to bear, it may not be any loss of time to produce a few more reasons to induce us to spare our censures, in cases, where, to say the least, we cannot have sufficient knowledge to justify the judgment we may be inclined to make concerning another’s moral state and character.

(1.) In the first place, we increase the certain misery of the suffering party, by considering their afflictions as the punishment and judgment of their sins appointed by almighty God. But justice, as well as humanity, would direct us, from the very uncertainty of our interpretation, to err on the favorable side, and to alleviate, rather than to aggravate, the sufferings of the wretched. “The contrary humour proceeds (says a much admired writer) from wrong notions of religion, which, in its own nature,

produces good-will towards men, and puts the mildest construction upon every accident that befalls them. In this case, therefore, it is not religion that sours a man's temper, but it is his temper that sours his religion : people of gloomy uncheerful imaginations, or of envious malignant tempers, whatever kind of life they are engaged in, will discover their natural tincture of mind in all their thoughts, words, and actions. As the finest fruits have often the taste of the soil, so even the most religious thoughts often draw something that is particular from the constitution of the mind in which they arise."

(2.) "Neither can we, if we seriously consider our subject, help looking upon this manner of judging upon misfortunes, not only to be very uncharitable in regard to the person whom they befall, but very presumptuous in regard to him who is supposed to inflict them. It is a strong argument for a state of retribution hereafter, that in this world virtuous persons are very often unfortunate, and vicious persons prosperous ; which is wholly repugnant to the nature of a being who appears infinitely wise and good in all his  
his

his works, unless we may suppose that such a promiscuous and undistinguishing distribution of good and evil, which was necessary for carrying on the designs of providence in this life, will be rectified and made amends for in another. We are not, therefore, to expect that fire should fall from heaven in the ordinary course of providence; nor when we see triumphant guilt, or depressed virtue in particular persons, that omnipotence will make bare its holy arm in the defence of the one, or punishment of the other. It is sufficient that there is a day set apart for the hearing and requiting of both, according to their respective merits."

(3.) In proof of the uncertainty and precariousness of ascribing temporal judgments to any particular crimes, it may be generally observed, that "there is no calamity or affliction, which is supposed to have happened as a judgment to a vicious man, which does not sometimes happen to men of approved religion and virtue. We are all involved in the same calamities, and subject to the same accidents: and when we see any one of our species under any particular oppression, we

should look upon it as arising from the common lot of human nature, rather than from the guilt of the person who suffers."

(4.) "Another consideration, that may check our presumption in putting such a construction upon a misfortune, is this, that it is impossible for us to know what are calamities, and what are blessings. How many accidents have passed for misfortunes, which have turned to the welfare and prosperity of the persons to whose lot they have fallen? How many disappointments have, in their consequences, saved a man from ruin? If we could look into the effects of every thing, we might be allowed to pronounce boldly upon blessings and judgments; but for a man to give his opinion of what he sees but in part, and in its beginnings, is an unjustifiable piece of rashness and folly."

These considerations, taken collectively, should determine us to correct every degree of forwardness in accounting for the afflictions of human life by pronouncing them to be peculiar and appropriate judgment of heaven: our ignorance of the cause of them, and of the effect intended to be worked by them, must

must necessarily denominate any opinion we may pretend to, presumptuous; and ought to regulate, if not to silence, our speculations. In questions involved in so much darkness and uncertainty, it is wisdom, to say the least, to incline to the favourable side; it is even friendly to our own happiness, that we should do so, or we may live to reproach ourselves for having condemned the innocent; it is also good policy, and a piece of provident forecast to shew mercy to others, lest affliction should visit our own doors, and dwell under our own roofs.

But, above all, the consideration that every thing is, under the direction of God, working together for good, for the whole rational offspring of mankind, and is in the disposal of an all-wise being: and, after this life is ended, that we shall arise from the sleep of death to a life immortal, and be severally rewarded according as we shall have done good or evil; according as we shall have used his bounty and kindness, or have been improved by his fatherly correction. These considerations, I say, may and ought to reconcile us

to a patient bearing of our own afflictions, and to a charitable interpretation of those which befall our friends, our neighbours, or any of our fellow-creatures.



S E R M O N    X V I \* .

THE SPIRIT OF INTOLERANCE.

LUKE IX. 55, 56.

HE TURNED AND REBUKED THEM, AND SAID, YE KNOW NOT WHAT MANNER OF SPIRIT YE ARE OF; FOR THE SON OF MAN IS NOT COME TO DESTROY MEN'S LIVES, BUT TO SAVE THEM.

WHEN our lord had occasion to pass through the village of Samaria, in the course of an intended journey from Galilee to Jerufalem, he took the previous precaution of sending some of the company before him, in order to make the necessary preparations for his reception. But, though it was his intention to travel to Jerufalem, the Samaritans would not, on account of some religious differences, receive

\* Preached on Sunday, November 5th, 1786.

him

him into their town \*. “ They were vexed, in all probability, that so celebrated a prophet and teacher, as he was reported to be, should thus decide the controverted question against them, by going to worship at the temple of Jerusalem rather than at their temple †.”

At this inhospitable treatment of Jesus, two of his disciples, James and John, were instantly provoked, and said, “ Lord, wilt thou that we call down fire from heaven to consume them, even as Elias did ?”— Now the prophet Elias had, in this miraculous manner, destroyed two captains, with all their soldiers, who were sent to take him ‡. And as that event happened near to Samaria, it is not improbable that their being so near the place, where Elias had done the same before, might prompt them to make this request §.

“ Jesus seeing them in this heat, notwithstanding the reasons they pleaded for

\* See Tillotson’s “ Sermons,” 8vo. vol. i. serm. 19. p. 434, 435.

† Jortin’s Sermons, vol. vii. p. 123.

‡ ib. p. 124: see 2 Kings i. 10.

§ Tillotson’s Sermons, 8vo. vol. i. serm. 19. p. 436.

their passion, and notwithstanding also that they sheltered themselves under the example of Elias, calmly but severely reprov'd this temper of theirs,—“ Ye know not,” said he, “ what manner of spirit ye are of : for the son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them\*.”

In this reproof of the vindictive spirit which arose in James and John from an impatient desire of vindicating the honour of their master, Christ has instructed us to cultivate and preserve a better temper on all similar occasions. Neither can we omit to observe, that though the motive, which betrayed these disciples into this momentary heat, were in some sort commendable ; they were nevertheless seduced by a zeal void of a right knowledge of their christian profession, and were very deserving of severe reprehension when that zeal broke forth in any disposition to violence. If, therefore, this first effort of an hasty spirit be blameable, when exhibited from an apparently mistaken, rather than a wilfully corrupted, judgment ; and, that too, when it had gone no further than to ask an improper request of heaven, how

\* Tillotson, *ib.*

highly

highly criminal must it be in us to assume to ourselves the judgment and condemnation of our brethren! Or, if we ourselves appeal to almighty God for some extraordinary vengeance on those who differ from us in opinion, how unbecoming and inconsistent to molest, harass, persecute, and condemn our fellow-creatures, without waiting for some most certain assurances of his will concerning them!

If this precaution had been taken by persecutors, and their ill-judging zeal had admitted of some abatement in the warmth in us of temper, which stirred them to the anti-christian expedient; the misery and wretchedness, and murders, which have disgraced the history of christendom, had never existed. "If, at the reformation, when multitudes of heretics and schismatics, as they called them, arose in all places, the romanists had addressed themselves to God in solemn prayer, and devoutly called for fire from heaven to consume the protestants; they might have called long enough and loud enough, like the idolatrous priests mentioned in the old Testament, who cried from morning till evening, O Baal, hear  
hear

hear us; and they would have met with the same disappointment. But instead of doing so, they kindled the fire themselves; they fetched their fire from hell, to burn heretics\*." But, besides the uniform character of our Lord himself, who was ever meek and charitable, and forbearing; besides the proper nature of the religion which he taught; he has proceeded, in this conversation with his two disciples, expressly to declare to them, as a reason for his reproof of their design, that "the son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

The amiable temper of Jesus was anxious to impress his own example, and to teach his precepts to his followers; and to call them to that just recollection of the true nature of his religion, which would be eminently conducive to their walking, in all respects, worthy of their vocation. For the extent of his reasoning went, not only to the extirpation of persecution on account of religious differences, in every shape and degree, but to the cessation of war between nations, and

\* Jortin's "Sermons," vol. vii. p. 127.

even to every hostile and unfriendly resentment in the concerns of more private life.

It is very true, that it is elsewhere said, that he was “not come to send peace, but a sword;” which, however, “we are not to understand of the natural tendency of his religion, but of the accidental event and effect of it through the malice and perverseness of men. Whereas here he speaks of the proper intention and design of his coming. He came not to kill and destroy, but “for the healing of the nations;” for the salvation of mankind not only “from the wrath to come,” but from a great part of the evils and miseries of this life: he came to discountenance all fierceness, rage, and cruelty in men, one towards another; to restrain and subdue that furious and unpeaceable spirit, which is so troublesome to the world, and the cause of so many mischiefs and disorders in it: and to introduce a religion, which consults not only the eternal salvation of men’s souls, but their temporal peace and security, their comfort and happiness in this world\*.”

\* Tillotson’s “Sermons,” vol. i. p. 436.

Our attention may, on this day, more particularly be called to the spirit of the religion of Jesus, by the consideration of a design which threatened the destruction of the whole body of the legislature; and which is very generally ascribed, in the annals of our country, to the vindictive and exterminating principles of certain christians who profess faith in our common lord. Happily for us, and for themselves likewise, that wretched and intolerant disposition which admits no arguments, but those of numbers and violence, in the maintenance of particular tenets, is greatly meliorated in every description of men. It must, at the same time, be seriously lamented that there are any, the faintest traces of it left in the mind or actions of any man, whether papist or protestant; and, more especially, that a single line, having such a tendency, should remain to disgrace the written laws of a protestant country.

The civil government of every nation in Europe begins now, even in our own time, to shew a disposition to correct and suppress the angry designs of bigotted and interested ecclesiastics; and is more inclined, possibly  
from

from a jealousy of the power of the priesthood, to apportion to them their proper place, that of servants of the state, instead of suffering them to be “ lords over God’s heritage\*.”

It would, probably, be sacrificing truth to an excess of candor, not to ascribe the countenance which the treason of this day received from the confessors of the Roman faith to the principles of their profession, which led them to pursue, by any means, the utter extirpation of what they called heresy : principles, which, at that time, had a greater influence over the better natural disposition of the human heart, than the more liberal temper of the present age will admit.

But, while we recount, with thankfulness, this signal escape from the intended destruction of the protestant cause in our own country ; it should not hastily be forgotten, that it had been preceded in France, and was followed in Ireland by a more successful and more extensive murder of protestants. It was only three and thirty years before this period † that seventy thousand hugonots were mur-

\* 1 Pet. v. 3.

† In the year 1571.

dered



dered in the streets of Paris, by order of Charles the ninth of France; and within the compass of less than forty years after this period\*, in the reign of our first Charles, a similar scene of carnage was exhibited against the protestants residing in Ireland. According to current authorities, one hundred and fifty-four thousand protestants were murdered in the province of Ulster only. "Nor age, nor sex, nor infancy were spared; all conditions were involved in the general ruin †."

How far either of these tragical scenes were planned for the establishment of civil tyranny, and how far countenanced by the professors of the Roman church, as such, this is not the place minutely to inquire. It will suffice to say, that criminality of the first magnitude belongs to those who instigated, and those who executed cruelties shocking to religion, reason, and humanity: nor are they faultless, if any such there be, who would excuse them.

Intolerance, under every disguise and pal-

\* 1641.

† See Macaulay's "History of England" vol. iii. p. 70, 71.

liation, ought to be, and is, justly hateful in the sight of every true christian, because it is so radically subversive of the distinguishing principle, the leading and most amiable character of his faith: even to slacken in a cool but most determined opposition to such evil spirit, would be to betray the gospel of Christ into the hands of its worst enemies, and to render it of no effect.

The excess of persecution by fire and sword, we may reasonably hope, is for ever banished from our land. Nevertheless, dormant laws remain, which not only violate christian liberty by their very existence, but, if executed, would revive the worst part of popery in our protestant community. For the doctrines of popery, contradictory as I conceive them to be to the gospel of Christ, are surely excusable in the serious believers in them; but the spirit of popery respects not merely the concerns between its disciples and their God, but involves the security and liberty of every protesting fellow-christian.

It is the reasonable expectation of many thousands of our countrymen, that by peaceable and persevering applications to the civil  
power,

power, these sad monuments of ignorance and bigotry will be obliterated from our statute-book. But, public, no more than private, reformation is the work of a moment ; we may hope that time, “ which overthrows the illusions of opinions, but establishes the decisions of nature\*,” will subdue every subsisting impediment to the entire removal of the unhal- lowed resolves of darkness and intolerance. The day may yet dawn on Britain, when every unholy practice in the concerns of religion shall be renounced in her code of laws, and every inhabitant may not only enjoy the perfect liberty of the gospel, but universally allow to others that freedom which himself finds so congenial to the spirit of his religion, and so essential to his own profession of it in sincerity and truth.

The time will come when the adversaries of religious liberty will be convinced of the discordancy of their principles, not only with the religion of Christ, of which they make profession ; but with the blessings of civil

\* “ *Opinionum commenta delet dies, naturæ judicia confirmat.*” CICERO.

liberty, and the common interests of the human kind. Be it our earnest endeavour to forward such their conviction, and consequent conversion from the destructive error of the way wherein they have walked, in the hope that they may become dispensers of that perfect freedom, without which the vital spirit of religion is annihilated and lost.

In these aspirations after the perfection of religious liberty, suggested from the consideration of our deliverance from one memorable, although unsuccessful, attempt against the liberties of our country; and which has generally been looked upon as the fruit of that persecuting and desolating principle, which has so frequently stained not our land alone, but the whole christian world, with the blood of our fellow-men, and fellow-christians; from the consideration of this occasion of thankfulness, we will pass on to another, which is equally memorable with the former, and whose anniversary is united with it.

To the establishment of the glorious revolution of 1688, we owe both our preservation from despotism and superstition, and our enjoyment of an improved and more settled  
 portion

portion of personal liberty. We owe also to the same illustrious event, what should be equally dear to us, and may be more so to our posterity, the establishment of that just political principle, which constitutes the basis of our civil rights, and will apply, on all like occasions, to their protection. We owe to the revolution, not only the banishment of the tyrant, which of itself affords a poor and inadequate compensation to an insulted and much injured people; but we owe the banishment of tyranny, by the better security of more equal liberty under the social compact, and by the practical reprobation of that servile conceit of implicit unqualified obedience.

It was lately well observed before one of our universities, that the revolution, of which we are now speaking, “ was planned in  
 “ wisdom, and founded in justice; and that  
 “ it was erected on the ruins of a royal house,  
 “ a glorious and awful monument, (said the  
 “ same person,) to tell mankind, There is  
 “ no greatness or dominion on earth so fa-  
 “ cred, but it must fall before the liberties of  
 “ the people\*.”

\* Mr. Crowe's Sermon at Oxford, Nov. 5, 1781. p. 12.

The prerogative, which our happy constitution affigns to our kings, receives its brightest lustre from the maintenance of these principles, which derive mutual advantage and honor on prince and people. For while the people receive protection from the crown, as the delegated head, they give back, not the empty and unmeaning professions of fervility, but the true and faithful allegiance of a free and generous nation. And as it is the highest praise and most honorable appellation of any prince, to stile him, “the father of his people,” so he will find it the greatest happiness of his life to deserve it. Under a consciousness of the purity and sincerity with which he uses the powers entrusted to him by the state for the welfare of the people, he will experience the rare felicity of receiving the most unequivocal proofs of filial piety and affection.

In the application of the reproof in our text to the two events, which the present season has more particularly called to our minds, we have exhibited the demonstrative tendency of an intolerant spirit to the entire annihilation of civil and religious liberty. The instances we have recited are evidences ad-  
duced

duced to prove the position. In the defeat of the former of them by a timely discovery, and of the latter by the arrival and settlement of the prince of Orange, we have never-ceasing cause of national and personal thankfulness to the great bestower of every blessing both public and private.

As far as human judgment is competent to pronounce, if we suppose a contrary termination to have taken place, in either case, we should, at this moment, have been the slaves of an absolute monarch, and of an intolerant hierarchy: or, in the resumption of our liberties, we must have hazarded imprisonment and death, or been obliged to have fled from our native country.

In all human institutions there is necessarily much imperfection; and consequently, in our own government, much remains to be done before we arrive at that perfection of just and equal liberty, civil and religious, which may be attained in practice.

Independent of the various schemes formed by speculative reasoners, the practical ideas of men have been enlarged; their situation, therefore, demands (even upon the principle

of expediency,) an enlarged portion of legal liberty.

It is a difficult matter to persuade men to withhold their claim to that which they conceive to be their own : it is even an ungracious offer to tender to them as a favor, that which they know to be their right. And as it is the criterion of political wisdom to conciliate the party governed, we trust that it will, in the course of God's good providence, be the aim, as it is the only legitimate end, of every human government, to dispense the blessings of freedom to the fullest extent that the state of society will admit. And this cannot be effected by any other means than liberal cultivation of genuine principles of true religion and of rational liberty.



S E R M O N    X V I I .

THE RELIGIOUS AND VIRTUOUS OECONOMY  
OF TIME.

JAMES IV. 13—15\*.

GO TO NOW, YE THAT SAY, TO-DAY OR TO-MOR-  
ROW WE WILL GO INTO SUCH A CITY, AND  
CONTINUE THERE A YEAR, AND BUY, AND SELL,  
AND GET GAIN; (WHEREAS YE KNOW NOT  
WHAT SHALL BE ON THE MORROW; FOR WHAT  
IS YOUR LIFE? IT IS EVEN A VAPOUR, THAT  
APPEARETH FOR A LITTLE TIME, AND THEN  
VANISHETH AWAY.) FOR THAT YE OUGHT TO  
SAY, IF THE LORD WILL, WE SHALL LIVE, AND  
DO THIS OR THAT.

THIS general epistle of the apostle James  
contains many admirable lessons of religious  
and moral instruction; lessons, which are no  
less calculated for our improvement and edi-

\* Preached on Sunday, January 4, 1789.

fication,

fication, than for the improvement and edification of the jewish christians, for whose use it was more immediately written. It not only teacheth the necessity of good works to perfect our faith, “ which is” indeed “ dead, “ being alone \* :” but treateth of those christian virtues which constitute the chief excellences in the character of a faithful disciple of the blessed Jesus.

“ The reasons of our apostle’s writing this epistle, were, (as we may collect from a review of the contents of it,) to prevent the jewish christians from falling into the vices, which abounded among their countrymen; such as pride in prosperity; impatience under poverty, or any other affliction; unworthy thoughts of God, and more particularly the looking upon him as the author of moral evil; a valuing themselves on their faith, knowledge, or right opinion, without a virtuous practice; a very criminal partiality for the rich, and a contempt of the poor; an affectation of being teachers; an indulgence of passion and rash anger, envy and uncharitableness, strife and contention: abusing the

\* James ii. 17.

noble faculty of speech, and being guilty of the vices of the tongue, such as cursing and swearing, slander and backbiting, and all rash and unguarded speeches whatever. So, likewise, he wrote to caution them against covetousness and sensuality, distrusting the divine goodness, neglecting prayer, or praying with wrong views, and the want of a due sense of their constant and immediate dependence upon God\*.”

The prudential instruction given in our text is so far from being of inferior concern to that which may more strictly be denominated religious or moral, that the œconomy of our time is that which alone can provide the proper field and scope for exertions of any kind. The uncertain continuance of our lives, and of those capacities and opportunities which it hath pleased God to afford us, pronounce us to be creatures dependent on the will of another, and loudly call upon us to improve the present time, which is all that we can call our own.

Too anxious an attention to the ordinary

\* See Benson's Paraphrase and notes on the epistles, vol. 2. p. 19. sect. iv, of the hist. of James.

and

and necessary demands of our worldly affairs will sometimes interfere with our improvement in the knowledge of our greater interest in the world to come, and our desire to cultivate it with that serious piety and singleness of heart which become him, who claims to be an heir of immortality.

It is, therefore, the part of a truly wise man to mark, with just precision, the boundaries of the various duties which appertain more immediately to the present world, and those which particularly respect his happiness in a future state; duties, which are so far from being incompatible with, that they really assist and promote, each other; insomuch, that they can be no further contradistinguished, than while the one ought to be done, the other ought not to be left undone.

The reproof which is conveyed in the text to those who propose “to-day or to-morrow, to go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain,” is, in its literal sense, designed only for those, who, forgetting their obligations to duties of higher concern, wholly occupy themselves with over-anxious care in  
conducting

conducting distant projects of gain, regardless of the means which are used to accomplish them, and without having any other end in view, but the gratification of their avarice. These persons violate every principle which ties men together as fellow-members of one community in this world, and fellow-heirs of one hope in another. And to such as these, no admonition more necessary or more awful, than to be reminded that they know not “ what will be on the morrow,” or as it is elsewhere expressed\*, “ what a day may “ bring forth.” To this description of men was written the parable of the rich man in the gospel, who, trusting in his accumulated but uncertain abundance, and proposing to devote himself to luxury and voluptuousness, is represented as receiving this awful salutation from God, in the instant that he was presuming upon his own independence, and self-sufficiency: “ Thou fool,” said this seasonable monitor, “ this night thy life shall “ be required of thee; then whose shall those “ things be, which thou hast provided? So

\* Prov. xxvii. 1.

“ is he that layeth up treasure for himself,  
 “ and is not rich towards God\*.”

But, notwithstanding the reproof in the text, and the admonition in the parable, and indeed many other similar passages in the new Testament, will apply, more particularly and literally, to those who place their sole trust in the uncertain possessions of this world; of whom it is also said, that it is harder for such to “ go into the kingdom of “ God, than for a camel to go through the “ eye of a needle †,” we are, I say, notwithstanding these particular applications, not to turn over the pages of our bible, with such self-complacency as if we were uninterested in those lessons which, in the first view of them, more pointedly apply to the most abandoned and profligate of the sons of men. The strongest cases ought, at least, to lead us to be circumspect and watchful of ourselves, for on these, as on other occasions, presumption will involve danger, while caution will produce security.

There is a species of casuistry which is

\* Luke xii. 20, 21.      † Matt. xix. 24.

often introduced into the subject of morals, because it is frequently found convenient to cover our mistakes; but it loosens the reins of self-government, even on the brink of a precipice. For instance; there is between prodigality and parsimony that just medium which is, at once, deserving of the united appellation of generosity and prudence: but how apt are we, in practice, to miss of this happy medium, not merely in the opinion of others, who may err from their ignorance of our ability, and consequently make a false estimate of our means, but also in the subsequent judgment of ourselves. We are liable, and often disposed to favor one side or the other of this question, how narrowly soever we may watch ourselves; or, in the honest intention of correcting our fault, we may even then pass into the contrary disposition. The first thoughts of a liberal mind are generally inclined to generosity, the second to prudence. In a covetous temper of mind, the first thought is to retain that which it possesseth, and if the second be not the same, it will probably spoil the gift, by the ungraceful manner of bestowing it.

This

This case is not introduced with a view to proceed in analyzing the characters of the covetous and the generous man, but as one instance, among many, to shew how much attention we ought to pay to our own conduct, if we are anxious to act well the part assigned us; and, at the same time, how obvious it is to apply the strongest language in the scriptures to the common concerns and cases of mankind. On some occasions it administers proportionate comfort to our honest endeavours without generating arrogance; on others, it inspires a fear accompanied by love, without despondence or distrust of the bountiful bestower of every good.

In the case stated in the text, it is the design of the apostle to impress his readers with the necessity of retaining such a continual and practical sense of the uncertainty of our continuance in this life, as shall tend to correct, if not altogether prevent, that unbecoming attachment to the perishable possessions and enjoyments of the present world, which is so justly reprehensible, both on account of the little satisfaction these things bring  
with



with them, and because every improper indulgence in them is fatal to our improvement in religion and virtue with a view to that world which shall endure for ever.

For what is our life? "It is," says the apostle, "even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away \*!" To this all nature bears witness, and nothing but our familiarity with death, which indeed ought to impress the greater awe at its approach, can account for the little attention that is paid to that universal truth, which is so elegantly expressed by Job; "Man cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not †."

Nevertheless, take man to those scenes which immediately interest his affections, and he will directly learn that lesson which the God of nature intended he should read in the mortality of his species. He, indeed, gains wisdom at the dearest rate, who pays his experience for the price; but it is better that he should make the purchase at any rate, than

\* James iv. 14.

† Job xiv. 2.

not be possessed of that jewel which is above all value. Go now to the parent who has lost his infant child; the child, "who only broke its fast, and went away;" you will find his mind oppressed by, if not absorbed in, this scene of mortality; and though he be neither insensible to the demands of religion, nor unwilling to obey, with humble resignation, the will of God, still none but those who have felt a parent's anguish can be duly impressed with the conflict between his affection for his child, and his acquiescence even to the decree of acknowledged mercy.

Of themselves, neither the shortness, nor uncertainty of life are evils: and it is in our power to prevent them being, even eventually such, in any respect. The shortness of this life's most extended span ought to be a continual incitement to activity and usefulness: and the uncertainty of its termination admits of no relaxation from the ever-pleasing, and truly profitable, employment of piety towards God, and the exercise of good-will towards men.

It is not the length of a man's life that will add to his future honor, in any other way than  
 than

than as he may have added to the number of his years and to his usefulness, by a life of virtue, sobriety, and temperance. The proportion of good done while in the body, and the integrity of principle with which a man conducts himself, will be the cause of his rejoicing, and his crown of glory hereafter.

Many, very many, are the opportunities afforded us of promoting truth and righteousness in the world in all the variety of ways, in which our different circumstances and situations may place us. And these are the talents for which we shall be made accountable at the last, according to the number committed to our care, when the unprofitable servant will be cast into outward darkness.

It will be no excuse to plead the limitation of our powers, or the little extent of our influence ; it will justly be expected that those powers and that influence have been properly directed and employed. Suppose them, for a moment, not to extend beyond the man himself, (though he cannot confine the effect of a good example,) he needs not to be told that if every man would only reform one, the

world would soon wear a very different appearance from what it does now. In assemblies of large bodies of men very important questions have been repeatedly decided by one voice; and the very probability of the same happening again should call every man to his post of duty. It is also very necessary that every man should attend to his own course and habits of life, because his reformation and improvement rest wholly with himself, and his recompense is entirely his own. Wherever, therefore, the prize of our christian calling shall be lost, it be will wilfully lost. Involuntary ignorance of duty will of course be pardoned; but judgment will be awarded, according to the degree of their neglect, to those who knew their lord's will, but regarded it not.

Further, whatever be the nature of our main pursuits, be they in the way of any worldly profession or business, or be they directed to some public, disinterested, or noble purpose, we know that of ourselves we can do nothing; and that it is only under the providence of God, (through whom we live, and move, and have our being,) that we can  
 hope

hope to accomplish our design. This happy dependence upon the ruler of the world can only be cultivated with advantage by frequent applications to him in prayer. Not that we are to imagine that he will hear and answer our petitions on account of our much-speaking; but that our frequent intercourse with our maker, and our cherishing those dispositions which are congenial with acts of piety and devotion, will fit and prepare us for being partakers in his favourable support and regards. With this view, our apostle bids us to say, “ If the lord will, we shall live, “ and do this or that :” for if he wills not to assist or permit us to proceed in our designs and undertakings, all our strength is weakness, and all our wisdom folly.

“ The days of our age are three-score years  
 “ and ten, and though men be so strong that  
 “ they come to four-score years; yet is the  
 “ increase of them then but labour and sorrow;  
 “ for we are soon cut off, and are  
 “ gone \*.” We have lately seen the close of

\* Psalm xc. 10.

another year in the advance of time, but that year has not passed over without exhibiting to us scenes of mortality in our society ; some have been taken from among us, during that short period, who had not arrived at that fullness of years, which is likened by Job, to “ a flock of corn coming in his season.” It is, therefore, probable that the present year, upon which we have now entered, may not run its course, without removing some one of us undistinguished by maturity of age, to the silent mansions of the grave.

These events and the return of stated periods claim our recollection of ourselves ; and we ought, for our own sakes, to bestow upon them such reflections as are suitable to the consideration of what we are doing, and whither we are all hastening.

Our ignorance of “ what shall be on the “ morrow” at once demonstrates the wisdom and necessity of our properly employing and improving to-day. Let us, therefore, endeavour so to employ this, and every fol-

\* Job v. 26.

lowing day, throughout the period of our existence in time, that we may have no distressing, much less agonizing, reflection on what shall be past, when we are about to enter upon eternity.

1. The first part of the document  
describes the general situation  
of the country and the  
state of the economy.



## S E R M O N XVIII.

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION INDEPENDENT OF  
CIVIL GOVERNMENT.

MATTHEW XXII. 21.

JESUS SAID UNTO THEM, RENDER UNTO CÆSAR  
THE THINGS WHICH ARE CÆSAR'S; AND UNTO  
GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD'S.

IT appears from various parts of the plain and unaffected narrative of the life of Christ, as we find it written by the evangelists, that the pharisees, (a forward and self-sufficient sect among the jews who made much boast in their observance of the external rites and ceremonies of their religion,) were wont to try every means, and to take every opportunity to put insidious questions to our lord, in order to draw from him some unguarded expression respecting the ceremonial law of Moses,

Moses, or the civil power of the roman empire.

In the case which is here mentioned by Matthew, the pharisees are represented to have consulted together how they might lead him into a conversation, which would reduce him to the criminal alternative of renouncing his allegiance to the imperial government, or the still greater one of ascribing to Cæsar that authority which belonged to God alone, and was not delegated to any civil magistrate whatever.

Some, among these pharisees, joined with others of the herodians, (who were also another sect, which supported the dominion of the romans over the jews, and also held very loose principles in respect to their accommodation to heathen modes and usages,) were sent out to speak with Jesus; and under the pretence of seeking information, they saluted him with “ Master, we know that  
 “ thou art true, and teachest the way of God  
 “ in truth, neither carest thou for any man :  
 “ for thou regardest not the person of man.  
 “ Tell us, therefore, what thinkest thou ?  
 “ Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar or  
 “ not ?”

“ not?” Under this fair appearance the question was proposed which was designed to distress the answerer ! But Jesus perceived their wicked intentions, and said, “ Why tempt ye  
 “ me, ye hypocrites ? shew me the tribute-  
 “ money,” or a piece of the current coin of the empire ; “ and they brought unto him a  
 “ denarius,” a coin of the value of about eight-pence in our money. He then significantly asked of them, Whose image and inscription it bore ? they said Cæsar’s ; to which he replied, “ Render to Cæsar the  
 “ things which are Cæsar’s, and to God the  
 “ things that are God’s.” As much as to say,  
 “ Since your coin bears the head and name of Cæsar, that sufficiently implies his government ; and your acknowledgment of his civil authority is necessarily included in the currency which you give to the money. The question, therefore, which you put to me is foreign to the honest purpose of serious inquiry. While you voluntarily remain the subjects of Cæsar, give to Cæsar the allegiance due to the civil government of your country ; but reserve for God that first obedience which is due unto him in things which  
 respect

respect not Cæsar's government, and which are only due unto the one invisible spirit, the king of kings, the ruler and disposer of princes."

In short; if we read the account of this interview and conversation between Jesus and some of the pharisees and herodians, previously divesting ourselves of all prejudice and partial construction of the passage, we shall plainly see that the natural and obvious import and amount of the whole is, that the gospel of Christ did not concern itself at all with the civil government, as such.

Nevertheless, these words have long and frequently been sounded in our ears as a clear and positive command of implicit obedience to tyranny and despotism; insomuch, that it is hard to say where we have known them to be used, without seeing them prostituted to the support of that abject submission, to which the gospel gives no countenance, or made to support principles, which, in their effect, would destroy the gospel itself.

So far, indeed, as the christian virtues constitute the character of a good man, so far  
the

the gospel of Christ very materially contributes to the forming the character of a good citizen. The spirit of true religion, joined to the hopes and promises which it holds out to its disciples, gives vigour and effect to the just principles of every equal and free government ; neither countenancing licentiousness on the one hand, nor a servile and unconditional submission on the other.

Without forming a constituent part, or being even an ally of any political system whatever, true religion supports the just and rightful claims of different parties, and would unite, in cordial amity and love, as in a center, the common and very compatible interests of all. When it bids its disciples to love their neighbours as themselves, it virtually prohibits the claim, and much more the exercise, of all wanton acts of power : so when it teaches us to obey God rather than man, it virtually forbids us to surrender our reasonable liberty and write ourselves “ slaves ” to the most distinguished of our species. As the establishment of tyranny and slavery presupposes the loss of virtue, and the  
 extinction

extinction of every social affection that can bind the heart of man to man, they are necessarily opposed by the divine morality of the gospel, without being the special objects of a dispensation, the peculiar character of which is, to unfold to us a future state of happiness and immortality.

From no one cause hath true religion suffered more, than from being made a party in political institutions. This hath been a source of evil never to be too much lamented, in the review of the times which are past; and never to be too much guarded against in respect to the improvement, the peace and happiness of future ages. All sides have alternately sued for her support and pressed her into their service; royalists and republicans have had their turns among ourselves; but the gospel gives no determinate preference to any specific form of government. Through this officious and ill-judging zeal, the christian religion has never appeared in its own amiable and engaging form, but hath been held up to the eyes of the multitude a distorted and mis-shapen figure,

figure, without proportion and symmetry, and consequently hath appeared to many, (who have not taken the trouble to look any further,) to be without truth or beauty.

Now, as the christian religion keeps at such a distance from, and observes a perfect neutrality in regard to particular forms of civil government, it were fervently to be wished that political legislators would leave her to her own proper province. In which case, so far as the hearts and understandings of men can be improved by the doctrines and precepts, or influenced by the hopes and promises of christianity, the civil constitution of every country would be left to stand, or fall, or to reform itself, upon its own proper principles, the advantage and happiness of the party governed. For, as is observed of the times of old, in the book of Kings\*, God consulted the interest of Israel, not the advantage of Solomon, in raising him to a throne: it is not there said that “because the Lord loved Solomon,” but, “because he loved Israel, therefore made he Solomon king.”

\* 1 Kings x. 9.

In the matter of religious rights, the christian revelation is more specific and determinate, that is to say, it is explicit in declaring them independent of the consent or opinions of men, and not subject to the obligation of mutual contract, from whence we derive the authority of the civil power. Our religious privileges, as they respect the duties of conscience, are not transferrable; we cannot divest ourselves of them, and ought not to be indifferent to them; neither can others molest us in them without usurpation. The gospel, therefore, proclaims Christ to be king in his own kingdom, without regard to monarchical or republican, episcopal or presbyterian, forms of government. Even political wisdom does not affect to prescribe uniformity in civil institutions. The influence of manners, climate, and other collateral circumstances will, and must, be taken into the computation of human wisdom. But prevail whichever may, if the civil power means to nourish the seeds of the genuine truth of the gospel, she must leave them to make their natural advance, and to shoot and ripen spontaneously, according to their own  
 free



free course, until the lord of the harvest shall come; if she means to secure the public peace and happiness, and retain her own authority, she must return protection for allegiance, whatever difference of religious opinions may subsist among her subjects. The contract is mutual; and while all parties enjoy their religious faith and liberty without controul, they will be better disposed, from principles which faction will never be able to shake, to keep the respective conditions of their engagement. Any occasional licentiousness on the one hand, or oppression on the other, which may be incidental to all human governments, will not call for any violent corrective, but, from the uncorrupted influence of a religious principle, will, soon be remedied.

In fine; we can draw no other conclusion from our lord's ever memorable answer, bidding the pharisees and herodians to "render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's," than that the concerns of civil authority were left by him, as he found them: and further that the proper concerns

of his kingdom, which were to be regulated by the laws which he had declared concerning it, were amenable to God alone, by whose authority he had become a lawgiver to those who so believed on him. The inquiry into the nature of Christ's kingdom, occupied much of the attention of our countrymen early in the present century; and it is to the venerable name of Hoadley that we owe the just sentiments upon this subject, which are to be found among us at this day.

It is further deserving of remark, that in the address of the pharisees and herodians to our lord, we may observe an emphatic precision in the beginning of their speech, which, though apparently spoken without any good design on their part, is peculiarly descriptive of the character of the blessed Jesus. "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man, for thou regardest not the person of man." There is a justness of expression in this language, which coming from the flatterers of Cæsar, at once records their own infamy, and reflects honor on the gospel of Christ,

Christ, inasmuch as it marks the determinate independence of his religion on all external circumstances. The gradation is argumentative and demonstrative, as well as eloquent. It contains an acknowledgment of the proper mastership of Jesus, his derived authority from almighty God, and the truth of his doctrine; also the impartiality and universality of that revelation from the father of heaven, in equally regarding the poor and the mean man, with the rich and powerful follower of its faith. It expresses the true greatness of the character of Jesus, and the divine original of that religion which he taught; for, like the great author of all nature, neither the gospel nor its preachers regarded the persons of men. Christ and his apostles did not accommodate themselves in the discharge of their duty to the occasional flattery or threats of their hearers; neither has the gospel any where made unbecoming compliances with the passions or little interests of men, who, under the sanction of the christian name, would wish to find countenance and support for particular systems in political disquisitions; of men,

who ardently seek to find some apology for defections from that virtue, which is the first distinction of man in his civil capacity, I mean genuine and incorruptible patriotism, which is equally regardless of the censure or applause of men, and which seeks not its own, but its country's cause. Except, indeed, in those rare instances, where this cause, great and noble as it is, becomes inferior only to the still greater and more noble cause, the general welfare of the human species scattered over the whole face of this habitable world. For we should remember that we are citizens of Europe, as well as of Britain; and that we also count ourselves among the aggregate of God's rational creatures at large, as well as among the inhabitants of this island, or this quarter of the globe. It is, therefore, neither diversity of languages, contrariety of manners, or distinction of colour, that should withhold the exercise of acts of humanity, and the mutual exchange of good offices, either between nations or individuals. Even that which is sometimes called, in political language, an opposition of interests, and is frequently considered as a natural foundation  
for

for perpetual and irreconcilable enmities, is, in truth, nothing else but the child of the imagination, and of false policy. God created the human kind to be helpful to each other; and, in their several wants and abundance, calls forth the exercise of those dispositions which, at once, give happiness and dignity to human nature. The great variety of soil, climate, and situation occasions a reciprocal exchange of the bountiful produce of nature, in like manner as the different bodily and mental capacities of men, in the same country, are the means of improving the condition of them all.

If it were considered only as a matter of expedience, and independent of the laws of nature and of revelation, we should find our peace and happiness to be increased by cultivating these principles in our own minds, and by acting upon them to the extent of our respective abilities.

In all things, therefore, let us regard the real welfare of our country, and be obedient to its civil constitution, in all things lawful and honest; let us “render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s.” Let us not, however,

concur in perverting the word of God, by applying it to cases with which it has no connection, and in which we may be induced to profane it by an unhallowed accommodation to the interests of the world; but at all events, and at all hazard of our temporal interest, let us “render to God the things that are God’s.”

S E R M O N    X I X .

THE RIGHT KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND CHRIST.

JOHN XVII. 3.

THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL, THAT THEY MIGHT KNOW  
THEE THE ONLY TRUE GOD, AND JESUS CHRIST  
WHOM THOU HAST SENT.

JESUS CHRIST, a short time before his death, forewarned his disciples that they might expect great trials and persecutions, telling them, at the same time, that they would be supported by the spirit or power of God, that is to say, by almighty God himself. For, when we speak of the spirit of God, we must mean God himself; in the same manner as when we speak of the spirit of a man, we mean the man himself; and not any other intelligent person, or agent.

Christ then proceeded to pray to God, that he would glorify him, or forward the completion of his work, because he should thereby be enabled more fully to open to his disciples the whole design of his mission; and, eventually, be the means of obtaining eternal life for those, who should become followers of him.

It is, indeed, added in the continuation of this prayer to God, that he would "glorify Christ with the glory, which he had with God before the world was:" but this expression has been repeatedly shewn, not to refer to any pre-existent state which Christ is, by some, supposed to have had before he was born of Mary\*. It is sufficient, therefore, to observe, that the glory he asked for was only the success of the gospel, and the

\* See Lardner's "Letter on the logos," vol. xi. of his works, p. 91. Cardale's "True doctrine of the new Testament," 2d. edit. p. 89. and his "Comment on Christ's prayer," p. 72—104. "The Theolog. repository," vol. ii. p. 73, 74. vol. iii. p. 146, 147. also 268—270. also 348. and 442. Lindsey's "Sequel." p. 239—259. his "Historical view," p. 225—227. his "Examination of Robinson's Plea for the divinity of Christ," p. 162—164.

recompense



recompense of his arduous labours in the publication of it, which were promised to attend on the messiah, and were the eternal purpose of God to bestow, before the world itself was called into existence.

Our lord then goes on very summarily, but very satisfactorily, to state, not indeed the precise nature of eternal life, or the exact time of its commencement, which would have answered no other purpose, but the gratifying an idle and fatal curiosity; but to state the means, by which we may attain it. “This,” says he, “is eternal life, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent:” meaning by this declaration the right knowledge of the nature and attributes of the only true God, Jehovah, who was his God and their God; and a right understanding also of the design and nature of the revelation promulgated by himself, who was the sent of God, that is, who was the messenger, or apostle of God. A dispensation wisely calculated to lead men to that virtuous and amiable conduct in this life, which will meet with acceptance from God, in that future and eternal world, more particularly revealed in it.

“To

“ To know God,” is to be acquainted and impressed with the inherent and essential perfections and excellence of his nature ; to recognize him as the sole creator of the world, from the beauty and harmony we discern in the works of creation ; and to own him for the sole governor of it, from his never-ceasing superintending providence over all that he has made.

Thus “ to know God,” from the principles of natural religion, were sufficient to the reasonable and reflecting mind of man, to teach him to “ cease to do evil,” and “ to learn to do well ;” to pursue a life of virtue for virtue’s sake ; to direct the grateful heart to exercise and expand itself in acts of goodness acceptable to the giver of those powers, by which we are made capable of distinguishing, that his will and our own greatest good are united and inseparable. Let man contemplate those evidences which the world presents to his view, and which his own unbiassed reason will suggest ; let him examine the wonderful fitness of every created being and consider for what purpose each was designed ; let him note the order of nature in the animals and vegetables around him ; let him observe

observe the reasoning powers and reflections of his own mind; and the unavoidable result will be, that he will be convinced that there is a God, and that that God is one supreme independent Being; he will acknowledge that he created all things by his fiat, and that all the things which he hath made are what he has pronounced them to be, very good: he will be convinced that the whole creation, intellectual and inanimate, are so admirably adapted to their respective situations and ends, as to be worthy of infinite wisdom and goodness.

This knowledge of God, which arises from the first principles of all religion, would have been every way sufficiently adequate to the reasonable wants of man, had he not proceeded to despoil these fair impressions and convictions of natural religion by the fancies of his imagination, and the criminal indulgence of his passions, which led to the abuse of his reason, and consequent misapprehension of the will and ways of God, thus discoverable in the laws of nature, and in the works of creation.

The sufficiency of natural religion, therefore, cannot be denied, without impeachment  
of

of the wisdom of God; and only from the abuse of it, we shall be able to discover the necessity of any further revelation. Mankind, in a rude uncivilized state, do not indeed present us with any very striking recommendation of the immediate and universal good effects of natural religion, according to our apprehension of things, who are now so far advanced in the culture of the mind, forwarded and improved by revelation. We may, however, observe the extent to which natural religion advanced morality in some of the philosophers of the heathen world; nevertheless, it failed in many very important articles, and in none more than in suffering the world to entertain unworthy notions of the deity. But the abuse of natural, any more than the abuse of revealed, religion, is no argument against it: and it must be confessed that we have read and seen as gross abuses of the truths of revelation, as of those of nature; abuses, which have sapped and destroyed, in the opinion of many well-meaning men, the very foundation of christianity. Take, for instance, the creed of the heathen polytheist and that of christians of certain denominations,

denominations, and where is the wonder that one should be heard to say, “ If such be christianity, let my soul be with the philosophers ? ”

In the religion of nature, it is acknowledged, there are difficulties which our limited understandings cannot resolve ; but this concession amounts to no more than owning that a finite being cannot fathom the counsels of him who is infinite. But there are christian churches which insist upon the assent of its ministers to certain articles of faith which not only involve difficulties, but direct contradictions and absolute impossibilities ; and maintain doctrines which are wholly irreconcilable to every part of the christian revelation. They have even been so far disposed to consider them as important, that they have pronounced them to be the foundation and corner-stone of the building, and essentially necessary to the preservation of the christian verity. It is in deference to these same doctrines, which have dishonoured the christian revelation, and hindered the general reception of it, that the same men have absurdly pronounced that faith to be most acceptable

acceptable to the deity, which is opposed to our reason, and requires our relinquishment of it, as the proper offering of our religious profession. Blind and mistaken guides these, who look not into revelation without first abandoning their reason, and quitting that instructor, which God hath given to his creatures of mankind for the noble and exalted purpose of causing them to know more of his mind and will, and to be more obedient to his laws!

It has already been observed, that natural religion has suffered in common with every other gift of God; and has been made the parent of error, not by the God of nature, whom we view in nature's laws, but by the perversion and misapprehension of man.

In this state of the heathen world, that same God, whom the greatest part of them had deserted or misrepresented, thought good to declare himself further to mankind; not to declare another, or a new, law, but to republish the first, accompanied with such circumstances as the state of mankind, at that time, required, in order to establish and preserve his unity.

In the subsequent history of the world, we find the second promulgation of the law was abused; and the doctrine of the unity of the one only true God was again supplanted by the prevailing idolatry of succeeding times.

If it should here be asked, How these dispensations came to be thus abused and perverted, or, in other words, how the ruling providence of God permitted such abuses to take place? The answer, though general, may be considered as conclusive. He gave to man laws which were good, and by which they might live, in the one case by an express revelation of his will, in the other by the constitution of nature itself. God having done this, and made man a reasonable and accountable creature, it was inconsistent with the scheme of creation, a scheme of wisdom and goodness, to regulate or counteract their measures by a continued miracle.

The same observation will equally apply to the publication, and indifferent success, of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in which God again declared his mind and will by the ministry of his messenger and prophet, adding to his former dispensation the promise

mife of acceptance of the sincere repentance and amendment of all his rational creatures, and an explicit affurance of eternal life and happinefs to the virtuous and the good.

It is an injuflice to christianity to represent it, as fome have been wont to do, as an entirely new code of laws, precluding, if not fubverting, the law of nature, and the former revelation. On the contrary, it is perfective of both, repeating the unity of God, and confirming all the moral duties. Almighty God, ever confifent with himfelf, fets his final feal in this his laft revelation, to every truth and every duty of moral obligation, which he had before declared to mankind.

We will now proceed, by a natural gradation, to the confideration of what it is to “know Jefus Chrift, whom,” as our text expreffes it, “God hath fent.” And, although it is, morally fpeaking, almoft impoffible to mifunderftand the plain and honeft import of the words, it may, nevertheless, be no mifapplication of our time to give them that attention which their importance deferves, though all that may be faid amount



amount only to the repetition of what we may be already acquainted with.

“ To know Jesus Christ whom he hath “ sent,” signifies, in the first place, the belief and acknowledgment of his mission or appointment from God, that is to say, the authority by which he acted. And we are not called upon in the gospel, blindly and implicitly to believe, but carefully and dispassionately to examine the evidences with which his mission was accompanied, whether external, as they respected the words he spake, or the works he did, or internal, as they referred to the doctrines which he taught. So likewise, when we have thus prosecuted our inquiry and examination, we are not to abandon our reason, and commit ourselves to the decision of implicit faith in any human authority, however respectable; but, having exercised our reason, we are to be determined by it, and by it to regulate both our faith and practice. For, by what safer compass can we steer our course through life, than by the word of God, approved and interpreted by our own reason and judgment?

This knowledge of Christ can only be learned from what himself, or his apostles, have said concerning him, whether it respects matters of doctrine, or matters of practice.

In reference to his doctrine, we should first satisfy ourselves concerning what the christian scriptures say of him, and of the authority by which he is delegated to so high and honorable an office; we should also satisfy ourselves concerning that life and immortality which the gospel is said to have brought to light, and that repentance which will finally be accepted by almighty God.

Concerning these, the christian world have, indeed, been much divided. Some have contended that Jesus Christ was no other than the eternal God himself; others, that he pre-existed in a former state before his appearance in the world, and literally descended from heaven, sustaining only the form of a man. To others, he appears, from his own account of himself, to be no more than a man, who existed only from his birth of Mary, and was highly approved and favoured of God; employed by him for the further declaration of his will; and supported, in all  
 extraordinary

extraordinary cases, by his immediate aid and assistance. In other words ; these do so distinguish between the character of Christ and of God, that while they maintain that the one is the sole creator and governor of the world, they admit the other to be only a creature and subject of that government : they acknowledge, with the apostle Paul, that there is “ one God, and one mediator, between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

Concerning a future state, rational christians are now very generally agreed that its commencement will take place at the general resurrection ; and that then the virtuous part of mankind will continually advance from one degree of happiness to another.

Of the nature of that repentance which will avail us at the great tribunal of God, there can be little room for diversity of opinion ; and it is only to be wondered how sober christians could ever have had two opinions on so plain a question. Repentance, however sincere, which is not followed by a life, reformed upon the principles of that re-

penitance, is only a mockery of God and all seriousness: in short, repentance and reformation; a sense of our sins and follies, and an abstinence from and renunciation of them, must be inseparable.

But there is another, and more important sense of the words, to “know Christ;” and that is, to live in the voluntary and habitual obedience to his laws, and to imitate the glorious example of his own amiable and excellent character: and to do this, under a sober conviction that he was the messenger of God to man, and hath taught us the only sure way to future happiness.

It is especially important to our happiness, both here and hereafter, as men and as christians, that we actively endeavour to render every beneficial service to our fellow-creatures of mankind by improving their usefulness and happiness; that we consult the interest of our posterity by cultivating and advancing the interest of truth and liberty, of rational religion and virtue, in our own and in the rising generation. At the same time, we must remember to sit so loose to the world ourselves, that in the midst of our enjoyment

joyment of the abundance of the good things of this life, and of life itself, we may at any time be ready to quit our station, and resign ourselves into the hands of death, in the well-grounded hope, through the mercy of God, of a resurrection to life and happiness which shall endure for ever.

The passing scenes of this world, all its pleasures and all its sorrows, however sensibly enjoyed or felt, are fleeting as the wind that wafts the air ; but like the wind, which, whether in storms or gentle breezes, renders the atmosphere more salutary, they tend to recommend our sojourning here by their variety, and to perfect our character before that judge who knoweth the thoughts and intents of the heart of man.

If we habituate ourselves to look up to God, through the medium of his creation, dispensations, and government, we shall have abundant reason to adore that infinite and friendly power that brought us into being, and intended us for virtue and for happiness ; that brought us out of nothing, gave us a reasoning mind, and is ready to portion us with immortal bliss.

In the limited judgment we sometimes make in our own, or other particular cases, we misunderstand their respective merits, because we are partial and uninformed; and also because we overvalue things present, and do not consider them as being wholly subservient to things to come. We are also sometimes perplexed at the means, because, while we immediately suffer, we do not, in that suffering state, look forward to the end. In a word; in the anguish of nature, we feel the wound, and though we know in whose hand is lodged the only power that can heal, we are hard to be persuaded that we are visited by affliction for our good.

An intimate knowledge of mankind would demonstrate how much more equally the human race are dealt with, than superficial appearances seem to admit. And this equality, amidst the different outward situations of men, is an argument of that justice and goodness which constitute the basis of almighty God's dealings with his creatures, and are the foundation of our highest expectations from the disposer of all events, and the giver of every good.

Let

Let us, therefore, adopt the excellent advice of our lord, conveyed in the words of the text: let us take them with us into our closet, and retain them in our converse with the world: they will conduct us through life with honor and comfort; they will support us in the last affecting scene, the separation from all that we now look upon, and all that we hold most dear on earth, the scene of death, with composure, resignation, and a pleasing and lively hope of future happiness and immortality. Let us, therefore, remember, that “ this is eternal life, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.”





## S E R M O N    X X .

JESUS'S AFFECTIONATE SYMPATHY WITH  
THE FRIENDS OF LAZARUS.

JOHN XI. 35.

JESUS WEPT.

THE narrative of the apostle John, in which we meet with this instance of the sympathizing affection of our lord, relates the sickness, death, and resurrection of Lazarus: and the story is as follows. Lazarus, who lived at Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem\*, being sick, his sisters Mary and Martha applied to Jesus, who was affectionately interested for the happiness of the whole family, to restore him to health. Jesus (who was then beyond Jordan †) proposed to go into Judea, and at the same time

\* See John xi. 18. "fifteen furlongs off." † ib. x. 40.  
acquainted

acquainted his disciples, that Lazarus was dead. At the end of their journey, they found that Lazarus had been buried four days: and both his sisters particularly lamented the absence of Jesus, being persuaded, that had he been present, he might have saved their brother. This interview was followed by Jesus's visiting the grave of Lazarus, accompanied by Mary and Martha, and many jews, who jointly mourned over the remains of their beloved Lazarus.

Jesus shared deeply in the affliction of the friends of Lazarus, and being also himself personally attached to him, "he wept\*." He then fervently addressed himself in prayer to God, and afterwards said in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." And he that was "dead came forth, bound hand and foot "with grave cloths; and his face was "bound about with a napkin †."

There is in the whole of this account a

\* See Bp. Newcome's "Observations on our lord's "conduct as a divine instructor." 4to. p. 341. (part ii. sect. 3.) Where different interpretations of the cause or motive of Jesus's weeping are briefly stated.

† John xi. 44.

very striking simplicity in the principal, and in all the accompanying, circumstances of the history. Jesus discovers an amiable sympathy at the affliction of others, and a mind greatly interested in their welfare. And the whole is represented as much in the characters of truth, as those of humanity and kindness.

Nevertheless, some of the jews thought that Jesus might have more properly shewn his friendly disposition to the family of Lazarus by restoring him to health, than by partaking with them in their concern on occasion of his death. “ Could not this “ man”, said they, “ who opened the eyes “ of the blind, have caused that even this “ man should not have died \*?”

But Jesus exhibited the evidence of the power of God in a way much more friendly, in every moral view, to the family of Lazarus, and more satisfactory to the jews, if any evidence would have satisfied them; for the restoration to life, after death hath actually taken place, greatly exceedeth the ordinary restoration of health, which so fre-

\* John xi. 37.

quently follows the application of natural means.

In order to give the most decisive proof of the divine mission of Jesus, and, if so it might be, to work conviction on the minds of the sceptic jews, Jesus performed works, not only of humanity and kindness, but was enabled, by the special assistance of God, to surpass the greatest powers of other men, in restoring to life the already putrified body of Lazarus. The account given by John recites the facts and the motives; and there we are told, that Jesus prayed to God and said, “ Father, I thank thee, that thou hast  
 “ heard me. And I knew that thou hearest  
 “ me always: but because of the people who  
 “ stand by, I said it, that they may believe  
 “ that thou hast sent me. Then many of  
 “ the jews who came to Mary, and had  
 “ seen the things which Jesus did, believed  
 “ on him\*.”

The observation which our subject primarily suggests is, that our lord possessed all the affections of a good and tender mind, that he shared in the sorrows of others, and

\* John xi. 41, 42, 45.

was ready to relieve them: and that he availed himself of the advantage, which the circumstances of Lazarus's death afforded him, by exercising those affections in the way most conducive to the credit and honor of the commission he bore, and to the eventual conversion of the minds of the jews to the belief of the power of God displayed in his mission.

Sympathy will imply similarity of situations and capacities. To rejoice with those who rejoice, and to mourn with those who mourn, presupposes either our having been partakers in the same fortune, or a possibility, in nature, of a future inter-change of joy and sorrow. Indeed, it is at once the property and the proof of an obdurate and unnatural heart, or of the deprivation of reason, when we are assured of the existence of any character who can share neither in the pleasures, nor the pains, of others.

Man is as much a member of society, as his hand or arm is a member of himself; and as an individual he can no more say to his brethren of mankind, "I have no more  
"need of you," than his hand or arm can  
say

say to his head, " I have no need of thee." Connected as we are, in all the social intercourse of life, we may as soon shake the foundation of the world, as dissolve, or cease to apply, the relation we stand in to each other. We cannot help partaking in those events which greatly interest our kind, without doing violence to ourselves; we cannot see with indifference merely animal life to suffer pain. In short, to sympathize at another's woe is not only a proof of our being men, but a strong presumption that our minds are moulded and attuned to goodness and to happiness. An extreme insensibility of mind in this life something resembles a state of annihilation in the next: a prospect, which deadens all virtuous energies here, and destroys the assured happiness of immortality hereafter.

Let us then cultivate the amiable and benevolent temper which Jesus shewed in this and other cases. Let us feel for others, as for ourselves; but let this interesting affection be followed by our endeavours to alleviate affliction, as well as be prompt to participate in the prosperity of our fellow-creatures.

creatures. Let us support the persecuted, relieve the necessitous, comfort the broken-hearted. If we can but loosen one envenomed shaft that hath any way disturbed the happiness, or wounded the peace of mind, of a brother, let us stretch forth our hand to his assistance, and not draw it back until it has administered to his relief.

Along with this readiness to support the drooping, or to raise the fallen spirit; be it our more especial care that we ourselves do not, either deliberately or inadvertently, sow tares among our neighbour's wheat, nor yet plant thorns and briars in his fields, which we may never be able afterwards to separate, or destroy.

As for such evils of this kind as may fall to our own share, let us endeavour, from our firm trust in God, and in his providence, to bear them like men and christians; that is to say, let us resist them with temper and resignation; and though we may be obliged to drink the bitter potion, let us forgive the persons of those who have thus mixed our cup. Human prudence, and that duty which every man owes to himself, will suggest some rules of  
caution

caution here; and, in no case, is caution, more strictly speaking, the mother of security; for though we may patiently bear to be the victims of another's wrong, we need not to live the sport either of the folly, or the malice, of our enemy.

There is another observation which will not escape the notice of the attentive reader of the passage and context now before us; and that is, that in doing this extraordinary act of kindness to the family of Lazarus, by restoring him to life, our lord assumed no extraordinary power to himself, but declared that it was effected by the power of God alone, and that he himself was only his favored instrument. It was God who "heard and answered his prayer:" and it was in the furtherance of his will and pleasure, and for the advancement of his truth among unbelievers, that the miracle was wrought.

Jesus Christ was sensibly affected by every scene of distress, but was always resigned and ready to sacrifice his feelings, and at length his life, in the cause of truth and righteousness, of which he was the chief teacher: on no occasion did he seek to  
do



do his own will, but at all times, and in all things, the will of him that sent him; even under his own greatest sufferings, his prayer to almighty God was, “not my will, but thine be done.”

In this part of our lord’s conduct we have a very important lesson for our own. It is an indispensable rule for us to observe, that, before all things, we do that which we conscientiously conceive to be the will of God; this will preserve pure the motives on which we act, and recommend every action to the approbation of him who knoweth the intention of the heart of man.

It becometh, therefore, the faithful disciple of Christ to consult the mind and will of God, as far as he shall be able by diligent inquiry to discover it: and to regulate his own conduct by that only rule of life. He will find that his very pursuit after an improved knowledge of this rule will enlarge his capacity for happiness; and that his practical observance of it will secure that happiness both in this world and the next, which by any other means he will seek in vain. By a serious attention to, and study of,

this rule, and of himself, he will obtain the sovereignty of his own temper of mind, and be able to give that direction to all his desires, which will rouse him to do the will of God with alacrity and ardor. He will find, by experience, that the ways of religion are the only ways of pleasantness, and that her paths are the only paths of peace.

There is no mistake concerning religion more false, or more fatal, than to conceive that it imposes irksome tasks, and condemns our days to solitude and sorrow. Such a representation is directly the reverse of the truth; for God hath given us all things richly to enjoy, and religion bids us to enjoy them with thankfulness and innocence. God hath placed us on this earth in a state of dependence on each other; and in the society and intercourse of our kindred of mankind he designs us to exercise ourselves in doing good to the fullest extent of our several powers and opportunities.

Our reason will tell us, that the order of duties is to be observed, and revelation has expressly added, that all must be fulfilled. If we were to have recourse to the wretched  
sophistry

sophistry of some unhappy men, who think to commute with God for their sins upon easy terms, the sober heathen would tell us, we must be mistaken. For, to obey in one point of the law and to neglect the rest, would be to destroy the principle which gives to obedience all that is truly excellent; it would be to observe the command only in part, while we disputed the authority which enjoins it. The providence and authority of God are universal; and the love and obedience of man ought to be universal also. Even that servant, who obeyeth not the commands of his earthly master, except only at his own option or convenience, obtains not his master's confidence by his services, be they ever so many, because he does not act from a principle of duty, but from his own caprice or pleasure.

In every review we take of our lord's life, we shall find increasing reason to admire his character: his obedience to God, and his love for man, and desire to do good, were the great principles which regulated his whole life, and supported him in death; which secured him the eminently distinguished favor

of God, and constituted him the most perfect pattern for the future imitation of the sons of men.

The extraordinary powers which were delegated to him for the discharge of his ministry, and to prove him to be the promised messiah, or the sent of God, he declared he derived from his and our heavenly father: powers, which were peculiarly necessary for the part he was called to sustain, and for completing the work he had to do. By the special blessing of God, he was, indeed, enabled to bear the cruel reproaches and persecutions of the enemies of the doctrines which he taught; it was also by the miraculous powers which were given him, that he was further enabled to prove the truth of his pretensions to the office to which he was appointed.

Less powerful, but not less amiable, does he appear on many common and familiar occasions. When his own natural disposition and temper were called into action by any ordinary occurrence in his life, and when there was no demand for any miraculous interposition; when no greater powers were

were required, than what every truly good man is endowed with, he is ever to be distinguished by an uniform excellence of temper and demeanour. Whenever he speaks of himself, it is with all the graceful humility of a meek, pure, and uncorrupted mind, and in every action of his life he appears to have been the model of human perfection in every virtue that can be comprehended in the high and honourable appellation of a “son of God;” a title this, which we also may attain, and which it ought to be our greatest ambition to deserve.

Nevertheless, plain and intelligible as is the only record we can consult upon the question, the world itself would hardly contain the books that might be written minutely to relate how it has come to pass, that a character like that of Jesus Christ should have been so grossly mistaken, mistaken too in the opposite extremes. For, while some have considered him as being the one only true God himself; others have treated him as an impostor.

Suffice it for the present to observe, that it belongs to us, and to all men, to inquire

diligently how these things really are, previously relinquishing all prejudices of every kind, and finally to settle our faith according to our own best and conscientious judgment.

In regard to every repeated examination of the character of Jesus Christ, it is sufficient to observe, that it is one great means of our improvement and edification to study and imitate every part of it. His compassionate sympathy and affection for the family of Lazarus, like the affectionate distress he expressed for the impending destruction of Jerusalem\*, indicate dispositions which approve themselves to God and man: dispositions, which we ought to cultivate, because they are highly beneficial to ourselves, being the best source and the best security of all that is truly excellent in the human character, and the foundation of our doing to others as we would have others do to us. These dispositions will also lead us to look up with reverence and love to the kind parent of all and the bountiful giver of every good; and to acknowledge him, in word and deed, in our daily practice, as well as in our public

\* Luke xix. 41.

worship of him, to be the one only living and true God, the invisible observer of every thing we do, and the rewarder of every pious and virtuous action of his creatures of mankind.





S E R M O N    X X I .

PERSEVERANCE IN THE CHRISTIAN  
CHARACTER.

LUKE IX. 62.

JESUS SAID UNTO HIM, NO MAN HAVING PUT HIS  
HAND TO THE PLOUGH, AND LOOKING BACK, IS  
FIT FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

THE conversation which our lord is reported to have held, on this occasion, with one of his disciples, is related generally by the two evangelists, Matthew\* and Luke: the pointed observation, or moral deduction, which Jesus drew from it, and which we have now recited, is recorded only by the latter of them.

The narrative informs us, that one of our lord's disciples was forward to declare his

\* Matt. viii. 18—22.

readiness

readiness to “ follow him, whithersoever he “ went;” in other words, to share with him that fortune which should attend his teaching the will of God to man : and that Jesus thereupon suggested to him in the familiar language of common observation, the difficulties and discouragements he might expect from his associating himself with him : “ Foxes have holes,” said he, “ and birds of “ the air have nests, but the son of man “ hath not where to lay his head.” He then called him to the service for which he offered himself, bidding him to “ follow “ him.” But no sooner was his own proposal thus tendered to him, under these circumstances with which it was connected, than he began to make excuses, and to endeavour to postpone his service in the cause of truth, when accompanied with worldly difficulties. “ Lord,” said he, “ suffer me first “ to go and bury my father.” Jesus answered, “ Let the dead bury their dead ; “ but go thou, and preach the kingdom of “ God.” This, in general language, is saying, let worldly-minded men regard worldly things, but do you forthwith entirely attend

attend to the service for which you offered yourself, and in which I am now engaged. Another disciple also said, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell who are at home at my house;" as much as to say, let me first settle my affairs at home, before I embark in the same service with you. Then proceeds our lord to make the remark in the text—  
 "No man having put his hand to the plough,  
 "and looking back, is fit for the kingdom  
 "of God."

We have, in the gospel, other representations of persons of warm and zealous tempers, and even good dispositions, making excuses for their delay in seriously entering upon, and pursuing the duties to which they were called, in consequence of their own voluntary offer. In the parable of the wedding-supper\*, we read of one, who excused his attendance at supper-time, because he had  
 "bought a piece of ground, and must needs  
 "go to see it;" of another, because he had  
 "bought five yoke of oxen, and was going  
 "to prove them;" of a third, because he

\* Matt. xxii. 1—14. Luke xiv: 16—24.

had “ married a wife.” And this recital is closed in the parable with the reflection, that “ many are called, but few are chosen\*.”

It becomes, therefore, our business, who profess to have put our hands to the plough, not to look back; but assiduously to attend to the work, the very important work, which lies before us, and which every day of our lives presents to our view. It becomes us, who have received and accepted the invitation to the marriage-feast, to take care that we be prepared to fulfil our engagement.

It was not the intention of Jesus, in either of these cases, to represent the profession or practice of his religion as attended with greater difficulties than the power of man is able to surmount; but, because his religion necessarily opposes every compliance with those fashions of the world which it was given to correct, it requires some exercise of judgment and discretion to preserve a virtuous mind from every infectious contagion. His gospel is, therefore, called a burden, and a yoke; but it is to be remembered

\* Luke xiv. 14.

withal, that it is a burden which is light, and a yoke which is easy. Every restraint of the will and affections is irksome in the first instance; but it is prudent and salutary judiciously to bound, and rightly to direct, the passions of our nature, both as a mean of securing present enjoyment, as well as the very end of our existence.

Difficulties and discouragements in our christian course may and will, indeed, present themselves in various shapes. The world has many temptations to offer to those who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; our habits (which in such cases are apt to exceed the demands of nature) plead for some indulgence; and it sometimes happens that even the duties of humanity have to struggle with the duty we owe to God, and his truth. But these may be, and are, easily resisted by a virtuous and religious mind. The temptations of the world are, at their best, short, uncertain, and unsatisfactory. It does not require that the objects of sense should be viewed in the shade only, in order to see that they cannot in their nature constitute the true happiness of man; nor does it require a  
long

long life to discover that they are deceitful in their promises, and delusive in their enjoyment. Our habits, whatever they may prompt us to expect, are by no means entitled to unlimited gratification, for they are of our own forming, and under our own control: and as we may easily observe their power over others, and feel it in ourselves, we are, in every view, bound to regulate them by the exercise of our reason, before the meridian of life arrives. By this regimen and regulation of them, they are easily made to subserve our happiness, by enhancing our enjoyment of every favorable and fortunate occurrence, and by rendering us more patient and resigned under every adverse event in human life.

The duties and affections of humanity want not the arts of argument or eloquence to call them forth, and set them off to advantage. Our nature is so kindly tempered by our maker, that we must offer violence to our native impulse, voluntarily, and without cause, to turn our backs on those, who are linked to us by the strong ties of genuine affection. Nevertheless, we must recollect that

that those times and seasons may come, and those trying occasions may occur, wherein we may be called to this strong test of our pre-eminent love to the cause of God and his truth. “ He that loveth father or mother, “ or son or daughter,” says our lord, “ more “ than me, is not worthy of me\* ;” and everlasting life is promised, on the same authority, to “ every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or lands, for his name’s sake †.” And, indeed, the covenant of mercy and goodness held out to us in the gospel is upon this expressed condition, that “ whosoever shall deny Christ before men, “ him will he also deny before his father, “ who is in heaven ‡.”

These conditions will not admit of any abatement, or any commutation with the world; and because they are founded in justice, and our obedience to them would constitute our greatest happiness, they are, therefore, of the highest obligation, and allow of no plausible ground for any hesitation, or for our halting

\* Matt. x. 37. † ib. xix: 29. ‡ ib. x. 33.

between two opinions. The assurance of, and the belief in, a future state, now expressly revealed to us by the gospel, removes the little futile objections which have been suggested by worldly-minded men. For if we carry our imaginations to their utmost extent in estimating the sacrifices of worldly interest, which any occasion may require us to offer to the cause of God and his truth, they will appear trifling, when compared with the approbation of our own conscience, and the acceptance of our God. And it is some practical evidence that this is no visionary diminution of such sacrifices, when, if we review the lives of some men, whom the world are generally agreed to pronounce fortunate, and candidly examine all that we have seen and heard concerning them, we cannot suppress the exclamation of Solomon, "that all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

When, indeed, we observe a man zealous in good works, improving the religious and moral character of his neighbours by his example, or advancing the permanent and rational happiness of his species by the cultivation of their religious or civil interests, we  
cannot



cannot refrain from pronouncing him blessed; blessed, both in his labour and his reward. But when we see a reasonable creature of God, who is born to immortality and happiness, wasting the moments of his very probation in an inglorious indolence, in the dissipations of fashion, or the yet more infamous excesses of vice and profligacy; we must lament the wreck of human happiness in the loss of a creature of God, and of one who was a joint-heir with Christ.

These observations are of that sort, which we are very much disposed to apply to others, in preference to ourselves. It becomes us, however, to benefit by these wretched examples; for even they, like every thing else around us, are intended to work together for our good.

We profess to have embraced the christian faith upon the commendable principles of inquiry and conviction, let us exhibit such our profession in our lives and conversation, the only faithful mirror in which we can see it ourselves, or make it known to others. Having put our hands to the plough, let us

not look back ; but rather, with the apostle Paul\*, “ forget those things which are behind, and reach forth unto those things which are before :” let us “ press toward the mark, for the prize of the high-calling of God in Christ Jesus,” with that integrity, consistency, and perseverance, which are necessary to the success and accomplishment of so great and glorious an end.

The instructive lesson conveyed in our present subject is familiarly evident from every pursuit to which man can direct the faculties of his mind, or the mechanical powers of his body. Science calls for diligence and perseverance in the attainment ; nor are the extraordinary achievements even of manual labour to be effected by any other means. How congenial then is it with our nature, that our very “ fitness for the kingdom of God,” (which, of course, includes our capacity for the enjoyment of heaven’s happiness,) should be perfected by the same process. Solomon repeated, therefore, only the language of nature, and anticipated the advice of revelation, when he said, “ Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy

\* Phil. iii. 13, 14.

“ might ;

“ might; for there is no work, nor device,  
 “ nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave  
 “ whither thou goest\*.” More particularly,  
 as the revelation of the will of God is ten-  
 dered to our reasonable understanding, and  
 the example of our master is held forth to us  
 for our imitation, we are expected (with the  
 apostle Peter) “ to give diligence to make  
 “ our calling and election sure †:” and with  
 Paul to “ work out our salvation with fear  
 “ and trembling ‡.”

If we seriously contemplate our situation  
 in the present world, and keep our minds  
 fixed on that future state, which natural re-  
 ligion will admit to be probable, and which  
 revealed religion hath demonstrated to its  
 disciples to be certain, the great end and ob-  
 ject of human life is, or ought to be, univer-  
 sally one, that is to say, the approbation of  
 God to a faithful discharge of every duty,  
 which we can comprehend.

If the difficulties of our situation here are  
 increased by the superior purity and demands  
 of the gospel, we must consider that although

\* Eccles. ix. 10. † 2 Pet. i. 10. ‡ Phil. ii. 12.

we are bidden to be pure, even as our heavenly father is pure, the assurance of the rewards of the gospel is proportioned to its increased demands upon us.

“ My son,” says Solomon, “ give me thine heart\*.” The wise king well knew that, if the employment of the pupil did not reach and interest the heart, the importance and obligation of the duty enjoined would be disregarded. The lessons of the sublimest wisdom must engage the affections of the learner, before they will attract his attachment, and encourage him to persevere in the way in which he should go.

Considering then ourselves as the disciples and soldiers of Jesus Christ informed of his doctrine and example, it will be necessary for us, at all times, to act correspondently with those characters. The enemies of our happiness are many, and at some times they apply their force united; at others, in such rapid succession, that our duty, and even good policy, require us to be constantly prepared, if

\* Prov. xxiii. 26.

we expect to be able successfully to resist them. For we are exposed not only to regular attacks, but to fallies and surprises which may take us under great disadvantage. Like centinels, we should keep our post with watchfulness, for by observation and prudence, we may avoid dangers which we might not be able to repel by force. As the apostle Paul writes, “ We not only have to  
 “ wrestle against flesh and blood, but against  
 “ the authority, against the powers, against  
 “ the rulers of this dark age; against the  
 “ wickedness of spiritual men in a heavenly  
 “ dispensation\*.” Wherefore he exhorts us  
 “ to take up the whole armour of God, that  
 “ we may be able to withstand during this  
 “ wicked season; and, after destroying every  
 “ enemy, to stand up: to have our loins  
 “ girded about with truth, and with the  
 “ breast-plate of righteousness upon us, and  
 “ with feet ready shod for the gospel of re-  
 “ conciliation: to take up the shield of  
 “ faith, by which we shall be able to quench

\* Ephes. vi. 12. Mr. Wakefield's Translation.]

“ all the fiery darts of the wicked one ; and  
 “ the helmet of salvation, and that spiritual  
 “ sword, the word of God : to pray at all  
 “ times with all prayer and supplication, and  
 “ watching for this purpose with all pati-  
 “ ence\*.”

This bold and figurative language of the apostle needs no comment to make it level to the common understanding of mankind. For, whether we read the description of our duty, in the present view of it, in his words, or in those of Jesus, when he says, “ No man  
 “ having put his hand to the plough and  
 “ looking back is fit for the kingdom of  
 “ God ;” we cannot mistake the admonition, but must understand each direction, as explanatory of, and strengthening the other.

We may, and indeed we ought to consider our subject in a yet stronger point of view. For admitting that we know our duty, and this we cannot deny with any pretensions to a regard for truth, or, if we do, it must be at the expence of confessing a very blameable

\* Ephes. vi. 13—18.

and criminal degree of ignorance; an ignorance that is wilful, and almost, if not altogether, incredible: admitting, I say, that we have a knowledge of our duty, every positive disobedience and every habitual neglect of it, is a criminal desertion of our post and character. “ To him who knoweth to do good, “ and doeth it not, to him it is sin\* :” and under the convictions which we may be presumed to have of the truth of the gospel, and the obligation of all moral duties, it is impossible that we should escape without punishment from the justice of God; from that justice, which is essential to his own nature, and to the moral government of his rational creatures; if we obey not the gospel.

Persuaded, therefore, as we are, of these truths, the word of exhortation may well be spared. The acknowledgment of the truth, as it is in Jesus, and our obligation to follow and abide by it, will, of themselves, leave stronger impressions upon the understanding and the heart, than any address to the pas-

\* James iv. 17.

sions. The last may, indeed, sometimes captivate the imagination, and occasionally extort an involuntary resolution to take the character of Christ for our example, in this or that particular case; and to say, to ourselves, we will go and do likewise. But if we are to be drawn to imitate him, with any good effect upon our own happiness, we must review his doctrines, his precepts, his temper; we must enter into his whole character; we must approve it in all views, and situations, and circumstances; we must cheerfully endeavour to follow his direction and imitate his conduct; and not only to follow and to imitate him, but perseveringly keep that only road which will lead us to everlasting life, against every opposing trial and temptation, to the latest hour of our existence here. "Having put our hands to the plough," we must not "look back," we must not become cool or irresolute, if we expect to be found "fit for the kingdom of God."



S E R M O N XXII.

CHRIST'S SPEECH ON THE CROSS NO EVIDENCE  
OF AN INTERMEDIATE ESTATE\*.

LUKE. XXIII. 43.

VERILY, I SAY UNTO THEE TO-DAY, THOU SHALT BE  
WITH ME IN PARADISE.

LUKE is the only evangelist who records this speech of Jesus to one of those two unfortunate persons, who were crucified at the same time with him, "the one on the right-hand, the other on the left."

The multitude, through whom our lord had passed in his way to Calvary, or place of a scull, (an hill without the walls of Jerusalem, where criminals were executed,) and the chief priests also †, reviled and mocked

\* Preached on Good-Friday. † Matt. xxvii. 39—44.  
him,

him, saying, " If thou be the son of God,  
 " come down from the cross." And, again,  
 " He saved others, cannot he save himself?  
 " If he be the king of Israel, let him now  
 " come down from the cross, and we will  
 " believe. He trusted in God; let him  
 " deliver him now, if he will have him, for  
 " he said, I am the son of God."

According to Matthew\* and Mark †, the two malefactors who were crucified with him, reproached him in like manner. Luke's account states that only one of them " railed  
 " on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save  
 " thyself and us ‡." And he then proceeds to give a more particular relation of what passed at this awful season, telling us, that " the  
 " other, answering, rebuked" his fellow-malefactor, " saying, Dost not thou fear  
 " God, seeing that thou art in the same  
 " condemnation? And we indeed justly; for  
 " we receive the due reward of our deeds;  
 " but this man hath done nothing amiss." This same person then turning to Jesus said unto him; " Lord, remember me when thou  
 " comest into thy kingdom." The reply

\* Matt. xxvii 44. † Mark xv. 32. ‡ Luke xxiii. 39.  
 which

which Jesus made is expressed in the words of the text, “ Verily, I say unto thee to-day, “ thou shalt be with me in paradise.”

The peculiar case and circumstances which may have brought these unfortunate men into this situation, I stay not to inquire, partly because it does not affect the purpose more immediately before us, and partly because they are enveloped in much uncertainty. It is, however, most probable, that they were not of that description, which we properly call thieves, but had been condemned for some political offence against the state. It is nevertheless certain, that the jews intended to degrade the death and sufferings of Jesus, as well by his associates in, as by the place and instrument of, his execution. Thus much we may believe equally of the chief priests, as of the multitude, for they appear on this occasion, and not on this only, to have been very ready to join in, if not to lead, the popular clamour against the crucified Jesus.

But to return. The serious appeal which this other malefactor made to Jesus, beseeching him to remember him when he came  
into

into his kingdom, has given very just occasion to suppose that he was, or had been, a disciple of our lord, for he even bore testimony to his innocence by asserting that he “ had done nothing amiss.” This same unhappy person, having given himself up to the sentence of the law, applied to Jesus, almost in the article of death, to remember him when he should be in possession of his kingdom.

In answer to this petition, our lord tells him he could assure him that he should have a place with him in paradise, by which term “ the jews most familiarly and distinctly expressed the future state of blessedness\* :” “ I say unto thee this day †, thou shalt be “ with me in paradise.”

It would, however, be disingenuous not to acknowledge that this manner of reading and apprehending the answer of Jesus has been much objected to; and that it has been insisted, that the words “ to-day,” refer, not to the time of speaking, but to the time

\* See Bp. Law’s, Appendix to his “ Considerations,” p. 413. 5th edit. 1765.

† See Bowyer’s “ Conjectures,” on the place.

of being received into paradise; and, therefore, it is contended that this dying man would on that day be happy with his master in paradise.

But, in reply, we need only to remark, that our lord was himself a dead corpse in the tomb until the third day after his death, which circumstance alone makes an intermission not consistent with the notion of immediate happiness.

If, however, this punctuation and reading of the passage be again objected to, our present interpretation is countenanced and supported by a liberal construction of similar expressions in other places in the old Testament, which explain the idiom of the language to a Jewish ear. In Deuteronomy it is said, "Hear, O Israel, thou art to pass over Jordan THIS DAY." And again, "that he may establish thee TO-DAY for a people unto himself\*." In the Psalms, "Thou art my son, THIS DAY have I begotten thee †." In all these places the words this "day and to-day" are not, nor indeed can

\* Deut. ix. 1. xxix. 13.

† ii. 7.

they

they be, understood to mean, instantly, or the day on which the words were spoken, but to refer generally to a future time, not far distant\*.

But this interpretation is further thought improbable by some, because, say they, if our consciousness be not resumed till the general resurrection, how will the promise of Jesus to the dying malefactor, "to-day thou shalt be with me in paradise," in any sense of those words apply to, or be consistent with, so many intervening ages of sleep and insensibility?

The first obvious remarks upon this question are, that time unperceived is as the twinkling of an eye; the sleeping and waking moments are instantly and perfectly united; the ages of unconsciousness are swallowed in oblivion. In the language of

\* Mr. Evanston has revived the charge mentioned by Origen against the authenticity of this celebrated passage in Luke xxiii, 43. and, thereupon observes on the silence of Justin, Irenæus and Tertullian respecting it, though they have quoted almost every other passage of Luke relating to the crucifixion. See Evanston's "Dissonance of the four generally received evangelists." p. 11—13.

the psalmist, “ a thousand years in the sight of God are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night \*.”

But, though our reasoning on this head may be satisfactory and conclusive, we are also justified in the use of it, by the authority of the scriptures themselves; and we may use this argument in accommodation, as it were, to the express words of revelation. We are referred by the christian revelation to the general resurrection, for our being awakened and made alive; until that period shall arrive, the wicked, we are told, shall not be severed from the righteous, the elect shall not be gathered together, the world shall not be judged; the virtuous shall not be rewarded, they shall not have eternal life, or salvation, shall not put on immortality, be received unto Christ, enter into his joy, behold his glory, or be like him; until that period, the wicked will not be punished. From hence it plainly appears, “ that the scripture, in speaking of the connection between our present and future being, doth not take into the argument our intermediate state

\* Psalm xc. 4.

in death; any more than we, in describing the course of any man's actions, take in the time he sleeps. Therefore, the scriptures (to be consistent with themselves) must affirm an immediate connection between death and judgment\*." "It is appointed unto men "once to die, but after this the judgment †.

In short, where death meets us, there judgment will find us; for "there is no "work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor "wisdom in the grave, whither we are "going ‡: there, indeed, the wicked cease "to trouble; and there the weary are at "rest §." But it is not until the resurrection of the dead at the last day, "in which, all "who are in their graves shall hear the "voice of the son of man, and shall come "forth; they who have done good, unto the "resurrection of life; and they who have "done evil, unto the resurrection of con- "demnation ||:" then it is that all nations "shall be gathered before the son of man;

\* See Bp. Law's Appendix to his "Considerations."

‡ 391—404.

† Heb. ix. 27. † Eccles. ix. 10. § Job iii. 17.

|| John v. 28, 29.

" and



“ and he shall separate them one from another,  
 “ as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the  
 “ goats: and he shall set the sheep on his  
 “ right-hand, but the goats on the left.  
 “ Then shall he say to them on the right-  
 “ hand, Come, ye blessed of my father, in-  
 “ herit the kingdom prepared for you from  
 “ the foundation of the world. Then shall  
 “ he say also unto them on the left-hand,  
 “ Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting  
 “ fire, prepared for the devil and his  
 “ angels\*.”

We have entered upon this inquiry into the meaning of our text in the hope of ascertaining its true sense, and, ultimately, to remove the difficulty which it might otherwise be supposed to suggest against the doctrine of an unconscious state, between death and the resurrection: “ a doctrine, which strikes home at the pride of the philosopher, the enthusiastic visions of the mystic, the lucrative systems of the interested church-

\* Matt. xxv. 32—34, 41.

man, and the various prejudices and superstitions of their respective disciples\*.”

But it may more particularly concern our present assembling ourselves together to observe, with the learned Dr. Lardner, upon our lord's behaviour in this very instance now before us, and at a time so immediately preceding his own death. “ The request, (says he,) of the malefactor is a proof that he had seen something very great and extraordinary in the person and behaviour of Jesus under his sufferings. If before he was set upon the cross, he had some knowledge of Jesus, and a faith in him as the Christ, (which may be reckoned probable,) yet, undoubtedly, his faith was increased and confirmed by the excellent behaviour of Jesus, during this afflictive and melancholy season.” And our lord's answer sets before us another and manifest instance of the excellent frame of his mind. “ Verily, I say unto thee, this day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” Which

\* See “ Historical view of the controversy concerning an intermediate state.” 2d. edit. Pref. p. lxvi.

shews

shews that his spirit was not broken, sunk down, and dejected by the continued scene of various afflictions of the most trying nature. He is still composed. He is persuaded of the happy issue of all. He knows his own innocence, and eyes the reward set before him. He receives the profession made of a belief in his character and kingdom. He shews his approbation of it, and his satisfaction therein: and with full authority he promises a place (according to this writer) that very day in paradise. How great is Jesus here! He triumphs every where; and how glorious is this triumph! On the cross during the very time of his most ignominious sufferings, he carries on, and accomplishes his great design of converting and saving sinners. Truly the pharisees had still cause of envy and indignation. They were before offended, because sinners resorted to him to hear him, and he taught them: or because he received them, and comforted them with assurance of pardon, when they gave tokens of compunction and repentance. They make him suffer with sinners, yea with malefactors. And one of them openly

professes faith in him, and humbly seeks to him. And Jesus receives him, and promises him, (says our author,) immediate admission, together with himself, into paradise\*.”

This recapitulation of part of our lord's behaviour immediately before his death, that is to say, of so much as respects his conversation with the penitent malefactor, will, correspondently with the subject itself, suggest two things for our further consideration.

The first is, that Jesus sustained that character, and no other, which Peter declared him to be before the rest of the apostles, “ a man approved of God among them, by “ miracles and wonders and signs, which “ God did by him in the midst of them † :” and that “ it became him” (as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews writes) “ for “ whom are all things, and by whom are “ all things, in bringing many sons unto “ glory, to make the captain of their salva- “ tion perfect through sufferings. And, “ being made perfect, he became the author

\* Lardner's "Works," vol. x. p. 331, 332. (Sermons.)

† Acts ii. 22.

“ of eternal falvation unto all them that obey  
 “ him\*.”

Let us, therefore, follow the blessed Jefus as our guide and pattern through life, and in death; as one, who “ was in all points  
 “ tempted like as we are, yet without fin †.” But let us not take from the one only living and true God that homage of the whole heart, that praife and adoration which are due unto him and to none other, by giving divine worfhip to Jefus of Nazareth, who is the Chrift or chosen of God. It is barely poffible to believe, (and that only becaufe the fact confronts every fuppoftion to the contrary,) that mankind, and more efppecially that chriftians, fhould fall down and give divine worfhip to a man, (although the moft excellent of his race,) born of a woman, and who expired on the crofs before many witneffes; who himfelf renounced all divine worfhip, and declared that he came but to do the will of his heavenly father, his father and our father, his God and our God. Nay; if there be any peculiar advantage to be de-

\* Heb. ii. 10. and v. 9.      † ib. iv. 15.

rived from our attendance in this place upon particular occasions, and directing our attention to the subject connected with them, it is to remind us of the humanity of our lord and master, that he was born, died, and rose again; and to impress us with the deepest gratitude to God for commissioning such a teacher and prophet to reveal his mind and will to us, and for supporting so benevolent a mission by evidence, which is reasonable, satisfactory, and convincing to an ingenuous and inquiring mind. Surely, our meditations on the birth, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of our lord, cannot lead us to think and conceive of him as being the one almighty creator and governor of the world, who existed before time, and shall endure the same through the ages of eternity; or, by the aid of any metaphysical distinctions and subtleties, to consider Christ as God and man united, “perfect God and perfect man\*,” or “very God of very God †.” Neither reason nor

\* Athanasian creed: and the exhortation in the communion-service “both God and man.”

† Nicene creed.

scripture would, of themselves, have suggested such conceits; nor will they be found to give any support to such unworthy notions of God and the divine nature.

Another observation will occur to us all, that if we consider Jesus Christ as the founder and finisher of our faith, approved by almighty God, and acknowledged by us as our leader and master, it particularly concerns us to set his example before us, and to endeavour to walk as he also walked; and also to remember that whatever service or suffering we may be called to endure, we must do the will of him, whose creatures we are, and by whom we live, and move, and have our being. And be it further observed, that we shall not satisfy this great and extensive obligation by a generally decent moral character, and by preserving appearances before the world, unless we also form our internal temper of mind and disposition to a likeness with his; and, if occasion should require it, be ready to endure afflictions, persecution, and death for the truth, as it is in Jesus; constantly bearing in mind the precept of our lord, “ Fear not them

“ the soul: but rather fear him who is able  
 “ to destroy both soul and body in hell\*.”

It is impossible not to observe, in the character of Jesus, that cool intrepid resignation which constitutes the highest degree of true courage; that courage, which arises from conscious innocence, and rectitude of intention, and from an humble trust in God's mercy, and the hope of everlasting life. Such a deportment has not been exceeded by any of the noble army of martyrs: indeed, in a state of persecution, he is, or ought to be, our master, pattern, and example. The emulation of his virtues will gain us the same support that he received from God; we must not, indeed, expect to have committed to us the power of working miracles now all occasion for them has ceased, but we may assure ourselves of being enabled to bear the utmost malevolence and bigotry of man. We have seen, on various occasions, the length to which honest men of different persuasions, have been carried in consequence of their convictions; and in this respect all parties

\* Matt. x. 28.



have acquired equal honour, for though martyrdom alone is no proof of the truth of a doctrine, it is very good proof of the sincerity of him who professes it unto death.

Let us propose to ourselves one of the questions in Paul's epistle to the Romans, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword\*?" And may we, with humble confidence, be able to make the same reply which he did on behalf of himself and certain of his brethren; "In all these things we are more than conquerors, through him who loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come; nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our lord."

\* Rom. viii. 35.



S E R M O N    XXIII. \*

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS,

ACTS XXIV. 15.

AND HAVE HOPE TOWARDS GOD, WHICH THEY THEMSELVES ALSO ALLOW, THAT THERE SHALL BE A RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD, BOTH OF THE JUST AND UNJUST.

WE are told by Luke, the writer of the Acts of the apostles, that when Lyfias, the chief captain, had rescued Paul from the hands of Ananias the high-priest, in order that he might be brought before, and tried by, the civil power, he conducted him to the court where Felix the roman governor presided. Tertullus, an orator, or pleader, appeared there against Paul, and charged him with being “ a (very) pestilence, and one

\* Preached on Easter-sunday.

“ who

“ who stirred up tumults against all the  
 “ jews, throughout the world; (or empire;)”  
 “ a ring-leader of the sect of the Nazarenes;  
 “ one also who had attempted to profane the  
 “ temple\*.” To this charge, brought forward and supported by the eloquence of Tertullus, the jews who attended him assented.

Our apostle then entered on his defence with that ability and spirit which so eminently distinguished him, and with that unabashed deportment and address which so noble a cause is naturally disposed to inspire. He insisted that it was “ only twelve days  
 “ since he went up to Jerusalem to worship;  
 “ that neither in the temple found they  
 “ him disputing with any man; neither  
 “ causing a meeting of the people against  
 “ any one, either in the synagogues, or in  
 “ the city; and that they could not prove,  
 “ or make appear, the things whereof they  
 “ then accused him.” He then adds, “ But  
 “ I confess unto thee, that after the way  
 “ which they call a heresy, so worship I the  
 “ God of our fathers, believing all things

\* Acts xxiv. 5.

“ which

“ which are written in the law and the  
 “ prophets.” In other words ; he declared  
 before Felix, that he was a christian, and  
 that he was such, partly on the authority of  
 their law and the prophets. He then goes  
 on to avow, as the consequence of his being  
 of the sect, or as our present version reads, of  
 the “ heresy,” of the Nazarenes, (that is to  
 say, as the consequence of his conversion to  
 the christian faith,) that “ he had hope  
 “ towards God, that there would be, what  
 “ the jews themselves also allowed, a re-  
 “ surrection of the dead, both of the just  
 “ and unjust.”

The further account of this ever-memora-  
 ble arraignment of Paul is generally well  
 known ; and, were it only from the effect  
 his defence and subsequent conversation had  
 upon his judge, will ever be a much admired  
 and very valuable fact in the history of the  
 christian church. For, after the governor  
 had deferred giving judgment, he repeatedly  
 sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the  
 faith of Christ ; and “ as he discoursed of  
 “ justice, continence, and a judgment to  
 “ come, Felix trembled ; and answered,  
 “ Go

“ Go thy way for this time; when I have  
 “ a convenient season, I will call for thee.”

But, we will not now enter at large into Paul's defence of himself before Felix, but more particularly consider that part of it, in which he declares his hope and belief that there would be “ a resurrection of the dead, “ both of the just and unjust.”

A general persuasion of a future state will follow from every serious inquiry into the ways and dispensations of God. Natural religion would impress the reason and judgment of a contemplative mind with the probability of a future state, from its consistency with, and perfection of, so much of the scheme of providence as the light of nature presents to us in the government of the system around us. But, if we inquire after the opinions of those of the heathen world, who were enlightened by philosophy, and were the ornaments of their age, we shall find they had no fixed opinions on this head, and ultimately abandoned themselves to despair and uncertainty. Cicero, “ notwithstanding all the fine things which he had said about the immortality of the soul,

in which point he seems to be most sanguine and positive of any, yet in his epistles, (where he is most likely to speak his real thoughts,) we find him giving it all up, and having recourse only to the miserable comfort of insensibility\*." If we turn to the schools of Athens, and inquire what Socrates taught, we shall find, not indeed that confirmed uncertainty which we meet with in the writings of Cicero, but then we shall observe a frequent citing of tradition and some sacred records. In short, that he had benefited by revelation, through some medium of information, but was himself very inferior to that character, to which some of his admirers would raise him †.

In the written dispensation of the will of God to the jews, we see this doctrine so repeatedly intimated and maintained, that we cannot but be convinced of their belief of a future state. We may infer this from the translation of Enoch, and from the

\* See Bp. Law's "Considerations." edit. 5. p. 119. note.

† Ib. p. 117, 118. note.

promise to Abraham\*. The apostle Paul, in this very declaration of his own faith, bears testimony that the jews, generally “ allowed a resurrection of the dead.”

But it is no further of use for us to inquire what evidence either nature or the old Testament afford of a future state, than as the inquiry shews that nature and the dispensation of religion to the jews virtually agree with the revelation of the gospel. Christianity will still retain its pre-eminent distinction as it produces the most abundant evidence to assure and satisfy us of a future resurrection to life and immortality.

Neither is it merely upon the authority of a doctrine taught, or an opinion advanced, by an apostle, that we rest our evidence: it is not because Paul tells his converts at Corinth, that “ since by man came death, “ by man came also the resurrection of the “ dead; that as in Adam all die, even so “ in Christ shall all be made alive; that this “ corruptible must put on incorruption, and

\* See Ep. Law's “ Considerations.” p. 59, 60, 68, 70.



“ this mortal must put on immortality\* :” it is not even because Jesus himself hath said, “ I am the resurrection and the life † ;” that we believe in his resurrection. It is, because, after suffering death upon the cross, he appeared alive to many credible witnesses, that we say with Peter, “ Blessed be the God “ and father of our lord Jesus Christ, who, “ according to his abundant mercy, hath be- “ gotten us again unto a lively hope, by the “ resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, “ to an inheritance incorruptible and unde- “ filed, and that fadeth not away, reserved “ in heaven for us ‡ .”

The evidence of the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead is now put to issue, not on the probability of such resumption of life from the glimmering light of nature ; not from the few incidental and collateral proofs in the old Testament ; not even upon the authority of the new Testament, as a doctrinal opinion ; but upon the evidence of

\* 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22 and 53.

† John xi. 25.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

this historical fact, that the man Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.

The crucifixion and death of Jesus are facts, which are related not only by the immediate writers of his life, but by other historians; and they are as well established and as generally admitted, as the accounts we have of the deaths of Cæsar, or Cato. Indeed, with respect to the death of Christ, the enemies of the christian revelation have been more disposed to admit the fact, accompanied with the reproach of a suffering messiah, than to object to the truth of it.

Among the evidences of his resurrection, we must first mention the soldiers who were set to guard the dead body of our lord: and then recount his appearance to Mary Magdalene, to the women returning from the sepulchre, to two of his disciples in their way to Emmaus, to Peter, to his assembled disciples, to Thomas, to his disciples at the sea of Tiberias, and on a mountain in Galilee, to James and to five hundred brethren at once. And lastly to Paul, who, in consequence from a persecution, became a believer.

The artless relation of disinterested historians,

rians, and the concurrent admission of the truth of their narratives by the successive generations of mankind, who have very generally admitted the premises, even where they were disposed to deny the conclusions, constitutes no inconsiderable testimony in our favor. Besides all this; the sufferings of his apostles, being brought upon them for their bearing testimony to this fact, are so many proofs of its truth. For though there have been martyrs in support of opposite opinions, the bearing testimony to a false fact is not within the reach of enthusiasm itself. A fact admitted by all my senses, and supported by all concurring circumstances, is not the probable subject for a warm imagination and misguided zeal to deny or misrepresent. It acquires the same degree of certainty as a mathematical demonstration, which is only admissible through the same medium. It requires no inspiration in the relator, nor any extraordinary faith in the believer.

Founding our faith on a chain of evidence; connected in every link, we are justified in challenging the adversaries of revelation to disprove, or impeach, the credibility of the re-

urrection of Jesus: and more particularly so, because our lord rested the truth of his own divine commission upon this event. Whatever be the issue of this examination and inquiry, truth will be the gainer.

The apostle Paul also hath observed, that “if Christ be not raised, our faith is vain.” So very essential he thought the establishment of the fact of Christ’s resurrection to the truth of the christian dispensation, that he conceived it to be the christian’s chief, if not only, support under the then prevailing state of persecution; for, “if in this life “only,” says he, “we have hope in Christ, “we are of all men most miserable\*.”

But, presuming that the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus is admitted, the practical importance of our subject remains to be considered as it applies to ourselves; to our situation in this life, as a state of discipline and probation; and to our expectations and hopes of a better.

As an article of our faith, the doctrine of a resurrection is the proper test of our belief in the divine mission of Jesus, for it is the

\* 1 Cor. xv. 17.

appropriate character of his gospel, that it brought life and immortality to light. Neither can we give a more clear or decisive proof of our being his disciples than by a declaration of our belief in a future state, upon the authority of his resurrection.

But civil society is much more interested in our leading our lives agreeably to this faith, than in our barely making confession of it as a religious test: and will, indeed, more certainly discover by our actions, than by any written subscription of our names, the truth and integrity of our faith. The proper interest which every civil government has in our receiving christianity as a divine revelation, and living agreeably to its precepts, is the security which so excellent a system of religious and moral truths gives for the virtuous behaviour of the several individuals, who, collectively, form the aggregate of society. Infinitely greater, therefore, is this security which is derived from our virtuous lives, than from all the tests and confessions which the wit of man can devise, or the power of man can impose; because the obligation to obey the will of God is

heightened by our reverence for his sole authority, and is enforced by our example. And, further, he who acts from the pure principle of religion, turns neither to the right-hand, nor to the left, from the road that leadeth to life everlasting; he seeks no occasion to digress from the right way; has no temptation to evade the force of truth; he knows that all he does is open to the eye of omniscience, and that he is under the providential care of omnipotence.

Let us now direct our observations to the influence which our doctrine will naturally have upon ourselves. Not meaning to insist on the consequences of our belief of a resurrection as the main inducement to admit the doctrine: but, having considered the resurrection of Jesus as a fact sufficiently authenticated and established, and the authenticity and establishment of that fact as a conclusive proof of the truth of his gospel, we will briefly consider the consequences which result from it; and these are so favorable to virtue and happiness, that they are worthy of that revelation which claims to be derived from God.

It is always a very considerable assurance that we shall adhere to the principles we embrace, (be they religious, moral, or civil,) when they are the result of our own examination and conviction. He, who hastily adopts opinions on the authority of others, generally parts with them with the same facility; he fluctuates in his conduct, and is frequently influenced by the last person with whom he has conversed, or by the last book he has read. On the contrary, he who thinks for himself, who inquires after truth, and judges for himself, will act with resolution and consistency, agreeably to his principles: his opinions will change, though truth be always the same, for otherwise his inquiry and information would produce no increase of knowledge and wisdom. Neither needs this inquirer to be told, that what may ultimately prove to be error, is truth to him, who, after such examination, conceives it so to be.

God does not require all men to think alike; his own wise dispensations have prevented the possibility of it. And nothing can more strongly mark the folly of mankind, than to see large societies of

christians contend for, and insist upon, uniformity of profession, while they must know the absolute impossibility of preventing a discordancy and contradiction of sentiment even among the members of each of these societies. We may mark not only the folly of requiring this profession of uniformity, but the extreme folly of imagining that, under such circumstances, it can possibly answer any one good purpose, civil or religious.

We ought to remember, that it is an important duty required of all christians, to consider the advantages which the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead holds forth to us; and that it is admirably fitted to improve our greatest happiness in this world, as well as to secure it in that future one, to which it assures our admission. Let us, for a moment, view ourselves in some of the different situations and circumstances, in which the various events in life, at one time or other, place us, and we shall see the use we ought to make of our belief in a resurrection to a future life, and the natural effect of it.

Every one of us lives in the enjoyment of many blessings; and no consideration can  
more



more forcibly lead us to make a wise and proper use of them, than the prospect of an inheritance incorruptible, that fadeth not away, eternal in the heavens, which every man shall receive who shall have made the proper use of the blessings conferred upon him.

Suppose us in the possession of some extraordinary degree of worldly happiness and prosperity, what will be more likely to prevent us from yielding to the temptation to forget that it was not our own power that obtained it, than the uncertainty of its continuance, and the assurance of being called to render an account of the talents which shall have been committed to our care, and rewarded or punished in a future state for the use or abuse of them respectively ?

If we carry our minds back to the hours, or years, wherein we have suffered adversity, or have been visited, and almost over-whelmed, with affliction, what consolation have we ever received from any external object, or temporal consideration, or even from the counsel of friends, which can be compared with the comfort of having a mind void of any wilful  
offence

offence against God or man, and anticipating that future state of blessedness, where all tears will be wiped away, and no more affliction will pursue us? A state, where we shall be restored to the society of those we have loved here; where peace and harmony will reign, without interruption from the wicked plunderers of our earthly happiness; where love, which is the leading principle of the gospel, will be universal and eternal?

When we thus consider that the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead administers to our comfort and happiness in all our various situations here; that it tends, at once, to regulate, and really to enlarge, our capacity for the enjoyment of the things of this world, and to support us under the afflictions incident to humanity, we cannot be sufficiently thankful for the ample assurance and proof which we receive from the gospel of Jesus Christ, that there will be a resurrection to eternal life.

To conclude. “ I would not have you  
 “ to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them  
 “ who are asleep; that ye sorrow not,  
 “ even

“ even as others who have no hope; for  
“ if we believe that Jesus died, and rose  
“ again, even so them also who sleep in  
“ Jesus will God bring with him. Where-  
“ fore, comfort one another with these  
“ words \*.”

\* I. Theff. iv. 13, 14, 18.



S E R M O N    XXIV.

MUTUAL FORBEARANCE AND TOLERATION.

MATTHEW, XIII. 30.

LET BOTH [THE WHEAT AND THE TARES] GROW TOGETHER UNTIL THE HARVEST; AND, IN THE TIME OF HARVEST, I WILL SAY TO THE REAPERS, GATHER YE TOGETHER FIRST THE TARES, AND BIND THEM IN BUNDLES TO BURN THEM: BUT GATHER THE WHEAT INTO MY BARN.

IN the parable before us, we read a beautiful lesson of moral and religious instruction. A brief recital of the supposed circumstances of the case will bring the whole to your recollection; and the honor and interests of our christian profession will be promoted by a rational construction and application of the parable. “Whofo hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

The owner of a field is represented to have tilled his land and sowed it with good seed, in the hope of a suitable return; but some unfriendly hand had come, in an unsuspected hour, and sowed tares, or weeds, among his wheat. When his servants discovered the blades of both to grow intermixed with each other, they proposed to their master to go and pick out the latter; but he rejected their proposal, lest while they were picking them out, they should root up the wheat also with them. And he concluded his answer by observing, " Let both grow together until the harvest; and, in the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn." The doctrine particularly inculcated by our lord, in this parable, is, in few words, the mutually bearing with the infirmities of each other in this state of trial and probation, and mutually tolerating that diversity of opinion which must necessarily prevail among the reasonable creatures of God in their progression to that future world, for which we are designed. A doctrine,

trine,

trine, which is taught us by the conduct of almighty God himself, who is no respecter of persons, but whose sun shineth equally on the evil and on the good; and who sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust: a doctrine, which we may deduce from the very constitution of our nature, which has so many demands upon the charity and good offices of all, that there is no man living that is sufficient for his own happiness; or, as the apostle Paul expresseth it, “none of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself.”

The explanation of this parable was given by our lord himself, to such of his disciples as followed him into a house, and requested him to explain it unto them.

“ He that sowed the good seed is the son of  
 “ man: the field is the world: the good seed  
 “ are the children of the kingdom: but the  
 “ tares are the children of the wicked one: the  
 “ enemy, who sowed the tares, is the devil;  
 “ the harvest is the end of this age: and the  
 “ reapers are the angels\*.”

Nothing needs to be added to this explana-

\* Matthew xiii. 37—39.

tion, unless I may be permitted to observe, that the personification which runs through the whole of it is used in accommodation to the manner of speaking in parables most familiar to our lord's hearers, and which he, therefore, adopted for the better illustration of his subject. It should also be observed, that when any thing is said in the scriptures to be done by, or at the instigation of, the devil, the sacred writers uniformly appear to mean nothing more than men's own wicked inclinations and dispositions, which so frequently prevail with them to sacrifice their reason to passion, their conscience to lust and appetite, the promise and assurance of future happiness to present criminal and inferior gratifications. For to admit the fanciful supposition of a great evil spirit counteracting the designs of almighty God, is to commit the government of the world to a second being, capable of defeating the purposes of him who has existed from all eternity, who reigns without controul, and by whose laws all his creatures will be judged.

There are few, among the many absurdities which mankind have taken up and entertained



entertained in religious matters, more hurtful to the cause of true religion and virtue, than that which places the commission of all sin to the account of the instigation of the devil, as it is frequently expressed; and that supplemental conceit, which directs men to trust for the pardon of their wilful transgressions against the word of God, to the vicarious sacrifice and atonement of Jesus Christ. These notions comprize two opinions of very considerable influence upon our moral conduct, and both of them directly tend to undermine the foundation and security of virtue. They place a rational creature of God in the most irrational and contradictory situation in which it is possible for him to be placed: on the one hand, he is supposed to be seduced and impelled by the powerful agency of one who can counteract the almighty himself; and on the other, his pardon is made to depend on the efficacy of the mere death of an innocent person, who suffered upwards of seventeen hundred years ago. The sentiment is shocking to every principle of justice: and our common sense revolts at the grossness of the

absurdity. It degrades the deity, and leaves man in the most dangerous situation in which we can view him.

May these monstrous conceits, therefore, be eradicated from the minds of all the rational creatures of God; and, in the place of them, may they severally be impressed with these truths; that God having placed them in a state of probation here has given to each of them a capacity to know good from evil, and a power, in every situation, to chuse the one and resist the other; and that they are personally answerable before him for the various talents and opportunities which, for wise and good reasons, he hath unequally distributed among the different nations of the earth, and the individual inhabitants of each.

At the end of the age (that is, of the jewish dispensation), which is the harvest-season here referred to, the wicked will be severed from the righteous\*; and in proportion to the light afforded them, and the use or abuse respectively which they shall have made of their

\* Matt. xiii. 40. and see bishop Pearce on that and the following verse.

talents,

talents, will their allotment of recompence or punishment be awarded.

But in this final judgment, we are not to suppose the formalities of trial to take place before him, who needeth not to be informed of any thing that has been done in this world ; but that upon our resurrection from the sleep of the grave to life and consciofness, when the unperceived night of death shall be followed by our awakening to future life and immortality, we shall arise to that state of happiness or misery (let them consist in what they may) which shall correspond with the deeds done by each man in the body, whether they be good or evil.

This rule of justice must no less prevail with the heathen, than with the jewish and the christian world. For the revealed will of God is only a law to those to whom it is tendered, and by whom it is received: “ for  
 “ they who have no law are a law unto  
 “ themselves\*.” But, to us who profess our faith in the christian dispensation, that dispensation shall be our law, and in this

\* Rom ii. 14, 15.

ſenſe only can Chriſt be ſaid to be our judge. For the ſeveral deſcriptions of the general reſurrection, which ſpeak of “ the ſon of man  
 “ coming in his glory, and all the holy  
 “ angels with him, and his ſitting on the  
 “ throne of his glory \*; or of his coming  
 “ down from heaven, with a commanding  
 “ voice of an archangel, and a loud-found-  
 “ ing trumpet †;” or any ſimilar expreſſions, are not neceſſarily to be underſtood literally of his perſonal appearance with theſe accompaniments to inquire into the different characters of men, and in conſequence thereof, awarding a formal ſentence upon each individual with all the pageantry of an earthly tribunal.

Theſe and other paſſages in the ſcriptures, in which we are told, that “ God hath ap-  
 “ pointed a day, in which he will judge the  
 “ world, by that man whom he hath or-  
 “ dained ‡:” that “ he will judge the ſecrets  
 “ of men by Jeſus Chriſt §;” and that “ the  
 “ lord Jeſus Chriſt ſhall judge the living and  
 “ the dead at his appearing ||;” have no other meaning than that at the general reſurrec-

\* Matt. xxv. 31. † 1 Theſſ. iv. 16. ‡ Acts, xvii. 31.

§ Rom. ii. 16. || 2 Tim. iv. 1.

tion,

tion, the future state of each professing christian will be determined by the principles of the gospel, his opportunities of knowing it, and the conformity of his life to its precepts. And we have no reason to doubt but that judgment will be tempered with that mercy, which is essential to justice itself, when dispensed by a power competent to know the secret thoughts and intentions of the heart of every man.

In such future state, it is not, I trust, a fanciful notion, that our happiness will be of that sort which we may distinguish by the name of mental, in opposition to corporeal; and that we shall even then progressively advance in true excellence to all eternity, as much happiness seems to depend upon such progression.

There are many expressions, which are familiar to us in various forms of service for public worship, in which the name of Jesus Christ must be understood to mean his gospel, and surely the compilers would have acted more wisely if they had avoided the ambiguity. For instance; when christians pray to God that they may “magnify his holy name,  
“ through

“ through Christ our lord;” when they ascribe to God “ honour and glory, through Jesus Christ;” or give “ thanks to him; through Jesus Christ our lord;” they must mean, that they praise God, ascribe to him honour, and give thanks to him, not through the person of Jesus Christ, as though he were now interceding for them; but according to his gospel, and as becomes his disciples. So likewise, when they speak of “ the hope of everlasting life which God has given them in Jesus Christ;” they must mean, the knowledge of such everlasting life, which is given them in the gospel, and by the resurrection, of Jesus Christ. So again, when they desire any thing of God, “ for his mercy’s sake in Jesus Christ,” they must mean to desire such blessings as the effect of his mercy, not of any claims of their merit, and this they conceive to be promised them in the revelation of his will by Jesus Christ.

Having gone thus far in endeavouring to correct any gross ideas we may have formed of a general judgment, and a future state, it will more particularly comport with what I have already said, to suggest a few words of  
 exhortation,

exhortation, to you and to myself, to keep these great objects before us: and indeed we ought so to impress their importance upon our minds, that they may influence us to comply with those conditions, which can alone ensure that happy immortality, which is yet open to every one of us, and to all the human race, who shall be obedient to the law which has been given to them, or who shall sincerely repent of the sins they may have committed against their better knowledge, and return into the ways of virtue and holiness.

As it is the rule which the moral governor of the world has laid down for himself, to reserve the separation of the wicked from the good, until the commencement of a future state; and, among other reasons, no doubt for this, because to proceed to judgment before probation is fully made, would be unjust with respect to the individuals, and would interrupt and defeat the plan of his providence with respect to the world at large: we ought, for the same reason, not to proceed prematurely to form a decisive judgment upon the characters of others, when not only  
 full

full probation has not been made with respect to them, but while we ourselves have very uncertain information concerning those whom we may arraign; and may possibly act under the influence of passion, prejudice, or misrepresentation.

In all cases, therefore, in which the interest of civil society does not require us to assume a prompt decision from the principle of self-defence and preservation, or from the obviously nefarious tendency of their measures, it will be well for us to regulate our judgment of others by the example of the great lord of the harvest, who reserves the separation of the wheat from the tares, until the harvest-season.

To recite the evils that have been occasioned by an officious discrimination of men and their opinions, would be to recite the history of the christian church, which is the history of more persecutions than disgrace the standard of Mahomet. It were sufficient barely to call to our recollection what has been, to make us feel the full force of the argument that may be drawn from experience against every dogmatic determination upon  
the



the opinions, and, oftentimes, even upon the conduct of other men.

Exhort, and, when occasion requires, rebuke; for when the motive to such friendly office is pure, the exhortation and rebuke must benefit one party at least, and may benefit both: but let us be just, let us be generous, let us be candid. Justice to ourselves requires this conduct; for great indeed must be the sin of the person persecuted, if that of the persecutor does not exceed it.

These observations will not surely be misunderstood as intended to inculcate an indifference to vice or error. The distinction which is intended to be made, is sufficiently obvious. Extirpate vice by representing it as it is in itself, and in its consequences; and by contrasting it with the fair form of virtue. Extirpate error by presenting to view and vindicating truth, and stating the intimate connection and influence both have upon human happiness. But spare the person and character of him who falls into what we may call error; and if society be not injured by overt acts, spare the person and life of the  
vicious,

vicious, reserve him for repentance, which is at once his punishment and his reward.

It is a subject of very serious regret to every reflecting mind, that mankind have so much harrassed and persecuted each other for opinions, of which none ought to have judicial cognizance, in which they have no interest, and concerning which they are unable to judge. If we wish to convert the unbeliever we must argue rationally against infidelity; but if we persecute the man, either openly, or by any indirect methods, we shall probably fix his unbelief for ever. Our misbehaviour in this matter may make our own principles suspected, but cannot possibly correct his faith.

The same observation will apply to all similar cases. Let us consult our own hearts and our own case, and be ingenuous. Do the penal laws against the first article of our religious faith and of all true religion shake our resolution, or are they likely to effect our conversion, or to silence our arguments? Do they tend to conciliate our minds towards those who support them, or make us think better of their integrity, or their charity, or  
their

their faith itself? No: in all these respects, they look a quite contrary way; and, both in the letter and spirit of them, defeat their proposed end. Besides, they are wholly inefficient, for as well might we storm a castle with syllogisms, as answer arguments by penalties.

The same injudicious means will produce just the same effect in ordinary life. If a parent is austere in his behaviour towards his children, the children will be reserved before the parent, and, probably, from this very circumstance, will appear very different characters before the world. That ardent affection which nature has implanted in the parent's breast should be consecrated by mutual confidence and friendship with his offspring; or that connection which nature designed as the source of the highest delight and joy, and comfort, may, by art and a wrong education, be converted into reproach and sorrow, and wretchedness. Where nature has set roses, mismanagement may plant thorns. The heart is naturally generous; but it is indued with a sensibility which will resist oppression.

Let

Let us now, my brethern, joyfully and with one accord, adopt the conduct which our present subject teaches us. Let mutual forbearance and charity mark our steps, not only in respect to our religious opinions, against which the powers of this world are at present unhappily at war with us; but in respect to our whole conduct through life, in all our intercourse with the mixed and motley characters, with whom we may be engaged. Nevertheless, let us act with some caution; for every one, who has lived some years in the world, will find, (possibly by dear-bought experience,) that self-defence requires some degree of prudence. Let us accommodate in all things that are innocent and immaterial, but let not one principle of our duty to God or man be sacrificed to fear, to folly, or to fashion. Bear with the evil-doer, if possible, with the meekness of a lamb; but resist the evil with the courage of a lion. God will bring every secret thing into judgment; let us, therefore, remember that we act not the hypocrite, either before the world, or before ourselves. Rather let us look upon the  
the

the faults of others with charity, and upon our own with severity. Let us submit to a close and impartial examination of ourselves, that we may be equally able to correct what is wrong, as to persevere in what is right.

With the fortitude and complacency of true christians, let us unite in endeavouring to attain the truest enjoyment of this life, that peace of mind which surpasseth all understanding, and a reasonable hope and assurance of that future happiness which is promised to the virtuous and the holy, by the most favoured messenger of almighty God.

Let us be merciful as our heavenly father is merciful, and kindly disposed one to another. Let us improve our title to heaven's happiness, by contributing to anticipate it upon earth, in changing discord, hatred, and war, into harmony, love and peace.



S E R M O N    XXV.

THE GOSPEL, A DISPENSATION OF PEACE AND  
HAPPINESS TO THOSE WHO OBSERVE ITS  
PRECEPTS.

LUKE XIV. 34, 35.

SALT IS GOOD; BUT IF THE SALT HATH LOST ITS  
SAVOUR, WHEREWITH SHALL IT BE SEASONED?  
IT IS NEITHER FIT FOR THE LAND, NOR YET FOR  
THE DUNG-HILL; BUT MEN CAST IT OUT. HE  
THAT HATH EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR.

THE context, from whence our subject is  
taken, is employed in a very interesting de-  
scription of the conditions and evidences of  
our being disciples of Christ. They were  
stated by Christ himself, addressed by him to  
a considerable multitude who joined him  
upon his leaving the house of the chief of  
the pharisees, whither he had gone for some  
refreshment on the sabbath-day, and where

he had inculcated the obligation of the duties of charity on that, as well as on all other days; where he had taught them humility, by bidding them to take the lower seats at public entertainments, and to invite the poor to partake of their banquets; where he had illustrated his invitation to them to receive the doctrines and practice of the gospel, by the parable of the great supper, on which occasion the lord of the feast is represented as earnestly searching the highways and hedges for guests, while he forbids those who were invited, but excused themselves, from partaking of his supper.

These instructions being delivered, our evangelist goes on to say that there went a great multitude with him, who probably professed no small attachment to his ministry and his person. Upon this, he took occasion to apprise them of what would be expected from them, if they wished to acquit themselves with honor in the christian vocation, and hoped to obtain the reward promised to the faithful servants of God, and disciples of Christ. This precaution was the more necessary on account of the forward zeal  
which



which is generally shewn by new converts, and induces them to make large professions. Honest minds, acting under the influence of strong and recent convictions, are easily led to engage to perform all that shall be required of them, without considering the difficulties and discouragements that lie in the way; and, consequently, without being acquainted with the firmness, fidelity, and perseverance that will be required to surmount them.

Our lord, therefore, addressing himself to these new converts, apprised them, in plain terms, of what would be expected from them. “ If any one come to me, and hate  
 “ not his father and mother and wife and  
 “ children and brethren and sisters, and even  
 “ his own life also, he cannot be my dis-  
 “ ciple. And whosoever beareth not his  
 “ cross, and cometh with me, cannot be my  
 “ disciple\*.”

This doctrine, which carried the appearance of severe discipline, he left not to the ungoverned workings of their imaginations, which might have misled them, as they may also us his professed followers in this our day;

\* Luke xiv. 26, 27. Mr. Wakefield's Translation.

but he illustrated it by such familiar reasoning as would be readily apprehended by them, and would be deliberately considered by their cool and sober judgment. “ Which of  
 “ you, that wisheth to build a tower, doth  
 “ not stay to reckon first the cost, whether  
 “ he have wherewith to finish it? lest haply,  
 “ after he hath laid the foundation, and is  
 “ not able to finish, every beholder laugh at  
 “ him, and say: This man began to build,  
 “ and was not able to finish. Or, what  
 “ king, before he goeth to engage another  
 “ king in battle, doth not stay to consult,  
 “ whether he be able with ten thousand men  
 “ to meet the other coming against him  
 “ with twenty thousand? or else, whilst he  
 “ is yet far off, sendeth an embassy to ask  
 “ conditions of peace. In like manner,  
 “ whosoever of you doth not give up all his  
 “ substance, cannot be my disciple.

“ Salt is good; but if this salt have lost its  
 “ favour, with what shall it be seasoned? it is  
 “ not fit even to manure the land; but is  
 “ thrown away. Whoso hath ears to hear,  
 “ let him hear.” \*

\* Luke xiv. 28—35. Mr. Wakefield's Translation.

This is literally true of salt, and no less true and just is the application of the remark to the subject on which our lord discoursed. The dispensation of the gospel is indeed good, it is the glad-tidings of great joy ; but if it produces not its proper effect upon our life and character, it is no dispensation of peace and happiness to us, for it is only charged with glad-tidings to those who earnestly endeavour to make it the standard of their temper, and the rule of their conduct. It ceaseth to benefit us, if we receive it with indifference, or entertain it without respect to its authority : and if we corrupt its doctrines or neglect its moral precepts, it will destroy our present peace and future prospects, and, in the end, increase the measure of our condemnation. Under such a virtual rejection of the gospel, should we not be compelled to exclaim, “ Wherewith shall we be salted ? ” or, in the words of the jailor to the apostle Paul, to ask ourselves, “ How shall we be saved ? ” The salt that has lost its favour is not fit even to manure the land, and is therefore thrown away.

“ He that hath ears to hear,” adds our

lord, “ let him hear.” A warning this, which most explicitly declares that that disciple of Jesus Christ who professeth a belief in his divine mission, (and in this character we are now assembled together,) but who neither keepeth the faith of Christ, nor followeth his precepts; in one word, who is not a religious and virtuous character before God and man, will be disowned by our lord at the last day, and cast out from the presence, and favour of God.

It may be proper to observe here, once for all, that this purity, fidelity, and perseverance in the christian course, are not, properly speaking, so much duties attached to the christian character, as very material parts of the character itself, and the only unequivocal proofs of sincerity in the christian profession. A christian in name only is no christian, but an hypocrite in the most important duties he owes to God his maker, and to man his fellow-creature. His dissimulation is only to be equalled by his weakness. Such an one lives a practical contradiction and a daily lie to his public profession before the world.

If we were under a due impression of the  
nature

nature and importance of our christian calling, the contemplation of the merely negative character of many professing christians would present to us a truly melancholy void and nothingness; and would affect every serious and pious mind with a mixture of astonishment and concern.

But when we behold a profligate and vicious character assuming the mien and name of a christian, our minds must turn with indignation from so gross a prostitution.

The fact stated by our lord, and his reasoning upon it, which includes the subject proposed for our present consideration, will admit of many collateral observations interesting to us all.

The different faculties with which we are endowed by nature, the different acquirements which each of us may have made, and the different situations in which the providence of God hath placed us, form together the respective number of talents and opportunities which we may have of acting wisely and doing good; and for which we are respectively accountable before God.

In the first place; nothing is more common

mon, but, at the same time, nothing more futile, than to hear persons endeavour to screen and excuse their inactivity under the pretence of the non-importance, or insignificance, of what can be done by obscure individuals, as, upon such occasions, they are pleased to consider themselves.

But these persons hold a different doctrine with respect to their self-consequence upon all occasions where a sense of duty does not thwart their inclinations. Observe them in society, and you will find them tenacious of their place, vain of their name or fortune, ambitious to set the fashion in the trifling baubles of their day: but, speak to them in the character of christians, which, if they do not disown, they will disregard, and you will find that the habits of religion and virtue are treated with disgust.

Talk to them of the great influence which the manners and example of the upper ranks of society have upon the lower, and they will shrink away like the sensitive plant from the touch. Should your arguments disturb their lethargy in the cause of religion and virtue, they will even then enter on the service and duties

duties of the christian with confessed irksomeness and reluctance.

Under these discouragements, a knowledge of religion is not easily propagated in the world. I do not here mean the knowledge of any particular doctrines, but a just sense and persuasion of the truth of natural and revealed religion in general, their agreement with each other, their obligation upon man, and their importance to his real happiness in the present, as well as in a future, life.

To try the force of fair argument with men wholly devoted to the world is to talk to the stones; to reason with the sceptic, who may have the blunted shafts of wit and raillery at command, is, probably, not to leave him a sceptic still, but, from the untoward bent of his own folly and false pride, to drive him to atheism. To speak of the charms and comfort of a life of religion and virtue in the ears of those who are matured in profligacy and vice, is too often as unsuccessful, as an attempt to confine the raging billows of the sea.

These difficulties in the way of promoting the virtuous course of the rational creatures  
of

of God on earth, are very discouraging, but will never justify our giving up the work of religious and moral reformation in despair.

Large bodies of men are only to be wrought upon and reclaimed by gradual and temperate means. There is nothing in the general distinction of rich or poor, that will make them universally obedient to the voice of scripture or of reason, however plainly delivered, or however ardently pressed upon them: but then, there is nothing in the situation of either which necessarily precludes our hopes of the reformation of individuals. On the contrary, every fluctuation of worldly prosperity or adversity is a lesson of instruction; and the continuance of the many blessings which we all enjoy should equally remind us of the power by which the dispensations of the world are finally regulated, and convince us that all things work together for our good.

It is a great point gained to convince any wavering or prejudiced mind, that he is a dependant and an accountable being before God for his actions; that he is accountable, in the first place, for himself, and, in the second, accountable



countable for the use of his powers and capacities of doing good to others. As far as his precept or his example shall extend, he is accountable, not indeed for their success, but for their tendency. If he shall have caused many to err from the commandments of God, heavy will be his account: but if he shall have virtuously laboured to bring many to righteousness, great will be his reward.

It is a great consolation to every serious and pious mind, that various unexpected occurrences, among the mixed events in human life, bring the thoughtless to reflection, reclaim the profligate, and sometimes reform the oldest offenders. This world, while it is a state of temptation to pleasure on the one hand, is a state of trouble and sorrow on the other. The accompaniments and vicissitudes of each are well calculated to purify and perfect the rational subjects of God's moral government. The ordinary events of life afford a lesson that is capable of being improved to the most substantial advantage. The constitution of our mind and the frame of our body; the earth we inhabit, and the air we breathe; our waking powers, and the rest of sleep;

sleep; these may indeed, and will, be overlooked by the thoughtless multitude, though the conclusions to be drawn from the consideration of them, are written with a sun-beam before the eye of reason and reflection, and carry with them greater evidence than miracles themselves, and meet the person who will attend to them with more effect.

Virtuous instruction may be derived from an enemy; and the value of religious principle may be tried and proved by an unfaithful friend. Again; Prosperity is more pleasant, but dangerous; adversity is less palatable, but more profitable. In this view, it is wisely said, that it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting.

It hath seemed good in the sight of God, to chequer the life of man with events, which we are generally agreed in distinguishing by prosperous and adverse fortune, that each might temper and qualify the other. As he hath varied the face of nature by successive scenes which give additional beauty to each other in their turn, so, likewise, hath he varied the scenes in the life of man, and  
blessed

bleſſed him, with that almoſt only happy ignorance, the not knowing what a day may bring forth. Hence, though he cannot expect to gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles, rational hope is ever open before him; deſpair is forbidden to enter into his breaſt; and the qualified enjoyment and uncertain continuance of any of, and all, our boaſted poſſeſſions, admoniſhes us, in the language of the trueſt and pureſt friendſhip, to be wiſe and temperate in ſetting our affections upon them, and in the uſe we make of them.

Time alone will correct ſome of our wrong notions on this head, but our converſion may be protracted to ſo late an hour, that we may have become incapable of receiving any reaſonable comfort from our change. It is our buſineſs to remember, that we muſt work while it is day, leſt the night overtake us, when no man can work.

The diſpenſations of God are indeed very good; but if they do not accompliſh the effect they were intended to produce, by convincing our reaſonable minds of our obligation conſcientiouſly to diſcharge our duty to God and man, neither nature nor revelation  
bring

bring any tidings of joy to us : but, in proportion to the favourable opportunities which have been afforded us, and the good or bad use we have made of them, will be our portion of happiness or misery in the world to come.

A faithful discharge of our duty to God and man, is calculated, in its own nature, to ensure an abundant return in the peace and comfort of our own minds here, and in the future approbation of God hereafter. And it is no less the object, than the design, of the gospel, to strengthen the motives to the practice of our several duties, and to afford us consolation and support under all the difficulties and discouragements with which we have to contend.

He, therefore, who rejects the gospel, weakeneth that security, and loseth that satisfaction which, we hesitate not to say, is tendered to him, as the rational creature of God here, designed for immortality, and journeying on his road to that country from which no traveller returns. But, he, who, not contented with rejecting the last, best, gift of heaven, shall contumeliously despise it,  
ought

ought to take especial care, that he be not guilty of despising the great author of it, the God and father of Jesus Christ, who published it to the world.

It is, therefore, not only highly expedient, but indispensably necessary, that every one of us do consider with very serious attention his natural faculties, his subsequent acquirements, and his situation and character in the world; and that, in all these respects, he do rigid justice to himself.

In a word; a truly wise man will consider, while the day-spring is yet on high, how far he hath himself obeyed the laws of God, and how far he hath endeavoured to promote an obedience to them in others. For, according to his own obedience, and his pious endeavours to assist his fellow-creatures of mankind in the same holy work, will be his rejoicing in that day, when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, and impartial justice shall be awarded.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



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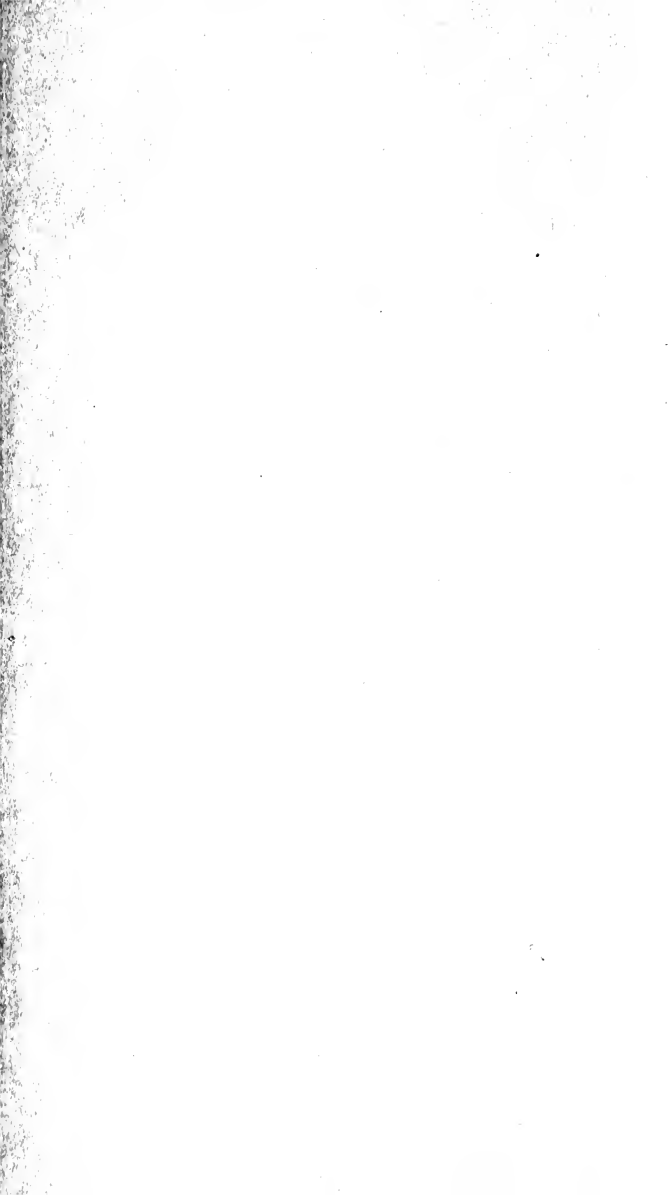
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